



Excelsior – Alan Munde

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[Alan Munde](#) needs no introduction in the world of banjo. The American Banjo Hall of Fame member has inspired and taught legions of players through his numerous recordings, instructional materials, and at music workshops nationwide. His latest solo release, [Excelsior](#), gives us that sheer originality and sense of adventure we've come to expect in Munde's recorded work.

All but two of the fifteen tunes on *Excelsior* were composed by Munde. The opening track, *Longfellow's Excelsior Hornpipe*, is a great example of the melodic playing that's so closely associated with Alan's banjo style. This also features stellar mandolin picking from both Kym Warner and Billy Bright. As with several other tunes on this project, Dom Fisher provides wonderful bass backing.

Lloyd's of Lubbock was written in honor of Alan's longtime friend, Lloyd Maines. A country flavored tune, this piece features masterful steel guitar work from Maines as well as solid percussion from Pat Manske.

Miss Kitty's Hornpipe is one of several tunes that include the instrumentation of just banjo and mandolin. This piece written in an old time vein pairs Munde with Emory Lester. The two

instrumentalists play off each other really well on this track. It's a good study for musicians on the subject of dynamics.

Another track that features this instrumentation is *Byron's Buddies*, written in memory of another longstanding friend and musical collaborator, Byron Berline. With Sam Bush on mandolin, Munde honors Berline's legacy with this three part tune paying homage to the Texas contest style of fiddling that Byron was a master of. While Bush presents fine lead work here, his rhythm backing is phenomenal. It's reminiscent of the backup provided by guitar players for contest fiddlers. Though he's playing mandolin, he captures the feel of it so well.

Hymn For Slim is a solo piece that Alan wrote thinking of Slim Richey, an important figure in both Munde's journey and Texas music in general. This track captures Alan's distinct banjo tone and his imaginative compositional ideas in more of a jazz idiom.

Holler Up A Possum is one of two tunes written by Elliott Rogers. Along with Rogers on guitar and Billy Bright on mandolin, this track features excellent slap bass from Dom Fisher.

Stay With Me Waltz is a track that should get the attention of the mandolin players listening. Featuring Kym Warner on mandolin, Billy Bright on mandolin and mandola, and Paul Glasse on electric mandolin, this dream-like tune has a beautiful melody which is enhanced by each of the mandolinists.

Also included is first tune ever composed by Alan at age sixteen, *The Ten Cent Breakfast*. Inspired by the steel guitar styles of Tom Brumley and Buddy Charleton, this composition incorporates ideas from those two players onto the five string banjo. Featuring Maines again on steel guitar, Josh Baca on accordion, Billy Bright on mandolin, and Pat Manske on percussion, this track captures the adventurous spirit of Alan's instrumental approach.

My father, a banjoist himself, has said that Alan is "a banjo player's banjo player." *Excelsior* makes a great case for that declaration. It's chock full of Munde's inventiveness. With a career spanning well over fifty years, it's clear that Alan isn't finished creating and bringing new ideas forward.