

FOLKWAYS RECORDS FA 2468

Barbara Dane

AND THE

Chambers Brothers



IT ISN'T NICE
YOU GOT TO REAP WHAT YOU SOW
YOU JUST CAN'T MAKE IT BY YOURSELF
PACK UP YOUR SORROWS
I AM A WEARY AND A LONESOME TRAVELLER
WE'LL NEVER TURN BACK
COME BY HERE
FREEDOM IS A CONSTANT STRUGGLE
GO TELL IT ON THE MOUNTAIN

RETURN TO ARCHIVE
CENTER FOR FOLKLIFE PROGRAMS
AND CULTURAL STUDIES
SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

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BARBARA DANE AND THE CHAMBERS BROTHERS

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This album came together finally after a real heap of obstacles were overcome. We wanted to start it in late spring of 1964 when we were at the Ash Grove together, with the song "It Isn't Nice", but it seemed the record companies were afraid of it. Even now, with all the top-forty-folk-rock protest around, I think they still are because it offers a program of action instead of the aimless complaining so popular now.

Malvina Reynolds' powerful words, written after she herself had participated in the San Francisco Palace Hotel Sit-Ins, has helped change the history of hundreds of young people there who kept on insisting on their rights even when the "old-heads" of the established civil rights groups told them "It Isn't Nice", and it has a special and personal meaning for them. I felt that the same sense of courage and commitment was what I wanted to pass on to the young Mississippians and other students working in the South where I was going to sing at Freedom Schools and mass meetings that summer.

I wanted to give the music a forceful rhythmic feeling in hopes that this would help the meaning get across and the words be picked up and passed around quicker, so I made a new tune and added a solid-rock beat. Lots of people were shocked, including Malvina herself, saying what's the idea of making rock-and-roll out of serious stuff, but I saw no conflict. It seemed to me the more serious the content, the more appealing the form should be. And before long, kids all over the Mississippi delta were harmonizing it and "working out" to it... and we got "folk rock".

While I was in the South, I heard Mrs. Fanny Lou Hamer sing "Freedom is a Constant Struggle" and "Go Tell it on the Mountain", and learned them from her. Until someone gets her to hold still long enough between speaking for the Freedom Democratic Party, firing up the cotton pickers to strike, raising money for the people around Ruleville who get knocked off relief for registration activities, challenging the Congress of the United States to seat her and the other two FDP-elected Negro Congresswomen from Mississippi to record these songs herself, here they are.

They say that Sam Block, who dodged vigilante bullets in Greenwood, Miss., is responsible for the song "Freedom is a Constant Struggle" and that he made it after the disappearance of Chaney, Goodman, and Schwerner in the beginning of that fateful Freedom Summer of 1964. I guess the merging of two older songs into the present "Go Tell it on the Mountain" may have begun with Milt Okun-Peter-Paul-and/or Mary, but the fancy chord changes and harmonies have been circumscribed by the reality of practical use and a clean, direct version has emerged all over the South now.

"We'll Never Turn Back" is another great song of the Freedom Movement, put together out of traditional materials by Bertha Gober, a teen-age girl who wanted to create a memorial for Herbert Lee of Amite, Miss., shot to death by State Representative Eugene Hurst. The all-white Coroner's jury refused to indict the killer, who pled self-defense. According to Guy Carawan's book, "We Shall Overcome", where the song appears, Herbert Lee had been helping SNCC workers meet with local Negroes in the voter registration drive, which angered Rep. Hurst.

In a little church way up in the red back-country hills called Pilgrim's Rest some young, tender girls sang "Come By Here"... and again I heard it in the Indianola Freedom School (since burned down), at a mass meeting... ringing out loud and clear while the sheriff's men circled the grounds copying license numbers from the cars. A great song for raising courage it has grown to be! No one claims to know for sure whether the song came from Africa or was born in the States. Pete Seeger writes that it probably went over there to Angola with a missionary after World War I and came back as "Kumbaya", an "untranslatable" African word. At any rate, every summer camper seems to know the tune now.

I learned roughly "You've Got to Reap" from Bessie Jones, that remarkable reservoir of Georgia religious and play songs and games who leads the Georgia Sea Island Singers, and put it to my own secular uses. The song of Dick Farina's called "Pack Up Your Sorrows" stuck in my head after the marvelous way it floated us all through the cloud-burst at Newport Folk Festival 1965. "Lonesome Traveler" is a song I feel I've always known, never remember to sing, and which was actually made by Lee Hays and Walter Lowenfels some time in the '40s. I'm sure I learned it from the People's Songs Bulletin which always travelled quite lonesomely in my guitar case in those days. I made the song "You Just Can't Make It By Yourself" one 3 AM in late '63 while trying to make it by myself down Highway 99 in California.

I hope you can use these songs and that you will sing with us. The Chambers Brothers could make anybody sing good. One day soon we'll make a blues album together, with plenty of time to work it all out just right, and then you'll hear a lot more of Lester's fine exciting harp, Willie's juicy guitar, and all the rest. I'd love to see them make some Folkways albums by themselves, too, so you could really hear them without echo and amps turned high, just singing their souls.

Barbara Dane

Side A
Band 1

IT ISN'T NICE

Words: Malvina Reynolds

Music: Barbara Dane & Malvina Reynolds

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It isn't nice to block the doorway,
It isn't nice to go to jail.
There are nicer ways to do it
But the nice ways always fail.
It isn't nice, it isn't nice.

You told us once, you told us twice,
But if that's freedom's price
We don't mind, oh no no no.
We don't mind.

It isn't nice to dump the groceries
Or to sleep in on the floor
Or to shout our cry of freedom
In the hotel or the store;
It isn't nice, it isn't nice.
You told us once, you told us twice,
But if that's freedom's price
We don't mind, oh no no no,
We don't mind.

Yeah, we tried negotiation
And the token picket line.
Mr. Charlie didn't see us
And he might as well be blind.
When you deal with men of ice
You can't deal with ways so nice.
Well if that's freedom's price
We don't mind, oh no no no,
We don't mind.

They murdered folks in Alabama.
They shot Medgar in the back.
Did you say that wasn't proper?
Did you stand out on the track?
You were quiet just like mice
Now you say that we're not nice.
Well if that's freedom's price,
We don't mind, oh no no no,
We don't mind.

(repeat first verse)

Side A
Band 2

YOU'VE GOT TO REAP WHAT YOU SOW
Words: Dane/Trad.
Music: Traditional

I want to dedicate this song to McGeorge Bundy,
to Robert McNamara, to Lyndon Baines Johnson,
and to the memory of John Foster Dulles.

You got to reap just what you sow, (repeat)
You may sow it in the day,
But you gonna reap it any way,
You got to reap just what you sow.

You got to reap just what you sow, (repeat)
You may sow it in the night.
You gonna reap it in the light,
You got to reap just what you sow.

. . . You may sow it in the rain.
But you gonna reap it just the same. . .

McGeorge Bundy's got to reap, just what he sows,
Mister Johnson's got to reap, just what they sow;
Mister Johnson's got to reap,
But in the meantime he cannot sleep,
You got to reap just what you sow.

(repeat second verse)

You got to reap, just what you sow;
McNamara got to reap, just what he sows;
You sow it in the night,
But you gonna reap it in the light,
You got to reap just what you sow.

Just what you sow. . . (repeat phrase)

Side A
Band 3

YOU CAN'T MAKE IT BY YOURSELF

Poem from SNCC Bulletin, author unknown

Words and Music: Barbara Dane

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(Dane): Someone sat and told me something new.
I'm taking off. Out there a mile or more is
meadows, where the soft green summer children
go. I'd like a lot to look at them a little while, re-
member being small, of curled hair and loved and
let alone to use my fingertips even on the grownups'
pretty hands. That certainly was a long time ago.
I understand your crucifix. Come on, we'll walk
a way. You know already how to climb a hill, and
here's the simple plan. I lift up the wire while you
go under, and you lift up the wire for me.

Oh well you --

Chorus:

Just can't make it by yourself, by yourself, (repeat)
Oh, oh, just can't make it by yourself, by yourself.
Father, mother, sister, brother,
You know you're bound to need each other,
And you just can't make it by yourself, by yourself.

Well now, the rich man can't make it by himself,
(repeat)

Verse 1

When the world is all on fire,
Helping hands are not for hire,
You better keep your friends,
You can't make it by yourself, by yourself.

Now, the poor man can't make it by himself,
(repeat)

With no one to share his bread/bed,
He'll very soon be dead,
You know you just can't make it by yourself, (by yourself)

Chorus:

Verse 2

The big shot can't make it by himself. (repeat)
What's the good of tryin' to be it
If there ain't no one to see it?
Well you just can't make it by yourself, (by yourself)

The humble man can't make it by himself, (repeat)
His heart will break in two one day
And he won't know what to do because
It's just too sad to make it by yourself, (by yourself)

Chorus:

Verse 3

Colonel Glenn had to make it by himself, (repeat)
He made it to orbit all alone,
But Conrad and Cooper brought it home,
Well you just can't make it by yourself, by yourself.

Robinson Crusoe thought he would make it by himself,
(repeat)
He made it for awhile, but Christ almighty,
Was he glad when he saw Friday, cause he
Just couldn't make it by himself.

Chorus:

Side A
Band 4

PACK UP YOUR SORROWS

Words and Music: Dick Farina, Pauline Marden
©1964 by Ryerson Music Publishers, Inc.

(Solo): No use cryin', talkin' to a stranger,
Namin' sorrows you've seen.
Too many sad times,
Too many bad times,
And nobody knows what you mean.

(Together): But if somehow you could
Pack up your sorrows,
And give them all to me,
You would lose them,
I know how to use them,
Give them all to me.

(Solo): No use ramblin', walkin' in the shadows,
Trailing a wandering star,
No one beside you,
No one to hide you, and
Nobody knows where you are.

(Together): But if somehow you could
Pack up your sorrows. . .

(Solo): No use gamblin', runnin' in the darkness,
Lookin' for a spirit that's free,
Too many wrong times,
Too many long times,
And nobody knows what you see.

(Together): But if somehow you could
Pack up your sorrows. . .

(Solo): No use roamin', walking by the roadside,
Seekin' a satisfied mind,
Too many highways,
Too many byways,
And nobody's walkin' behind.

(Together): But if somehow you could
Pack up your sorrows. . .

Side A
Band 5

I AM A WEARY AND A LONESOME TRAVELLER
Words and Music: Lee Hays and Walter Lowenfels
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I am a weary and lonesome traveler, (3 times)
I been a travelin' on.

Travelin' in the mountains, and in the valley,
(3 times)

I'm travelin' on.

Traveled with the rich, traveled with the poor,
(3 times)

I'm travelin' on.

I've been travelin' on the road to freedom,
Been lookin' for the road to freedom,
I've been travelin' to the road to freedom
And I've been travelin' on.

I've been a-carryin' a heavy load (3 times)
But I keep travelin' on.

This whole world is in a sad condition (3 times)
But I keep on travelin' on.

I will travel on until I get to freedom (3 times)
I will keep on travelin' on.

Side B
Band 1

WE'LL NEVER TURN BACK
Words and Music: Bertha Gober

We've been 'buked and we've been scorned,
We've been talked about, sure's you're born.
But we'll never turn back,
But we'll never turn back
Until we have all been free.
And we have equality.

We have walked through the shadow of death,
We had to walk it all by ourselves,
But we'll never turn back. . . .

We have hung our heads and cried,
Cried for the ones who had to die,
But we'll never turn back. . . .

No, we'll never turn back, (repeat)
Until we have all been free,
And we have equality. (repeat)

Side B
Band 2

COME BY HERE
Arranged by Barbara Dane
and The Chambers Brothers

(Barbara Dane - Solo):
Come by here, my Lord,
Come by here; (3 times)
Oh Lord, come by here.

(Chambers Brothers):
Come by here, my Lord,
Come by here; (3 times)
Oh Lord, come by here.

(Solo): Somebody needs you, Lord.

(Together): Come by here;

(Chambers Brothers - Chorus):

Somebody needs you, Lord,
Come by here; (twice)
Oh Lord, come by here.

Somebody's prayin', Lord. . .

Somebody's shootin', Lord. . .

Somebody's bombin', Lord. . .

Somebody's dyin', Lord. . .

Somebody needs you, Lord. . .

Come by here, my Lord. . .

Side B
Band 3

FREEDOM IS A CONSTANT STRUGGLE

They say that freedom is a constant struggle, (3 times)
Oh Lord, we struggled so long we must be free,
We must be free.

They say that freedom is a constant sorrow. . .

They say that freedom is a constant dyin'. . .

They say that freedom is a constant struggle. . .

Side B
Band 4

GO TELL IT ON THE MOUNTAIN
As learned from Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer

(Solo): I want to go

(Chorus): Go tell it on the mountain,
Over the hills and everywhere,
Go tell it on the mountain,
To let my people go.

(Solo): Who's that, children, dressed in red?

(Chorus): Let my people go.

(Solo): Well it must be the children Bob Moses led.

(Chorus): Let my people go.
Go tell it on the mountain. . .

(Solo): Who's that, children, dressed in blue?

(Chorus): Let my people go.

(Solo): Well it must be the registers coming through.

(Chorus): Let my people go.
Go tell it on the mountain. . .

(Solo): Well who's that, children, dressed in black?

(Chorus): Let my people go.

(Solo): Well it must be the hypocrites turning back.

(Chorus): Let my people go.
Go tell it on the mountain. . .

(Solo): Well, only one thing that we did wrong.

(Chorus): Let my people go.

(Solo): Stayed in the wilderness a day too long.

(Chorus): Let my people go.
Won't you go tell it on the mountain. . .

(Solo): Only one thing that we did right.

(Chorus): Let my people go.

(Solo): Well it was the day that we began to fight.

(Chorus): Let my people go.
Won't you go tell it on the mountain. . .

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From gospel to rock-and-roll and back again

The Chambers Brothers

Do That Real Thing

by Barbara Dane

Photo by Jim Marshall



The Ash Grove in Los Angeles, under the guidance of Edwin Pearl, has long provided well-cultivated ground for musical experimentation and discovery. A lovely old man named George Chambers provided some exceptionally gifted seed for this ground when he brought his thirteen children out of Carthage, Mississippi, ten years ago.

All of them made music, but out of the eight boys and five girls, there were four brothers who had to do it all the time, so they set out to make their living by it. And so, here come the Chambers Brothers! Willy, 25, is probably the most exciting young blues guitar man around; Joe, 21, acts as emcee, plays second guitar, and sings great bass; George, Jr., is 32 and a family man, and plays washtub bass with taste; Lester, 23, is without doubt the most creative blues harp man since Sonny Terry.

There is a prideful beauty about all of them and when they wade right into old-fashioned gospel quartet singing, they create an excitement worthy of the best of that tradition. They love to work out in the rock-and-roll idiom, too, but they never sacrifice content to style. But when they break out the bottle band and get down with the country-style feeling, a visible joy and relief spreads over the audience. Relief because one senses that with the emergence of this group, there is a beginning of the end of the necessity to deal in the two-sided false coin of the clown-caricature/slick white-sounding Negro entertainer.

George, Sr., was a tenant farmer on a large plantation of the same feudal sort still operating in Mississippi today. He had twenty-five acres in cotton and another twenty-five in corn, potatoes, peanuts, and such. There was always too much work to do, so the babies were welcomed as future hands. Even the smallest kid worked, since every last thing the family used had to be raised in addition to the money crops. Only staples were bought in the store -- flour, sugar, and such. So the little kids milked cows, fed chickens, weeded, and chopped cotton from as early as they can remember.

The family sang at work in the fields all day, and the sound carried so clearly that when social times came, the neighbors complimented them and asked for requests by name. The little boys were sometimes asked to sing for well-to-do whites, and the pay was...an apple. The traditional presentation of that apple was with one bite removed, so that everybody "kept their places." But Willy Chambers says, "That was still more than the

other kids had, and besides, we had enjoyed ourselves singing so much, we just didn't worry about what we got for it."

The brothers sang while roaming the warm country roads at night. They sang at the Mt. Calvary Baptist Church on Sunday mornings and at house parties Saturday nights, and always old George cracked jokes at them, bragged outrageously about women, and taught them more songs.

In the evenings at home, there was always a guitar, often a harmonica, washtub bass, bottles tuned by filling with water, and a lot of things that could be rattled or banged to make music. George Chambers used these evenings to fill his family full of love for each other, joy, lively wit, and hopefulness -- and a great respect for the music they made together.

The love the brothers show for their father even now, and their obvious respect for what he is, provides a strong basis for their ability to accept themselves and the heritage which for generations the white world has tried to turn into a thing of shame. Although he is now past eighty, the brothers still take George, Sr., along on occasional jobs because he enjoys being "one of the boys," eyeballing the girls with appreciation, and inventing tall stories about his conquests!

Admittedly, the folk scene has not yet come to attract large groups of young Negro fans, and, consequently, has not produced a significant number of new performers from those ranks. This is partly because so much of that "scene" happens on the college campus and among those students with some leisure. Most Negro students who make it to college are too busy studying or working after school hours. It is also due to the pre-eminent interest in the old-time Southern white sound which can only recall for these young people a time of pain without end. Is it any wonder that they prefer the riches of rhythm-and-blues-based rock-and-roll?

The Chambers Brothers had their first job outside the ghetto world in 1961, when they were added to an Ash Grove New Year's Eve bill that promised to be a swinger. I was closing, Brownie McGhee and Sonny Terry were overlapping their opening, and the audience expected us to live up to a precedent, set some years before, of improvising and challenging each other. The addition of the Brothers was news to us, and they seemed so young, diffident, and nervous; but soon, the general looseness caught them up and when midnight came, I led off the tired "Auld Lang Syne,"

Brownie set up the famous beat common only to him and the Basile band, and Sonny wailed his harp over and up while the Chambers Brothers began a rhythmic chant that wouldn't stop! We got hold of such a wild and rejoicing thing we could hardly let go!

The Brothers came around to hear other performers after that, and became acquainted with Carroll Peery, the music connoisseur who ran the Ash Grove kitchen and bar for many years. This accidental meeting provided a number of important clues and directions for the brothers, as well as a great friend and booster.

Why should Carroll, a light-skinned, city-bred cosmopolitan cat who obviously knows his way in and out of the jungle (who, in fact, had gotten out via a non-stereotyped job), bother himself with the older country bluesmen who often appear at the Grove? Why would he take pains to help Jesse Fuller find a plain old hot dog in the (to Jesse) strange-looking Jewish neighborhood where the Ash Grove is located? Or drive Lightnin' Hopkins across town to get his hair conked? Or organize a little social life for Bukka White, Big Joe Williams, or Mance Lipscomb? The articulate Carroll explained it to the brothers: because he realizes so deeply the value of the music these men make and loves them fiercely for protecting it and keeping it alive.

In Carroll's words: "The blues is a sanctuary from self-doubt; the reality in them underlines the validity of the human being who sings them." This is something of what he strove to show the brothers about themselves. And when the old money pinch tempted them, Carroll was there to say, "hold on," as the brothers came to realize that through their own validity they would survive, that without the substance which their real identities gave their work and their lives, there was little point in surviving anyway.

Recent appearances on *Shindig* and a new recording contract with ABC-Paramount present strong pulls for them toward the comparatively easy victory of rock-and-roll stardom. If the Chambers Brothers are swept into that world, it will represent a serious loss to the numberless kids who need the kind of affirmation and validation their present work can give. If they can stick to their own special truth, they can become the first important young Southern country-born Negroes to insist on acceptance of the real, root thing; and they will gain even greater recognition for themselves in the eyes of history while gaining a very solid victory over the cheaters!

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