

Willie Marschner – Willie Marschner

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Suffice it to say, Willie Marschner's parents must be proud. His eponymous album for Patuxent Records shows that at the age of only 13, this native of Fairfax Virginia displays a combination of skill and dexterity on the fiddle that would likely make musicians many times his age blush with envy.

Backed by an able group of pickers and players — his dad Pearse Marschner on banjo and guitar, mandolinist and guitar player Danny Knicely, Brennen Ernest contributing banjo and piano, Mark Schatz on bass, and label head Tom Mindte providing a cameo on mandolin — the younger Marschner shows a verve and versatility that distinguishes each of these fifteen tunes and allows the music to shine. Willie's well-versed in his craft, as evidenced by the remarkable range of material and the sources that he gleans in the process. He switches styles with an apparent ease, from the upbeat *Sugar Tree Stomp* and the lively and sprightly *Brown County Breakdown* (one of three songs he covers by Bill Monroe), to a touching trilogy, *The Irish Slow Set*, and a graceful remake of *Autumn Leaves* which he effectively makes his own.

Although the album consists almost entirely of instrumentals — the one exception is another Bill Monroe composition, the moving *Mansions for Me*, which finds Willie harmonizing with his dad and sharing an impressive mandolin solo as well — the music makes a marked impression in terms of the execution and emotion invested throughout. That said, Willie avoids the temptation to steal the spotlight or purvey the precocious attitude to which younger musicians sometimes fall prey while in the process of trying to prove they're every bit as capable as their elders. In this case, the performances provide all the proof needed that this young man is not only able to hold his own, but talented enough to dictate the direction.

There's little doubt, then, that the kudos will come quickly. Of course, some will say simply that Willie is a prodigy and they'll emphasize his age when commending him on his ability. The fact is, however, that there's really no need to qualify the complements or use his youth as a defining

distinction. Willie Marschner's skill speaks for itself and, given that fact, nothing else really needs to be noted.