

The album, "Ghost of the Damned" is Ventucky String Band's fifth release on Philville Records. The ten song concept album featuring the songwriting of bandleader, Matt Sayles, focuses around some of the darker tales in Bluegrass and Western swing, interspersed with both stylized original and traditional music from the era of the featured characters.

"The Ballad of Roy Lee Centers" tells the sad story of one of the greatest vocalists and guitar pickers in Bluegrass, Roy Lee Centers (of Ralph Stanley's "Clinch Mountain Boys."). Roy replaced Ralph's brother, Carter, after he died, and sang with such an eerie similarity to Carter, it sometimes unnerved Ralph Stanley. [Roy Lee Centers met his dark fate in Kentucky in the early 1970's, and his murderer—a prominent member of town—was convicted of the crime, but was later released on appeal due to a highly suspicious jury decision.](#)

"If There's Western Swing In Hell" tells the story of the [infamous Oklahoma native and self proclaimed "King of Western Swing" –Spade Cooley](#). Once a popular Los Angeles band leader in the 30's, 40's and 50's, Spade Cooley committed a disturbing murder late in his career, and met his fate just before he was to be set free from jail.

Other original songs like the title track, "Ghost of the Damned" and "Cursed Rover" are narrated from the perspective of spirits that haunt the lonely forested back-roads of Kentucky and the wide-expanse of the West referenced in "Ballad of Roy Lee Centers" and "If There's Western Swing In Hell"

The other songs, "What Makes Life Worthwhile" and "Herlong Mamma" are added for levity—with the former being an ode to the beer halls that so many string bands still perform in, and the latter being a tribute to the sturdy and tough women of [Herlong, in the Honey Lake Valley California](#).

The traditional songs like "Alabama Jubilee," "Lost John," and "Columbus Stockade Blues" offer a glimpse of what you might have heard played by the characters and the bands who inhabit the original songs on the album.

The final track, "I Bid Farewell," is an homage to all bands that strive to keep alive the early roots of American Folk, Blues, and Country music—which is itself, a melancholy endeavor.

To bookend the fifth release by the Ventucky String Band on Philville Records (Catalog #014), the band brought back their original fiddle player, David Roine, who appeared on their first self-titled release in 2011. David Roine plays on "Ghost of the Damned," and "If There's Western Swing in Hell" as well as "Herlong Mamma." Roine grew up in Southern California and recalled watching Spade Cooley on television as a young man—as well as hearing about the horrible murder Spade Cooley committed later in life.

Roine's appreciation of this era of music and ability to play beautiful double-fiddle parts on the tracks captured a sound that helped bring the original pieces to a more period-authentic sound.

Founding members David White and Rick Clemens once again returned for this fifth release, with David White contributing mandolin, banjo, harmonica, and vocals on the album, and Rick Clemens playing up-right Bass.

Matt Sayles sings lead vocals on all tracks except "the Ballad of Roy Lee Centers" (Dave White sings lead on that track) and plays guitar, dobro, tri-cone resonator, banjo, and lead guitar on the album.

The album was recorded, produced, mixed and mastered by Matt Sayles on his independent label, Philville Records, in Ventura, California.