



MARK PEARSON
MUSIC

Minneapolis

I

*And a finer man there'll never be
Than what that song man was to me
Taking words forming worlds
He'd share with anyone who'd hear*

Chorus

*Sing your song, oh, song man sing your song
Sing your song, oh, song man sing your song
As you sing your song, oh, song man as you sing
Please, can't I come along*

That's the first verse of *Song Man* a song I wrote on Vashon Island. It was recorded in Minneapolis in July of 1973 the summer I hoped Bob Dylan's brother, David Zimmerman, was going to make me a star.

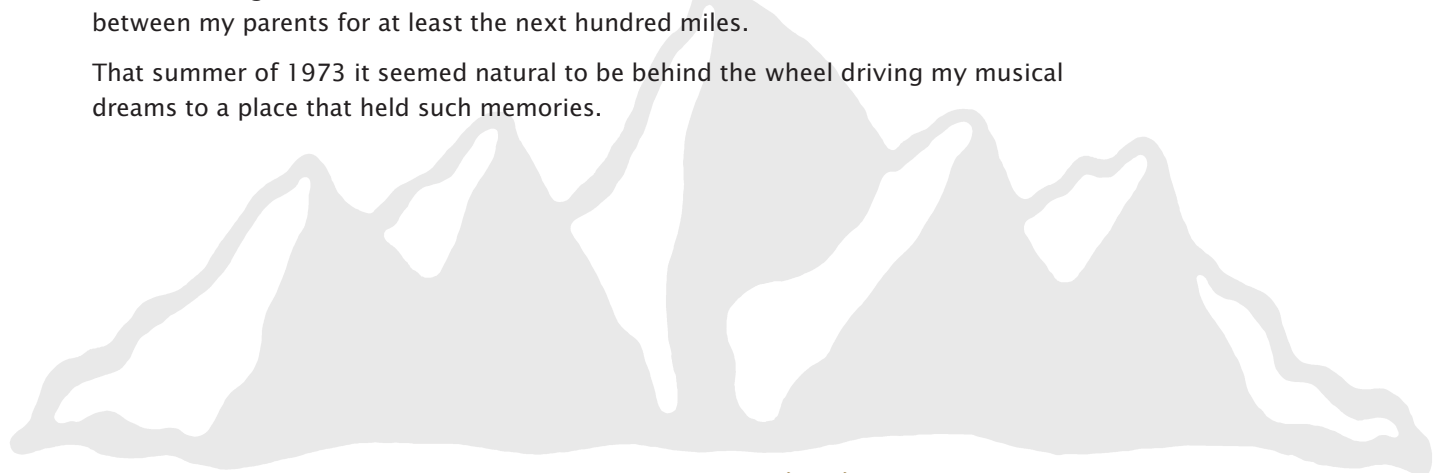
While I grew up in Spokane and have lived in Western Washington most of my adult life my roots are in Minnesota. I was born in Minneapolis and I spent my first five years in the town Shakopee just south of the Twin Cities on the banks of the Minnesota River.

My mom's parents were born and lived in Northwest Minnesota in the little town of Ada on the Red River where they raised their four daughters where my granddad owned the hardware store where his picture still hangs in the clubhouse of the golf course he built and where my grandparents are buried next to each other in that small town's cemetery.

My dad was the first American born of Swedish immigrants. He grew up in Minneapolis attended the University of Minnesota where as a medical student he met my mom who was training to be a nurse. Their first date was a canoe ride on Lake of the Isles one of Minneapolis's Chain of Lakes.

Growing up in Spokane meant summer road trips to Minnesota in the family station wagon to visit grandparents and a vast array of aunts and uncles and cousins. The car didn't have air conditioning as one of three brothers one of us was always stuck in the middle of the back seat until we inevitably drove each other or our parents over some edge after which one of us was exiled to the middle of the front seat between my parents for at least the next hundred miles.

That summer of 1973 it seemed natural to be behind the wheel driving my musical dreams to a place that held such memories.



Let love go forward from this time and place...

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II

*As you sing your song, oh, song man as you sing
Please, can't I come along*

In my mid-twenties moving half way across the country didn't seem that odd. In the 4 1/2 years since I'd left college I'd lived in 9 different places around Seattle as well as 6 weeks in David Zimmerman's furnished Minneapolis apartment. My wife was supportive and a good sport as we left our Vashon Island idyll, most of what we owned fitting into our Dodge Van including lots of new songs even some children's songs I'd written with my younger brother complete now with my wife's illustrations. We were literally and figuratively loaded down with high hopes and big dreams.

The word Minneapolis is a combination of Dakota Indian and Ancient Greek meaning City of Lakes. One of my Minneapolis uncles told me that everyone there lived within three blocks of a park. My wife and I found one of the places where they were mighty long blocks. It was the furnished upstairs of a two-story house. It had its own entrance. The owners lived on the main floor. There was a used car lot across the street and lots of summer days through the open screened windows you could hear someone paging someone hoping to make the sale.

David Zimmerman had moved to the suburbs with his wife, Gail, and son, Seth. He was managing me and a few other artists. One of the first things we did when I got into town was record what I considered the best of my original songs. Looking back David had his own big dreams that included becoming a successful record producer. One time during the process of selecting songs to record we were in David's living room and David said something about how I wrote music just like his brother Bob. Without missing a beat Gail looked up and said you mean songs without discernible melodies? Gail liked her brother-in-law best when he wasn't perched on a pedestal.

We planned to use the recordings as promotional tools and ideally find a record label who might see the recording as the next singer-songwriter delivered to them on a silver-or in this case-a vinyl-platter.

We recorded at Sound 80 the premier Minneapolis recording studio. David knew a bunch of great musicians and while it was becoming common practice to record basic tracks first and then vocals afterwards we recorded everything at once. The guy who played clarinet and flute happened to be blind. His guide dog slept quietly under his chair except in the middle of one take when the dog got sick. We stopped immediately. We laughed nervously. I was too anxious and inexperienced to see that K-9 incident and accident as any kind of bad omen.

There's an interesting story about Bob Dylan recording half the tracks for what became *Blood on the Tracks* at Sound 80. He had first recorded all the songs in New York in September of 1974 at the old Columbia A studio on 54th street with Phil Ramone producing using musicians led by Eric Weissberg who had gained fame as the guy who actually played the banjo on *Dueling Banjos* for the movie *Deliverance*.

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A few months later Dylan was at a place he owned near Minneapolis on the Crow River known as The Farm. He'd written a lot of the songs for *Blood on the Tracks* there. As he was listening to those New York recordings with his brother, David, they decided some of the songs would sound better if they re-recorded them. So between Christmas and New Years they booked time at Sound 80 and using many of the same musicians and the same recording techniques that David used in our recording the year before they re-recorded 5 of the 10 songs. Those Minnesota recordings ended up replacing the New York tracks on the album. For lots of reasons including how important that album became in Dylan's career and because the Minnesota musicians were never properly credited that story's became part of the myth and folklore of folk music documented in a book entitled *Simple Twist of Fate* written by Andy Gill and Kevin Odegard, who was one of the Minnesota musicians.

In the fall of 1975 I was with David at The Farm where he played me tracks from what would become Dylan's next album, *Desire*. David said he was talking with his brother about re-recording some of those tracks with the musicians from Minneapolis. It didn't happen but sometimes I wonder if it had what might have happened to David's career as a music producer. Not all twists of fate are simple.

III

*He'd play for princes, queens, and kings
Or children dancing to his tunes
For all he'd sing his love his life
In tunes of joy, in tunes of strife*

*Chorus
Sing your song, oh song man sing your song
Sing your song, oh song man sing your song
As you sing your song oh song man as you sing
Please, can't I come along*

"It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena...who at the best knows...the triumph of high achievement...at the worst...fails...daring greatly, so his place shall never be with those ... timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat."

As someone who at different times has been afraid of both success and failure it feels good to now be at a time and place where I feel I understand what President Teddy Roosevelt meant with those often quoted lines from his Man in the Arena speech. I didn't understand those words very well in the summer of 1973 when it felt like I spent a lot of time standing in the hallway next to a door leading to the arena.

David and I took the recordings we made to LA in hopes of selling them to a record company. David stayed with his brother in Malibu. I wanted to stay there as well. A friend of mine had become the assistant manager of the Continental Hotel where I'd stayed when The Brothers Four went to LA to record so that's where I ended

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up staying. I don't remember meeting with record people so I'm thinking now the meetings weren't that memorable.

After we got back from LA I got a call from The Brothers Four's manager, Mort Lewis who at the time was weeks away from turning 50. He had started his career as a roadie for the Stan Kenton band, became the manager for The Dave Brubeck Quartet, then The Brothers Four, then Simon and Garfunkel and finally Blood, Sweat, and Tears. I'd seen him two years earlier when I had sung *Bridge Over Troubled Water* on his yacht in Miami. He was now inviting me to come to New York to talk about my career. During that visit he showed me an album Columbia records was pushing called *Greetings from Ashbury Park* by an unknown New Jersey artist named Bruce Springsteen. I was introduced to Phil Ramone who'd become the go to producer for artists on Columbia Records. And then Mort talked about how hard it was to get a new artist broken in and broken out and making it in the business.

From time to time I've wondered what might have happened if during or after that visit he'd said he wanted to be my manager. How would I have broken the news to wife that we were moving to New York? Was Mort ever that serious about managing a new artist? He never did. About managing me? Would it have felt disloyal to The Brothers Four? What about my loyalty to David Zimmerman? Did sharing the recording I'd made in Minneapolis help or hurt my chances? Lots of questions that someone might ask standing in the hallway that leads to the arena next to the door that remains unopened.

IV

*Sing your song, oh, song man sing your song
Sing your song, oh, song man sing your song
As you sing your song, oh, song man as you sing
Please, can't I come along*

The Twin Cities will always be one of my favorite places. The people are great. There is a wonderful art and theater community. You can walk for miles along the banks of the Mississippi on both sides of the river though I like the St. Paul side best. My favorite urban bike ride is in Minneapolis around Lake of the Isles then Lake Calhoun, on to Lake Harriet, along Minnehaha Parkway past Lake Nokomis to Minnehaha Park.

My friend Gary Drager visited the summer of 73. One evening we rode our bikes to the Westgate Theater where we watched *Harold and Maude*, an offbeat comedy with a Cat Stevens soundtrack. Nationwide the movie had bombed but in Minneapolis it became a phenomenon playing for three straight years in that theater. Drager and I still talk about how funny we thought that movie was and how hard we laughed.

David's business partner had season tickets to the Minnesota Twins. Starting in August he couldn't use them so we ended up with free tickets to a lot of major league baseball games.

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David found some interesting places for me to work. One was a roadhouse out on Highway 55 called The Red Garter. I worked with a blind keyboard player named Lowell and they wanted us to play mostly Dixieland music. I had a repertoire of maybe 45 minutes of Dixieland on the four string banjo. The first set lasted an hour and a half and some nights it felt like twice that long. David came one time and marveled at how I had the audience in the palm of my hands. What I remember most after playing 4 string banjo non stop for an hour and a half was how much my hands hurt. Lowell and I had some real successful weeks in a club in what's known as Nord'east Minneapolis.

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In September the people we were renting from wanted the upstairs for their kids so we ended up moving a dozen blocks away to the upstairs of another place with a recent graduate of Macalester College renting downstairs. We were quickly introduced to her friends, a tight group of 20-somethings who were bright, well educated, and finding their way in a fast changing world.

Sometimes I feel like someone took the world I grew up in in the 50's and picked it up by the lapels beginning with Kennedy's assassination on November 22, 1963 and kept shaking it until the Fall of Saigon on April 30, 1975. And while those times were tumultuous for a kid who grew up in a conservative town in a Mayberry-like environment in a traditional patriarchal family who knew no African Americans in grade school who when recruited by the Air Force Academy to play football considered becoming a fighter pilot who didn't think to object when a girl was made fun of just because she could and did run faster than the boys, for that kid, for me, those years, that time was surely educational and, yes, transformational.

By 1973 it was finally women's turn to be given voices and choices among them to be free to choose to run as far and as fast as they could without the fear of being humiliated. In March of 1972 The Equal Rights Amendment had been passed by Congress, signed by President Nixon, and in the spirit of the 14th amendment sent to the states for ratification. Title IX had become the law of the land in June of 72. In January of 1973 the Supreme Court's decision concerning Roe v Wade made it appear that abortions might finally become safe and no longer secretive and humiliating.

On September 20th we went downstairs and with those friends from Macalester watched Billie Jean King beat the pants off Bobby Riggs in a made for TV extravaganza that involved tennis but had ramifications that we were only beginning to understand. Network television was also a mirror for change that fall. Saturday night on CBS at 8:30 with Viet Nam winding down we could laugh till we cried as we watched America fight a forgotten war in Korea in a show called M*A*S*H. At 9 o'clock we could sit in our neighbor's Minneapolis living room and watch Mary Tyler Moore and her cohorts in a fictitious Minneapolis newsroom trying desperately and humorously to give voice to a changing workplace and work force. Half an hour later The Bob Newhart Show with Newhart playing the often bemused and sometimes befuddled psychologist could keep us in stitches exploring the notion that things we held onto so tightly growing up could end up instead holding on tightly to us with we, the me generation, not quite understanding how many of the jokes were really on us.

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V

*Now life has closed its beckoning door
Upon that ageless troubadour
When I close my eyes sing his songs
I know, I know that man's not really gone*

Chorus

*Sing your song oh song man sing your song
As you sing your song oh song man sing your song
As you sing your song oh song man as you sing
Please, can't I come along*

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A few weeks after eating two Thanksgiving dinners, one with relatives from my mom's side and the other with relatives from my dad's, my wife and I decided it was time to go home. There were lots of reasons. We wanted to be in Spokane with family and friends for Christmas. Mike McCoy was getting married in Seattle between Christmas and New Years. McCoy and I had accepted a job singing at the Ore House in Sun Valley for the month of January. If we did come back to Minneapolis we wanted to live in a place that was a little brighter and maybe a little bigger than the one we were living in.

People I know who make movies tell me that sometimes they don't feel like they actually finish a movie, they simply reach a point where they abandon it. Looking back that's kind of how leaving Minneapolis felt. With nothing quite working out it was just hard to imagine ways and reasons to stay.

Leaving a few dreams behind we packed the van and this time headed west. The oil embargo triggered by the Yom Kipper War fought between Israel and its oil producing neighbors meant gas was now up to 40 cents a gallon. We started out one morning and by the afternoon of the next day we were in Spokane preparing to celebrate the holidays.

Please can't I come along



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