

## Dixie Lullabies

The Kentucky Headhunters



## Review

by William Ruhlmann

Originally consisting of the brothers [Ricky Lee](#) (vocals) and [Doug](#) (bass) Phelps, and [Richard](#) (rhythm guitar) and [Fred](#) (drums) Young, plus the Youngs' cousin [Greg Martin](#) (lead guitar), the [Kentucky HeadHunters](#) had been playing together for over 20 years before they broke through nationally in the late 1980s and early '90s, particularly in the country market, selling millions of records and earning several CMA awards. That career momentum was stopped by the departure of the Phelps brothers after two albums in 1992 ([Doug](#) returned in 1996), and by then another two decades had

passed. But the remaining quartet is still at it, and [Dixie Lullabies](#), their 12th album, is their first studio recording of new original material since 2003. Not surprisingly for musicians who have been together so long, it is similar to previous efforts. [The Kentucky HeadHunters](#) may be placed in the Southern rock category, but in their case, that means they straddle a country and a blues-rock boogie approach. "Great Acoustics," for example, sounds like a candidate for the country charts, joining previous hits from the early '90s like "Dumas Walker." On the other hand, "Boones Farm Boogie" might have been borrowed from the [ZZ Top](#) songbook, and "Little Miss Blues Breaker" has a big rock guitar riff that makes it sound like a close relative of [Mountain's](#) "Mississippi Queen." It doesn't seem to be an accident that [Doug Phelps](#) sings the more country-oriented material, while [Richard Young](#) is the vocalist on the rockers. Phelps has a warm and resonant light baritone with a distinct country twang, perfect for numbers like "Les Paul Standard," another country-tinged number, while Young's high, rusty tenor cuts through the hard-rocking tracks. Much of the time, the group sounds like it based much of its musical style on a close study of [the Rolling Stones'](#) "Honky Tonk Woman" and other slightly country-styled [Stones](#) songs of the late '60s and early '70s; [Martin's](#) lead work strongly evokes [Keith Richards](#). These original songs may be recently written, but they are steeped in familiar structures, with lyrics full of references to drinking and loose women. (The "Little Angel" referred to in the song of that title is a pole dancer, for instance.) Many of them are likely to find their way into the concert repertoire of this long-lived and hard-working outfit, however, and they will fit right in with the band's earlier material.

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