

NO DEPRESSION

(/)

COLUMN

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Exploring music without a map.

[EASY ED \(/USERS/EASY-ED\)](/users/easy-ed)



Since 2009, Ed has shared his thoughts on ND about music that touches him, and rambled hither and yon about what else is on his mind.

Five Strings Down in Rockville



Photo by Michael G. Stewart

HATS OFF TO THE astute reader who will glance at the headline, look at the accompanying picture, and come to the conclusion that the writer is confusing his stringband string-ology. He is not. The man in the hat is Tom Mindte -- a bluegrass musician and the founder/owner of Patuxent Music (<http://www.pxrec.com/>), home to both a record label and studio. Ignore for a moment the mandolin he's holding, because last year his label released a sweet collection of banjo-based performances that I keep coming back to like a bowl of peanuts on a bar.

Produced by Mark Delaney and Randy Barrett, both noted players in their own right, *The Patuxent Banjo Project* brings together 40 regional players from the Baltimore-Washington corridor, an area rich in bluegrass history and tradition.

Rockville is the county seat and home to over 60,000 people. It has the state's largest Chinese population and is the area's center for Jewish culture and religion. I'll also mention that the town has two women's flat track roller derby teams: the Black-Eyed Suzies and the Rock Villains.

More to the point, back in the mid-1940s, the entire area became a destination for the rural folks who lived in the Appalachian and Piedmont regions of the Virginias, Carolinas, and Tennessee. Attracted by job opportunities, the people brought the music from the hills with

~~Mem.~~

Country music historian Ivan Tribes has written detailed notes (http://www.pxrec.com/p2_Patuxent_Banjo_project.html) for the banjo project, attesting to how the "barroom bluegrass" scene came about, and citing the ease of travel north to Philadelphia and south to Richmond to play at country music parks, festivals, and quite a number of bars and venues. Tribes notes key players such as "Buzz Busby, Benny and Vallie Cain, Bill Harrell, and Earl Taylor. Others," he writes, "were known by collective names such as the Bluegrass Champs, Rocky Mountain Boys, Shady Valley Boys, Pike County Boys, and — perhaps best known of all from 1957 forward — the Country Gentlemen."

Patuxent Music began back in 1995 when Mindte recorded fiddler Joe Meadows, who worked with the Stanley Brothers and Bill Monroe, and brought the record out himself the following year. Next up was a blues record in the Piedmont style and his catalog soon expanded to include jazz, old time, swing, and country. With string bands being his primary interest, he has focused both on musicians with long careers, such as members of the Stoneman family and Frank Wakefield, as well as the younger players. Nate Leath from Old School Freight Train has released a number of albums on Patuxent; his *Rockville Pike* album features a 16-year-old Sarah Jarosz and 14-year-old Tatiana Hargreaves.

No One Knows my Name



The Patuxent Banjo Project, which led me down this path of discovery, is a two-disc set with 40 tracks and a 40-page booklet. Some of the Baltimore/Washington musicians you might already know include Bill Emerson, Eddie Adcock, Walt Hensley, Chris Warner, Tom Adams, Dick Smith, Keith Arneson, Murphy Henry, Kevin Church, Roni Stoneman, and Mike Munford. Richard Thompson (not that one, the *other* one) from *Bluegrass Today* (<http://bluegrasstoday.com/the-patuxent-banjo-project/>) breaks down what you can expect to hear.



Not only are there variations of three-finger banjo playing, old-time, there are two banjo/fiddle duets, a classical piece and a couple of twin banjo numbers, one of which features cello-banjo. All of which adds up to a major audio documentation of a versatile instrument.

Back on Father's Day in 2013, I bought a five string banjo in Beacon, New York, the home of Pete Seeger. It seemed like the right thing to do, given his recent passing earlier that year. I got it from David Bernz, who produced some of Pete's last albums and who also runs Main Street Music with his son. Trying to teach myself how to either clawhammer or three-finger roll the darn thing was useless, and I've since settled on a two-finger early fingerstyle method from the 19th century. Most of the time it hangs on my wall, but *The Patuxent Banjo Project* has been inspiring me to try a little harder. More importantly, it's carrying on an American roots music tradition to a new generation of players. Five strings down in Rockville. Hallelujah.



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BY [GARY STOLLER \(/USERS/GARY-STOLLER\)](/users/gary-stoller) ON APRIL 19, 2015

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