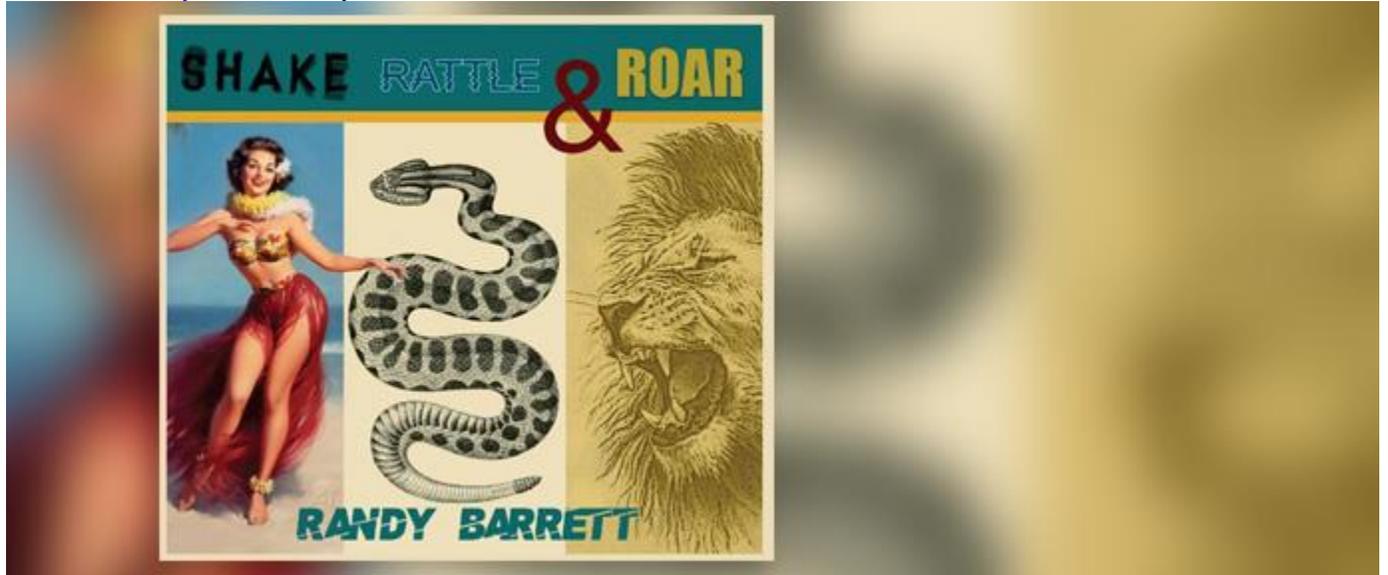


Shake, Rattle & Roar – Randy Barrett

Posted on [May 18, 2020](#) by [Lee Zimmerman](#)



Randy Barrett seems to come by his craft naturally. A singer, songwriter, banjo player, fiddler, teacher, and luthier, he's enjoyed a 40 year career recreating sounds of vintage origins. A winner of seven Washington area music awards and a member of the band Big Howdy, he's released four albums on his own and also occupies a seat on the board of Bluegrass Country radio, the country's oldest traditional music broadcaster. He also served as president of the DC Bluegrass Union until stepping down after a 12 year stint to make more time for playing and performing.

It's little wonder then that [Shake, Rattle & Roar](#) is as expressive as its title suggests, although it's hardly the singular rave-up that the banner might have us believe. Comprised primarily of instrumentals — the one exception, closing track, *Walkin' Boss*, is a rustic traditional tune for which Barrett supplied additional lyrics — it spotlights Randy and his able backing band (Nate Leath on fiddle, Danny Knicely on mandolin, guitarist Tom McLaughlin, and bassist Mark Schatz) to excellent effect throughout.

Barrett's banjo playing is nimble, assured, emphatic and expressive, giving songs such as *Mercury Dime*, *Nashville Blues*, and *Appomattox* a zest and dynamic that consistently captures the listener's attention and makes the songs soar. Likewise, the more subdued offerings — the lullaby-like *Midnight on the Water* and the thoughtful *December Light* — set a mellower mood, with Schatz's rich bass work providing extra depth in terms of tone and texture.

Naturally, the overall energy and enthusiasm are well apparent. Barrett's original compositions dominate the proceedings, although Earl Scruggs and Eric Weissberg are represented as well on the aforementioned *Nashville Blues* and the rollicking *Pony Express*, respectively. Yet Barrett's single most obvious influence appears to be Béla Fleck, and on the steadily paced *Gracie's Groove*, that impression becomes obvious. On the other hand, when the group gets into a groove

of its own, as on *Old Zeke* and the title track in particular, their easy affinity with one another is immediately apparent.

Granted, instrumental music doesn't always attain a clear connection, especially when the emphasis is on dazzling displays of virtuosity rather than trying to sustain a tangible melody. Barrett and company manage to accomplish both, making *Shake, Rattle & Roar* from Patuxent Records an album that's effectively defined by both its verve and its variety.