



Let's Get Together

I

*Love is but a song we sing fear a way we die
You can make the mountains ring or hear the angels cry
Though the dove is on the wing you need not know why*

That was the first verse of *Let's Get Together*, an anthem of sorts during the literally and figuratively late 60's. The definitive version of that song was recorded by The Youngbloods featuring Jesse Colin Young out of San Francisco the home of flower power and a music scene that went global after Clive Davis, newly appointed president of Columbia Records, saw the Monterey Pop Festival in 1967 and groups like The Mamas and The Papas, The Jefferson Airplane, The Byrds, Laura Nyro, The Grateful Dead and Steve Miller Band added their voices to a quickly changing music soundtrack started a few years earlier with the arrival of The Beatles in 1964.

By 1969 The Brothers Four were trying to keep their voice in that conversation. When they'd signed with Columbia Records in 1959 Mitch Miller of *Follow the Bouncing Ball* and *Sing Along with Mitch* fame was the label's President, folk music was a money-making category, and The Brothers Four were soon a recognizable voice in that scene. There was some talk ten years later of Columbia Records reintroducing The Brothers Four as an alternative to *The Lettermen*, a three man vocal group singing syrupy love songs and selling a lot of albums for Capitol Records. It's hard to say why that didn't happen. Lots of reasons, I guess. The music *business* is so much about trends and luck and momentum, The Brothers Four so identified with folk music, and those who championed the group at the label years earlier long gone.

And so it was in the winter of 1969 The Brothers Four with a new member went down to LA to fulfill a contractual obligation and record an album that would be titled *Let's Get Together, The Brothers Four sing the Great Songs of Today*

II

*Hey people now smile on your brother
Let me see you get together try to love one another right now*

It was something for me to be in LA as a professional musician. I'd been there the year before competing in *Your All American College Show*, but this felt more like pressing my nose against the glass from the inside. We stayed on Sunset Blvd at The Continental Hotel a place that sold Billboard magazines in the lobby as well as Sherman cigarettes, a brand wrapped in brown paper and favored by musicians of all stripes.

Burl Ives was recording an album at The Columbia Studios, and it was something to run into this one-man folk group in the hallway. The Brothers Four didn't have a lot of input in our recording process. The record company had hired Bill Justis to produce our album. He was best known for his 1957 Grammy Hall of Fame song, *Raunchy*, and while he'd become a successful Nashville producer and arranger he was at 46 kind of old to a 21-year-old kid.

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

MarkPearsonMusic.com
(360) 643-1705

P.O. Box 65002
Port Ludlow
Washington
98365



We recorded eleven songs as well as a medley of Bee Gees tunes. The song *Let's Get Together* was my choice. The tune *Without Her* was Bob Flick's. Bill Justis chose the country tune, *Skip a Rope*. *I'll Be Your Baby Tonight*, a Dylan song from the Nashville Skyline album, was a group choice. I can't remember exactly how we chose the rest of the songs.

The basic tracks-guitars, bass, piano, and drums-were laid down first. We used session players instead of playing ourselves. The only name I remember was Smilin' Neal Lavang who along with Buddy Merrill played those wonderful Fender electric guitars on the Lawrence Welk show in the 50's and the 60's and inspired a lot of us kids looking over our parents' shoulders with how much joy those guys brought to their music. He was friendly that day. It was neat to meet him and have him play on the album. He had some instruments stolen out of his car that afternoon when he was in the session. It's funny the things we remember all those years later.

We recorded the ensemble vocals by singing into two microphones. I sang melody along with Dick. Bob and John sang melody or a lower part into the other mic. The other guys sat in the control room when I sang solos on *Wichita Lineman* and *Both Sides Now*. The whole process took three or four days. I don't remember being nervous then although not long after making that record I would spend years becoming incredibly self-conscious whenever I went back into a recording studio.

III

*Some will come and some will go and we shall surely find
When the one who left us here returns for us at last
We are but a moment's sunlight fading on the grass*

One afternoon after a recording session the four of us stopped by Schwabs Drug Store, 8024 Sunset Blvd. It was a place that people went at the time to watch other people and maybe be watched themselves or as Hollywood legend goes be discovered there like Lana Turner, and Tom Waits even mentioned Schwabs Drug store in his song *Invitation to the Blues*.

For some reason when we finished the meal I was inspired to explain to the other three guys how sophisticated I'd become in just a year and a half. I did it by explaining to them that when I first visited New York City, in the summer of 1967, I went into my first authentic Jewish deli, and I ordered a hot pastrami sandwich.

"What do you want on it?" asked a voice in a white apron from the other side of the counter.

Without thinking I said "Mayonnaise."

The guy taking my order stopped and yelled at the top of his lungs.

"Hey this guy wants to order mayonnaise on a hot pastrami sandwich."



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Maybe because he quickly saw how horrified I was he softened and he explained, Hey, you don't put mayo on a hot sandwich, it's simply not Kosher, and I was much too embarrassed to tell him I didn't know what Kosher meant.

Now 18 months later I'm telling that story for the first time I guess to impress my new singing partners who manage to nod and smile politely.

But here's the real punch line: 3 or 4 minutes after finishing the story a waitress comes out of the kitchen from the other end of the restaurant, stops at our table, and whispers in conspiratorial tones.

"You see those guys over there by the window?"

Four heads turn and nod in unison.

"Those are the kind of guys who would order hot pastrami with mayonnaise"

Well, it took 5 minutes for the other three guys to stop laughing and it took me at least five years before I could laugh myself...to laugh at myself...and to talk again about ordering my first hot pastrami sandwich with mayonnaise with, as Paul Harvey might say, the rest of the story.

IV

*Hey people now smile on your brother
Let me see you get together try to love one another right now*

A few months after we finished the vocals a test pressing or acetate arrived in Seattle. The four of us listened to the recordings that now included strings, a few horns, and a guitar part or two that were overdubbed after we left town. An album cover was created from a picture taken at a Seattle photo studio. For some reason it was rejected. I think I have the only copy ever printed. It was replaced by a close up of four serious faces in sweaters and sideburns. Turn the album over and it's four full-length guys smiling in sports jackets and ties.

Years earlier The Brothers Four gained a lot of new fans through The Columbia Record Club. That was where somebody could buy some albums for a penny if they agreed to purchase a certain number of other albums for a fixed price. It wasn't available to the group anymore. The record company wasn't interested into putting much money into promoting the new album so I'm not sure how many albums were sold.

The group did begin singing *Let's Get Together* at a number of concerts. We also performed *I'll Be Your Baby Tonight* and *Last Night I Had the Strangest Dream*. *Both Sides Now* became part of an airline's in flight entertainment package for a while I think Pan Am or TWA. The recording of that song it occasionally appears on some *Best of* compilation albums especially in Japan.

A year after the album was first released it was repackaged and rereleased on Harmony Records, a discount label owned by Columbia. Although the group was contractually obligated for one more Columbia record by mutual consent the contract was terminated and a decade long relationship came to an end.

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



MARK PEARSON
MUSIC

V

*And if you hear the song I'm singing you will understand
You hold the key to love and fear all in your trembling hand
One key unlocks them both now it's at your command*

It is something to still be recording these days and to think about that first Brothers Four recording all these years later, to listen to those songs now and to let them lead me back to a time so long ago. It is something to hear the live recording of *Let's Get Together* the one that Mike McCoy and I made with the other guys in our college group in December of 1967 and to compare it to the one The Brothers Four made 13 months later.

It's a privilege to continue to be making records. To record my own songs. To have a few of those songs recorded by other singers. To still record with Mike McCoy as Pearson and McCoy as well as members of The Brothers Four.

It feels good these days to be recording without a self-consciousness that was such a part of the process for so many years, to finally be able remove the veil that somehow came between me and sharing the heart of what I wanted to do in the studio. To be seen and heard for what we truly are. Maybe that's what we're all after, after all.

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