

THE BEAUTIFUL WORLD OF THE BROTHERS FOUR - The Brothers Four (Seattle Works Entertainment)

By Michael McDowell, Editor, Blitz Magazine

“We’re still busy with lots of singing and traveling.”

So said Bob Flick, bassist, co-founder and sole active original member of the pioneering folk rock quartet, the Brothers Four. The fruits of their labor are evidenced in abundance in this, their most recent release, and their first since their acclaimed *Golden Anniversary* collection in 2010. *The Beautiful World Of The Brothers Four* features a healthy mix of highlights from the band’s fruitful tenure with Columbia Records, as well as several sympathetic covers and a generous helping of new originals.

Interestingly enough, some of the cover material is drawn from the repertoires of artists who came up through the folk boom of the late 1950s and early 1960s, as did the Brothers Four. To wit, the band herein respectfully revisits the Harry Belafonte/Kingston Trio staple, *Scarlet Ribbons*, as well as Belafonte’s *Jamaica Farewell* (which the Brothers Four had previously attempted on their *The Big Folk Hits* LP for Columbia) the Bob Dylan-penned Wonder Who/Peter, Paul And Mary classic *Don’t Think Twice It’s Alright*, the Kingston Trio/Pete Seeger/Dave Van Ronk staple *All My Trials*, the great Rolf Harris’ *Tie Me Kangaroo Down Sport* (as *Kangaroo Sing-Along*) and the often recorded (Peter, Paul And Mary, the Journeymen, the Kingston Trio, the Highwaymen, Bobby Bare, the Seekers, Jackie DeShannon, Sonny and Cher and others) *500 Miles*.

During their association with Columbia, such emphasis on material readily associated with others of like minded artistic vision (with the exception of their aforementioned *The Big Folk Hits* album) would have been unlikely, given the resolve of all concerned at that time to establish their respective legacies with at least a modicum of individuality. But with sole surviving original member Robert Castle “Bob Shane” Schoen having retired from the Kingston Trio due to health concerns, coupled with the passing of Peter, Paul And Mary’s Mary Travers and the tragic death of Highwaymen co-founder and resident visionary Dave Fisher (which effectively ended the still very much active quintet’s unprecedented half century run), the Brothers Four now reign supreme amongst folk boom survivors. Although the Brothers Four did indeed pay similar tribute to their colleagues in their 1996 *Greenfields & Other Gold* CD, the cover material herein nonetheless carries with it a relatively heightened sense of respect and admiration for those who came up through the ranks with them.

True to form, the band carries their trademark geniality and rich vocal harmony into the remaining outside material. To wit, their comparatively upbeat interpretation of Henry Clay Work's 1876 composition, *Grandfather's Clock* differs markedly in arrangement and execution from the somewhat otherworldly vocal by the great Larry Hooper on the Lawrence Welk Orchestra's 1960 rendition for Dot Records. In turn, Louis Armstrong's *What A Wonderful World* and former Mitchell Trio vocalist Henry John "John Denver" Deutschendorf's *Sunshine On My Shoulders* are rendered faithfully, with perhaps a slight hint of melancholy to reiterate each artist's ongoing impact on a variety of genres. Even the updates of their own often revisited *Try To Remember* and *Greenfields* manage to sidestep the usual consequences of ongoing and frequent exposure, with each benefiting from the fresh perspective of the band's comparatively newer members.

Not surprisingly, it is with the new material that the band made its greatest impact here. While each stays true to the Brothers Four's basic mission statement, the variations therein reiterate both the timelessness of both genre and subject matter. Flick's quintessential folk ballad, *Winds Of Green* opens the proceedings accordingly, while *Little Green Frogs* takes a familiar band theme (given their 1961 *Frogg* single for Columbia) and follows the lead of the Chenille Sisters, the Tokens, the Simon Sisters and others in reworking the format for a very young demographic. Most endearingly, the band herein took the framework of the anthemic 1908 Haydn Quartet monster classic, *Take Me Out To The Ball Game* and fashioned it into a tribute to the Seattle Mariners. Guitarist Mark Pearson also contributed handsomely to the Americana perspective with his self-penned and engaging, *Heart Of The Heartland*

"Our guys, Mark Pearson, Mike McCoy and Karl Olsen continue to do a fabulous professional job", said Flick.

"So terrific that they love and respect the music so much."

So much so that with *The Beautiful World Of The Brothers Four*, the beloved quartet has added yet another triumph to their vast and impressive recorded legacy. Or in the words of one of their many Columbia gems, another victory for the premier representatives of the *First Battalion* of folk rock.



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