

THE
SELDOM
SCENE

REMAINS
TO BE SCENE



THE SELDOM SCENE REMAINS TO BE SCENE

- 1. LAST OF THE STEAM-POWERED TRAINS** 3:49
(Raymond Douglas Davies/Unichappell Music, Inc., BMI o/b/o Davray Music LTD., PRS - Abkco Music, Inc., BMI)
- 2. MAN AT THE CROSSROADS** 2:46
(David Aloysius Norris, BMI)
- 3. A GOOD TIME MAN LIKE ME AIN'T GOT NO BUSINESS (SINGIN' THE BLUES)** 2:09
(Jim Croce/BMG Gold Songs o/b/o Croce Publishing, ASCAP-BMG Gold Songs o/b/o Time in a Bottle Publishing, ASCAP)
- 4. HARD TRAVELIN'** 2:56
(Woody Guthrie/TRO-Ludlow Music, Inc. o/b/o Woody Guthrie Publications, Inc., BMI)
- 5. FAREWELL, ANGELINA** 4:01
(Bob Dylan/Universal Tunes, SESAC)
- 6. WALKING DOWN THE LINE** 2:35
(Bob Dylan/Universal Tunes, SESAC)
- 7. LONESOME DAY** 2:36
(Bobby Love/Lonesome Day Publishing, ASCAP)
- 8. I COULD CRY** 2:29
(Don Reno/Fort Knox Music Inc., BMI-Trio Music Company, BMI)
- 9. WHITE LINE** 3:40
(William P. Bennett/Tessa Publishing Company, BMI)
- 10. SHOW ME THE WAY TO GO HOME** 2:46
(Cullen Galyean/Wynwood Music Company, Inc., BMI)
- 11. THE STORY OF MY LIFE** 2:48
(Wayne Walker/Universal-Songs of Polygram International, Inc., BMI)



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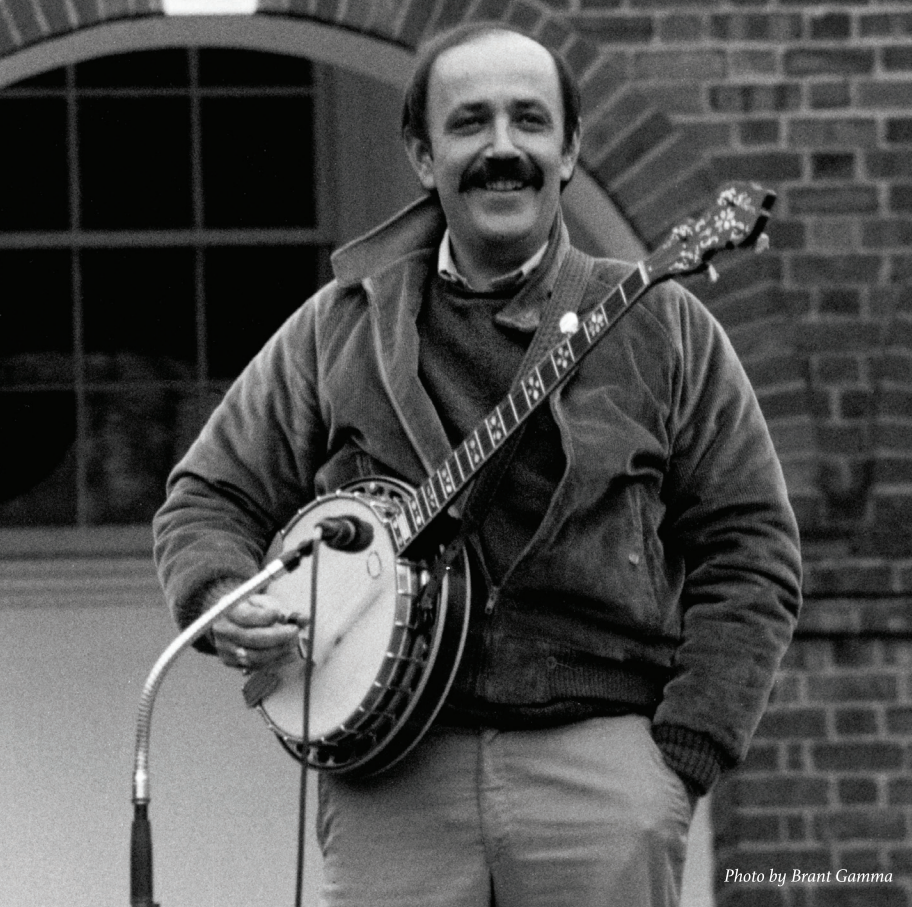


Photo by Brant Gamma

THIS ALBUM IS DEDICATED TO
BEN ELDRIDGE

This year, we said our final goodbyes to our dear friend and a founding member of The Seldom Scene, Ben Eldridge. While we mourn this great loss, we also celebrate almost 30 amazing years we had sharing not just the stage, but friendship and life with Ben. Ben had that rare quality of being one of the most innovative, talented banjo players on the planet while still remaining one of the humblest. He pushed the boundaries of bluegrass banjo playing yet stayed true to the genre while creating a complex and driving style that was unique to him—a style that has inspired, challenged, and influenced many a banjo player over the years. In addition to being (in our humble opinions) the G.O.A.T when it came to the banjo, Ben was an incredible human being. He was always welcoming, kind, encouraging, and had a great sense of humor (he could sure tell a limerick!). Ben was a great friend and musical genius. Being in The Scene with Ben was an incredible honor, and his legacy of music and kindness will continue to motivate and inspire us every day. Thank you, Ben, for your love, friendship, unwavering support, and incredible music. We miss you, buddy. R.I.P.

“Don’t cry because it’s over, smile because it happened.” -Dr. Seuss

FIFTY-THREE YEARS AND COUNTING

In early 1995, John Duffey and I were faced with a big dilemma in our music careers—whether to disband The Seldom Scene of 24 years at that time or continue on. Three of our band members decided to leave to form another band. We decided then to continue but were now faced with another big decision—finding three qualified people to take over the dobro, bass, and guitar positions, who could also sing lead and harmony vocals, knew our songs, and could jump in and hit the ground running. A daunting task for us, but we were willing to accept the challenge. And I am so glad we did because we would have missed some great music and fun times.

We knew there were talented replacements out there, but who and where were they? We had gigs on the books and we just didn't know how long the process would take to get back up and running.

We were aware of Fred Travers. His wife, Kyle, had given Fred a dobro lesson or two with Mike Auldridge as a wedding present. We knew Fred was more than qualified, and we found out later that he'd followed The Scene's music for a number of years and knew most of our early songs. Mike Auldridge told me years later (jokingly, of course) that he felt like breaking Fred's arms because he missed being in the band

but knew that Fred was doing a great job in the spot he once held.

We also heard that Ronnie Simpkins was possibly “on the market.” Knowing of his time with the Virginia Squires and then with Tony Rice, we knew that having Ronnie take over as our bass player was a “no-brainer.” It was so much fun being on stage with Ronnie, having him feed us lines and just hanging out before and after the shows. They were all good times, but just to name a few that stood out: the Gettysburg Bluegrass Festival, the Wildwood Lodge in Steelville, Missouri, and all the festivals we did out in Colorado—Lyons, Telluride, and Crested Butte.

What was puzzling was who could we get to fill the lead singing and guitar positions? Out of the blue one afternoon, Duffey gets a call from Dudley Connell. He was calling to express his condolences on hearing of the band's breakup. Duffey explained that we were not interested in disbanding, but rather we were needing to find three new members quickly. The next thing I remember was Duffey calling me to say that he had received this call from Dudley, and I remember saying yes! Dudley had been in the guitar/lead and tenor singing positions with the very popular Johnson Mountain Boys for a number of years—he had knowledge of the music and its history, and his being able to pull great music ideas from various artists like Dylan, Cream (Eric Clapton), and Springsteen was a serious plus.

Duffey made contact with the guys, and in the subsequent weeks we all met at Duffey's home in Arlington to audition and practice. While there were small bumps early on along the way, we could tell that the chemistry was right and the knowledge the guys had of our material was most adequate (in the words of John Duffey). Duffey had a history of not liking to practice, but he organized practice sessions over the next several weeks and really seemed to enjoy them. Our first show with Fred, Ronnie, and Dudley was New Year's Eve 1995 at The Birchmere. Duffey was having fun traveling and performing with the new guys. They seem to have breathed new life into John for what was to be his last year. We lost John to congestive heart failure on December 10, 1996—a very sad day for me, the entire band, and the bluegrass community.

After Duffey's passing, Lou Reid returned to the band to fill the lead/tenor vocal and mandolin spots. This was Lou's second stint with the band. His initial start was in the spring of 1986 when Phil Rosenthal left the band. Lou has spent a total of nearly 34 years in The Seldom Scene. What can I say other than wow! What a talent and wonderful addition to the band. Lou has contributed so much to the band and our sound.

My last show with the band was on July 16, 2016, at The Birchmere. Rickie Simpkins replaced me on banjo and contributed fiddle but left soon thereafter to pursue other projects. Ron Stewart then came into the fold and is doing a masterful

job on banjo and fiddle. Side note here: And if any instruments should break, he knows how to fix them and fix them extremely well.

Love the boys' new project, *Remains to Be Scene!* "Last of the Steam-Powered Trains" featuring Ronnie and Lou has tremendous drive and bounce (and there can't be too many SS train songs). Dudley's lead singing on "A Good Time Man" was awesome, and I loved Ronnie's bass singing on the last note of the song. The Reno and Smiley tune "I Could Cry" has always been one of my favorites. It hops, and I love Dudley's and Fred's vocals. What a treat to hear Ron Stewart singing on "Hard Travelin'" and his fiddle playing on "White Line," "Lonesome Day," "Angelina," and "A Good Time Man" (the boy is a music monster). "White Line"—what a classic song. Lou does a great job singing lead, and the chorus with all the tight harmonies is making me feel somewhat emotional. It's very reminiscent of John Starling's version that was recorded at the Cellar Door in Georgetown in the early 70s (*Live at the Cellar Door*). Fred's singing on "Man at the Crossroads" is typical Fred—always spot on and beautiful. Thank you, Fred, and you, Dave Norris, for writing another great song. I always loved performing two of your others: "Dusty" and "Heart and Soul."

The band is sounding great, is definitely in capable hands, and is still rolling strong 53 years following its inception in 1971.

— Ben Eldridge (August 15, 1938 – April 14, 2024)





IT'S STILL GOOD TO BE SCENE

A few weeks ago I was in Bethesda, Maryland, peering out of my hotel window, getting spruced up for my 50th high school reunion dinner that night. My hotel was just a few blocks from where the Red Fox Inn used to be, the place where I first saw *The Seldom Scene*. My mind was flooded with memories: John Duffey's piercing tenor voice, the peculiar "duck" mandolin he designed, built, and played. Ben Eldridge's fluid, driving banjo, a beautiful old Mastertone named "Harvey." In his hands, it produced an exquisite tone that this beginner banjo player wanted to emulate. I remember the great harmonies. I remember Emmylou Harris sitting in one night, Tony Rice another. And when the Red Fox closed, smitten as I was with *The Seldom Scene*, I went to their new home base, The Birchmere, then the second Birchmere, then the third, as often as I could. It's a love affair that never ended.

After more than 50 years, I'm still alive and kickin', and so is *The Seldom Scene*. I'm still trying to emulate Ben Eldridge's perfect tone, and *The Seldom Scene* is still producing great records.

This latest effort, *Remains to Be Scene*, is a fitting benchmark of the band's evolution, one that affirms The Scene's rightful place in bluegrass's pantheon.

Take the song "Last of the Steam-Powered Trains." Halfway through this medium-tempo paeon to a bygone era, bassist Ronnie Simpkins launches into a solo that suggests the song is about to speed up to breakdown tempo, a freight train highballin' down the tracks. But it never does. An aha! moment for this listener. Like a wise old man, this band doesn't need to match the hot licks of contemporary bluegrass (although it could). Been there, done that.

Indeed, each song in *Remains to Be Scene* reflects the band's maturity and coming of age. Ron Stewart's banjo is not fiery, it's simply rock solid, his timing perfect. (As one sound engineer who recorded Stewart once told me, "I watched the VU meter as he plays, it's absolutely, precisely, measurably, right on the beat, EVERY TIME! I'VE NEVER SEEN THAT!") And what a treat to hear Ron, known as one of bluegrass's premiere instrumental sidemen, sing lead, too, as he does with Woody Guthrie's "Hard Travelin'." The extra treat for Scene fans is the addition of Ron's fiddle and guitar playing. As with his banjo, his timing is perfect. So are his intonation and taste. What a talented multi-instrumentalist! What an addition to The Seldom Scene!

Same with Fred Travers's dobro. You hear his reverence for Mike Auldridge, but he throws in a Jerry Douglas hammer on triplet here and there to remind listeners that he can still throw a 100 mph fastball. Fred's voice really shines on the vocal duet "I Could Cry," which evokes the Louvins or Everlys style of tight brother harmonies; Fred's vocals are really on display with the original song by Dave Norris, "Crossroads," as well as Bobby Love's "Lonesome Day."

And so it is with Dudley Connell's voice, now maturer, softer, richer. You hear that especially on "Show Me the Way to Go Home." It's a song best sung by someone and some band who've lived life fully through thick and thin, and reached the age of satisfaction and contentment.

Same could be said of Lou Reid's lovely vocal take on "White Line," a song first recorded by The Scene when John Starling was lead vocalist, in its *Live at the Cellar Door* album. In reviving this gem, Lou pays tribute to the band's long, rich history. It's a reminder that, now in its 5th decade performing and recording, The Seldom Scene has managed to maintain its unique blend of reverence for the bluegrass tradition while embracing innovation, but always with subtlety and taste.

In short, *Remains to Be Scene* is a metaphor for the life of The Seldom Scene, a life well lived, a life still going strong.

— Doug McKelway







TRACK NOTES

1. LAST OF THE STEAM-POWERED TRAINS

This song was written by Ray Douglas Davies and recorded by the rock group The Kinks in the 1960s. The Scene has always looked outside the box for material, and we thought this one fit the bill. (Lou)

2. MAN AT THE CROSSROADS

I have known of this song a long time. It was written by my friend and neighbor singer/songwriter David Norris, and I have always wanted to record it. Thanks to my boys in The Scene for allowing me that opportunity! (Fred)

3. A GOOD TIME MAN LIKE ME AIN'T GOT NO BUSINESS (SINGIN' THE BLUES)

This song, written by the great Jim Croce, was all over the radio when I was a young teen. I loved the song but never

The Seldom Scene

Dudley Connell: *vocals, guitar*

Lou Reid: *vocals, mandolin, guitar*

Ronnie Simpkins: *vocals, bass*

Ron Stewart: *vocals, banjo, fiddle, guitar*

Fred Travers: *vocals, dobro*

envisioned myself singing it. With Lou's encouragement, I decided to give it a try. My goal in approaching the vocal was to add as much of myself as possible, while at the same time not deviating too far from the original melody. (Dudley)

4. HARD TRAVELIN'

This song comes from a Flatt and Scruggs album of the same title, circa 1963. Written by Woody Guthrie, the song was first recorded in 1947. Anyone who knows me knows how much I love Flatt and Scruggs, and this is one of my favorites from the early 1960s when they were still plowing bluegrass but using material from a broad range of writers. (Ron)

5. FAREWELL, ANGELINA

This song, written in 1964, is another gem by Bob Dylan. Our arrangement is based off John Mellencamp's version;

and in addition to the fiddle, Ron's talent on guitar is showcased. I must credit my daughter, Megan, for insisting we record this one. I'm glad we listened! (Ronnie)

6. WALKING DOWN THE LINE

This is a Bob Dylan song written in 1962 and recorded by The Dillards. The Country Gentlemen made it famous in the bluegrass genre; and others such as Joan Baez, Glen Campbell, Arlo Guthrie, and Pete Seeger have recorded this as well. Thanks to Ron for bringing this one to our attention. (Lou)

7. LONESOME DAY

When we were gathering material for this recording, Lou presented this song written by Bobby Love. He thought it would be a good one for me to sing—thank you, Lou. (Fred)

8. I COULD CRY

This song was written by Don Reno and recorded by the bluegrass group Don Reno, Red Smiley, and the Tennessee Cut-Ups on King Records in 1953. Reno and Smiley were my mom and dad's favorite bluegrass band, so I was honored to sing this. I might add The Seldom Scene doesn't perform many duets, so

it was fun recording this as a duet with Fred. (Dudley)

9. WHITE LINE

This song, written by Canadian Willie P. Bennet, was sung by original member John Starling and recorded on The Scene's *Live at the Cellar Door* album. I would like to thank Paul Beard for loaning me the 1935 Regal/Dobro #401 guitar to use on this song. It's the same one Mike Auldridge played on The Scene's original version in 1974. (Fred)

10. SHOW ME THE WAY TO GO HOME

Lou brought this one to the table and suggested we record it. It's written by Cullen Galyean from Low Gap, North Carolina, who has recorded several albums for Folkways. We decided to sing as a quartet on the choruses. (Ronnie)

11. THE STORY OF MY LIFE

During the 1980s, I toured with a bluegrass band, The Johnson Mountain Boys, and we used to perform this one with Eddie Stubbs singing a solo lead. The song was written by Wayne Walker and recorded by Benny Martin. I had forgotten all about this song until Ron brought it to the band from a live recording by the JMB. (Dudley)





CREDITS

Produced by The Seldom Scene
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Mastered by Mike Monseur, Axis Audio, Nashville, TN

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The Seldom Scene would especially like to thank Joey Crawford, our booking agent at Upper Management Talent; Megan Schmid for managing our social media sites; Jeromie Stevens, our photographer; The Grass Spot for designing the cover for this project; Jim Robeson, our engineer, and his loving wife Marianne, whom we sadly said goodbye to on Aug. 14, 2024; Mike Monseur for his skillful mastering; The Birchmere; Smithsonian Folkways for recording and preserving our music; Barbara Eldridge for her support, friendship, laughter, and hospitality over the years; and The Scene's founding members, John Duffey, John Starling, Ben Eldridge, Mike Auldrige, and Tom Gray, who created their own unique, innovative brand of music that extended far beyond the bounds of bluegrass and entrusted us with keeping it going. It's been an incredible honor and privilege, and

we are extremely and humbly grateful for the opportunity. And where we take it from here . . . *remains to be seen.*

Dudley Connell - I would like to thank my own dear family, Charlie, Emily, and my darling Sally; Lee Olson; and lastly, I'd like to offer a special thank-you to all the promoters and friends who have believed in The Seldom Scene for the last 50-plus years.

Lou Reid - I'd like to thank Susannah, Sean Pyrtle, and all my Pyrtle family!

Ron Stewart - Thanks to my wife, Sarah; my son, McKinley; Victoria and Savannah; my Mom and Dad; Rosie; all of my McCullough family; and the scores of wonderful people I've come to know on the road.

Fred Travers - Thanks to my wife, Kyle, and all my family and friends for their loyal support and encouragement over the years. Y'all are the best!

Ronnie Simpkins - Heartfelt thanks to my wife, Monie, my family—Megan, Kevin, Sadie, Hattie, Emily, Brian; also to Mary Monseur, Mike Monseur, Jessie Wells, Folkways, and especially my heavenly Father for the many blessings in my life.

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