Media

Finger-picking good—*Heartland*

The DownTown Mountain Boys (bluegrass), with Professor of Politics and Government Don Share on guitar and vocals, and Terry Enyeart, Dave Keenan, Tom Moran, and Paul Elliott

Audio CD

Review by Ian Fox '14
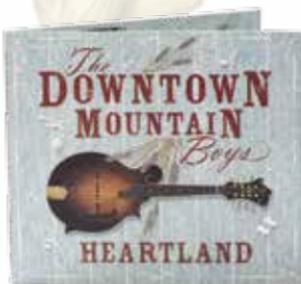
Harmony. It has a few definitions, but any way you use it, no word better describes the DownTown Mountain Boys' latest album, *Heartland.*

Each of the Boys is an accomplished musician in his own right, but together they become an exemplary classic bluegrass group.

Heartland, their second album (we reviewed their first, *Big Darlin',* in these pages in 2008), is a celebration of the bluegrass spirit, from their joyful rendition of "Like a Train Needs a Track" to the haunting "If It Hadn't Been For Love." And though the Boys toy with various song structures and moods, they never stray from their roots. Tracks like "Riding on the L&N" and the heartbreaking "Shannon's Last Ride" are distilled to their essences—catchy, intricate songs with addictive harmonies.

The band's love for the genre shines through in a live show. It feels less like a performance and more like a jam session. Their deceivingly simple three-part harmonies never get in the way of a quirky sense of humor: "Like a Train Needs a Track," for example, ends with a harmony that replicates a runaway steam train.

In fact, listening to the album again after the show, I yearned for the "voice" of their live performance. Putting it on tape almost lessens the band's unity, breaking up the instruments and vocals into distinct objects as opposed to their music brewing together to make a rich, complex flavor.

But even if recordings can't replicate the DownTown Mountain Boys' stage presence, *Heartland* puts on display what the band does best—well-crafted songs, simple and exciting lyrics, and exemplary musicianship. Combined, they've really reached a special kind of harmony.

Ian Fox, in addition to the many talents he exhibits as Arches *intern, is a pretty durned good mandolin player and a bluegrass fanatic.*