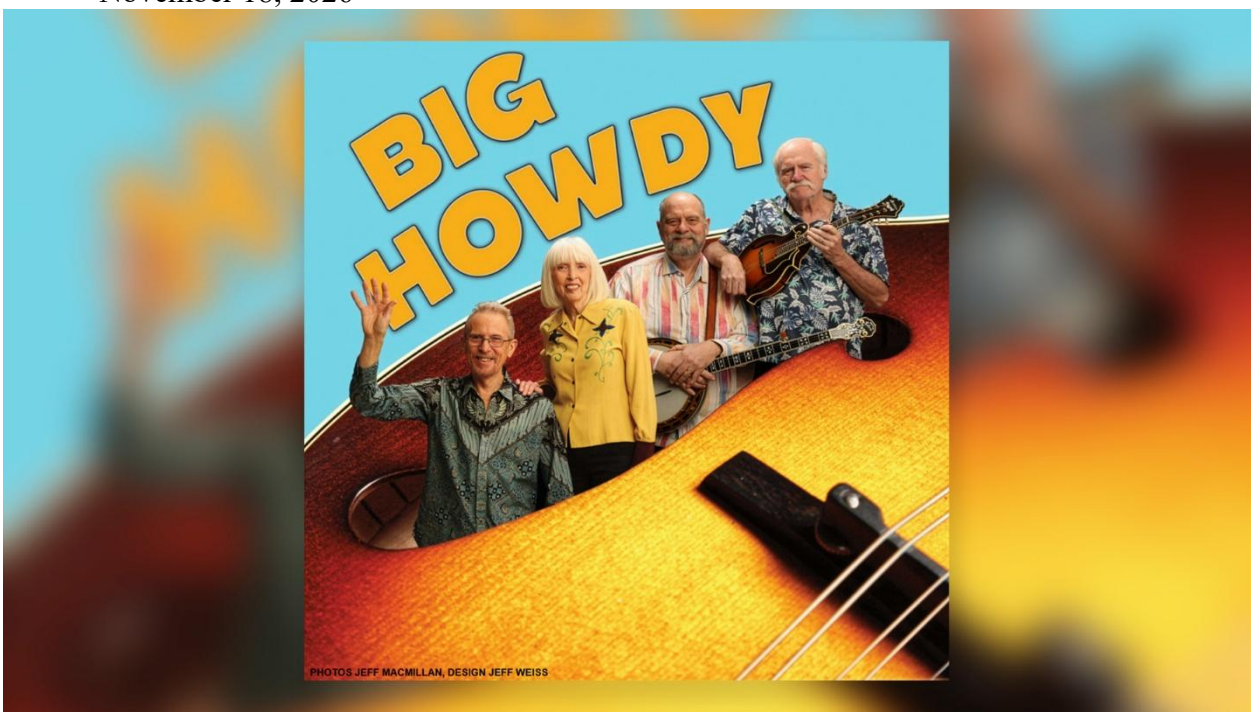
Bluegrass Today

Self-Titled – Big Howdy

- Braeden Paul
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With their home base in the DC area, Big Howdy describes themselves on their website as "progressive bluegrass with an eye on the future and a nod to the past." The group's self-titled debut release on Patuxent Music shows how incredibly accurate that assessment is. All thirteen selections vary stylistically, but never stray too far from Big Howdy's core sound.

The album opens with *All Along,* written by the great songwriter Bob Lucas. With solid trio vocal harmony, Big Howdy comes out of the gate strong. The band consists of Randy Barrett on banjo and vocals, Dede Wyland on guitar and vocals, Tom McLaughin on mandolin and vocals, and Ira Gitlin on bass and vocals.

The next two tracks, *Richmon Safford* and *Hillbilly Chrome,* were both penned by Randy Barrett. The former tells a sad, albeit a bit spooky tale, while the latter is an instrumental showcasing Barrett's clawhammer banjo playing. On both of these selections, Ron Stewart is guesting with the band on fiddle.

The highlights of this recording are the duet vocal numbers featuring Barrett and Wyland. One such example is *Little Darlin'.* Written by Julie Miller, the song's feelings of sadness and heartache come through powerfully through Barrett and Wyland's singing, along with the dobro augmented by guest Fred Travers.

Cowboy Yodel Song and *When A Good Girl Goes Bad* are great stylistic contrasts. The former puts Dede Wyland front and center doing some impressive yodeling while the latter is a Randy Barrett original with a slight rockabilly flavor. Tom McLaughlin's mandolin playing on this track particularly stands out.

Speaking of instrumentalism, the album closes with *Cold Frosty Morning,* an old time favorite that allows every single person in the band to show what they can do on their instruments. As Dede Wyland stated in the liner notes, Big Howdy initially started out as a loose configuration playing pick-up gigs here and there, before saying the "band" word out loud and making it official. Thank god they did! Big Howdy has released an excellent debut, one chock-full of variety and originality.