

Tom Mindte & Mason Via

Self-titled

Published on October 23, 2020 Reviewed by John Fabke [Purchase & More Info](#)

Filed in: [Music Reviews](#)



The close harmony-singing, mandolin- and guitar-driven brother duets of the 1930s such as the Blue Sky Boys, Monroe Brothers, and others, arguably saw their enduring popularity and influence appear mainly within the post-WWII bluegrass scene. However, any fan of old-time music with a set of big ears and interest in all the varying musical styles that appeared on early commercial country music recordings will no doubt appreciate how and why that sound deserves a home within the genre.

Tom Mindte and Mason Via's recent, self-titled Patuxent CD is constructed on that foundation of mandolin, guitar, and tight vocals. The pairing of an established veteran with a young up-and-comer is nice to see and hear. Mindte, a multi-instrumentalist, record collector, and record label owner has deep ties to the Washington, DC, bluegrass scene that was the home to his friend and mentor Buzz Busby, as well as other standouts such as Hazel Dickens, the Country Gentlemen, the Stoneman Family, and others. Young Mason Via, originally from Danbury, North Carolina, grew up immersed in the music and culture of his home region. Despite the differences in age, Tom and Mason are fellow travelers of sorts. Both musicians revere the traditional sounds but he also open to making timely music that might veer a little bit off of the purely traditional path.

Tom (mandolin) and Mason (guitar) are both skillful singers and instrumentalists. Both share responsibilities as lead singers and ably catch the tenor harmony when needed. Tom has a stout, old-school, melodic approach on the mandolin while Mason has a more contemporary bluegrass-inspired flatpicking approach that is flashy but maintains enough crunch to keep it down to earth.

Most of the songs on their recording feature the guitar/mando combination along with Ben Somerville's solid upright bass playing holding it all together. The twelve sacred and secular cuts they have chosen to showcase their talents, interests, and influences pull from allied sources; the Carter Family, Stanley Brothers, Larry Sparks, and even a deep-catalog classic, "Best Female Actress," from the repertoire of the sorely underappreciated Charlie Moore. Their version of "Midnight on the Stormy Deep" is a nice synthesis of the Blue Sky Boys' setting combined with the well known version of the song recorded by Bill Monroe. A handful of songs veer away from the straight-up, old-time country feel. "I'm Gonna Be a Wheel Someday," highlights the piano playing of phenom multi-instrumentalist Brennen Ernst. His touch gives the old Fats Domino piece the feel of a long lost Moon Mullican cut. Guest instrumentalists also appear on a few other Mindte & Via songs. Victor Furtado (banjo) and Nate Leath (fiddle) lend their skills to the old-time standard "Rockingham Cindy," Rob Benzing plays bluegrass banjo on the lead-off track, and resophonic guitarist Donnie Scott slides tastefully through the Wayne Erbsen-penned gospel song "Run and Hide."

The CD also showcases Mason's ability as a songwriter in the bluegrass and traditional country genre. In 2019, Via honed his songwriting skills when he participated in a Virginia Folklife songwriting apprenticeship. His two original songs here, "Heed This Advice" and "Love in My Heart" fit well among the other great, old songs presented on the CD.

Tom Mindte & Mason Via's CD is recommended for those within the old-time community who are fans of traditional bluegrass and close harmony singing that hews to the first- and second-generation style, while also sounding and feeling original, current, honest, and fun.