

Tony Furtado

Decembering

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“Tony Furtado, banjo player, is back...in a big way,” writes banjo master Tony Trischka in his liner notes to *Decembering*, the brand-new album from Tony Furtado. “He’s planted his flag in the midst of the fertile ground that is modern banjo. Texturally fresh, confidently audacious, rich and giving, this recording is a masterpiece.”

It’s been over thirty years since Tony Furtado first made his mark on Planet Banjo with the release of his debut album on Rounder Records, *Swamped*. He was—and still is—traditionally rooted, progressively oriented, and a composer of rare skill. *Decembering* is a welcome return to the banjo and a much-needed ray of sunshine and light in these troubled times.

Because of the pandemic, *Decembering* was recorded in isolation, with no face-to-face contact between musicians. “I started this in my basement (affectionately called Squirrelville Studio) just as the pandemic began,” explains Tony. “The process was simple but really challenging. I would record my parts first, send them out to each player to put down their parts one at a time, sometimes doubling back to re-record each part to fit better as the tune grew and evolved. It was like a game of audio ping-pong.”

Recording an album with this process was quite a feat, but *Decembering* is well worth the extra effort that was required. The album contains eight tunes Tony wrote on for the banjo and cello banjo, plus a Beatles cover (“Here Comes the Sun”) and a new take on a traditional fiddle tune, “Nimrod Hornpipe,” reimagined as a Brazilian folk song. Tony’s original tunes and inventive arrangements make this an album that rewards careful, repeated listening. Tony’s banjo is front and center, both the regular five-string and the lower-tuned cello banjo. He’s also a brilliant slide guitarist, though in this case, it’s here to support the banjo.

Tony is joined on *Decembering* by a stellar cast of musicians who rose to the challenges presented by recording an album in isolation. The roster included some folks Tony has played with over the years and some he’s admired but never worked with, including John Doyle on guitar & bouzouki (Solás), Todd Sickafoose on bass (Ani DiFranco/Anais Mitchell), Rob Burger on keyboards & accordion (Iron & Wine/Tin Hat Trio), fiddler Luke Price (Love, Dean), cellist Tristan Clarridge (Bee Eaters), mandolinists Mike Marshall & Matt Flinner, and drummers Scott Amendola, Aaron Johnston, & Carter McClean.

Feeling that we all needed some light and some hope, Tony wanted *Decembering* to be a heartfelt and vivid statement. There’s a real sense of joy that comes through on every cut on this recording from a veteran and truly original musician. In the words of Tony Trischka, “Considering that this album was created as the pandemic was revving up, this is one mighty silver lining.”

“A banjo album recorded during a pandemic” sounds like the punchline to a bad banjo joke, but *Decembering* is one of the deepest, most satisfying albums in Tony’s catalog, a soulful, tuneful meditation on the craziness and chaos of the past year and a half.



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Tony Furtado’s new project is required listening for anyone curious about the possibilities for the five string banjo. - **Alison Brown**