

New Bluegrass: Springfield Exit's 'That Was Then'

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Springfield Exit — That Was Then

Label: Patuxent Music

On their new album, *That Was Then*, Springfield Exit offers 14 flawless, mostly traditional bluegrass songs — each of them as pure and uncluttered as could ever be hoped for in a bluegrass tune, and all of them a perfect synthesis of vocals and instrumentation. From the opening rhythms of “No One Knows” to the final strummed chord of “I’ve Endured,” the album knows exactly where it is going and takes you there with a sometimes relaxed, sometimes jaunty, often emotionally hypnotic effect.

Springfield Exit includes three former members of the Johnson Mountain Boys and two members from the band Appalachian Trail: Linda Lay (vocals), David Lay (guitar & vocals), David McLaughlin (mandolin, guitar, banjo, fiddle & vocal), Marshall Wilborn (bass) and Tom Adams (banjo).

The material is a seamless blend of originals and classics. One of the most alluring aspects of this album is the self-restraint shown in the performances. In this age of the constant hard sell, it is so refreshing to hear a group of musicians (who are clearly more than capable of being solo virtuosi) be so assured of their talent that they actually hold a little bit back. The music is so good that it has the effect of making you lean in and actively listen. And that’s a pleasure to do when the lead vocalist is Linda Lay. If you’ve never had the chance to breathe in the air of Bristol, TN & VA, her voice will transport you there... and by the time she finishes a song like “Don’t We All Have the Right,” you’ll swear you grew up there yourself. There’s potential heartbreak underneath almost every note she sings, which shades every song with the history of pain and pride in that hallowed mountain air.

If you can't get yourself to 11-E and experience Bristol in person, I can think of no better alternative route than taking the Springfield Exit, no matter where you are. It will take you places your ears (and your heart) will love.

Essential Downloads: "That Was Then and This Is Now," "Lonesome Wind," "Till The Rivers All Run Dry," "Some Old Day."