



Excelsior

ALAN MUNDE

REVIEWED BY
BOB ALLEN

Besides being one of the most gifted banjo players on the scene, as well as a polished composer, Alan Munde is also someone who apparently knows how to have a good time and share his upbeat vibes with others. Munde has said that “playing music is the most fun of all.”

The genesis of his immensely enjoyable new instrumental album speaks to this. Munde, a member of the American Banjo Museum Hall of Fame, who has recorded and served in bands with Jimmy Martin, Sam Bush, Byron Berline, Keith Whitely, Wayne Stewart, Bobby Hicks and Roland and Clarence White, among others, was the recipient of the 2021 Steve Martin Banjo Prize. The cash that came

with award allowed Munde to literally roam the country revisiting people and places from his musical past.

Excelsior, which features 13 original instrumentals and two others composed by Elliott Rogers, was recorded with various musicians in no fewer than nine studios in Texas, Tennessee, Illinois, Missouri, New Mexico and Ontario, Canada.

The result is a sparkling collection of inspired and mostly upbeat collaborations with some of his favorite fellow pickers that will most likely warm your heart and get your toes tapping.

Some of the song titles themselves — “Lloyd’s of Lubbock,” “Hymn for Slim,” “The Ten Cent Breakfast” and “Holler Up a Possum” — reflect the good-natured levity that’s abundant here. Lovely melodies, sparse yet captivating arrangements are also at the heart of these delightfully rendered tunes.

“Lloyd’s of Lubbock,” for instance features some snazzy steel guitar work

from distinguished Texan Lloyd Maines in syncopation with Munde’s exquisite banjo licks, Billy Bright’s mandolin, Dom Fisher’s bass and Pat Manske’s subtle percussion.

“Holler Up a Possum” is a rip-roaring old-timey reel that once again features Bright on mandolin. Bright, along with Manske, also produced and engineered *Excelsior*.

On “Byron’s Buddies,” Munde and his old friend Sam Bush trade sizzling licks as the two of them deftly switch back and forth between lead and rhythmic roles.

Munde’s beguiling arrangement of the lilting “Stay With Me Waltz” showcases Kim Warner and Bright on mandolin, Bright (also) on mandola, Paul Glasse on electric mandolin and Fisher on bass.

All in all, this is one gem of a sunny-side-of-life collection, almost guaranteed to brighten your day.