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REVIEW

“What The” by Pete Wernick and Flexigrass. CD. www.drbanjo.com

Review by Ian Perry

Over the years, there have been many attempts to combine the sound of bluegrass banjo with different instruments in non-bluegrass settings, with varying degrees of success. But there is no question that Pete Wernick has found a formula that works with his band Flexigrass. Their CD “*What The*” brings together banjo, vibes, clarinet, bass and drums and in the process weaves a musical tapestry that is new and exciting, while still drawing firmly on the roots of both traditional bluegrass and jazz. The music created by this apparent potpourri of instruments is brought into focus by the very distinctive, versatile and alluring vocals of Pete’s wife Joan, who manages to deliver bluegrass classics, timeless jazz standards, and even Ann Murray’s pop-country crossover hit *Snowbird*, with complete conviction and total believability.

The other members of Flexigrass are Greg Harris (vibes), Bill Ponterelli (clarinet), Kris Ditson (drums) and Roger Johns (bass) and through the course of “*What The*”, all show that they possess the kind of chops necessary to handle such diverse material. The clarinet and vibes easily handle the barn-burning tempo of the Pete Wernick original *Leaving Town* while Pete’s tasteful banjo intro on the jazzy *Wrap Your Troubles In A Dream* fits into the groove perfectly.

The CD kicks off with the bluegrass favorite *Blue Train*, immediately letting you know that these musicians have found common ground. *The Highest Place*, another Wernick original, brings back Pete's "banjo through a phase shifter" sound that fans of his earlier recordings will remember well. The rest of "What The" includes three more Wernick originals, the bluegrass standard *Blackberry Blossom* and even a version of the Benny Goodman classic *Air Mail Special*. On *Bye Bye Blackbird* Pete flexes his Flexigrass muscles, showing that the band can swing a tune all the way from

a smooth jazz standard into a rollicking bluegrass romp.

Pete Wernick has a long history of respecting tradition while keeping an eye to the future, and Flexigrass is an excellent example of that approach. "What The" is a valid and enjoyable step in the evolution of the 5-string as it strives to spread its wings and find its place in an ever broadening spectrum of musical styles. Die-hard traditionalists may be scared away by the drums and other instrumentation, but anyone interested in exploring the possibilities of the banjo in particular, and music in

general, will be pleasantly rewarded by the Flexigrass experience.

Tab notes: This tune got started when Cory Walker, then 13, was at my banjo camp and asked me how Rob McCoury played the break on *Vincent Black Lightning* 1952. I checked out the record, and of course Rob starts with the 3-2 pulloff on the first string, on a C chord. That night I messed around with that at home, and once I got the pull-off on the F6 chord going, I had this tune started. —Pete Wernick

Waiting For Daylight

G Tuning: gDGBD
By Pete Wernick. Tab by Pete Wernick with Ian Perry

A Part

C

F C

F G Dm

Am Eb C

G C F C

B Part Gm F C

F G

C

Available as an Mp3 soundfile at www.banjonews.com
For more info or to get this record go to www.drbanjo.com