

## Travers Chandler

**Archaic** – 2016 (Patuxent)

Reviewed by Donald Teplyske

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*Archaic: Relating to, being or characteristic of words and language that were once in regular use but are not relatively rare and suggestive of an earlier style or period.*

With those words, an online dictionary provides a fairly concise summary of Virginian Travers Chandler's approach to bluegrass music. "Archaic" is his fourth album, and as with "State of Depression" from 2010 and "Pardon Me..." from 2012, Chandler ably demonstrates that he had a deep respect for and admiration of the music made during the 1950s-1970s.

What "Archaic" further shows, however, is that Chandler isn't especially interested in moving beyond this time period. His performances are unadorned bluegrass, but by the conclusion of this 33-minute testament to the past one recalls that sepia-toned memories often obscure reality.

There are several strong performances, including the opening track "Shot Man Blues" and Bill Grant's excellent "The Many Faces of Charles Edward Brown." Todd Grebe's contemporary "Until Tomorrow" is a terrific bluegrass-honky tonk tune, and "Shadow of a Lie" is a disturbing portrait of a guy with whom you never want to go into the wilderness.

Chandler's mandolin rings throughout, including on the Jimmy Martin/Buddy Spicher tune "Uptown Blues," which also nicely showcases Merl Johnson's fiddle, and "Until Tomorrow." It is apparent that Chandler has built the album around the mandolin. Ray Edwards' banjo contributions are impressive.

Elsewhere, things are less palatable. The Roy McMillan/Terry Foust/Ray Edwards song "Portrait of Sin" is basic slut-shaming, and fits another definition of "archaic" to a T - *no longer current or applicable*. "High Society" is a step down from there. "Mother Knows Best" has likely been sufficiently recorded, and one doesn't really need to hear "Ramblin' Fever" or "Rover Rover" again anytime soon. There should have been more of an opportunity to feature Adam Poindexter's guitar more prominently.

The uneven quality of the album may be due to its extended gestation. "Portrait of Sin" was mentioned in an interview two years ago, and it appears the album was first scheduled for 2014. Chandler's desire to keep the spirit of hardcore, aggressive bluegrass viable is admirable. Unfortunately, "Archaic" is half-formed.

 CD Reviews

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