

# “On Jordan’s Stormy Banks I Stand...”



Sacred Songs of America  
Ed McCurdy with Dana McCurdy



Folkways  
FTS 32430 stereo



"On Jordan's Stormy Banks I Stand..."  
Sacred Songs of America

Side A

1. Old Hundredth
2. Bound for the Promised Land
3. Through All the World Below
4. Satan's Kingdom
5. On My Journey Home
6. Amazing Grace
7. Let Us Break Bread Together
8. Paul and Silas
9. Just a Closer Walk With Thee

Side B

1. Lonesome Valley
2. Brighten the Corner
3. The Great Speckled Bird
4. Farther Along
5. Life is like a Mountain Railroad
6. Love Lifted Me

Ed McCurdy Vocals and Guitar  
Dana McCurdy Lead Guitar and Vocals  
Brian Flahive Harmonium

Engineered by Scott Salem  
Mixed by Scott Salem and Dana McCurdy  
with Ed McCurdy

Cover Illustration by Ed McCurdy  
Cover Design by Brian Flahive

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## ON JORDAN'S SHORES

This record is a very personal labor of love for me. I've known and sung these songs since childhood. Being raised Presbyterian I was influenced mainly by white Anglo-Saxon Protestant sacred music. However, the Black musical expression to which I was also exposed by knowing Black people and hearing Black religious music in church made a very strong impression on me and continues to do so.

At about the age of fourteen I began vocal study and dealt mainly with the formal, or so-called "classical" repertoire. But I continued my relationship with sacred music in churches in my geographic area of south central Pennsylvania.

While attending college in Edmund, Oklahoma in about 1937 I was hired to sing gospel hymns on radio station WKY in Oklahoma City three mornings a week. After a year I went to New York to further my vocal study. During that time I went into vaudeville and night clubs singing musical comedy material as a very loud baritone. Eventually, after working off and on in radio as an announcer and singer, I started singing folk songs and writing and performing children's programs on the Canadian Broadcasting Network from Vancouver, where I met and married my wife Beryl, a ballet dancer. We have three children and two grandchildren.

The folk song singing period in my life started by accident when a C.B.C. official heard me singing an old English-Scottish song at a rather liquid party. I had learned quite a number of folk songs from my parents. I became increasingly interested and deeply impressed by the manner of expression used by the folk poets and composers known, and unknown, through the ages as preserved by the singers and folklorists for many many years. As a trained singer I have been inspired and challenged by the immense variety of textures and feelings expressed in Anglo-American song. As a result I have for many years devoted myself to the collection, study and performance of this musical treasure.

In this recording of traditional sacred song, I've tried to cover, in brief, the wide span of expression relating to human feeling about the divine. In my years as a student of voice (I continue to study) I learned and sang oratorio arias. Although they were challenging and very artfully written, they did not cover the same amount of emotion as did the traditional songs represented on this recording.

There is another special personal pleasure involved in this effort. My son Dana plays lead guitar and sings tenor with me. He is a synthesist and teaches the synthesizer at the Institute of Audio Research and in the Composers' Theatre program workshop at the New School for Social Research here in New York. Brian Flahne, who plays harmonium, is both a synthesist and graphic artist. Dana and Brian together perform as "En food," and explore and demonstrate the many aspects of their instruments.

Now for the songs themselves. "Old Hundredth" is based on the hundredth psalm and the air is attributed to Louis Bourgeois, 1545 psalter translator and musical influence. Secular as well as ecclesiastical airs were used. "Old Hundredth" is possibly one of the least original tunes in

the Genevan psalter. It is the only tune which has been preserved intact throughout the entire history of metrical psalmody and modern hymnody. Its present text is by Kethe for the English psalter. The first verse for a long while has included the words "Him serve with fear." In the 1551 version the word "mirth" is used instead of "fear." We chose "mirth." Also, we used quarter notes evenly stated instead of half notes and whole notes. In most hymnals the doxology is used with its "praise father, son and Holy Ghost." The doxology was used alone as an offertory from 1929. "Old Hundredth" is generally sung in unison. Dana and I use harmony.

"I'm Bound For the Promised Land" was sung by the early pioneers because it related to their earthly yearnings.

"Through All the World Below," as we call it, is "Captain Kidd—II," a designation used by folklorists for this early 19th century song. The term "Captain Kidd" is used for other songs including "Wondrous Love," as a melodic source. There are several Captain Kidd ballads, with differing tunes, about the pirate "Kidd." "Satan's Kingdom" is a revival hymn published by H. W. Day of Boston in 1842. We use a faster than usual tempo because we felt it that way.

"On My Journey Home" or "Saint's Delight" was written by Isaac Watts in 1709. It appeared in the "Sacred Harp" collection.

"Amazing Grace" is not the well known song as recorded by Jean Ritchie and Judy Collins and others. I'm not sure which I like most to sing.

"Let Us Break Bread Together" is one of the most gently moving expressions of supplication from the black contribution to our culture. I make no effort to emulate a so-called "black" manner of singing it.

"Paul and Silas" is one of several songs referring to the experience of these two biblical figures.

"Just A Closer Walk" is a very well known spiritual and the melody has been used as a jazz oriented funeral march. It has been recorded by such diverse types of singers as Rev. Gary Davis and Ella Fitzgerald.

"Lonesome Valley" has been around at least since slavery days, and has been sung by black people and white people. There are a few versions recorded. Richard Dyer-Bennett has his own special way of singing it, and it is very dramatic and moving.

I don't know the date of "Brighten the Corner Where You Are." My sister Eva Means of Middle Spring, Penna., sent me her church book version which uses some rather old fashioned language. It was written by Ina Ogdon and Charles Gabriel. Ella Fitzgerald has sung it in an album of gospel songs.

"The Great Speckled Bird" has been a favorite of country singers for years. Roy Acuff recorded it long ago. The meaning of the song is somewhat obscure. From the information I have gathered from the Union Theological Seminary and Congregation Rodeph Shalom and other sources, I have found references to a bird in Revelations 4 verse 8, Hosea 9 verse 11, Ezekial 1 verse 10 and 10 verse 14. In Jeremia 12



verse 9 there is a verse that could be the primary biblical source. The verses I use are from oral sources and are a little difficult to fully understand. The last verse evidently reflects the feeling of some mortal who was not positively sure.

"Farther Along" by W. P. Joy is a very human, earth-bound expression of "Why Do the Wicked Prosper?"

"Life's Railway to Heaven" is a unique example of a people uniting earthly terms with heavenly promise. While singing on the C.B.C. radio network I sang this charming song and got a beautiful letter from a lady in the east coast

of Canada, saying how much the song meant to her. She said she was an adult before she could dismiss from her mind the picture of Jesus wearing a conductor's hat.

"Love Lifted Me" is the favorite hymn of Charlotte Daniels Webb, one of my favorite singers.

For their help in preparing this recording I wish to thank the following people: Mr. Pizro, organist at the Church of St. John The Divine, Jean Ritchie, John Koenig and Lynda Clark of Union Theological Seminary, Rabbi Bernstein of Rodeph Sholom, all of New York.

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