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## Review: Way Down Wanderers bend genres in soaring set



The Way Down Wanderers, “Illusions”

Somewhere on the spectrum between Old Crow Medicine Show and Mumford and Sons lies the spirited bluegrass-based artistry of the Way Down Wanderers.

With their second release, “Illusions,” the Illinois quintet puts its own hybrid imprint on the lickety-split brand of Americana that draws rock ‘n’ roll power from a banjo, a standup bass, a mandolin and other traditional sounds.

For band members and listeners alike, the desired effect is the adrenalin rush.

The album ranges around some, mostly between runaway jams and balladry. The lyrics are descriptive if not especially groundbreaking, and the musicianship is first-rate. The airtight harmonies and cohesive ensemble work reward repeat listening.

The opener, “Principles of Salt,” veers toward the Old Crow end of the spectrum, jaunty and celebratory but filled with provocative declarations. America, for example, has given up and “overdosed on Adderall.”

But then comes “Frozen Through,” a song that accelerates the pace. Standup bass and harmony drive the speeding train, kind of in the Mumford and Sons way but with a refreshingly less studied vibe. This one probably sounds great live, though it feels like the band could spin right off the stage.

A ballad, “Crooked Pines,” might be the album’s most anthemic song. The lyrics paint a shimmering pastoral portrait that gradually becomes the setting for heartache, but the effect is majestic.

The album’s lyrical sentiments veer toward sadness in that way, but the playing throughout “Illusions” rarely does. It is joyful, daring and occasionally sublime.