

SIDE A: 1. My Youth Won't Last 2. Song Writer's Creed 3. The What To Do Blues 4. Don't Bite the Hands that Feed Ya 5. Christa

SIDE B: 1. Life with the Wife 2. Come Liberty Hands 3. Nuclear Nonsense 4. N.Y. City Ballad Blues 5. My Pilgrim Son

Barry O'Brien is a hard-travelling topical song writer and performer who can be heard both on street corners and in concert halls around the United States. The ten songs on this recording represent him well—homespun, earnest, and easygoing. They carry strong messages for embattled times. Introduction by Stephen Baird.

 Smithsonian Folkways

Smithsonian/Folkways Recordings
Center for Folklife Programs
and Cultural Studies
955 L'Enfant Plaza, Suite 2600
Smithsonian Institution,
Washington D.C. 20560
Smithsonian/Folkways
C-SF 40099



© 1996 Smithsonian/
Folkways Recordings



SMITHSONIAN/
FOLKWAYS



Barry O'Brien Fight with Song

C-SF 40099

Fight with Song

BARRY O'BRIEN



Fight with Song BARRY O'BRIEN

SF40099

© © Smithsonian Folkways Recordings 1996

SIDE A

1. **My Youth Won't Last (3:02)**
2. **Song Writer's Creed (2:30)**
3. **The What To Do Blues (1:55)**
4. **Don't Bite the Hands that Feed Ya (4:26)**
5. **Christa (4:12)**

SIDE B

1. **Life with the Wife (3:16)**
2. **Come Liberty Hands (1:25)**
3. **Nuclear Nonsense (3:51)**
4. **N.Y. City Ballad Blues (2:32)**
5. **My Pilgrim Son (3:36)**

(All songs Barry O'Brien/Season Dweller Music, BMI)

DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF MOSES ASCH

Moses Asch, the founder of Folkways Records, contracted a number of recordings that he intended to produce after the acquisition of his company by the Smithsonian Institution. His untimely death in 1986, and subsequent changes in distribution and editorial policy, delayed the appearance of some of these recordings. *Barry O'Brien, Fight With Song* was one of the delayed projects, and is issued in memory of Moses Asch, who began to work on it before he died.

Anthony Seeger
Curator and Director
Smithsonian Folkways Recordings

INTRODUCTION TO THE RECORDING

Street Singer, Street Singer/play us a tune/Happy and free/Like the Sun and the moon

Street Singer, Street Singer/Play us the blues/So we won't feel sorry /For the things we've to loose.

From New Orleans to New York/I've heard these folkies play/I'm told California/and farther away. As Woody Guthrie once said/of these traveling men/They come with the dust/And are gone with the wind.

Barry O'Brien is one of these travelling men. You might happen upon him `most anywhere playing his guitar and harmonica, leaning his head back and letting his songs mingle with the breeze. I first saw Barry in Harvard Square. He was entertaining a group of passersby on Brattle Street. Barry captured this audience with his easy going style and manner. One could tell he had won quite a few friends with a wink of an eye. Since that first encounter, Barry and I have shared conversations about his travels across country; the encounters with the people he has met, the rides with the farmers, truckers and

ordinary folks, the songs he's shared with people in every conceivable place, in parks and schools, coffeehouses and pubs, ships and trains, but mostly on the streets.

Barry is self taught. He picked up the guitar and harmonica some years back after getting tired of the drums and piano. The tunes and style come from "watchin' and listenin' to other folks play." You're just as likely to find Barry strumming along with another musician as by himself. And this album represents Barry O'Brien well—homespun, earnest and easygoing. Helen Hausmann, a violinist from Montana, adds some nice licks on this live recording. And it all sounds as if one just turned a corner and caught this pleasant surprise.

Stephen Baird

THE STRUGGLE CONTINUES...

Barry O'Brien writes songs and participates in human rights causes. As a politically active balladeer he produced and performed in concerts for the democracy movements in China. O'Brien was interviewed and sang new songs that were broadcast on the Voice of America. During the Persian Gulf War he supported the

soldiers by playing the banjo and marching for peace. One performance was broadcast on the C-span Cable Television Network. Recently, Lakota peace activist, Quiet Spirit, heard some of Barry's original ballads inspired by Native American traditions and honored Barry by adopting him into the tribe. O'Brien continues to play benefit shows and performs on a regular basis, sometimes solo, sometimes with other musicians. As we make a turn into the next millennium, Barry the Balladeer and his songs will be there.

For more information about other songs by Barry O'Brien, or how to obtain lyric sheets or songbooks, write to Season Dweller Music, P.O. Box 5651, Washington, DC 20016.

SPEAKING OF HISTORY

Anthony Seeger, the Director of Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, asked me to write about these songs from a historical perspective. It's hard for me to look back because I'm more future-minded, but there are some important contemporary themes that I will note.

Each song has its own story and together the whole album flows in a certain direction.

While I didn't plan it that way, when I listened to the completed work, I heard it all as one long journey. There is a little tale here. And yes, that's me talkin.' I want you to draw your own conclusions and find your own meaning for these songs. I won't analyze and I will try to keep it simple without spilling the beans. These are for you. Listen to the songs! Part of the reason I do this is for spiritual survival and because it's a lot of fun.

Here are my thoughts on the tunes:

Side A:

1. **"My Youth Won't Last"** is dedicated to anyone who has ever pondered the idea of getting old.
2. **"Song Writer's Creed"** —the title says a lot about this one. It is very personal. Fellow song-makers seem to like it a lot. Maybe my essence of being is revealed here; I fight with song.
3. **"The What To Do Blues"** is me having fun with some country music themes.

4. **“Don’t Bite the Hands that Feed Ya”** is a salute to family farmers. Their fate continues to take the roughest of turns in the 1990s. My mom’s dad was a farmer in Minnesota and my aunts talk about how he used to play the accordion and the harmonica.

5. **“Christa”** is a remembrance of teacher-astronaut Christa McAuliffe who was from New Hampshire. She died tragically with five other astronauts in the Challenger Space Shuttle disaster of 1986. I graduated from high school in New Hampshire, so this felt close to home.

Side B:

1. I was nineteen years old and living in rural New England when I came out of a dream singing the first verse of **“Life with the Wife.”** It felt like I was a hundred years back in time. Short though it may be, it spans three generations.

2. 1986 also brought us Haley’s comet, the refurbishing of the Statue of Liberty

and the “Hands Across America” project—an effort at national unity in a decade known as the “decade of greed.” In **“Come Liberty Hands”** there is a verse for each event. The song came in handy when I lived in Washington, D.C., and a group of us were building a statue resembling that of the Chinese goddess of democracy that was destroyed by tanks in the June, 1989 massacre of students in Beijing..

3. **“Nuclear Nonsense”** is a hazard light blinking as a response to the nuclear industry that, despite the end of the cold war, has catapulted us into this fearful modern age. The nuclear warhead arms race is a cancer. To the truly informed, the crimes have been and are unspeakable. Chelyabinsk #40, in what used to be called the U.S.S.R., was a nuclear nightmare in an area hidden from the rest of the world for forty years. Chernobyl and Three Mile Island were small potatoes compared to this radiation devastation. I wonder what we’re hiding here.

The nuclear industry wants us to believe that we are dependent on this unsafe nuclear power. We can’t see radioactive dangers, but

we are killing each other and we might as well wake up to it. Argue if you want, but educate yourself about upcoming and already existing alternatives. Wouldn’t it be nice not to have to feel so guilty when you throw on the light switch? Nuclear waste lasts 25,000 years and is the death mask we leave behind for generations to come.

Did you just ask me if I can be positive? Well, here’s your answer: I think we wear our environment like we wear our clothes. We clean our clothes once in a while, why not our environment? The environment is more important than our clothes anyway.

4. **“N. Y. City Ballad Blues”** is me waking up to the city that never sleeps, talkn’ Dylan, talkn’ New York revisited, and talkn’ my own impressions.

5. **“My pilgrim Son,”** is a song a father might sing about his son who is out on a pilgrimage. It’s the “I wonder how the ‘walk about’ is going?” ballad.

Barry O’Brien

ABOUT SMITHSONIAN FOLKWAYS

Folkways Records was founded by Moses Asch and Marian Distler in 1948 to document music, spoken word, instruction, and sounds from around the world. In the ensuing decades, New York City-based Folkways became one of the largest independent record labels in the world, reaching a total of nearly 2,200 albums that were always kept in print.

The Smithsonian Institution acquired Folkways from the Asch estate in 1987 to ensure that the sounds and genius of the artists would be preserved for future generations. All Folkways recordings are now available on high-quality audio cassettes, each packed in a special box along with the original liner notes.

Smithsonian Folkways Recordings was formed to continue the Folkways tradition of releasing significant recordings with high quality documentation. It produces new titles, reissues of historic recordings from Folkways and other record labels, and in collaboration with other companies also produces instructional videotapes, recordings to accompany published books, and a variety of other educational projects.

The Smithsonian Folkways, Folkways,

CREDITS-INSTRUMENTS

Cook, Paredon, and Dyer-Bennet record labels are administered by the Smithsonian Institution's Center for Folklife Programs & Cultural Studies. They are one of the means through which the Center supports the work of traditional artists and expresses its commitment to cultural diversity, education, and increased understanding.

You can find Smithsonian Folkways Recordings at your local record store. Smithsonian Folkways, Folkways, Cook, Paredon, and Dyer-Bennet recordings are all available through: Smithsonian Folkways Mail Order, 414 Hungerford Drive, Suite 444, Rockville, MD 20850. Phone (301) 443-2314, Fax (301) 443-1819, **Orders only 1-800-410-9815 *(Discover, Visa, MasterCard accepted)**

For further information about all the labels distributed through the Center, please consult our Internet site (<http://www.si.edu/folkways>). Or request a printed catalogue by writing to: Catalogue, Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, 955 L'Enfant Plaza, Suite 2600, Washington, DC 20560. Or use the catalogue request line: (202) 287-3262 or e-mail folkways@aol.com

Vocals, guitar, harmonica, and drum:

Barry O'Brien

Violin: Helen Hausmann

Commissioned by Moses Asch

Recorded by Gerry Putnam at Sound Potential

Studio, New London, New Hampshire

Mastered by David Glasser at Airshow in

Springfield, VA

Notes by Barry O'Brien and Anthony Seeger

Introduction by Stephen Baird

Cover Photo: W.R. Hurshman, taken at the

Woodstock 22nd Reunion concert

Layout and design by Carol Hardy Design in

Vienna, VA

THANKS TO Lisa and Bert in Merrimack County and to Frances Asch, Marilyn Averett, Anthony Seeger, Merle, and everybody at Smithsonian Folkways. Also, Grant Harvey, Anne B. Harvey, John Simonson, Amy Herot, Michael Sullivan, Neti Van Drager, Michelle and Scott Free, Steven Baird, Tom Gladstone, Neil Van Drager, and Gary Hall. In New York, Stan Jay and Woody. And again, Helen. A SPECIAL THANK-YOU to the major recording artists who donated their time and talent to be a

part of Folkways: *A Vision Shared, A Tribute to Woody Guthrie and Leadbelly*. Proceeds from the sale of that album helped enable Smithsonian to acquire the Folkways collection. Thanks to: Taj Mahal, Arlo Guthrie, Bob Dylan, Pete Seeger, Bruce Springsteen, Emmylou Harris, U2, Willie Nelson, Brian Wilson, Little Richard with Fishbone, Sweet Honey In The Rock and John Mellencamp. Over the years, I've helped keep your songs alive out of pleasure for myself and others. Thanks for helping to keep mine alive. Cheers to all of you. To others who have inspired and influenced me — thanks to: the Beatles, Rolling Stones, Glen Campbell, The Grateful Dead, Steve Forbert, Neil Young, John Denver, Dermot Kelly, Elizabeth Cotten, Don McLean, Johnny Cash, Kris Kristofferson, The Chieftains, and so many others, known and unknown who have also warmed my heart along the way.

And to you, the unknown many, thanks for that ride down the highway, the coins and the food, the shelter, and the love that came without questions.

POST PRODUCTION GRATITUDE TO : The Lucky Seven, Lolo, Robert Geitgey and family, Danny Evans, Perry King, Julie Wilson, David Sawyer, Brian Gafney, Thomas and Ellen.

All tracks on this recording were recorded in the studio without overdubbing.

All songs written by Barry O'Brien, (c) 1986

All songs published by Season Dweller music(BMI)

All rights reserved

International copy right secured.

DEDICATION:

To Edward O'Brien Jr., my pop. A man whose razor sharp wit and humor was loved by me as much as his great abundance of love for our family and the singing of songs. God bless him. Before his spirit left, after teaching himself, he taught me how to use a computer. I hope the printer works. See ya!