

Reviews

The Way Down Wanderers

Illusions SELF-RELEASED



With the release of their eponymous debut, the Illinois-based group **The Way Down Wanderers** found themselves

occupying a crowded field. It's an area populated by those who tap bluegrass tradition and take a populist position through frequency on the festival circuit. Fortunately, The Way Down Wanderers distinguish themselves by pushing against the parameters that often confine certain artists, despite similar intents. If anything, the band's sophomore set is more assertive than the one before, in that it finds them infusing slight hints of reggae, jazz and even a bit of rap into their rootsy regimen. Producer **David Schiffman** likely has something to do with encouraging the diversity; with a past client roster that's included Johnny Cash, Haim and Rage Against the Machine, it's apparent that he's comfortable commanding any shift in style. So for every upbeat, back-porch bluegrass rave-up like "Frozen Through" or "Lonesome," there's the equally effusive harmonies of "Principles of Salt" and a spiky rhythm like the one that shuffles through a song like "She's Alright." Like many bluegrass sets, there is an emphasis on energy, but this is far from a series of solos and string vamps. The gentle caress of both "Crooked Pines" and the title track, the tangled tapestry strewn through "All My Words" and the clear conviction shared in "Heartland" all ensure that the melodic quotient remains intact—although never at the expense of the more assertive sounds. Consequently, those who consider themselves more song-centric will find plenty to appreciate as well. It's comforting to know there's nothing deceptive about these particular *Illusions*. *Lee Zimmerman*