

elizabeth mitchell you are my little bird



Smithsonian Folkways

elizabeth mitchell **you are my little bird**

1. little liza jane 2:24
(Arr. Elizabeth Mitchell / Last Affair Music, BMI)
2. who's my pretty baby 1:53
(Woody Guthrie / TRO-Ludlow Music Inc., BMI)
3. zousan (little elephant) 1:39
4. little bird, little bird 2:28
5. three little birds 2:33
(Bob Marley / Fainwood Music, ASCAP)
6. what goes on 2:53
(Lou Reed / Oakfield Avenue Music Ltd., BMI)
7. pom na tu ri (springtime outing) 1:20
8. buckeye jim 2:01
(Arr. Elizabeth Mitchell / Last Affair Music, BMI)
9. peace like a river 2:57
10. los pollitos (the little chicks) 1:51
11. winter's come and gone 1:59
(Gillian Welch-David Rawlings / Irving Music, Inc.-Cracklin' Music admin. by Bug, BMI)
12. little wing 2:39
(Neil Young / Silver Fiddle Music, ASCAP)
13. lily pond 0:59
(Vashti Bunyan / Warlock Music Ltd., PRS)
14. the north wind 0:39
15. if you listen 3:12
(Tommy Brown-Micky Jones)
16. down in the valley 2:21
17. grassy grass grass 0:56
(Woody Guthrie / TRO-Ludlow Music Inc., BMI)



children's music: a curator's introduction

Welcome to a wonderful collection of songs for young children by an engaging artist, performed with banjo and guitar, clapping and rhythm sticks, and accompanied by a charming child's voice. Elizabeth Mitchell combines new songs with old to produce a lovely compilation for parents and children alike. The songs are a pleasure to listen to, and would be even more fun to sing with a child in your lap or dancing around the room.

Music is a profoundly important part of young children's lives. Infants listen attentively for patterns and sounds and often master the melodies and rhythms of speech before the consonants and the grammar. Listening to infants vocalize, it seems as though humans sing before they talk. Perhaps infant vocalizations, which we call "babbling," would better be named "musical improvisation."

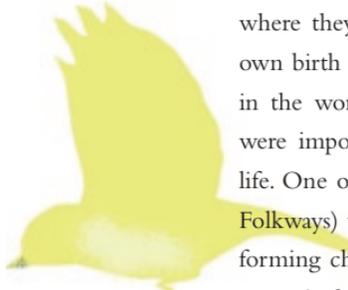
Every known society has some kind of music, especially song. In most places around the world, children are carried by parents or siblings to musical events where they absorb the music of their community. In some societies, but not all, children have their own music, which they learn from other children and pass on to younger children as they grow older. In the United States, for example, although

popular music keeps changing, many old children's rhymes and songs continue to please generations of those who perform them in playgrounds, on sidewalks, in backyards, or at home.

Songs passed from generation to generation of parents or children can be compared to stones washed over time in a mountain stream. They are changed by the action of time and accident. Rocks are smoothed by the constant movement of the water, just as songs are improved by their frequent and slightly varied repetition. Pebbles hit stones and chip them, just as parents may forget a song's words or melody. And neither rocks nor songs are simply shaped by water and time—they also shape the environment of which they are a part. Stones make the brooks bubble and chuckle, just as songs make children move and sing along.

Children's songs carry with them the wisdom of generations of parents who have successfully put children to sleep, or entertained them when they were tired, or amused them when they were grumpy. And songs passed by children to other children would only be taught and learned if they were fun and considered worthwhile.

Moses Asch, who founded Folkways Records in 1948, felt very strongly that people need to know their cultural heritage, to know



where they are from—not simply in the sense of knowing their own birth traditions, but of knowing the traditions of the peoples in the world in which we all live. He thought children’s songs were important in shaping the understanding and enjoyment of life. One of his earliest releases on his first record label (predating Folkways) was a recording of Lead Belly (Huddie Ledbetter) performing children songs (now available on SFW 45047). Over the years, Asch’s catalogue of children’s music grew to include nearly 200 long-playing records of music made by or for children in the United States and around the world, and many more recordings of poems and stories (see Folkways’ Children’s Catalogue, or visit www.folkways.si.edu). Some of these recordings have been popular with parents and teachers as well. For decades, Folkways’ best-selling artist has been Ella Jenkins, who began recording for Moses Asch many years ago and is known to generations of adults. This album, like many of those created by Ella Jenkins, mixes old songs that have grown out of deep tradition with new contributions to children’s music.

Children’s music has also been passed on through song books. Some of the most interesting of these were published by Ruth Crawford Seeger in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Her *American Folk Songs for*

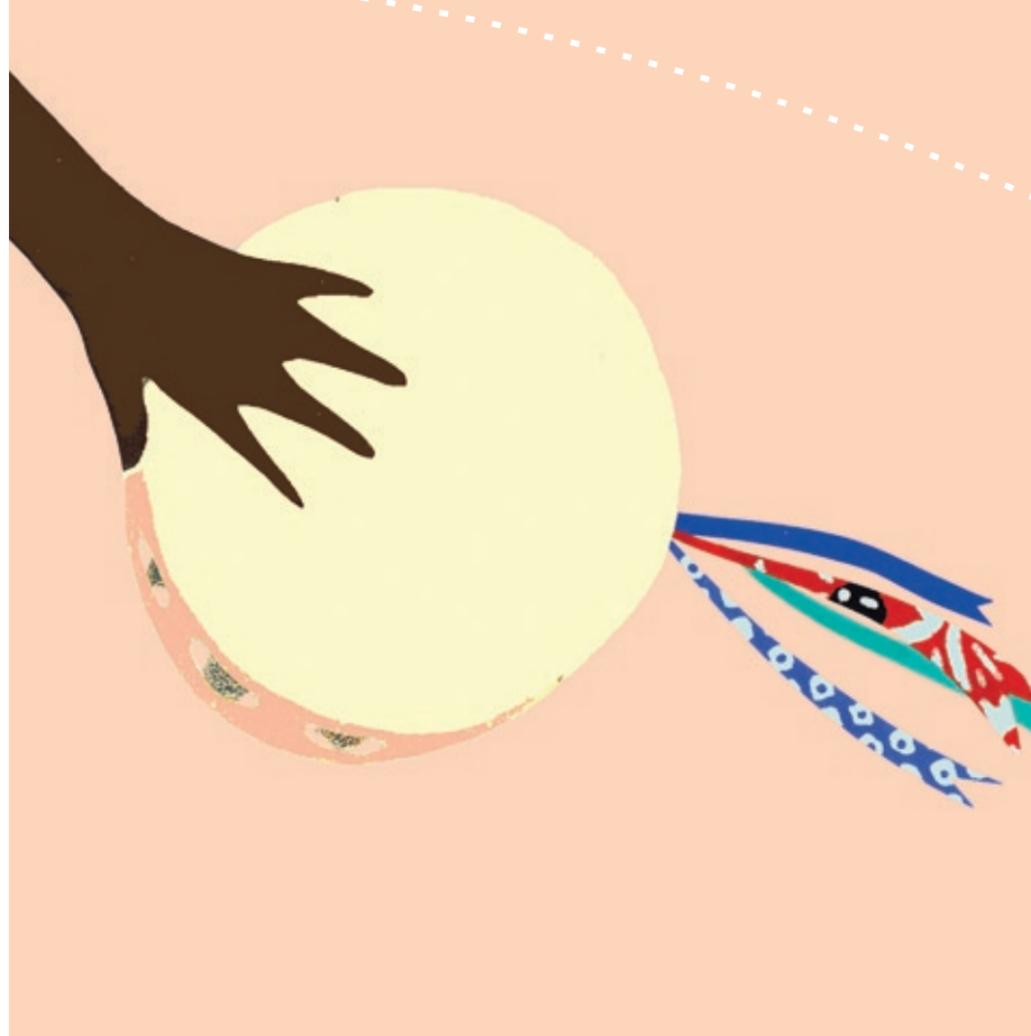
Children (1948) contains painstaking transcriptions of field recordings collected for the Library of Congress. She included songs of African Americans and European Americans living in rural areas who sang them for collectors and folklorists in the 1930s and 1940s. Ruth Crawford Seeger then carefully transcribed and arranged them for young children. She also transcribed recordings for John A. Lomax’s *Folk Song U.S.A.* These song books, like Moses Asch’s recordings and this album, enabled parents who hadn’t grown up in those traditions to leap over time and space to find and pass on old traditions to new generations of children.

“Buckeye Jim,” “Little Bird, Little Bird,” and “Little Liza Jane,” are all old songs. “Little Bird, Little Bird” can be found in Ruth Crawford Seeger’s song books and appeared on Folkways Records in the 1950s. Each song is performed here in a new way, polished once again by musical inspiration and parental experience. Other songs were composed for children more recently, like Woody Guthrie’s “Who’s My Pretty Baby.” What is particularly enjoyable about this recording is that some of the songs weren’t written for children at all, but have been transformed into children’s music, like Bob Marley’s “Three Little Birds” and the Velvet Underground’s “What Goes On.” Children’s songs have always been a mixture of

older material and recent additions. This album offers you some lovely ones.

I hope parents will be inspired by this recording to try singing along with the album and with their children. I hope it will inspire them to try singing by themselves. You don't have to sit still, either. Many wonderful children's songs are made to accompany activities. Then try composing a children's song of your own. Your children have prodigious memories, and they may pass it on to future generations.

ANTHONY SEEGER
DIRECTOR EMERITUS,
SMITHSONIAN
FOLKWAYS
RECORDINGS



a little bird told me so

In ancient Rome, birds were thought to predict coming good fortune. The advisors who studied the movements of birds in the sky were said to be “taking the auspices.” So, when Elizabeth Mitchell’s new recording, *You Are My Little Bird*, showed up in my mailbox, I took it as an auspicious event—one foretelling a joyous musical adventure. Elizabeth Mitchell entered my life from the far left of the radio dial singing “Come to dinner with me” on a song titled “Shoe In.” Such are the treasures found on small, independent radio stations. Her voice, supple and clear, astounded me. I learned that the band in which she sang, named Ida, hailed from New York City. They combined gorgeous vocals with superb musicianship and breathtaking, understated arrangements courtesy of Mitchell’s musical collaborator and husband, Daniel Littleton.

Several months later, the same radio station announced that Ida would be performing at my local record store here in Chicago. I went. I listened. I purchased. In fact, I bought all of the Ida recordings that day plus an album of children’s songs by Mitchell called *You Are My Flower*. My family and I filled our home with this music. Elizabeth’s singing, whether with Ida or on her children’s album,

was the perfect balm for my children following the usual frantic preparations to get ready for the school day. During our short commute, my seven-year-old son and five-year-old daughter either listened to the music with quiet concentration or sang along with it. By the time we arrived at school, they went off for their days calm and focused. Filled with gratitude for this magical effect on my children, I sent off a note of appreciation to Liz via email. Lest she not take my note seriously, I reminded her that I had provided her and Dan with directions to a much-loved burrito restaurant following their in-store performance. Liz wrote back thanking me for my note and for my excellent directions.

The more I listened to Liz’s children’s album, *You Are My Flower*, the more it reminded me of the recordings by our local and national treasure, Miss Ella Jenkins. A second album of children’s songs by Liz released a few years later, *You Are My Sunshine*, strengthened this connection in my mind. Liz, like Ella, possesses a knack for finding music from around the world and throughout history that speaks directly to children. A former pre-school teacher, Liz takes great care in assembling collections of songs that engage young listeners by encouraging participation through movement, sing-along, and play. Deft arrangements worked out with Dan’s help lend her work

an air of sophistication that is all too rare in music for children. All of which brings me to this new album. *You Are My Little Bird* abounds in timeless music from the American song book and from around the world that the whole family will enjoy. This is roots music at its finest. Best of all of course are the birds: here in abundance on seventeen musical flights of fancy. Put it on first thing in the morning to greet the start of a new day, and play it again in the evening to welcome the night. Listen. Watch. Something magical will happen. How do I know? Well, a little bird told me so.

Peace,

HUGH MUSICK
CHICAGO, IL



little bird, little bird

After mothers' milk, what could be more important to a child's developmental view of the world than the melodious voice of a parent singing, the comfort of breath and heartbeat communicated through song? Lullabies, clapping songs, party tunes, story-songs, children's dances and the like are imprinted on all of our subconscious minds.

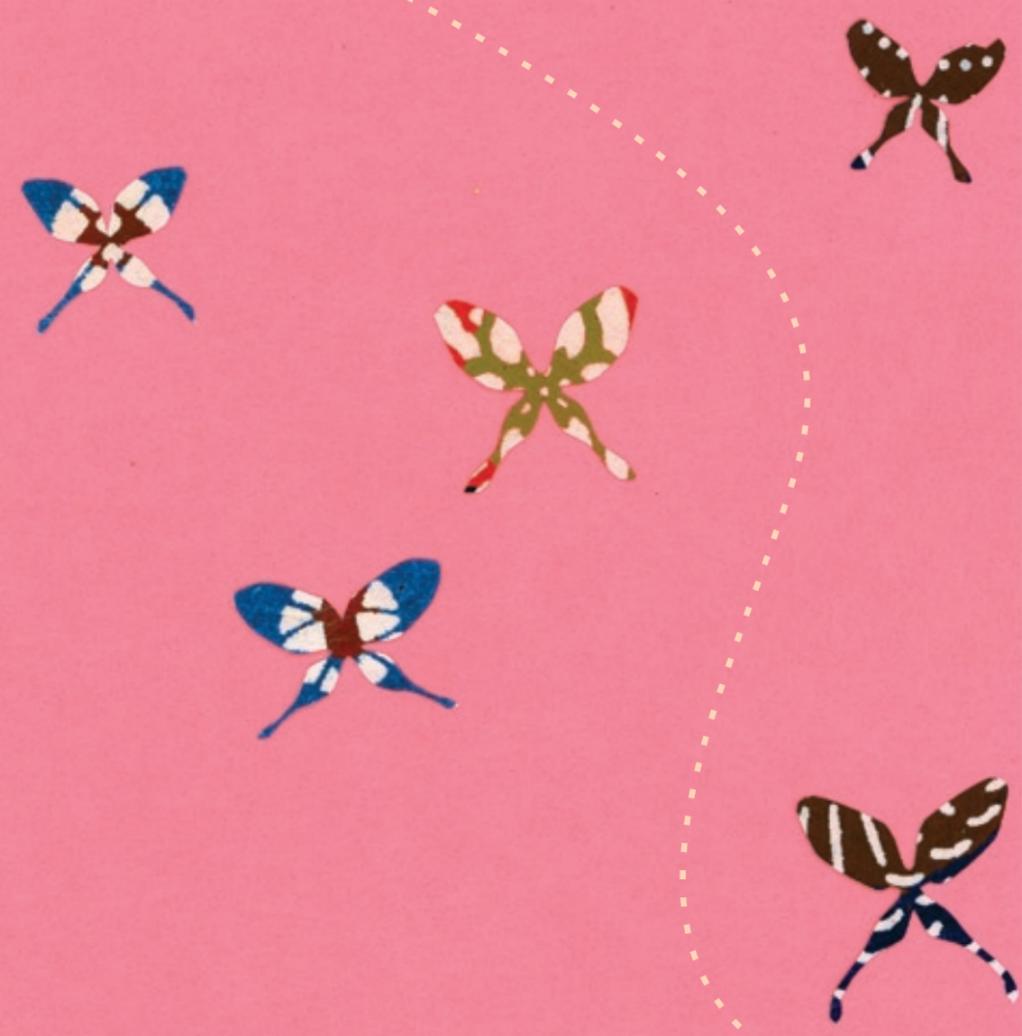
The young voices—mother, father, and child—on this CD reflect the timelessness of children's music. The songs and styles continue a tradition that many of us learned years ago from the folk songs of the Seegers, Woody Guthrie, Lead Belly, Bascom Lamar Lunsford, Jean Ritchie, and other early revivalists, with some rock 'n' roll, reggae, and world music sensibilities thrown in. Easy, infectious grooves are played on a variety of instruments; the lovely vocals throughout the CD belong to Liz Mitchell, but the songs are made richer and fuller by the participation—vocal and instrumental—of Dan Littleton and their daughter Storey, as well as some of Storey's friends.

I've loved Liz and Dan's music since the first time I heard them performing in a café in Woodstock, NY. Whether playing as a duo or in the larger ensemble called Ida, they display a deep understanding

of musical tradition combined with a hip alt-folk rhythmic and harmonic feel that reaches out and grabs the listener at a primal level. When applied to children's songs, this sensibility adds a swinging groove to the gentle intimacy and sweet naiveté of family music.

Like Liz's previous CDs, this collection is homemade music at its best, perfect for singing, clapping, and dancing along with its infectious tunes, swinging rhythms, and catchy choruses. Although this is kids' music, parents will enjoy the easy-going musicality of the songs and arrangements as well. I know I have been listening to this collection for a while now, forgetting that I'm supposed to be playing it for my grandkids. I guess I'll have to get them the CD, but for now I'll just keep on enjoying it myself. They'll hear it soon enough.

HAPPY TRAUM
WOODSTOCK, NY



song notes

In 1993 I was working as an assistant teacher at the Roosevelt Island Day Nursery School in New York City. It was a revelatory year for so many reasons, mostly because of the children and all they taught me. But musically, two things happened that year that changed my life. I found a copy of *Songs to Grow On for Mother and Child* by Woody Guthrie, and I heard the music of Elizabeth Cotten for the first time.

Having grown up on the music of the 1970s, you could say I received a great pop music education, but Elizabeth Cotten's music turned me on my head. Her patient, gentle voice and virtuosic guitar playing stopped me in my tracks. It was disarmingly still yet commanding, steadfast, and true. Hearing her music made me want to find that place in myself, somewhere deeper and stronger. I needed it to be a better teacher and musician.

The songs that jumped off the vinyl of the Woody Guthrie record were the first songs I heard that accessed the poetry of the emerging language of children. One of my jobs as an assistant teacher was to write down the children's descriptions of their artwork. Woody's songs sounded like the stories I would hear from my students as they explained their drawings to me. I cherished these windows

into their imaginations; as a songwriter it was inspiring, their minds were so free. I heard that same freedom in Woody's lyrics.

I brought the music of Elizabeth Cotten and Woody Guthrie into the classroom. We also learned the songs of the Carter Family and Lead Belly. The kids loved it, I loved it—we had a time.

I was able to teach for two more years before touring with my band took me away from the classroom. Since then I've made children's records and grownup records, exploring many genres of music. When Folkways called last year, I was thrilled, humbled, and inspired that our work had found appreciative ears at the record label whose music has profoundly impacted my life.

So here it is, *You Are My Little Bird*. I hope that you take it into your hearts, homes, travels, and journeys, and that you find peace and joy along the way. We had fun making it for you. We kept it homemade and personal, the sound of a family and a few friends (and the birds nesting outside the window, and the frogs in the pond... and the furnace in the boiler room) making music together. Here's hoping you'll make some music with yours.

ELIZABETH MITCHELL

1. little liza jane

In different times, through different voices, "Little Liza Jane" has lived countless lives, and no two performers seem to interpret this song the same way. We made it a song about having friends in many places, a reflection of our years on the road with our band, and the special things that can happen in those places. We had to leave out many of our favorite cities that were difficult to rhyme, but if you can think of a good rhyme for "Portland," "Boston," or "Olympia," let us know!

2. who's my pretty baby

One of my favorite songs from Woody Guthrie's Songs to Grow On for Mother and Child is this one. I've been singing it to my daughter Storey since the day she was born, and it never fails to make us both smile.

3. zousan (little elephant)

Storey's love of elephants drew us to this beautiful Japanese song. We dedicate it to the Thai Elephant Orchestra and to our friends at the Roger Williams Park Zoo in Rhode Island—Katie, Alice, and Ginny.

4. little bird, little bird

My favorite recording of this song is by Pete Seeger on his Smithsonian Folkways album Birds, Beasts, Bugs & Fishes (Little & Big Animal Folk Songs). We listened to it every morning last summer while driving to camp with Storey's cousin Athena, who sings it with us here. The end of the track features the sounds of real birds outside our home—a Black-throated Blue Warbler and some of her friends.

5. three little birds

One day last year Storey came home from school singing the verse to this song she had learned in music class. Although we had heard this song a few times before, it was as if we were hearing it for the first time.



6. what goes on

Our first children's record, You Are My Flower, has a track called "Rock and Roll" that features the sounds of my nephew and niece rocking out with us when they were toddlers. Now they are big kids, and we still make music with them in our band Messy Chocolate. We thought that covering a Velvet Underground song was the perfect way to start a band. Try it at home!

7. pom na tu ri (springtime outing)

Our violinist and friend Jean Cook taught us this song and sings it with us here. We couldn't believe we found another bird song, and in Korean!

8. buckeye jim

How I love this magically surreal song! While reading Folk Song U.S.A. by John Lomax, I discovered that Fletcher Collins, a distant relative of my husband Daniel's, was the first person to document this song. Fletcher then taught the song to his friend Burl Ives. Thank you, Fletcher! Storey's friend Annika came over to sing this with us, then her mom Kirsten joined in, then Storey's Lola (the word for grandmother in the Philippines) started to sing, then Uncle Miggy...

9. peace like a river

This is a simple and inspiring song that speaks for itself. Storey plays the harmonica here.

10. los pollitos (the little chicks)

I learned this song from a Folkways record by Suni Paz called Alerta Sings and Songs from the Playground. Suni has dedicated a lifetime

to spreading the message of peace and cultural understanding through her work as a musician and educator.

11. winter's come and gone

This is the first song we recorded for this album in our attic in Providence, Rhode Island, long before we knew we were moving to the mountains and making an album about birds. We forgot the last verse; our apologies to the songwriters, the great Gillian Welch and David Rawlings.



12. little wing

Our friend Kirsten joins us here on Neil Young's song from his album Hawks and Doves and in other songs on this album playing the flute. Kirsten is a great friend, ER doctor, and the best flautist in the Catskills.

13. lily pond

This song was written by Vashti Bunyan, a British folk singer and songwriter. She recorded one beautiful album, Just Another Diamond Day, in 1969, then left her life as a musician in London behind, moved to the country with her family and her cow named Bess, and didn't make another record for 35 years. I am so glad she is making music again that the world can hear.

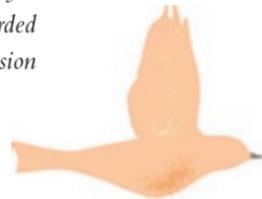
14. the north wind

I used to sing this song with my students at the Roosevelt Island Day Nursery in New York City. On bleak winter days the children loved to sing and act out the plight of the cold little bird. We are joined here by Mr. John Sebastian of the Lovin' Spoonful, another wonderful Woodstock neighbor, playing autoharp. When Daniel and I recorded this song with him at Levon Helm's barn, we spent most of the session looking at each other in happy disbelief.



15. if you listen

This song, originally recorded by French singer Françoise Hardy, is all about how listening can be a magical experience. We tried to arrange and record it in a way that would encourage people to listen imaginatively, not just to the words, but to a host of different sounds—distant birds, a harmonium drone, fingers gently tapping on the keys of a flute. All sounds can be musical, even silence, the rustling of leaves, the fluttering of wings...



16. down in the valley

Daniel used to sing this song with his father, Michael Storey Littleton. John Sebastian joins us again, this time on harmonica.

17. grassy grass grass

I think this is my favorite Woody Guthrie song of all; for me it is a perfect bedtime mantra. In his writing about children's music, Woody expressed his wish that people not follow his songs like a static text and sing them word for word. He wanted people to make up their own versions, to cultivate their own sense of creative freedom by listening to and learning from the children in their lives, something I strive to do every day. But Woody's poetry is too powerful to simply listen to, and sometimes I need to sing it just the way he wrote it.

resources

Books:

Lomax, John A., ed. 1947. *Folk Song U.S.A.* New York: Duell, Sloan, and Pearce.

Seeger, Pete. 2005. *Abiyoyo*. New York: Aladdin.

Seeger, Ruth Crawford. 1948. *American Folk Songs for Children*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday.

Recordings:

For more children's recordings from Smithsonian Folkways and its other labels, go to www.folkways.si.edu

To download albums or individual tracks and liner notes, go to www.smithsonianglobalsound.org

For more information about Elizabeth Mitchell, a listing of her other recordings, and lyrics and chords for some of the songs on this CD, go to www.youaremyflower.org

credits

Produced by ELIZABETH MITCHELL and WARREN DEFEVER

Recorded at ON-ME Sound, Providence, RI, and Mount Tremper, NY
Engineered and mixed by WARREN DEFEVER
"Little Wing" and "The North Wind" were recorded at Levon Helm Studios, Woodstock, NY and engineered by JUSTIN GUIP

Sound supervision and mastering by PETE REINIGER

ELIZABETH MITCHELL sings and plays guitar, Wurlitzer electric piano, and percussion.
DANIEL LITTLETON sings and plays guitar, banjo, harmonium, viola, Wurlitzer, Hammond organ, drums, and percussion.
STOREY LITTLETON sings and plays harmonica.
HERMINIA LITTLETON sings.
MIGGY LITTLETON sings and plays percussion.
JEAN COOK sings and plays violin.
KIRSTEN JACOBSON sings and plays flute.
WILLIAM "BOOGIE" CONSTAN sings and plays percussion.
CHARLOTTE "COCO" CONSTAN, GABI GEAUJON, ATHENA MIROS, ANNIKA ENZIEN, and FENNER OSMOND-FRIEDMAN sing.
WARREN DEFEVER plays bass.
JOHN SEBASTIAN plays autoharp and harmonica.

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Photo by ANNA VAQUERA-VASQUEZ
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Special thanks to the MITCHELL AND LITTLETON EXTENDED FAMILIES, ELISHA EDWARDS, HITOKO SAKAI, and HIGH MEADOW.



Daniel Littleton, Storey Littleton, Elizabeth Mitchell, Kingston, NY, 2006

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.

Smithsonian Folkways recordings are available at record stores. Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, Folkways, Cook, Dyer-Bennet, Fast Folk, Monitor, and Paredon recordings are all available through:

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Smithsonian Folkways Recordings

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