

That Was Then – Springfield Exit

[David Morris](#) | February 18, 2015 | [2 Comments](#)



One of my biggest gripes as a lover of bluegrass music is to hear terrific picking and singing on a CD only to hear that the band in question can't replicate that sound – or even come close – on the stage.

Such bands would do themselves – and their fans – a great service by listening to Springfield Exit's exquisite CD, [That Was Then](#), and following its lead. There are no triple fiddles, no over-the-top production, no all-star pickers standing in for the band's regular members. Just top-notch musicianship and sublime harmonies across the board.

Of course, Springfield Exit isn't just any band. The marriage of three former members of the Johnson Mountain Boys and two from the much-loved Virginia band, Appalachian Trail, makes for some great listening.

Each instrument is played with authority, but that shouldn't come as a surprise from a unit that features a three-time IBMA banjo player of the year (Tom Adams), four-time bass player of the year (Marshall Wilborn) and a guy who masters just about anything with strings (David McLaughlin). And don't overlook some fine rhythm guitar work from David Lay.

But the real highlight here is the singing, especially the lead vocals of Linda Lay. She doesn't have the following of those who are regularly nominated for awards, but she certainly has the chops. She sings with comfort and authority across a range of musical styles, sliding from tender ballad to growling blues with ease. From the opening notes of *No One Knows* to the swing of *That Was Then and This Is Now* (written by Wilborn) and the folk-rocky *Peaceful Easy Feeling* (popularized by the Eagles), Lay keeps the listener locked on her every word.

The best of the best in this collection is a cover of the Don Williams' classic, *Till The Rivers All Run Dry*. There's not an extra note or frill to be found. From first listen, and through dozens more, I've found Lay's interpretation even more compelling than the original. Don't be surprised to hear this one all over bluegrass radio.

Another favorite is Bob Dylan's *You Ain't Going Nowhere*. Wilborn is such a rock-steady bass player that it's easy to overlook his aw-shucks vocals, especially when he has spent much of career in bands with terrific singers – first his wife Lynn Morris and now Linda Lay. His vocal here, the only song Linda doesn't take the lead on, is fun and comfortable and though often recorded, the take is fresh and interesting.

Actually, fresh and compelling pretty much describes [*That Was Then*](#). If you give it a listen, I'm pretty sure you'll be tapping your foot and singing along.