

# Bridges and Backroads

CD: *Bridges and Backroads*

Artist: Jerry Salley

Label: Very Jerry Records

Artist Website: [JerrySalley.com](http://JerrySalley.com)

Jerry Salley is a powerful songwriter and performer. On *Bridges and Backroads*, he gives us twelve of his songs, all penned with a variety of co-writers. He also manages to assemble an impressive band, including everyone's favorite bassist, Mike Bub. The background vocalists are an all-star cast: Carl Jackson, Val Storey, Larry Cordle, Rhonda Vincent, and others.

Jerry is at the top of Nashville's songwriting royalty, and he gives us quite a treat on this CD. The song list is:

- 1. Miss My Miss in Mississippi
- 2. Let Me Be the Bridge
- 3. I Take the Backroads
- 4. Waltz Through the Ages
- 5. You Can't Hear a Heartbreak
- 6. How I Want to Be Remembered
- 7. A Memory Like Mine
- 8. Be Better to Your Neighbor
- 9. Dyin' To Hold Her Again
- 10. Hillbilly Lilly
- 11. Without Forgiveness
- 12. Life To My Days

I listened to this several times (no kidding!), with the CD starting out big and getting bigger with each listen, until I now find myself humming the tunes and bursting out loud in a chorus or two of my favorites. This does not happen to me

much, anymore; I am thankful this CD brought it out of me.

My favorites:

Of course, the uptempo *Miss My Miss in Mississippi*, the first song, was destined to be one of my faves. How could I not like it? Every landmark mentioned, every road, every thought of getting home to my own Mississippi Miss might as well have come from my own life. I enjoyed the Osborne Brothers-esque vocal flourish at the end.

*I Take The Backroads* also tapped into my psyche. Backroads give every bit as much in views and memories as what they cost in travel time. I particularly enjoyed the banjo work of Greg "Papaw" Davis. Davis' banjo had just what I like in syncopated notes and fat tone.

*Waltz Through The Ages*, a beautiful duet with Rhonda Vincent, will bring a joyful tear to a glass eye.

*You Can't Hear A Heartbreak* would be a good selection for a single release. It is a medium tempo Bluegrass ballad that should smoothly transition to other genres. Once again, "Papaw" Davis' banjo got my attention, along with some beautiful fiddle work from Jason Roller.

*A Memory Like Mine*, co-written with my friend Jim McBride, is a dark ballad of pain and hurt. Some memories are painful, but inescapable. The background vocals are beautifully haunting. "The truth never changes and the past never dies, when you've got a memory lie mine." I know a good line when I hear one.

*Be Better To Your Neighbor* is a straight ahead bluegrass tune, and calls to mind the Louvin's *If You Don't Love Your Neighbor Then You Don't Love God*; that is a good thing. You want better neighbors? Be a better neighbor. The banjo playing of Aaron McDaris got my attention this time; his tone and touch had me thinking Sonny Osborne, which should make any banjo player smile a big smile.

*Hillbilly Lilly*, had to grow on me, but it grew and grew until I think now it might just be my overall favorite song on the CD. At first, I found it downright disturbing. I don't know what changed other than I acquired a taste for its musical complexity. *Hillbilly Lilly* the person is as complex as the arrangement. There are great instrumental segues on this song. I find myself "Hey", "Ho", and "Yeahing" as I walk up the path from my studio to the house, as I bush-hog through overgrown pastures on hot August days, even as I write this. It is a powerful song. If it seems too in-your-face at first listen, give it another. I did. It won me over.

I first heard *Without Forgiveness* when my niece's husband, Jason Davidson, recorded it for his own remarkable Gospel/Contemporary Christian CD, *He Came Searching For Me*, in 2017. I liked it then, I still like it now. This is a powerful song. When Jason played the song for me prior to the CD release, I asked him who wrote it. When he told me, I said, "That's some powerful songwriting talent." That was not an overstatement.

*Life To My Days* is the song I most find myself singing, for a variety of reasons. Jerry Salley may have saved the best for last.

Hmmm. That's nine favorites out of twelve songs. I like the other three, too. I reckon the thing to say is that this is a fine piece of work, including the engineering, recording, mixing, and mastering. As is my habit, I put it on to play loud through my studio monitors just to see if I could find audio anomaly I could complain about. There were no complaints from me; none. My wife has her own stained glass studio in the same building as me, separated by a dog run bay in between us. My Mississippi Miss complained that I had the music way too loud.

Spoil Sport.

*Mississippi Chris Sharp*

8/22/20

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# Ordinary Soul

CD: Ordinary Soul

Artist: Stephen Mougín

Label: Dark Shadow Recording

Artist Website: [stephenmougin.com](http://stephenmougin.com)

Label Website: [darkshadowrecording.com](http://darkshadowrecording.com)

Songwriter, singer, guitarist, producer, and Sam Bush Band stalwart, Stephen Mougín has released a new CD, Ordinary Soul through his Dark Shadow Recording label. Ordinary Soul has ten Mougín original songs, ranging from hot bluegrass to poignant country ballads, featuring an all star band. The stellar songwriting and singing of Mougín, and contributions from banjoist Ned Luberecki, fiddlers Laura Orshaw and Becky Buller, and the mandolin and fiddle of the instantly recognizable Sam Bush bring some heavyweight power to this CD.

Twelve well produced songs give one a lot of listening for their money. The song selection is as follows:

- (1) New Beginnings
- (2) Color Me Lonely
- (3) The Song That I call Home
- (4) Railroad Man
- (5) A Place for a Fool

- (6) On the Riverside
- (7) Play Me a Sad Song Again
- (8) Last Time for Everything
- (9) Only You and You Alone
- (10) Handful of Dust
- (11) You Only Like Old Things
- (12) I'm Gonna Ride

Favorites are *New Beginnings*; *Railroad Man*, a real thumper where the overall vibe and the fiddling of Sam Bush put me in mind of the original Newgrass Revival; the country shuffle *A Place for a Fool* with Mike Bub's delightful walking bass, *On the Riverside* with its delightful harmonies; the waltz-time dirge, *Play Me A Sad Song Again*; *Last Time for Everything*, with Ned Luberecki's hot banjo work and a particularly enjoyable mandolin break from Cory Piatt (and if I spelled that wrong, sorry Cory. My ears are better than my eyes and I had to get out the magnifying glass to read the extremely small type); the forbodingly dark *Handful of Dust*, penned by Becky Buller; and perhaps my favorite favorite, *You Only Like Old Things*, featuring just Mougins and his guitar. There's nothing like one voice and one guitar. The line "Will I ever be part of your sepia tone world" just grabbed this songwriter. I admire a good line when I hear it. This is a good one.

That's seven favorites out a twelve song selection. That says a lot. I had the opportunity to work the Alabama Folk School with Mougins a few years ago. I enjoyed him and his guitar all alone on the stage. I now enjoy *Ordinary Soul*, from an extraordinary musician. I listened to this CD all the way through six times. It starts out good and gets better with every listen.

That's the way it should be.

***Mississippi Chris Sharp***

8/22/20

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# Freedom, Love And The Open Road

CD: *Freedom, Love And The Open Road*

Artist: Lindley Creek

Label: Pinecastle Recording Company

Artist Website: [lindleycreek.com](http://lindleycreek.com)

Label Website: [www.pinecastlemusic.com](http://www.pinecastlemusic.com)

One can't know everything. I didn't know about Lindley Creek. I can't say that anymore. ***Freedom, Love, And The Open Road*** caught me unaware and unprepared. It started out delightful and got better with every listen. The band is delightful, helped along by some stellar musicians in the studio. At times I heard echoes of the heavenly vocals of Sarah MacLachlan, Bonnie Raitt, or Loreena McKennitt, or the musicians at times suggesting instrumental whispers of The Beatles, The Band, all interspersed with Duane Allman and Ry Cooder. This isn't Bluegrass, but it is good music, even transporting at times.

The Songs are:

- 1. I Gotta Go
- 2. The Mockingbird's Voice
- 3. Right Back Where I Started
- 4. Words Last Forever

- 5. Four Men Walkin' Around
- 6. Home To You
- 7. I'm Gonna Take That Mountain
- 8. Old Soul
- 9. Forever Young
- 10. Grounded
- 11. Sunshine Song

I liked every cut on this CD. There is no filler here.

There are two songs that are even more outstanding than the rest of the outstanding songs to my ear: *Old Soul* and *Forever Young*. On both cuts, veteran bassist Todd Phillips, who clearly understands the magnificence of a fretless bass, puts his talents to work. The lap steel work of David Spires on *Old Soul* is outstanding, simply outstanding. Same for the guitar of Seth Taylor. Rob Ickes' ("He's a good boy") Dobro on *Forever Young* is delightful. *Old Soul* devolves into a the most delightful musical roundabout at the end.

It's not always easy to pull off a Bob Dylan cover, particularly one like *Forever Young*, but this just may be my favorite ever, even more than my own, and perhaps more than the version in Martin Scorsese's ***The Last Waltz***, which is stellar all the way around, if only for it's legendary all-star line-up, though I would daresay one can hardly call that one a cover of a Bob Dylan song since it's got Bob Dylan in it.

*Grounded* is one of the two songs on the CD penned by the band's Katherine Greer. I really liked this song and would like to hear more songs that come from the hand of Greer. The band seems to focus on the vocals, at least on this CD, even though they are shown holding instruments on the CD cover. The vocals are outstanding, and if the label insisted on having studio musicians for this recording, let me commend them on the musicians that were chosen. I was digging the bass before I knew it was Todd Phillips. I was enjoying the dobro before I

knew it was Rob Ickes. The band is so good, I am compelled to name the rest of them: Aaron Ramsey on mandolin, Jim Vancleve on fiddle, and the aforementioned Seth Taylor on guitar. There are a couple of other musicians, but the small print has exhausted me. Sorry. The band was awesome! I can't help but wonder what a Lindley Creek CD would sound like with the band playing all the instruments. This particular sound may be hard to reproduce on the road, but as Lindley Creek are working, traveling musicians, I expect they will sound just fine.

The production, engineering, recording, overdubbing, and mastering are all professionally done, which always helps make any CD an enjoyable listen.

This CD will stay in my regular rotation.

*Mississippi Chris Sharp*

8/22/20

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# **Randy Wood: The Lore of the Luthier**

**Title: Randy Wood: The Lore of the Luthier**

**Author: Daniel Wile**

**Publisher: The University of Tennessee Press, Charles K. Wolfe Music Series, Knoxville, TN**

**ISBN: 9781621905530**

Modern luthiery is in the midst of a renaissance. While marvelous violin and guitar luthiers have always been with us, the modern making of fine, custom mandolins, and the restoration of fine vintage instruments have been significantly impacted by the contributions of one man, Randy Wood. Author Daniel Wile explores these contributions Wood made, and is still making now, from his shop in Bloomington, Georgia.

Wile delves deeply into Wood's career, and his contributions not only to modern mandolin luthiery, but to Bluegrass music in general through his Old Time Picking Parlor, a Nashville institution for many years and a place where many budding musicians refined their chops. Wile gives us a thorough glimpse of how Wood arrived at where he is today, and allows us accompany him on his journey in a very readable way. Once I started reading, I could not put the book down. It was enjoyable all the way through, never boring.

There are few mandolin luthiers who would not admit to the influence of Randy Wood, and few Nashville musicians coming of age in the '70s who would not admit of some Wood influence on their career, since Wood's commitment to live music was as strong as his commitment to vintage and hand-made instruments. Not only was Wood's influence great in instrument building, but he, George Gruhn (Gruhn Guitars), and the late Tut Taylor helped to create a market for vintage and custom instruments, thus bringing them into the hands of thousands of talented musicians.

This book is an important work, scholarly but entirely readable. It helps bring a significant part of the history of modern luthiery and its connection with Bluegrass music to many who may not have otherwise had a chance to know it. Congratulations to my friend, Daniel Wile for the hard work on the book, and to my friend, Randy Wood, for the inspiration behind it. This book should certainly be up for an IBMA print media award.

Also, I must make mention Daniel Wile's acknowledgment in the book to author and Bluegrass Standard managing editor Richelle Putnam for her encouragement.

Randy Wood: The Lore of the Luthier is available through all major book outlets, and through Amazon at this link: [Daniel Wile/Randy Wood/Amazon](#). I am pleased to call both Daniel Wile and Randy Wood my influential friends. I am also pleased to have read this book.

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# Curios: Scroggins and Rose

## CD REVIEW – CURIOS

by Mississippi Chris Sharp

*Artist: Scroggins and Rose*

*Label: none listed*

Artist Website: [scrogginsandrose.com](http://scrogginsandrose.com)  
[tristanscroggins.com](http://tristanscroggins.com)

I was asked to review the new Scroggins and Rose CD, **Curios**, from mandolin virtuoso Tristan Scroggins and violinist Alisa Rose. They did not make it easy for me to review this new CD, which was scheduled for release on June 20, 2020. I stayed with it though, and thoroughly enjoyed wading through the mandolin and violin duets I heard from a streaming site. This all-instrumental CD feature just the mandolin and the violin, each instrument in the hands of masterful players, each instrument lending its assets to the overall sound, from the percussive chops on the mandolin, to the smooth legato of the

violin. I don't know where all the tunes come from, but the Soundcloud page from which I streamed the music credited six songs to Scroggins. Salute, Tristan, on a job well done.

The interplay between the mandolin and the fiddle was fabulous. This is not Bluegrass, but it is delightful acoustic music. Rose's fiddle sojourns to dizzying heights while notes just explode from the mandolin. There is a lot of music happening from a duo, which when done right, as this is, makes it sound like a full band. This music is complex at times, rhythmically and sonically, making me think that the artists are either extremely well-rehearsed, or reading music from standard notation, or both, which is likely. At other times, the music is soft, lyrical without lyrics (a remarkable achievement), and gentle.

Several tunes can be called favorites, but hands down my favorite is *Anxiety Jig*, where the soft mandolin and the pizzicato violin interlude is simply outstanding. This is a pleasurable listen from start to finish, definitely scoring high on my want-to-hear-it-again-meter.

A note forwarded from the publicist stated: "Combining two lifetimes of commitment to craft, technique, and stylistic integrity, Scroggins, a mandolinist and second generation Bluegrass virtuoso, and Rose, a Grammy-nominated violinist, create creative contemporary roots music with the expression and detail of classical music, the ebullient drive of fiddle music, and the thrilling virtuosity of both traditions," which is not an overstatement, and a sentence of fifty words that I admire, but not nearly so much as the music.

Credits include Producer Wes Corbett (Sam Bush Band), Engineer Dave Sinko, and artwork by Grace Van't Hof. The recording and mastering are superb. I would have liked to have seen more of the artwork from the CD, and the liner notes, but they were not available to me. I looked and looked and finally found the cover art for the CD on a website where it could be pre-

ordered; nothing was shown on the artist's websites, which is unfortunate.

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# Gary Brewer & The Kentucky Ramblers

## Gary Brewer & The Kentucky Ramblers

by Mississippi Chris Sharp

CD: 40th Anniversary Celebration

Artist: Gary Brewer & The Kentucky Ramblers

Label: Stretch Grass Music

Artist Website: [www.brewgrass.com](http://www.brewgrass.com)

Gary Brewer has released an all-star extravaganza of all original songs with his Gary Brewer & The Kentucky Ramblers 40th Anniversary Celebration. No doubt many of the songs, if not all, have appeared on some Brewer's previous fifty releases, but they were all new to me. The song list is as follows:

***Going up Shell Creek***

***Johnson City Blues***

***Daddy and the Old Oak Tree***

***The Rain is Coming Down***

***Blues Down in Kentucky***

*I Don't Know What's Become of Me*

*Down Home Memories*

*Home Ain't the Way it Used to Be*

*Girl from the Mountain*

*Money to Ride the Train*

*Love in the Mountains*

*I Can't Run off with You Darling*

*Big Train*

*Sally-0*



This is all straight ahead Bluegrass. My favorites songs are Johnson City Blues, Daddy and the Old Oak Tree (with Dale Ann Bradley), The Rain is Coming Down, Home Ain't the Way it Used to Be, Money to Ride the Train (with T. Graham Brown), I Can't Run off with You Darling, Big Train, and Sally-0: some driving Bluegrass, some poignant and reflective, and some just downright fun, like Sally-0. All done just right. All are Bluegrass in the Pocket.

The lineup other than the regular Kentucky Ramblers is Ron Stewart, Ronnie McCoury, Jason Carter, Dale Ann Bradley, Russell Moore, Sam Bush, Ashton Sheperd, T. Graham Brown,

Ralph Stanley II, and Doug Phelps. Gary Brewer shares the lead vocal duties with several of his guest artists. Money to Ride the Train was reminiscent of the Louvin's Cash on the Barrel-head, which is a good thing. The train doesn't run for free, which is a good life lesson.



I enjoyed this from start to finish: the music, the songs themselves, the artwork, and the liner notes. I tip my hat to Gary Brewer's original music, to all the The Kentucky Ramblers, and am anxious to hear more.

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# Daryl Mosley: The Secret of Life

## The Secret of Life

*CD: The Secret of Life*

*Artist: Daryl Mosley*

*Record Label: Pinecastle Recording Company*

*Artist Website: [www.darylmosely.com](http://www.darylmosely.com)*

*Label website: [www.pinecastlemusic.com](http://www.pinecastlemusic.com)*

*Release Date: May 22, 2020*

### Songs

1. A Few Years Ago
2. The Secret of Life
3. In a Country Town
4. Hands in Wood
5. It Never Gets Old
6. Do What the Good Book Says
7. All the Way Home
8. Piece at a Time
9. The Deal
10. I'd Write You
11. Heartaches Moving In

I am presented with far more CDs than I can review, even presented with more CDs than I can listen to. I am even presented with CDs I have listened to but either could not

make it through, or having made it through, never want to hear again: forgotten, tedious, mundane, run-of-the-mill, predictable, none of which are adjectives one wants applied to their CD. ***The Secret of Life*** is none of those things.

I admire songwriting, and simply thrill when songwriters spread their skills across the whole spectrum of a CD. Daryl Mosley's skill is evident upon the first listen. A promo sheet sent to me by his publicist listed many awards for songwriting. His songwriting is not a fluke. It has been tried and tested, and with ***The Secret of Life***, we are presented with an entire portfolio of his work. Of the eleven songs in ***The Secret of Life***, nine were penned outright by Mosley, with another two sharing co-writer credits, one with Rick Lang and other with The Grascal's Danny Roberts.

Mosely has some serious word-weaving skills to bring out a story in song, particularly in the title cut, *The Secret of Life*, and *In a Country Town*, *Hands in Wood*, and *A Piece at a Time*. *The Secret of Life* is a feel good song advising the listener that life is just where you find it. *In a Country Town* captures the feeling of life in the rural route and all the things those who choose such a life see as blessings which some perceive as drawbacks. *Hands in Wood* is an outstanding treatise on making a living with your hands and forging out a life for yourself and your family by the skills you bring to your work.

I liked all the songs on the CD. *The Deal* was a little dark for me, but others may find in it their own Secret of Life. My toe was fairly well tapping as I got to *In a Country Town*. The recording, mixing, and mastering were so smooth, I took the CD out of my laptop and hustled over to my studio PC. I fired it up loud on my Mackie HR824 monitors. If there was any harshness, those monitors would reveal it. I smiled because there was none. I turned it up louder and louder, until the walls were shaking: just smooth. That's the way I like it. I tip my hat to producers Mosely and Roberts, Gorilla's Nest

Studio, in Ashland City, TN, , and Audio Engineer Chris Latham. A couple of times I thought the fiddle was a bit too far back in the mix, but that is a matter of personal taste. All in all, it is a great piece of work.

The CD does not list a banjo player, but two mandolin players, co-producer Danny Roberts being one, and Aaron McDaris being the other. I scrambled around to find out who the banjoist was, and saw on the promo sheet sent to me that it was McDaris. I do not know if McDaris also played the mandolin on this CD, but I enjoyed it (Roberts?) I particularly enjoyed the banjo playing. While there is the school in Bluegrass music that subscribes to the concept of the constantly driving banjo, I did not attend that school. While McDaris drove right on through a couple of tunes, he does so impeccably. I thoroughly enjoyed his work. I also enjoyed the backup runs on Tony Wray's guitar. The sound of the guitar and the dobro, together, on *It Never Gets Old* had a delightful understated strength. Understated strength is a good thing since it lets our own minds inhabit the music and pull from our own experiences, which makes for a song that touches us personally. I think *It Never Gets Old* is my favorite song on the CD; the close duet harmonies are just perfect. *I'd Write You* is a hot-on-its-heels second.

*Do What the Good Book Says* just re-queued itself on my CD player. My toe is tapping.

I like that. Congratulations, Pinecastle and Daryl Mosely!

Mississippi Chris Sharp

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# Stillhouse Junkies: Calamity

## Stillhouse Junkies: Calamity

by Mississippi Chris Sharp

Artist: Stillhouse Junkies

CD: Calamity

Artist Website: [www.stillhousejunkies.com](http://www.stillhousejunkies.com)

Back in June, 2018, Stillhouse Junkie bassist Cody Tinnin sent me their new CD, Over the Pass. I was excited enough by what I heard that I wrote a review which I published in my blog ([Stillhouse Junkies – Over the Pass](#)) It was fresh, dynamic music. You'll note that I was captivated.

I saw that their new CD, CALAMITY, was just released. Thinking it would be hard for them to top the fresh originality of Over the Pass, I asked Tinnin to send me a link so I could review it for The Bluegrass Standard. Before I listened, I asked Tinnin what his thoughts on their new album were. His reply was,

*"This is our finest work yet for sure. Fred's songwriting is really great on this record and we accomplished what we set out to do which is to record a truly unique album."*

My initial thoughts were that Cody might be a little hasty. I was sure they couldn't top Over the Pass. They did. And they did it admirably.

The Bluegrass Standard offers traditional and progressive Bluegrass, Americana, and roots music. We'll place this firmly in the progressive acoustic Americana category. It sure ain't Bill Monroe. It was not intended to be. Good music is just

that, and my how I love to sit down and listen to a full album that has a theme. This album is like a good cigar; it takes time. Don't to bother spin it up unless you have the time to be absorbed and transported to a different place. There's no two minute breakdowns here. With several songs going over six minutes, they weren't worried about air-play, but getting the point of their music across in their own way. I'd say mission accomplished.

The Stillhouse Junkies aren't another jam band. Calamity is complex, with tight arrangements, stunning segues between musical sections, a fabulous trio sounding like a much bigger band, and stellar songwriting. From the wings, one might hazard the idea that their music is experimental, bringing to mind Led Zepplin, The Allman Brothers, The Hot Club of France, music from Mark O'Connor's new age phase, David Grisman, the Newgrass Revival, with the occasional and welcomed Celtic twist.

If new and fresh music is their goal, then they clearly see a pathway to creating it. Fred Kosak's songwriting is wonderfully poetic and complex. A few lines just grabbed me: "But the truth I hear is what you make it, and that was forty years ago, when I gambled everything I had in the mountains of New Mexico", "Stay if you must, chasing rust from your pipe dreams", "Nothing waiting at the end but all the miles left to go", and "Giving up on your mission is as good as giving in. Do you spend a lifetime wishing for a fight you can't win?" This is painful but glorious songwriting.

Those last three lines come from the Shackelton Suite: three songs, three parts, telling the story of [Sir Ernest Shackelton](#) and the tragic yet triumphant voyage of the Endurance to Antarctica. No one seems to bother writing and performing thematic albums, though there certainly did at one time. You rock music fans might recall King Crimson, Yes, The Moody Blues and a few others, who had entire albums with a theme. Those may not have been the most commercially successful

records, as they did not contain short, catchy songs, but they are still fresh and relevant as works of art. While Shackelton and his story may not be fresh, the triumphs and despairs of the human spirit are always relevant. I salute The Stillhouse Junkies for tackling music in this way.

I really like the inclusion of a snippet of the "Mission Impossible" theme song in Burn it Down. Roll it Home is high energy acoustic rock. Mountains of New Mexico has delightful melodic punctuation and interaction in the band. No Deal channels the Hot Club of France and Grapelli. Coraline, about love gone wrong, just flies at 160+ BPM. A Hundred Days was recycled from their previous CD and captures the spirit of Lewis and Clark in a Led Zeppelinesque sort of way; apparently the artist is not through with this song and its story. I went back and looked, and this is the second time I hear wisps of Led Zeppelin. Then the Shackelton Suite has it's own operatic quality, as intense as a Handel Oratorio. And My Own Hands echoes the Newgrass Revival with great instrumental transitions between musical sections and ethereal fiddle harmonics.

Cody Tinnin (bass/vocals), Alissa Wolf (fiddle/vocals), and Fred Kosak (guitar/mandolin/vocals) have the synergy to sound like a much larger band, which is what happens when the music is in the pocket. I am looking forward to seeing them soon. Congratulations, Stillhouse Junkies, on being original all the way. This music is art, through and through. Outstanding.

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# Bluegrass Headquarters

CD Review

CD: *Bluegrass Headquarters*

Artist: **Jussi Syren and The Groundbreakers**

Artist Website: [www.syren.fi](http://www.syren.fi)

Label: [Bluelight Records](#)

Label Website: N/A

Reviewer: Mississippi Chris Sharp

Finland is said to be the world's happiest country. That may be, as the Nordic countries have long found out how to make the best out of their lives in lands of short summers and long winters. With that in mind, I found myself wishing for a plate of [Poronkärjistys](#) or sautéed reindeer, one of the national dishes of Finland, as I listened to **Jussi Syren and the Groundbreaker's** CD, *Bluegrass Headquarters*. This CD starts and hardly stops for a breather. The first head-turner was the title cut, *Bluegrass Headquarters*, whereas the band was burning it up, some extremely hot fiddling had me reaching for the label to identify the fiddler. Mike Cleveland, it read. No wonder it turned my head.

I like that of the eleven songs on this CD, seven were penned by Syren, including the poignant *Okinawa Waltz*, which I enjoyed, which, along with *The Ballad of the White Death*, were about the only two songs in which one could catch one's breath. The instrumentals *Drop C Ride*, written by **Groundbreaker's** banjoist, Tauri Oksala, and the bluesy/modal *Road to Tammelund*, composed by Syren, were particularly enjoyable, with beautiful fiddle work by Cleveland and clear mandolin work by Syren. It reminded me of Monroe's *Last Days*

*on Earth*, though I'll bet a dollar to a dime Monroe never had a plate of Poronkäristys.

Syren's gospel tune, *Put the Bible Back in School Rooms*, was as Stanley-esque as anything I ever heard, while the *Ode to Bluegrass Mandolin* worked in a medley of tunes between the verses. The rest of the CD put me in remembrance of Jimmy Martin in speed and drive, other than the traditional *Walking in Jerusalem Just Like John*, which had me thinking of The Sullivan Family.

Included in the mix of tunes was Billy Joe Shaver's *I Been to Georgia on a Fast Train*. I counted it several times, and this song was played just at 180 beats per minute, which is about as fast as a train can go in Georgia. Apparently, they can go faster in Finland. It was blistering. If it had been any faster, I don't know if my hearing could have kept up. Let no one say that the Finns cannot play as fast as the North Carolinians, both of whom can play faster than this Mississippian. Never mind me; just pass the Poronkäristys.

I particularly liked the Bob and Joe Tanner song *Bitter Tears*.

Bluegrass is alive and well in Finland. Served up with some fresh sautéed reindeer, Finnish Bluegrass would be just the thing to go with on this cold, Mississippi, February night. I expect a February night is much colder in Finland. Maybe Jussi and me will retreat to our saunas, the biggest difference being that I have no snowbank to plunge into after I come out. Maybe we'll both take a ride to our Gulf Coasts: me to the Gulf of Mexico, he to the Gulf of Bothnia. No matter how cold,

we'll both have some hot bluegrass to warm us up.

The liner notes indicated that this CD was recorded live in the studio with the exception of Cleveland's fiddle and the dobro overdubs. I enjoyed the natural room reverb or the excellent plate reverb that the recording engineer used. To my ear, many of the tracks could have benefited from a little more separation and less bleed-over. Other than that. I'll say nicely done.

**Jussi Syren and the Groundbreakers'** *Bluegrass Headquarters* is straight ahead bluegrass brought to you from the world's happiest country. It made me happy just to listen.

Mississippi Chris Sharp

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# Barefoot Movement

by Mississippi Chris Sharp

CD: *Rise and Fly*

Artist: **The Barefoot Movement**

Artist Website: [thebarefootmovementofficial.com](http://thebarefootmovementofficial.com)

Label: Bonfire Recording Company/Bonfire Music Group

Label Website: [www.bonfiremusicgroup.com](http://www.bonfiremusicgroup.com)

Reviewer: Mississippi Chris Sharp

There's something to be said for an EP release of your new CD. With a limited number of songs, one can make sure that each song is dynamite, which is what I'd unreservedly call the five songs on **The Barefoot Movement's** new EP release, *Rise and Fly*. There's only five songs, and easily five favorites.

This CD came into my hands the other day, along with several others, and I was encouraged to listen to it a hard listen. I looked at the stack of CDs I'd been handed, then looked at *Rise and Fly*. I shrugged my shoulders at the EP, noting only five songs. After listening, I wished there was at least five more, sure that if there had been, the additional five would have been as enjoyable as the five included.

**The Barefoot Movement** bills themselves as an Americana/Bluegrass/Roots/Rock Influenced band; that covers a lot of ground, so much ground as it really has little meaning. What I am certain of is that what I heard on the EP was fresh, new but not too new, as for some reason I could not help thinking of the late 60's Folk-Rock/Celtic group Fairport

Convention as I listened, which many of you boomers like me recall as your first fine taste of guitar master Richard Thompson and his wonderful vocals and arrangements with the late Sandy Denny. If you do recall, you'll know this is some heady company. Whispers of Fleetwood Mac gave me a few gentle caresses, too: more heady company.

Of the five songs on this EP, four are originals by two bandmates, fiddler Noah Wall and guitarist Alex Conerly. The rest of the band consists of Tommy Norris on Mandolin, and bassist Katie Blomarz. All band members share in the vocals. The EP information indicates Josh Hunt played the drums, and from the sound of it, a true percussionist and not a mere drummer, which is a sincere compliment.

I learned from the band's website that they were the recipients of 2014 IBMA Momentum Award. The momentum has apparently lagged a bit as six years later, I have in my hand this five song EP. I hope the momentum is gaining steam, that the fire is stoked, and the boiler pressure is on the rise. This is the first encounter I've had with this group, but I'd sure like to hear more. As for not being familiar with the band, I live in an apparent vacuum since the number of bands I have not heard of can only be counted in scientific notation.

Three of the songs were written by Wall: *Doin' Alright*, *Every Little Thing*, and *At the End of the Day*. One song was penned by Conerly: *Lonely Mississippi Blues*. Any guess as to which was my absolute favorite? Hands down, *Lonely Mississippi Blues*. I'm assuming Conerly belts out the lead vocals on this song, which makes me nostalgic for my beloved Mississippi, even though I'm in Mississippi as I write this. My nostalgia should be easily satisfied as I listen once more to Conerly belt it out, making me think of the great Alabama band Wet Willie, and their lead singer, Jimmy Hall, with faint echoes of Little Feat.

The lead single, *Early in the Morning*, is billed as a

traditional song. I've never heard it before. The rousing a *capella* rendition was delightful, but not the single I would have picked for initial release. No doubt, this is the song that will come the closest to satisfying the traditionalist's tastes. Perhaps this is the reason for its release as a single. I can only speculate.

There's no indication of who's doing the singing on *At the End of the Day*, but it was a beautiful rendition of a poignant lullaby to send me off into the ether, having enjoyed several listens as I write this.

Congratulations, to **The Barefoot Movement**. They look to have an a active touring season coming up. Maybe I'll get to see them. I'll be looking forward to it. Whenever your hard-to-define Americana/Bluegrass/Roots/Rock-Influenced band dredges up echoes of Fairport Convention, Fleetwood Mac, Wet Willie, and Little Feat, I'd say you were doing something right, even if defining the music isn't so easy. In fact, it is far easier to like that it is to define.

I like that about it.

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