



MARK PEARSON  
MUSIC

## Greenfields Tonight

I

*While growing up in Spokane folk music was the rage  
Formed a group in high school we called The Castaways  
We learned songs off of records till we thought we had them right  
Before one show told Dan and Joe, "Let's sing Greenfields tonight."*

It's funny when I think back to my 20's I realize I tended to look at and then manage or maybe more accurately mismanage my time acting as if it would always be there while often being impatient with where I was and who I was at any given moment. Now in my mid-sixties I have a sense that how I live and am alive in the moment is what best defines my days and so my life.

With that in mind these are good days for The Brothers Four and me. When we're on stage together there is no place the four of us would rather be. When we're on the road we genuinely enjoy sharing a meal, exploring a city, taking a walk, or hanging out together. I try to remember that when I'm taking off my shoes and going through security at the airport.

II

*I got a call in college would I join The Brothers Four  
That is the real Greenfields group, of course I just said "Sure."  
The morning of our first show told myself I have arrived  
It will be something special singing Greenfields Tonight*

Although I've known the story forever it's only trying to put this adventure into words that I realize how incredible The Brothers Four's story is and how many stars needed to align for them to become stars in their own right. Four guys out of the Phi Gamma Delta Fraternity at The University of Washington in the spring of 1959 drive one of their parents' station wagons down to San Francisco in hopes of singing at the Hungry I, a coffee house made famous in the folk world when the Kingston Trio's 2nd album "From the Hungry i" sat on the charts for 3 and a half years becoming the standard by which all live folk performances would be judged

The Brothers Four's confidence that spring had been fed by the fact that six months earlier they received what they thought was a call from the Colony Club in Seattle asking them to perform. The call was a fraternity prank but the guys somehow talked themselves into an audition that turned into many successful months of singing and performing and developing their swagger and style.

So why not try for the Hungry i? After stopping by the club and being told they were out of their minds they drove over to the Phi Gamma Delta fraternity House in Berkeley but not before writing the fraternity phone number on a scrap of paper and giving it to the club manager. The rest is a star is born scenario. An act gets sick or doesn't show up, I can't remember which. Someone from the Hungry i calls the fraternity house and asks if they would like to perform after all. Word spreads through the Berkeley campus that this group from Seattle is performing that night. The Hungry i is stuffed with new Brothers Four fans. The guys can do no wrong.

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

MarkPearsonMusic.com  
(360) 643-1705

P.O. Box 65002  
Port Ludlow  
Washington  
98365



Every joke is funny. Every song is received with a roar. Mort Lewis, jazz great Dave Brubeck's manager, happens to be in the audience. Mr. Lewis, as I like to call him, had previously said no to managing the Kingston Trio as well as Johnny Mathis. He is not going to say no again. He agrees to take a demo to Columbia Records who is looking for a group as a rival for The Kingston Trio. The Brothers Four get their manager and their record contract. In early 1960 they have a number one song, *Green Fields*. A year later after a few hundred concerts on college campuses they complete their circle of success by singing at President Kennedy's inauguration and then performing their Oscar nominated song, *The Green Leaves of Summer*, at the Academy Awards.

Over the years one of the things I've appreciated most about the guys is on some level they've never forgotten how lucky they were.

### III

*Those were years of The Beatles, Woodstock, and Rock and Roll  
I was young and in my mind folk music just seemed old  
So I got up one morning and I kind of realized  
I don't think I want to sing Greenfields Tonight*

My becoming one of The Brothers Four was as lucky as it was unlikely. Because I was in the same fraternity the guys had been in and because someone I knew was dating Dick Foley's sister I hoped that someday I might meet them and maybe get some tips about the music business. The idea that Mike Kirkland might leave the group was simply unimaginable.

Coming back from the Bahamas in November of 1968 from what would be the last performance of the original group the three guys who wanted to keep singing, Dick Foley, Bob Flick, and John Paine, talked about their options. They discussed adding female voices and touring singing songs from *Jacques Brel is Alive and Well and Living in Paris*, a popular musical at the time. On their way back to Seattle they also met with John Denver in Minneapolis to see if he wanted to join the group. Three years earlier The Chad Mitchell Trio became The Mitchell Trio when Chad left and John Denver at the recommendation of Mike Kirkland was given an audition and ended up taking Chad's place. So it appeared natural that John might now take Mike Kirkland's place in The Brothers Four especially because The Mitchell Trio had disbanded, John was in debt, between jobs, and living with his wife's parents. John Denver told the three guys he was flattered by the offer and that he'd get back to them in a few weeks with his decision.

While there's no way to know it at the time my fate is hanging by a thread-or a more accurately a phone call. You see the Brothers Four have a performance booked in early January at the Lake City Elks in North Seattle. They can only wait so long for John Denver to call them.

In the meantime I am asked to audition, which I do with the three of them in Dick Foley's basement looking at a wall of autographed photos of astronauts and being

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



surprised when we sing at how much we sound like, well, The Brothers Four. There was a lunch at Franco's Hidden Harbor, a restaurant on Lake Union in Seattle to get to know each other better. On a Friday early in December I remember Dick telling me they would call me by the end of a weekend after the guys had come back from some property they owned south of Seattle and cut Christmas trees with their families. As it got later that Sunday I remember drinking a little too much beer listening to Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons records waiting for the phone to ring. Finally the phone call came with an offer to become part of the group.

After the holidays we were rehearsing for the Elks Club job, again in Dick's basement, when the phone rang. I didn't know it at the time but it was John Denver saying if the job was still available he would like to be part of the group. I am happy to say he waited too long to call.

#### IV

*They found someone to take myself and got along somehow  
Took my guitars and banjos home, said "What do I do now?"  
I remember mornings looking at the songs that I would write  
And saying I wish that I was singing Greenfields Tonight*

When we talk about The Brothers Four we are describing a musical quartet that is still going strong after more than 50 years. We are also talking about a total of 11 different guys who at one time or another were members of that group. I have shared the stage with all but two of them and while I appreciate each of them I feel closest to the three guys I started with and the one's I am singing with now, Bob Flick being a member of both of those groups.

My mom was worried when her twenty-one year old son went into show business in 1969. The guys I joined--John Paine, Dick Foley, and Bob Flick--took good care of me. They remain good people, fine men, honest human beings and I'm happy all these years later to know they are my friends. John is now my neighbor. While I don't see Dick often I am always delighted when I do.

Which brings us to guys in the group now. Bob Flick is the last original member still performing. I consider him my musical mentor and someone who always had faith in me even when I didn't have faith in myself.

Mike McCoy replaced John Paine in 2004. He and I have been friends since we were eighteen. He's like a brother to me. I grew up with two brothers so I told McCoy not long ago that I guess I have to consider him one of my three brothers personally and professionally. We laughed but we both knew how significant that realization was.

Karl Olsen has been one of The Brothers Four since 2008. He's an incredibly talented guy with a big voice and a bigger heart. He's always been someone people looked up to so I think he kind of likes being one of the guys. He is that and a whole lot more.

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



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One of the signatures of The Brothers Four has always been how the individual voices are transformed into a single unison voice. It sounds like that should be easy to do and yet doing it well takes trust and a feeling of closeness. From my perspective the group does that better now than ever.

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V

*When I got a second chance to be part of the band  
I was older I was wiser I could better understand  
That music has a special way of keeping memories alive  
That's what I'll try to remember when I sing Greenfields Tonight*

With this Campfire the journey enters a new stage-a new phase-as The Brothers Four become a significant part of this adventure, playing a role in all the coming stages. Stages when I was struggling to find my place in the group and those when it was important to find a place outside that group, those times when nothing about the road felt like home and others when nothing felt more like home than the road, times when being in the group felt like a job as well as the times when it felt like a great adventure, telling all the stories now from a place of gratitude and delight with the group feeling so vital and alive, while understanding and appreciating more and more that quote from TS Eliot that goes: We shall not cease from exploration/and the end of all our exploring/will be to arrive where we started/and know the place for the first time.

*The Brothers Four still travel around the world and the USA  
From time to time I may get tired of the music that we play  
But mostly I will savor it till that morning arrives  
When they say that no one wants to hear Greenfields Tonight  
Does anybody want to hear Greenfields Tonight?*



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