

LONG TIME... SELDOM SCENE



Smithsonian Folkways

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1. California Cottonfields 3:04

(Dallas Frazier-Earl Montgomery/Sony-ATV Acuff-Rose Music, BMI-Glad Music, BMI-Pappy Daily Music, BMI)

2. Wait a Minute 5:13

(Herb Pedersen/Dear Friends Music, ASCAP)

3. What Am I Doing Hangin' 'Round 2:50

(Michael Martin Murphey-Owen Castleman/Screen Gems-EMI Music, BMI)

4. Hickory Wind 4:02

(Gram Parsons-Bob Buchanan/Sixteen Stars Music, BMI-Chrysalis One Songs, BMI-Hot Burrito Music, BMI, GPJ Music, BMI)

5. I'll Be No Stranger There 2:20

(John Alcorn-Lonnie Combs-A.B. Sebren/Bridge Building Music, BMI)

6. Walk Through This World with Me 2:32

(Sandra Seamons-Kay Savage/Glad Music Publishing & Recording, BMI)

7. Big Train (from Memphis) 2:46

(John Fogerty/Wenaba Music Co., ASCAP)

8. With Body and Soul 3:22

(Virginia Stauffer/Bill Monroe Music, BMI)

9. Paradise 2:57

(John Prine/Walden Music, ASCAP)

10. It's All Over Now, Baby Blue 3:20

(Bob Dylan/Special Rider Music, SESAC)

11. Mean Mother Blues 3:08

(John Starling/Markyle Music, BMI)

12. My Better Years 3:08

(Hazel Dickens/Happy Valley Music, BMI)

13. Little Georgia Rose 2:54

(Bill Monroe/Unichappell Music, BMI)

14. Like I Used to Do 4:09

(Pat Alger-Tim O'Brien/Universal-Polygram International Pub., ASCAP-Howdy Skies Music, ASCAP)

15. Through the Bottom of the Glass 2:43

(Paul Craft/Sony-ATV Acuff-Rose Music, BMI)

16. Lorena 5:27

(Henry D. L. Webster-Joseph Philbrick Webster)



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Long Time...Seldom Scene SFW CD 40199

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*he Seldom Scene would like to dedicate
this album to the memory of John Duffey and Mike Auldridge.*



“Let’s not try to get rich doing this—keep your day job. Let’s just have fun.”

—John Duffey, Seldom Scene founding member

WHAT DOES IT TAKE FOR A BLUEGRASS BAND TO REMAIN POPULAR FOR more than four decades? One can surmise the usual reasons: talented musicians, a signature sound, and a solid repertoire. With the Seldom Scene, sheer fun should be added to the list. As this album title implies, *Long Time . . . Seldom Scene* takes a new look at some of the many songs that have remained among the Seldom Scene's most popular over the past 40-plus years, along with one previously unrecorded piece added to the mix. Offering a fresh, newly recorded version of familiar favorites with the current band members, joined by a few very special guests from their extended circle of friends, the album aims to capture the identity and playfulness that have endeared the group to audiences across the United States.

≡ *THE BEGINNINGS* ≡

In the 1940s and 1950s, people migrating from rural areas for work in the Washington, D.C., region brought with them the country music they played back home. One form of this music—which wouldn't be defined as, or officially named, bluegrass until the late 1950s—found immense popularity in the nation's capital, and bluegrass bands and venues for bluegrass music proliferated. The music appealed to folks with country roots and to urbanites as well. While bluegrass is still popular in the region today, in the 1970s it reached a peak. At that time there was a large concentration of accomplished and learning bluegrass musicians, as well as clubs and weekend festivals where they played. Out of this environment, in 1971, came the Seldom Scene.

The group started with John Duffey, John Starling, Ben Eldridge, Tom Gray, and Mike Auldridge, and today it continues with the current lineup of Ben Eldridge, Lou Reid, Dudley

Connell, Ronnie Simpkins, and Fred Travers. The band has had three additional “permanent” members over the years—Phil Rosenthal, T. Michael Coleman, and Moondi Klein—as well as others who filled in short-term. Some left to pursue careers outside of music, and others to pursue different musical directions. Yet the Seldom Scene and its spirit endure.

The Seldom Scene became known as a “progressive” bluegrass band, in that it has drawn its repertoire from popular music beyond the more traditional songs from rural America. Bill C. Malone wrote in *Stars of Country Music* (University of Illinois Press, 1975):

“Bluegrass performers such as the Osborne Brothers clearly identified with and sought acceptance within the country mainstream. An increasing number of bluegrass entertainers, however, drew upon rock and contemporary sources for much of their musical sustenance. The songs of such artists as Bob Dylan, Gordon Lightfoot, John Denver, and the Beatles have appeared with increasing frequency in the repertoires of youth-oriented bluegrass groups like the Country Gazette, J. D. Crowe and the New South, the Second Generation, the McLain Family, Cliff Waldron and the New Shades of Grass, the Bluegrass Alliance, the Seldom Scene, and the Country Gentlemen. Strangely, these groups, which have been eclectic and innovative in their selection of song material, have been more resistant to electric instruments than have such country-oriented groups as the Osborne Brothers and Jim and Jesse. As a result, a Bob Dylan composition—when performed by Cliff Waldron and the New Shades of Grass—sounds more ‘bluegrass’ than some of the electrified renditions performed by the Osborne Brothers.”



While the Seldom Scene has included electric instruments—T. Michael Coleman played electric bass, as did Tom Gray and Ronnie Simpkins on occasion, especially when circumstances prohibited bringing the upright—they remain rooted in acoustic instruments. Tom Gray says he regrets that he recorded “Wait a Minute” using electric bass on the 1974 *Old Train* album—if you want to hear it the way it should be, find the Seldom Scene’s performance of the song from the Tommy Hunter Show (Toronto, Ontario, Country Music program) on YouTube.

The following excerpts of conversations with current members (the *newest* of whom at this writing have been in the group for “only” 18 years) as well as surviving original members offer a sense of how each was inspired in youth to learn this music and of the paths that brought them to this enduring band. They also add insights into the source of each song on the album. Sadly, two founding members, John Duffey and Mike Auldridge, died, in 1996 and 2012, respectively.



*“There was something about
that music that made me crazy.”*

When he was a kid growing up in Richmond, Virginia, **Ben Eldridge** was attracted to what was then called hillbilly music. A WRVA radio program called *Old Dominion Barn*



Dance, hosted by Mary “Sunshine Sue” Workman, was on the air for 15-minute sessions throughout the day. One aired at the time Ben got home from school. Ben recalls:

“There was something about that music that made me crazy. My family wasn’t into it. They thought I was nuts. When I was about nine or ten years old, I wanted to learn how to play something, so I got a \$13 guitar and a book full of cowboy songs with chords

above the words. And I learned how to play that pretty quick. Then when I got to be 14 or 15, I heard Earl Scruggs play ‘Foggy Mountain Breakdown’ on the banjo, and I said, ‘I’ve got to do that.’ I talked my dad into buying me a banjo for my 16th birthday, and I had no idea how to play it. There were no instruction books back then. So the only way I knew how to play was to take Flatt and Scruggs records and slow them down from 45 to 33 [rpm] so I could hear the notes that Earl was playing, because normally they go by so fast. I had a little back porch, and I shut the door to not disturb anyone in the rest of the house. One day, my dad came in and I had the banjo tuned real low so I could play with Earl, and it sounded awful. And my dad said, ‘Son, buying that banjo for your birthday last year was the worst mistake of my life. That thing is nothing but a cacophony of harsh and unpleasant sounds.’ I didn’t know what cacophony meant at the time, but I knew it wasn’t good. Finally, I got to be reasonably proficient with it [the banjo].”

Ben now resides in Fredericksburg, Virginia, and is the only founding member still active with the band.



“This time I’m shopping for a bass.”

When **Tom Gray** was a young child living in Chicago in the 1940s, he had a babysitter from Tennessee who would sit by an old radio and listen to Flatt and Scruggs with Tom on her knee. Tom recalls how he became a hillbilly:



“After I moved to Washington at eight years old, I had an experience [with the music], I found something really magical about it. I used to listen to WARL, the Arlington [Virginia] station. We still do have good exposure on the radio in this area, for which we’re fortunate. I started playing accordion and piano and used to be the piano player who accompanied the kids singing in Sunday school. I discovered this hillbilly stuff, and then I found

some artists that were playing stuff that was faster and in higher keys—and this was bluegrass, before they had a name for it. They didn’t start using the name ‘bluegrass’ until about 1957, and I started listening to it in 1954 when there were only four bluegrass bands. There was Bill Monroe, there was the Stanley Brothers, there was Flatt and Scruggs, and Mac Wiseman. Well, I realized that I needed to learn to play that, so I went to the pawnshop and bought a cheap guitar, which may have cost \$15. To get my first guitar, I spent my coin collection at face value, which was a stupid thing to do. But I wanted the

guitar. And then I got a mandolin and started meeting other people who play this kind of music. Then I realized that everyone needs a bass player, and the bass had always appealed to me. Whenever I listen to music, I instinctively zero in on the root of what it is, and sometimes I'll be humming it to myself. Before I got a bass, I would sit on my bed with my guitar listening to old records playing bass lines on my guitar, and I thought, 'I need to get a real bass.' I went back to the pawnshop and said, "This time I'm shopping for a bass."

Today, Tom lives in Kensington, Maryland.



*“If you want to be good at something,
hang around people better than you are.”*

John Starling was born in Alabama, grew up in Virginia, and is now a neighbor of Ben's in Fredericksburg. He was more accustomed to playing guitar and singing by himself until he started attending picking parties.

“If you're playing music, collaboration becomes a lot of fun. In terms of the music I grew up listening to, there was music I enjoyed, and music I appreciated. I always appreciated classical music, but I never enjoyed it much. My parents were from Alabama, and I grew up in Virginia, but we would go down [to Alabama] for the summer to see their parents. I'd be listening to the radio a lot to Hank Williams, and I thought I had died and gone to heaven. I remember going out to his grave site several times. In Virginia, I also listened



to *Old Dominion Barn Dance*, WRVA-Richmond, and WWVA [from Wheeling, West Virginia]. And I'd listen to WLAC in Nashville, which played rhythm and blues, played black music. And I think of all of what I listened to, I think I enjoyed that probably more than anything else. I like listening to blues. And I appreciated Western Swing, but I didn't like it very much. Listening to Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys, I don't understand why I didn't like

them more back then. A relative of mine always used to say, 'If you want to be good at something, hang around people better than you are.' I look back and think how lucky I was to have been in medical school and met Ben Eldridge. [Before that] I was just sitting down playing folk music, just strumming and singing."

In 1977, John Starling left the Seldom Scene to pursue his medical career as an ear, nose, and throat specialist. Phil Rosenthal joined as lead singer and guitarist. In 1986, Rosenthal left the group for other pursuits, and Lou Reid joined the Scene as lead singer and guitarist. Tom Gray left in late 1987, and T. Michael Coleman joined as bass player.



“It was the best sound; I just thought it was remarkable.”

Lou Reid remembers as a child in Danbury, North Carolina, running into the living room whenever a Valleydale Sausage ad came on TV, picking up the fireplace broom, and pretending to play it like a guitar. Once he picked up the shovel by accident and got covered in soot. There were always a guitar and banjo around, and Lou first picked up the guitar, which he had to hold at an angle and finger with his thumb because his hands were so small. His father bought him a Mel Bay guitar chord book and took him to see Flatt and Scruggs at a local school a number of times. After learning guitar, Lou went on to learn banjo, mandolin, fiddle, and bass. He recalls:



“I started out playing fiddle in a little band that ended up being called the Bluegrass Buddies, getting together at the Moore’s Springs Country Store in Moore’s Springs, North Carolina. Then I moved over to mandolin, then to bass, because we had to figure out who was going to play what. We played fiddlers conventions all over from about 1965 to 1974. Along that same time, the Seldom Scene came out. I remember playing Camp Springs [a North Carolina bluegrass festival], and Dick Freeland, who owned Rebel Records, was there. He was thinking about signing us, and we’re sitting on Bluegrass 45’s bus, the Japanese band, and he says, ‘I’m going to play something for you. Let me know what you think.’ He starts playing the eight-track tape, and

says, ‘Recognize anybody?’ When Duffey came in singing, I said, ‘I know that’s Duffey. And that sounds like Ben Eldridge on banjo.’ He wasn’t letting us know anything—it wasn’t even out in stores yet. It tore our nerves, we loved it so much. Jimmy Haley, a good friend and we played together, was trying to talk Dick into giving him that tape. Luckily, I was the one who got it. He told me I couldn’t play it for anybody until next week when it was released, so I got the first eight-track tape of *The Seldom Scene Act 1*. It was the best sound; I just thought it was remarkable. John Starling I had never heard of, but I immediately loved the voice. Growing up, my main bass hero [was] Tom Gray. I listened to his bass playing and tried to sound as much like him as I could. I was a big fan of Ben when I took over banjo, and I tried to steal as many licks from him as I could. So I was a huge fan of the Seldom Scene. I played with the Bluegrass Buddies, [then] Southbound. I got a call from Doyle Lawson and on April 1, 1979, April Fool’s Day, we formed Doyle Lawson and Quicksilver. I stayed there about four years. Ricky Skaggs wanted me to join his band in June of ’82. I stayed with Ricky and had a great time for four years. I was still with him when I got a call from Mike Auldridge, who wanted to know if I’d be interested in joining the band. I said, ‘Wow!’ It kind of freaked me a little bit. Well, I was going to work with my heroes. I remember when we played the Birchmere [in Alexandria, VA], I was shaking. They made me feel great. It was like family. I didn’t want to let them down. I was trying to do my best, and I was just scared to death.”

Lou stayed until 1992, when he left to play with Vince Gill. He rejoined the group in 1996 after John Duffey’s death, this time as mandolinist and tenor singer. Lou now lives in Union Grove, North Carolina. When Lou departed, John Starling returned for one year and was then replaced by Moondi Klein as lead vocalist and guitarist from 1994 to 1996. In 1996,

Mike Auldridge, T. Michael Coleman, and Moondi Klein left to work full time on their group Chesapeake. Dudley Connell, Ronnie Simpkins, and Fred Travers then joined the Seldom Scene.



“That was it for me. It still gives me goose bumps....”

Dudley Connell is a lifelong resident of Montgomery County, Maryland. He now lives in Gaithersburg, Maryland. Dudley’s musical interests were varied until he attended a festival at the home of some bluegrass pioneers.



“My dad played banjo, and my mom sang old country stuff like Blue Sky Boys, Bailes Brothers, that ballad kind of stuff. Just before my teens, I got into whatever my peers were listening to—Beatles, Rolling Stones, Jimi Hendrix, Led Zeppelin.... Always in the back of my mind was this more rural-type music, and I later got into Bob Dylan, John Prine—the singer-songwriter-type stuff—Joni Mitchell and James Taylor. After that, it was like I never really left rock

and roll, pop music—it more left me, because when disco came in, I had nothing in common with it. I didn’t enjoy it, so I started searching and discovered Hank Williams and Jimmy Rodgers. What really got me was the Stanley Brothers, in particular Carter

Stanley. In 1973, [I] went to McClure, Virginia, to the old Stanley home place. That became like a religious experience for me. First, it's way out in the middle of nowhere. I remember going up these curvy mountain roads, thinking, 'There's no way there's a public event being held back here.' But we got to the top [of] Smith Ridge—that's where they're from, that's where they held this festival—still do, for that matter. There's a little row of these yellow lights that you see at carnival grounds strung up and an old fellow in big overalls at a ticket booth. It's like I'd gone back in time. We pulled in the gate, and up this mountain comes 'Man of Constant Sorrow'—Ralph on stage singing it solo—and that was it for me. It still gives me goose bumps thinking about what that felt like. I got home, and I really wanted to be a banjo player. I started learning how to play three-finger banjo by listening to old records. I ended up spending all my time in my room listening to records and reading and trying to learn to play.”

Working as a Montgomery County Schools' maintenance worker and truck driver, Dudley played open mic nights around the Washington area with various musicians and eventually started getting paid gigs. He also switched from banjo to guitar and began concentrating on his singing. While in the process of doing so and putting together what would become the Johnson Mountain Boys, Dudley played for a short while with local bluegrass stalwart Buzz Busby. The neo-traditional bluegrass band the Johnson Mountain Boys was together from about 1978 to 1988, and recorded ten albums. They also played some reunion concerts between 1988 and 1996.



“They were looking for a bass player.”

Seldom Scene bassist **Ronnie Simpkins** is from southwest Virginia. He now lives in Oak Hill, Virginia. Music seems to run in the veins of the Simpkins family. “I grew up in Montgomery County, southwest Virginia. My mom and dad both played, but when they started raising a family, the music had to be put aside. A few years later, the music was reintroduced when my older brother Rickie would get up at 5 a.m. to watch a local TV show out of Roanoke, Virginia, on WDBJ. The program featured Don Reno and Red Smiley, and was called *Top of the Morning*. Rickie would take two pieces of kindling and mimic playing the fiddle along with the program. My folks said, ‘We need to get him a fiddle for Christmas.’ So they did, and that sparked the drive for the family to pick up music again.



After my dad passed away, my younger sister took up the mandolin, and we started traveling to fiddlers conventions as a four-piece band. [mandolin, fiddle, bass, and guitar] During this time, local musicians—folks like Butch Robbins and Jimmy Arnold— would come to our house for jams. A few years later, during my junior/ senior year of high school, I joined a group called Upland Express. We branched out playing bluegrass festivals in Tennessee and North Carolina. Then, out of the blue, I got a phone call from a friend, J. C. Poff, who owned a local music store in Christiansburg, Virginia. J.C. was looking for a bass player to fill in for the weekend for a nationally known group, the Bluegrass Cardinals.

‘This is a great opportunity for you,’ J.C. told me. That weekend trip transformed into a year and a half with the Cardinals, and I also played on one their recordings.

The next move for me was to Richmond, Virginia, to play with the Heights of Grass. The band consisted of Sammy Shelor, Don Grubb, my brother Rickie, and at the time that I joined, Mark Newton also came on board. Out of that group came the Virginia Squires in 1983: Rickie, Sammy, Mark, and myself. We traveled extensively throughout the US and abroad and released four albums.

The next incredible musical step, or leap I should say, was a five-year stint with the Tony Rice Unit. Also with that, sitting in with the Bluegrass Album Band, Ricky Skaggs, Alison Krauss, Jerry Douglas, Chris Hillman, Herb Pederson, and many other of my musical heroes. These incredible experiences paved the way for me to be a part of a band that helped change the bluegrass world forever...the Seldom Scene. This is my longest stretch with one group...and I don't regret a single minute!



“I’m not sure what that guy is playing, but I really like that.”

Fred Travers is originally from Prince Georges County, Maryland, and now lives in Huntingtown. He was exposed to music at the tavern his father ran as well as through the bands his brother played in. Slide guitar is what piqued his interest.



“I was interested in slide because of the pedal steel guys back in the day at my dad’s tavern and in the ’70s listening to Duane Allman and all those guys play. I went to a [Doc Watson] concert at the Warner Theater in Washington, D.C., in about 1981. Merle [Doc’s son] played a little bit of slide on acoustic guitar. The Seldom Scene [the opening act] was the first bluegrass band I ever saw. From the moment they hit the opening note, I thought, ‘Man, this is

really cool, I like these guys. And I’m not sure what that guy Mike Auldridge is playing, but I really like that’—a combination of acoustic music and steel guitar slide. After that, I pursued it. The next day I had [my brother’s] Sears silver-tone guitar, and I took it out and took the nut out from the end of it. I raised the strings from the neck with a bolt and I found an old Stephen’s bar laying around and started playing slide. Then I bought every Mike Auldridge Seldom Scene record I could find. [I] happened to live close enough to the Birchmere back in those days where I could just go every Thursday night. At the Birchmere on Mt. Vernon Avenue [in Alexandria, Virginia], people would start lining up at three o’clock in the afternoon for a 7:30, eight o’clock show because it was general admission and everybody could pick their seats. Nobody took the seats right by the stage, because I guess the sound wasn’t very good there and you’re always looking up. I could walk in there five minutes before the show and I’d get a table right in front of Mike and watch him play, try to steal his licks. I did it on my own, got a book, and tried to read some things. After about a year of playing, I got married. For a wedding present, my wife Kyle gave me a lesson with Mike Auldridge. I was astounded because I held those guys—

Ben and Mike and Tom, all of them—in such high regard. I was like, ‘How did you get his phone number?’ And she said, ‘I looked in the phone book.’ I said, ‘Mike Auldridge’s phone number is certainly not in the phone book.’ And she said, ‘Yes, it was.’ So we did a lesson and became friends. I think he admired that I played similar to him. He enjoyed giving me a lesson because he could tell me something and I could understand what he was talking about. So we did a number of those over the next few years, so that’s pretty much how I got started.”

✦ *BIRTH OF THE SELDOM SCENE* ✦

The founding of the Seldom Scene is a well-known story. Five guys who got together to play music once a week in Ben Eldridge’s basement decided to perform publicly on a limited basis and even to make some recordings. All five had responsible day jobs. John Duffey was a luthier and repaired instruments. Tom Gray was a cartographer for National Geographic. John and Tom were former members of the popular local bluegrass group, the Country Gentlemen. Mike Auldridge was a graphic artist at the *Washington Star* newspaper. Ben Eldridge was a mathematician at Tetra Tech Inc. Mike and Ben were also former members of Cliff Waldron and the New Shades of Grass. And John Starling at the time was a medical intern at Walter Reed Hospital.

Ben Eldridge recalled:

“Being in D.C. and getting to know a lot of players—they used to have a lot of pickin’ parties and things like that—I met Mike Auldridge down in Tom Morgan’s basement, and he didn’t even have a real dobro [resonator acoustic slide guitar] at the time. It was a

Gibson flat top guitar that Tom Morgan had installed a dobro resonator into, and I was really impressed. We started getting together, along with Mike's brother Dave, on a regular basis in my basement. That's how I got into the bluegrass scene up in D.C. We had regular Monday night sessions. In the mid-1960s John Starling graduated medical school and had an internship up in D.C., and we started getting together. In the fall of 1971, Mike and I both stopped playing with Cliff [Waldron]. He [Cliff] was playing at the Red Fox [Inn restaurant], in Bethesda [Maryland], at the time. But then Cliff called and asked me if we could put the basement band together and take his place at the Red Fox for one night because he wanted to go down to Nashville for the DJ convention. And I said, 'Sure, we'll do it.' And there had been a rumor that the old basement guys were going to start a band. I walk into Arlington Music one day, which was where Duffey had his instrument repair business at the time, and John says, 'Hey, I hear we're going to have a band,' and I say, 'What?'"

John Starling recalls the rumor having started with a police detective in Arlington County, Len Holsclaw. Holsclaw was also the manager of the Country Gentlemen at the time, and he used to have a pickin' party on Christmas Eve. Starling showed up at the occasion, where he sang with John Duffey for the first time, and he recalls how Duffey thought they blended well and planted the idea of starting a band.

Ben Eldridge and Starling also remember how Duffey would not get on a plane, and when Charlie Waller heard that he might be getting into another band, he said they ought to start calling themselves the Seldom Seen. Duffey's response was, "Hey, that's a pretty good idea." The spelling of the group's name changed at a later date. Tom Gray recounted, "There had been a local rock and roll band that called themselves Seldom Scene, spelled exactly the way we did, but they didn't last very long. It was that previous day that planted the seed in [Charlie's] head, but before

we took on the name, we had to make sure that band didn't exist anymore, and it didn't."

Ben Eldridge explains their next steps: "We took the basement band over to the Red Fox and played for Cliff. And that night we got a call from the Rabbit's Foot [a Washington, D.C., club], and they heard about this bluegrass music and wanted to hear it. So I told them, without even asking the guys, that we'd be there. They wanted us to come up the first of November, and I'll never forget this, John Starling said, 'Let's call Duffey and see if he wants to play.' So we called John, and he said, 'Yeah, we can get together next Monday night.' So that's what we did, and we started at the Rabbit's Foot for maybe five weeks."

John Starling adds, "We were playing at the same time as the Redskins on *Monday Night Football*, and one guy [Richard Dress] asked the bartender at the Rabbit's Foot several times to turn down the sound of the game, and they kicked him out. We quit the Rabbit's Foot right then and there, and Ben and I went up to the Red Fox, had a couple of beers, and watched the game. So he went to the Red Fox, and we followed him."

Red Fox proprietor Walt Broderick invited the group to play the first Tuesday night of 1972. They accepted, and "the rest is history," says Eldridge. "We didn't really have a band name for about the first five or six weeks that we played there." According to Starling, John Duffey laid out the principles that would define the group from then on:

"Boys, I don't want this to be John Duffey and anything. Let's just have fun together. I just have two rules: no big deals, and that's important. In other words, let's not try to get rich doing this—keep your day job. Let's just have fun." The other rule was, "We're not going to play 'Roll in My Sweet Baby's Arms' over and over again. Let's come up with some

new stuff.” Starling explains: “He never wanted to be a huge star. He just liked playing. That’s the only reason I could be in a band at the time because I was doing my residency at Walter Reed. I remember the chairman of my department encouraged us to get our mind off things, play some music.” Tom Gray adds, “Everyone had a day job. That was part of our philosophy: we would never book so much that we felt like we had to make a decision of quitting the day job.”



Dudley Connell, Fred Travers, and Ronnie Simpkins first performed as part of the Seldom Scene on New Year’s Eve of 1995. Connell tells the story: “I saw this little blurb in *Bluegrass Unlimited* magazine, which is the closest thing we have to a trade journal. It said something about the Seldom Scene dissolving. So I called John [Duffey] and I said, ‘John, what’s up? This is terrible.’ I almost expressed my condolences because it was almost like a death in the family. The Seldom Scene is a Washington institution. I called to tell him how sorry I was to hear it, and he said, ‘Well, we’re not really dissolving the band, we’re just looking for a guitar player, lead singer, baritone singer, dobro player, bass player, bass singer, bus driver...’ He was kind of making fun of the whole thing. I don’t know what made me say it, but I said, ‘John, we ought to get together and sing sometime.’ [There was] total silence on the other end of the line. And I thought, ‘Oh, no, I’ve stepped over some kind of line that I didn’t know existed.’ He said, ‘Well, do you know any of my stuff?’ And I said, ‘Well, no, not really, but we all have heard it for years.’ So we were going to try to get together, but because of everybody’s touring schedules, we couldn’t until August. That’s when we started rehearsing. It was an audition-slash-rehearsal, I guess.”

Fred Travers also remembers how Mike Auldridge, Moondi Klein, and T. Michael Coleman were in the band while at the same time playing in their own group, Chesapeake, for a couple of years. “I think they decided that they wanted to go out on their own and make that band work. They talked to John and Ben and decided that parting ways was the best way to go rather than trying to manage two bands at once with schedule conflicts.” Since Simpkins, Travers, and Connell lived in the D.C. area, this was a big advantage in holding to the philosophy of the group as laid down by Duffey. Better yet, as Travers adds: “Dudley was a lead vocalist, obviously, a premier one. So that kind of brought us into the basket of possibilities, for sure.”

Coincidentally, the idea of playing with the Seldom Scene had been planted in Connell’s mind a couple of years earlier. When John Starling was leaving for the second time before Moondi came, Kitsy Kuykendall approached Connell and said, “You know, you really ought to audition for that job.” His reaction was “Me? And the Seldom Scene? Mr. Traditional and all that stuff? I just sort of brushed it off. But when the second opportunity came, I was much more serious that I would really like to do this; it could be really fun. Not only would it be fun, it would also be challenging because it’s a whole different style of music than what I’m used to playing.”

John Duffey died on December 10, 1996, after suffering a heart attack. Eventually, Lou Reid returned to the Seldom Scene. Lou remembers: “He [Duffey] was a powerful guy, singing-wise, mandolin-wise, too. If he really wanted to play, he could dazzle you with that instrument.” “He really could,” Ben Eldridge adds. “He always said, ‘I don’t know about the mandolin, I just need to hold something in my hands so I don’t look stupid up here.’ But he was an amazing mandolin player. He was an entertainer. He never practiced. Every now and



then, he'd play something that just wasn't very good, it would be pretty awful. But then he'd throw the thing around and whirl around and do something, and the crowd would go nuts. It used to really bug Mike, because Mike used to play everything absolutely flawlessly... The other thing about John is, he would have his moments of absolute brilliance. He would play a break on something, and it would just fly. And then he would turn around and tell me, 'I don't know if I can remember that the next time I do it.'"

Eldridge continues: "After John died we had a bunch of gigs on the books. So we used several [mandolin players to finish up commitments]. We were playing down where Lou

lives [and] thought we'd give him a call, and he said, 'Sure, we'll do it.' It was one of those evenings where we went out there, started playing, and it felt like we'd been out there 20 minutes, and I looked at my watch and we'd been there for an hour and a half. It was so much fun. Lou just clicked right in with us, whereas with the other guys, they weren't as familiar with our music so we had to rehearse a lot. It just worked, so we had a little meeting the next day and decided, OK, well, let's see if he'd be interested in coming back." Lou remembers Ben calling him and saying, "Would you be interested in coming back and joining the band? We talked about it and we think we have license to carry on." Lou answered, "Well, I think you do, too." Years later, Lou still appreciates his good fortune of having the chance to return to the group.

And carry on they have. When asked how it felt to keep playing in this band and playing these songs, Ben Eldridge replied, "It's still fun. It makes us feel good that the people want to hear those things. And like I say, I wouldn't be doing this if it wasn't fun. And it still is."

The members of the Seldom Scene still have day jobs. Ben works several days a week as a mathematician. Lou has a second band, Lou Reid and Carolina, with his wife Christy, but only books dates when the Scene isn't booked. They also operate a day care for children. Dudley is an audio archivist at the National Council for the Traditional Arts. Fred is a retired firefighter and works some in construction with his brother. Ronnie is an audio specialist for Smithsonian Folkways Recordings.

As far as the performing part of their lives goes, let's all hope that the Seldom Scene and its audiences continue having fun for a Long Time....



Chris Eldridge



Emmylou Harris



Rickie Simpkins

≡ GUEST ARTISTS ≡

Original members **John Starling** and **Tom Gray** graciously participated in this project.

Rickie Simpkins, who has worked with such artists as Ralph Stanley, Mary Chapin Carpenter, Charlie Waller, John Starling, Tony Rice, Mike Auldridge, Herb Pederson, and Emmylou Harris, brings his tasteful fiddle playing to this recording. He is the brother of Seldom Scene bass player Ronnie Simpkins. Punch Brother and founding member of the Infamous Stringdusters, **Chris Eldridge** contributes some fine singing and guitar playing to this recording. He is the son of Seldom Scene banjo player, Ben Eldridge. **Emmylou Harris** has been a friend of the Seldom Scene's since her days living and performing in the Washington area. An incomparable interpreter of songs and a great voice who worked with such artists as Gram Parsons, Linda Ronstadt, Dolly Parton, Willie Nelson, and Rodney Crowell, she graces *Long Time...Seldom Scene* with her appearance.

THE SONGS

1. California Cottonfields

Dudley Connell, vocal, guitar; Fred Travers, vocal, dobro; Lou Reid, vocal, mandolin; Ben Eldridge, banjo; Ronnie Simpkins, bass

Everybody's memory was a little unclear about exactly who brought this song to the group, but John Starling is a big Merle Haggard fan and likely is responsible. The song was originally recorded by Dallas Frazier for *Singing My Songs* (RCA, 1970) and then by Merle Haggard for *Someday We'll Look Back* (Capital, 1971). This song was included on *Seldom Scene Live at the Cellar Door* (Rebel, 1975).

2. Wait a Minute

Dudley Connell, vocal, guitar; John Starling, vocal; Lou Reid, vocal, mandolin; Fred Travers, vocal, dobro; Chris Eldridge, guitar; Rickie Simpkins, fiddle; Ben Eldridge, banjo; Ronnie Simpkins, bass

John Starling was in Los Angeles to attend a medical conference and went to hear Herb Pedersen playing at a club. Herb liked the Seldom Scene's newest recording, *Act III*, and gave John a tape with the songs "Wait a Minute" and "Old Train" on it. The Scene recorded both songs on the *Old Train* album (Rebel, 1974). In 1976, they recorded another Pedersen song, "Easy Ride from Good Times to the Blues," on *The New Seldom Scene Album*.

3. What Am I Doing Hangin' 'Round

Dudley Connell, vocal, guitar; Lou Reid, vocal, mandolin; Fred Travers, vocal, dobro; Ben Eldridge, banjo; Ronnie Simpkins, bass

"What Am I Doing Hangin' 'Round" was written by Michael Martin Murphey for the Monkees. It appeared on their album *Pisces, Aquarius, Capricorn and Jones Ltd.* (Colgems, 1967).

Before the formation of the Seldom Scene, John Duffey produced a recording of the Japanese bluegrass band, Bluegrass 45. The first track on this 1971 Rebel Records release, *Caravan*, was “What Am I Doing Hangin’ Round.” Duffey then brought the song into the repertoire of the Seldom Scene, who recorded it on their first LP, *The Seldom Scene Act 1* (Rebel, 1972).

4. Hickory Wind

Dudley Connell, vocal, guitar; Emmylou Harris, vocal; Lou Reid, vocal, mandolin; Fred Travers, vocal, dobro; Ben Eldridge, banjo; Ronnie Simpkins, bass

John Starling’s good friend and sometime Scene guest performer, Emmylou Harris, had worked with Gram Parsons and later recorded this song on her *Blue Kentucky Girl* album in 1980. Somewhere along the way, the song entered the Seldom Scene’s repertoire. Ben Eldridge thinks they worked up it up the night before the live performance used for the recording

Bluegrass: The World’s Greatest Show
(Sugar Hill, 1983).

5. I’ll Be No Stranger There

Dudley Connell, lead vocal, guitar; Lou Reid, tenor vocal, mandolin; Fred Travers, baritone vocal, dobro; Ben Eldridge, banjo; Ronnie Simpkins, bass vocal, bass

When Lou Reid filled in for Randy Graham on bass with the band New Quicksilver for a weekend, this was a gospel song they performed, and Lou brought it back to the Scene. They recorded it on *A Change of Scenery* (Sugar Hill, 1988).

6. Walk Through This World with Me

Dudley Connell, vocal, guitar; Lou Reid, vocal, mandolin; Fred Travers, vocal, dobro; Ben Eldridge, banjo; Rickie Simpkins, fiddle; Ronnie Simpkins, bass

Tom Gray said that when the group was recording the *Old Train* album, John Starling asked John Duffey if there was a George Jones song he’d like to do. Duffey

was a big George Jones fan, and they worked this song up in the studio. George Jones recorded it for his album *Walk Through This World with Me* (Musicor, 1967). The Seldom Scene first released it on *Old Train* (Rebel, 1974).

7. Big Train (from Memphis)

Dudley Connell, vocal, guitar; Lou Reid, vocal, mandolin; Fred Travers, vocal, dobro; Ben Eldridge, banjo; Chris Eldridge, guitar; Rickie Simpkins, fiddle; Ronnie Simpkins, bass

Lou Reid bought John Fogerty's album *Centerfield* when it came out in 1985. He was always looking for train songs and thought this would be a good one for the Scene. John Duffey concurred and referred to Fogerty's album as "Centerfold." This song was first recorded by the Scene at another live show and appears on *15th Anniversary Live at the Kennedy Center* (Sugar Hill, 1986).

8. With Body and Soul

John Starling, vocal, guitar; Lou Reid, vocal, mandolin; Emmylou Harris, vocal; Ben Eldridge, banjo; Fred Travers, dobro; Rickie Simpkins, fiddle; Tom Gray, bass

When John Starling first got to D.C., he went to see the Bluegrass Alliance at the Shamrock Tavern on M Street and heard Tony Rice sing this tune. The song was first recorded by Bill Monroe as a 45 rpm single on Side A for Decca (732574, 1969). The Seldom Scene recorded it on *Act 1* (Rebel, 1972).

9. Paradise

Dudley Connell, vocal, guitar; Lou Reid, vocal, mandolin; Fred Travers, vocal, dobro; Ben Eldridge, banjo; Ronnie Simpkins, bass

John Prine wrote and recorded this song for his self-named album released on Atlantic in 1971. Ben Eldridge had John Prine's album, and he and John Starling both remember learning the song from that album. Lyrically the song sounds like

it could have been penned long ago in the mountains of Appalachia rather than by the great singer-songwriter, John Prine. It fits in the bluegrass genre very well. The Scene first recorded it for *Act II* (Rebel, 1973).

10. It's All Over Now, Baby Blue

Dudley Connell, vocal, guitar; Lou Reid, vocal, guitar; Fred Travers, vocal, dobro; Ben Eldridge, banjo; Ronnie Simpkins, bass

Bob Dylan wrote this song and included it on *Bringing It All Back Home* (Columbia, 1965). John Duffey had performed it with the Country Gentlemen, liked it, and taught it to the Seldom Scene. It was captured for vinyl for *Live at the Cellar Door* (Rebel, 1975).

11. Mean Mother Blues

Dudley Connell, vocal, guitar; Lou Reid, vocal, mandolin; Chris Eldridge, vocal, guitar; John Starling, vocal; Fred Travers, dobro; Ben Eldridge, banjo; Ronnie Simpkins, bass

John Starling wrote this and maintains sealed lips as to whom he wrote it about. It was recorded on *Act III* (Rebel, 1973).

12. My Better Years

Dudley Connell, vocal, guitar; Lou Reid, vocal, mandolin; Fred Travers, vocal, dobro; Ben Eldridge, banjo; Ronnie Simpkins, bass; Rickie Simpkins, fiddle

Dudley Connell played and sang often with Hazel Dickens in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Hazel, a West Virginia native, moved to Baltimore in the early 1950s, where she became part of the Baltimore-Washington bluegrass crowd and played in bars in the region. There she met someone, fell in love, and married. After about a year, he strayed, and the couple divorced. One or two years later, her ex-husband returned, but Hazel was broken-hearted and told him to go away. From that experience, she wrote this song. It was first released on *Hazel and Alice* (Rounder, 1973).

Dudley Connell says, “A lot of songs come out of the imagination, but the best songs come from real life.” *Long Time...* *Seldom Scene* marks the debut recording of this tune by the Seldom Scene.

13. Little Georgia Rose

Dudley Connell, vocal, guitar; Lou Reid, vocal, mandolin; Fred Travers, vocal, dobro; Ben Eldridge, banjo; Tom Gray, bass

Bill Monroe first released this song on the B Side of a 45 rpm (Decca, 46222) in 1950. Ben Eldridge said John Duffey liked to sing this Monroe classic. Tom Gray recounts that the first recording session for *Act III* (Rebel, 1973) had been unproductive, with only “Little Georgia Rose” and one other song being recorded. At a subsequent session after a long day, Duffey said he wasn’t happy with “Little Georgia Rose” and wanted to re-record it. The new version is what was used on the album. In an article in the online publication *Bluegrass Today*, February, 20, 2012, Daniel Mullins wrote, “John Duffey’s

interpretation of ‘Little Georgia Rose’ may be one of the best Monroe covers ever. There’s a reason that it opens Rebel Records’ bluegrass tribute to Monroe, *With Body and Soul*. The power with which Duffey sings makes you believe that he wrote the song about his own life experience. He makes this bluegrass classic his own with his unique brand of tenor, matched with his equally unique mandolin style.”

14. Like I Used to Do

Dudley Connell, vocal, guitar; Lou Reid, vocal, mandolin; Fred Travers, vocal, dobro; Ben Eldridge, guitar; Ronnie Simpkins, bass

“Like I Used to Do” was written by Tim O’Brien and Pat Alger. John Starling heard Tim O’Brien perform it at the Station Inn in Nashville. It was on his album *Odd Man In* (Sugar Hill, 1991). A short time later, he saw co-writer Pat Alger at an outdoor event in Canada. Deciding to add it to their repertoire, the Seldom Scene recorded it during John Starling’s brief return to the

band in 1993. It appears on the album *Like We Used to Do* (Sugar Hill, 1994).

15. Through the Bottom of the Glass

Dudley Connell, vocal, guitar; Lou Reid, vocal, mandolin; Fred Travers, vocal, dobro; Ben Eldridge, banjo; Ronnie Simpkins, bass

Paul Craft was a friend of Ben Eldridge's from the University of Virginia and would hang out with the Seldom Scene. John Starling recounts that after college, Paul left for Memphis, where he opened a music store. At that time, he started writing songs and tried to get the attention of folks in Nashville, to no avail. Once, when he was in D.C., he went by Ben's house and dropped off four songs: "Raised by the Railroad Line," "Keep Me from Blowing Away," "Midnight Flyer," and "Through the Bottom of the Glass." Linda Ronstadt, who met the Seldom Scene through Emmylou Harris, was staying at John Starling's house, heard "Keep Me from Blowing Away," and said, "I'm going to record that." George

Massenburg engineered both *Old Train* (Rebel, 1974), on which the Scene recorded "Through the Bottom of the Glass," and *Heart Like a Wheel* for Linda Ronstadt, on which she did indeed record "Keep Me from Blowing Away." Meanwhile, the Eagles recorded "Midnight Flyer" on their album *On the Border*. The Scene later recorded "Raised by the Railroad Line" on *15th Anniversary Live at the Kennedy Center*. John Starling said that Paul Craft became sought after for songs in Nashville after that.

16. Lorena

Dudley Connell, vocal hums, guitar; Lou Reid, vocal hums, mandolin; Ben Eldridge, guitar; Fred Travers, dobro; Rickie Simpkins, fiddle; Ronnie Simpkins, bass

The lyrics to this song were written as a love poem in 1856 by Rev. Henry D. L. Webster. Joseph Philbrick Webster wrote the music, and the song was first published in Chicago in 1857. It was popular on both sides of the American Civil War.



Mike Auldridge liked this tune a lot and brought it into the Seldom Scene's repertoire as an instrumental. It was captured live and is on *15th Anniversary Live at the Kennedy Center* (Sugar Hill, 1986).

From 1967 to 1973 **Michael Oberman** interviewed over 300 musical groups for his weekly column in the *Washington Star* newspaper. The Seldom Scene was the only bluegrass group among them. Now, 40 years later, as a full-time photographer Michael once again spent the day with the Seldom Scene...not to interview them but to photograph them for this album.

Credits

Produced by Pete Reiniger

Recorded and mixed by Pete Reiniger

Assistant Engineer: Mike Monseur

Record at Bias Studios, Springfield, Virginia

Additional recording at Private Ear Recording, Hyattsville, Maryland

Mastered by Charlie Pilzer at Airshow

Mastering, Takoma Park, Maryland

Annotated by Pete Reiniger

Cover photo, pp. 3, 7, 24, and 33 by Michael Oberman; p. 9 by Charlie Weber; pp. 8, 11, 12, 14, 16, 18, and 26 by

Mike Monseur; back cover of booklet by Pete Reiniger; all photos in exterior packaging by Michael Oberman

Executive producers: Daniel E. Sheehy and D. A. Sonneborn

Production manager: Mary Monseur

Editorial assistance by Carla Borden

Design and layout by Jackson Foster, The ID Entity, www.theID-entity.com

Emmylou Harris and Chris Eldridge appear courtesy of Nonesuch Records.

Seldom Scene proudly endorses D'Addario strings

Seldom Scene is managed by: KCA Artists (c/o Lee Olsen) / 1025 17th Ave S, 2nd Fl / Nashville TN 37212

Ph: 615.327.4646 / www.keithcase.com

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About Smithsonian Folkways

Smithsonian Folkways Recordings is the nonprofit record label of the Smithsonian Institution, the national museum of the United States. Our mission is the legacy of Moses Asch, who founded Folkways Records in 1948 to document music, spoken word, instruction, and sounds from around the world. The Smithsonian acquired Folkways from the Asch estate in 1987, and Smithsonian Folkways Recordings has continued the Folkways tradition by supporting the work of traditional artists and

expressing a commitment to cultural diversity, education, and increased understanding among peoples through the documentation, preservation, and dissemination of sound.

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Smithsonian Folkways

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LONG TIME... SELDOM SCENE

1. California Cottonfields 3:04
2. Wait a Minute 5:13
3. What Am I Doing Hangin' 'Round 2:50
4. Hickory Wind 4:02
5. I'll Be No Stranger There 2:20
6. Walk Through This World with Me 2:32
7. Big Train (from Memphis) 2:46
8. With Body and Soul 3:22
9. Paradise 2:57
10. It's All Over Now, Baby Blue 3:20
11. Mean Mother Blues 3:08
12. My Better Years 3:08
13. Little Georgia Rose 2:54
14. Like I Used to Do 4:09
15. Through the Bottom of the Glass 2:43
16. Lorena 5:27



For more than four decades, profoundly influential bluegrass band the Seldom Scene has shared its undeniable talent, progressive repertoire, and creative spirit both in the studio and on stage. *Long Time...Seldom Scene* features fresh interpretations of 16 oft-requested tunes and is the band's first studio album since the GRAMMY-nominated album *Scenechronized* in 2007. It's a family reunion in all the best ways, featuring the current—and longest-running—lineup, joined by founding members Tom Gray and John Starling and guests Chris Eldridge, Emmylou Harris, and Rickie Simpkins. 54 minutes, 36 page booklet.



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