

RUSS CARSON LAST CHANCE

Patuxent Music
CD 219



This first recording by young Mr. Carson is an aural treat. Instead of hammering away on a dozen warhorses, he digs deep into tradition, creating contemporary versions of some older tunes with some powerfully good help. The title tune is an older piece he probably learned from Reed Martin, one of his influences. Carson, the son of an old-time fiddler, heard plenty of the old-time tunes as he grew up. This helps explain the great fiddle tunes, "Squirrel Hunters," the medley "Liberty Off The Corn Liquor Still" and "Devil In The Wood Pile" that pepper this project.

Russ is currently playing with Audie Blaylock and Redline. Previously he played with Gold Heart. They are present here with two numbers. "Blue" stands out for its complex vocal work and harmonies that only siblings can share. Brandon Rickman and Jeff Parker show up to sing Del McCoury's "I Feel The Blues Movin' In," "One Tear" from the Osborne Brothers, and the great Gordon Lightfoot tune "Redwood Hill." Another treat is Marshall Wilborn singing Ron Block's "You Can Take Your Time."

When Russ decides to play pure bluegrass instrumentals he tears through them with aplomb. He displays amazing finesse on "Shenandoah Breakdown" and Doyle Lawson's "Runaround." On an original, "Sullivan County," he craftily demonstrates his command of the banjo. His playing will catch your ear but he shares the limelight with his cast of players including Michael Cleveland and Patrick McAvinue on fiddles, Dominick Leslie, mandolin, Jake Stargel, guitar and Marshall Wilborn bass. Hot fiddle breaks, outstanding mandolin and slippery guitar breaks pop out of the music. McAvinue and Cleveland twin at times with outrageously effective and unexpected harmonies, and energizing fills.

Carson's great taste and restraint on this project goes a long way, highlighting his abilities, which are substantial. To miss this project is to miss one of the best banjo CDs of the year. (Patuxent Music, P.O. Bo 572, Rockville, MD 20848, www.pxrec.com.)RCB