

BREWFLIES

rain down mercy



When COVID exploded here in late winter of 2020, it seemed to come like an Old Testament angel of death seeping into every corner, putting an exclamation point on a series of plagues that had already worked their terrible political, social, and moral chaos.

The pandemic imposed its own sort of logic and order: everyone—or almost everyone—arranged their lives into protected and isolated spaces and greeted each other through masks. There were rituals involved with *any* sort of contact with a contaminated world, and any “formal” communication had to be conducted electronically. In the moment, it all had an apocalyptic smell to it.

The songs in this collection grew, first, out of the desperate need to keep a musical communication going in the face of that plague’s—and all the other plagues’—unprecedented forces of isolation and despair, division and fear, frustration and hatred..

Brewflies were used to making music “on the fly” and through “hard travelin’”—we’ve been spread out over a 350-mile arc from the Adirondacks to the Catskills to the South Fork of the East End of Long Island for a long time, and we’d already dealt with a kind of hit-and-run music making, rehearsing, and recording.

But this was different. And it took on a different process. It was piecemeal and painstaking, performed in isolation and then consolidated. We initially just wanted to find a way to make music together while still distanced...and we also began to lean on songs that deliberately or accidentally reflected the “new reality” and its slow but steady movement toward release.

It worked like this: A song idea would push its way into our collective consciousness; we’d work separately, then share (remotely and -gasp!- digitally), then share some more. And we noticed a kind of narrative in the song choices evolved that reflected a crippled world slowly finding its feet again.

And so we found ourselves building a *record*-ing.

We were not alone in this. Every artist—serious, casual, professional, amateur—faced the same walls. Each found her or his own way to push through to some connection or offering or contribution—each significant no matter the scale.

So we don’t make some claim that ours is any sort of landmark or defining response to all this. It is just ours, and we here open our conversation for you.

The first song in this narrative arc is “**For What It’s Worth**,” Stephen Stills’ brilliant evocation of the Sunset Strip protests of the 1960s, but which has perfectly encapsulated the sense of dread that seems to accompany all social movements of the following 50 plus years. We were drawn to Springsteen’s “**Johnny 99**” which sketched out some of the anxiety and dread and violence that was already a chronic plague before the pandemic and Fogerty’s “**Fortunate Son**,” a nod to recent avid or wanna-be combat Commanders-in-Chief with dubious exemptions from the military.

On this recording, as on our last two, we found inspiration in original songs by our friend and collaborator, Michael Veitch; this time, two songs about the struggle against hatred, repression, and isolation—“**Anything Is Possible**” and “**Above the Rain**” (which were featured in the recent PBS documentary *We Remember: Songs of Survivors*) drew us in, and though they were grounded in a horrible historical circumstance, they also seemed to speak to the moment. Each song tells the personal story of a Holocaust survivor whom Michael visited with and then composed a brilliant song out of that story. In each case, despite the hardships and horrors experienced by the survivor/narrator, there is an expression of almost unfathomable hope and faith.

Hope and faith, notwithstanding, the specter of death looms over that terrible history. And in the recent pandemic; the “forever war” of the last two decades; the circumstances of unjust violence or oppression or neglect targeting those seeking equality; or the awful accidental missteps of ordinary life, death seemed to press down on all of us without our usual curtains of distractions. “**Who Are You Redbird**” and “**Those Memories**” with their expressions of haunting loss and regret seemed, then, to call to us.

In these songs and the others that “spoke” to us, we found connections between the struggles and hardships of the past and our terrible present circumstances. There seemed a conversation there, too, among struggling peoples. And so the anguish and ultimate defiance of the speaker of Woody Guthrie’s “**I Ain’t Got No Home**” still voices the pain and determination of the oppressed and down-trodden today.

Mary Gauthier’s “**Mercy Now**,” makes an eloquent plea for understanding the pain of those nearest to us who are overwhelmed and sometimes warped, like Johnny in Springsteen’s tune, to reach for the easy solution of violence and hate...to institutions that take on similar characteristics, to even ourselves, who’d look to deny our involvement in a world wounded by humanity itself...and yet, upon all of us, and in spite of all of us, Gauthier’s song pleads for mercy.

Through that understanding and compassion, a way of coping presented itself to us in songs like Mark Knopfler's "Why Worry Now," Lennon and McCartney's "Wait" and Michael's "Try, Try, Try."

And that brings us to a sort of last stage in this album's narrative arc: a summation in Robbie Robertson and the Band's brilliant song "The Rumor" which begins with the ominous "Now when the rumor/Comes to your town,/It grows and grows,/Where it started no one knows." The song moves from the insidious effects of "rumors" to a compassionate view of the perpetrators and victims ("Big men, little men/Turn into dust,/Maybe it was all in fun/Didn't mean to ruin no one"), to a warning about "vigilantes" making a "move," to coping "until the fog blows away" and one can embrace "a brand new day."

We follow that up with the Band's one-time boss, Bob Dylan, picking up the theme with his joyous "New Morning."

We end the album with a coda, a song written, again, in different circumstances, that acknowledges our collective human insignificance and impotence in the face of nature's sometimes harsh backslap at our irrelevance and our own stupidity, greed, and jealousy. Yet it reminds us how significant and potent our small gestures of grace, compassion, and love can be which can "make it seem better, for a while", even in the midst of the plagues of a pandemic, racial animosity, political lies, and war: Iris Dement's "My Life."

Franz Kafka, the enigmatic German-Czech-Jewish teller of inscrutable tales, noted in his diary that "writing is a form of prayer." He claimed, furthermore, that though he loved it, he couldn't understand music. Doubtless, though, he certainly understood that music, too, is at its deepest a form of prayer. Kafka, an arguably profoundly secular artist at one level, did *not* mean that his novels, stories, and epigrams should be considered "religious," and we disavow any notion that this collection of songs of our plague years should be considered so, either.

Nevertheless, we humbly offer it as a plea and a petition, a confession and an expression of thanksgiving...and a simple "prayer" that we all rain down mercy on ourselves, each other, and our lonely planet.

—LB

For What It's Worth

- Stephen Stills

There's something happening here...
What it is ain't exactly clear—
There's a man with a gun over there,
Telling me I got to beware.

I think it's time we stop, children,
what's that sound?
Everybody look what's going down.

There's battle lines being formed;
Nobody's right when everybody's wrong.
Young people speaking their minds,
Meeting so much resistance from behind.

I think it's time we stop, hey, what's that sound?
Everybody look what's going down.

What a field-day for the heat!
There's thousands of people in the street;
Singing songs and they're carrying signs,
Mostly say, hooray for what's right.

It's time we stop, hey, what's that sound?
Everybody look what's going down.

Paranoia strikes deep,
Into your soul it will creep,
It starts when you're always afraid,
You step out of line, the man come
and take you away.

We better stop, hey, what's that sound?
Everybody look what's going down.
Stop, hey, what's that sound,
Everybody look what's going down,
Stop, now, what's that sound,
Everybody look what's going down
Stop, children, what's that sound,
Everybody look what's going down!

Larry Brittain – Guitars & Lead Vocals
Billy Clockel – Bass
Kirsti Gholson – Vocals
Dan Hickey – Drums
Joshua Pearl – Organ & Piano

Anything Is Possible

- Michael Veitch and Charles Srebnik

He told me just one step will start a road,
Taking us far or taking us home.
Anything's possible wherever you go;
Save one life you can save a soul.

To the frontline, a life line,
Nothing is impossible.
It's a life time, your lifeline;
Anything is possible.

He was watching the trains
arrive in the dark;
Counting the heads that come and depart.
Speaking in colors, codes and front yards,
Only 10 years old and come so far

To the frontline, a life line,
Nothing is impossible.
It's a life time, your lifeline;
Anything is possible

Who's in charge from day to night,
What is the look in the Pious eyes?
Big search lights, were in their sights,
The forest is alive tonight.

He said imagination will take you there;
Just imagine bigger than anywhere.
Greater than knowledge, lighter than air;
And it's all for the taking for us to share.

To the frontline, a life line,
Nothing is impossible.
It's a life time, your lifeline;
Anything is possible

Anything is possible;
Nothin' is impossible;
Anything, Anything, Anything

Larry Brittain – Guitars & Vocals
Billy Clockel – Bass
Kirsti Gholson – Lead Vocals
Dan Hickey – Drums
Gary Oleyar – Violin

Mercy Now

- Mary Gauthier

My father, could use a little mercy now—
The fruits of his labor fall and lie
rotting on the ground.
His time is nearly over; it won't be long,
till he's not around
I love my father, he could use some mercy now.

My brother, could use a little mercy now —
He's a stranger to freedom;
he's shackled to his fear and his doubt.
The pain that he lives in,
it's almost more than living will allow
I love my brother, he could use some mercy now.

My church and my country
could use a little mercy now—
As they sink into a poisoned pit,
it's going to take forever to climb out.
They carry the weight of the faithful
who follow them down;
I love my church and country,
they could use some mercy now.

Now every living thing could use
a little mercy now.
Only the hand of grace can end the race
to another mushroom cloud.
People in power, they'll do anything
to keep their crown;
Every living thing could use a little mercy now

Yeah, we all could use just a little mercy now.
I know we don't deserve it,
but we could use some anyhow;
We hang in the balance,
dangling 'tween hell and hallowed ground.
Oh, we all could use a little mercy now.
Every single one of us could
use some mercy now.
Yeah, every single one of us
could use some mercy now.

Larry Brittain – Guitars & Lead Vocals
Billy Clockel – Bass
Kirsti Gholson – Lead Vocals
Lisa Gutkin – Violin
Professor Louie – Piano & Accordion
Dan Hickey – Drums

Johnny 99

- Bruce Springsteen

Well they closed down the auto plant
in Mahwah late last month.
Ralph went out looking for a job
but he couldn't find none.
He came home too drunk
from mixing Tanqueray and wine.
He got a gun, shot a night clerk,
now they call him Johnny 99.

Down in the part of town where
when you hit a red light you don't stop,
Johnny's waving his gun around
and threatening to blow his top.
When an off-duty cop
snuck up on him from behind,
Out in front of the Club Tip Top
they slapped the cuffs on Johnny 99.

Well, the city supplied a public defender,
but the judge was Mean John Brown.
He came into the courtroom
and stared poor Johnny down.
Well, the evidence is clear,
gonna let the sentence, son, fit the crime—
Prison for 98 and a year,
and we'll call it even, Johnny 99.

A fistfight broke out in the courtroom,
they had to drag Johnny's girl away.
His mama stood up and shouted,
"Judge, don't take my boy this way!"
Well, son you got any statement
you'd like to make,
Before the bailiff comes
to forever take you away?

Now judge, judge, I got debts
no honest man could pay;
The bank was holding my mortgage,
and taking my house away.
Now, I ain't saying that
makes me an innocent man,
But it was more than all this that put
that gun in my hand.

Well, your honor I do believe
I'd be better off dead.
And if you can take a man's life
for the thoughts that's in his head,
Then won't you sit back in that chair,
Judge, and think it over one more time?
And let 'em shave off my hair
and put me on that execution line.

Well, the city supplied a public defender,
but the judge was Mean John Brown.
He came into the courtroom
and stared poor Johnny down.
Well, the evidence is clear,
gonna let the sentence, son, fit the crime—
Prison for 98 and a year,
and we'll call it even, Johnny 99;
Prison for 98 and a year,
and we'll call it even, Johnny 99.

Larry Brittain – Guitars & Vocals
Billy Clockel – Bass
Dan Hickey – Drums
Professor Louie – Accordion
Gary Oleyar – Violin
Marie Spinosa – Vocals

Above the Rain

- Michael Veitch and Rita Schwartz

The sun still shines above the darkness
On the days we've lost our way,
When everything can feel so heartless,
The sky, she always smiles above the rain
When all appears undone;
She smiles, she smiles on everyone.

Broken glass won't last forever,
Gone the boots and all the terror.
It's your chance for better weather;
We've got hope, we've got each other,
Here, we smile upon the rain,
Right here, we smile upon the rain.

Open your hand, there's a gift here for taking—
Do what you can, it's your life you are making—
Remember the past, share a story for telling—
It's a story worth saving.

I see blue skies when the others
Cry each morning—sisters, brothers.
Try and do the best you can;
All will mend in due time
While the sky, she smiles above the rain.
She smiles, she smiles above the rain.
She smiles...

Once the days were filled with laughter,
Chasing dreams and mornings after.
A new world full of fear and running,
Tears and prayers and endless waiting.
All is just as it should be
Before the crowds began to scream—

Right here, as days would turn to rain—
Right here, the days all turned to rain.

Open your hand, there's a gift here for taking—
Do what you can, it's your life you are making—
Remember the past share a story for telling—
It's a story worth saving.

Larry Brittain – Guitars
Billy Clockel – Bass
Kirsti Gholson – Lead Vocals
Dan Hickey – Drums
Professor Louie – Piano, Organ, & Accordion
Gary Oleyar – Violin
Tony Trishcka - Banjo

I Ain't Got No Home

-Woody Guthrie

I ain't got no home,
I'm just a-roamin' 'round,
Just a wanderin' worker,
and I go from town to town.
And the police make it hard,
wherever I may go,
And I ain't got no home
in this world anymore.
I ain't got no home in this world anymore.

My brothers and my sisters
have traveled on this road;
It's a long and dusty road
that a million feet have trod.
Rich man took my home,
and he threw me from my door,
And I ain't got no home in this world anymore.
I ain't got no home in this world anymore.

Now I been workin' shares,
and always I was poor;
Threw my crops right back
in the banker's door...
My wife up and died upon the cabin floor;
Now I ain't got no home
in this world anymore.
I ain't got no home in this world anymore
I just wander 'round, to see what I may see.
This wide, wicked world
is a funny place to be:

The gamblin' man is rich,
an' the workin' man is poor,
And I ain't got no home
in this world anymore.
I ain't got no home in this world anymore.
I ain't got no home,
I'm just a-roamin' 'round,
Just a wanderin' worker,
and I go from town to town.
The police make it hard wherever I may go,
So I ain't got no home
in this world anymore,
I ain't got no home in this world anymore,
I ain't got no home in this world anymore.

Larry Brittain – Guitars & Lead Vocals
Billy Clockel – Bass
E'lissa Jones – Vocals
Dan Hickey—Drums
Professor Louie – Piano & Organ

Fortunate Son

- John Fogerty

Some folks are born, made to wave the flag,
Ooh, their red, white and blue,
And when the band plays "Hail to the Chief,"
Ooh, they point the cannon at you, Lord.

It ain't me, It ain't me;
I ain't no senator's son, son.
It ain't me, It ain't me;
I ain't no fortunate one, no.

Some folks are born, silver spoon in hand,
Lord, don't they love to help themselves, y'all?
But when the taxman comes to the door,
Lord, the house looks like a rummage sale, yeah.

It ain't me, It ain't me;
I ain't no millionaire's son, no, no
It ain't me, It ain't me;
I ain't no fortunate one, no.

Some folks inherit star spangled eyes,
Ooh, they send you down to war, Lord.
And when you ask 'em,
"How much should we give?"
Ooh, they only answer "More! More! More!," Y'all.

It ain't me, It ain't me;
I ain't no military son, son.
It ain't me, It ain't me;
I ain't no fortunate one, one.
It ain't me, It ain't me;
I ain't no fortunate one, no, no, no;
It ain't me, It ain't me;
I ain't no fortunate son, no, no, no.

Larry Brittain – Guitar & Vocals
Billy Clockel – Bass
Jeff Schmich – Mandolin
Jimmy Heffernan - Dobro
Gary Oleyar – Violin
Tony Trishcka – Banjo

Why Worry Now

- Mark Knopfler

Baby, I know this world has made you sad.
Some people can be bad—
The things they do and things they say.
But baby, I'll wipe away those bitter tears,
I'll chase away your restless fears,
That turn your blue skies into gray.

Why worry? There should be laughter after pain;
There should be sunshine after rain;
These things have always been the same;
So why worry now?
Why worry now?

Baby, when I get down I turn to you,
And you make sense of what I do:
I know it isn't hard to say,
But baby, just when this world
seems mean and cold,
Our love comes shining red and gold,
And all the rest is by the way.

Why worry? There should be laughter after pain;
There should be sunshine after rain;
These things have always been the same;
So why worry now?
Why worry now?

Larry Brittain – Guitars & Lead Vocals
Billy Clockel – Bass
Kirsti Gholson – Lead Vocals
Jimmy Heffeman — Dobro
Dan Hickey – Drums
Joshua Pearl – Keyboards

Wait

- John Lennon and Paul McCartney

It's been a long time, now I'm, coming back home.
I've been away now, oh, how I've been alone...

Wait, till I come back to your side;
We'll forget the tears we've cried.

But if your heart breaks, don't wait, turn me away,
And if your heart's strong, hold on, I won't delay.

Wait, till I come back to your side;
We'll forget the tears we've cried.

I feel as though, you ought to know,
That I've been good, as good as I can be,
And if you do, I'll trust in you,
And know that you will wait for me.

It's been a long time, now I'm coming back home.
I've been away now, oh, how I've been alone...

Wait, till I come back to your side;
We'll forget the tears we've cried.

I feel as though, you ought to know,
That I've been good, as good as I can be
And if you do, I'll trust in you,
And know that you will wait for me

But if your heart breaks, don't wait, turn me away.
And if your heart's strong, hold on, I won't delay...

Wait, till I come back to your side;
We'll forget the tears we've cried.

It's been a long time, now I'm coming back home;
I've been away now, oh, how I've been alone.

Larry Brittain – Guitars & Lead Vocals
Billy Clockel – Bass
Dan Hickey – Percussion
Professor Louie – Piano & Organ
E'lissa Jones – Lead Vocals

Who Are You Redbird

- Beth Husband & Milan Miller

Who are you redbird- sitting on a limb?
A long lost loved one-
or dear departed friend?
You keep coming back to see me-
every now and then...
Who are you redbird- sitting on a limb?

Sometimes, when I'm feeling
blue and lonely,
Skies are gray and I'm running out of rope;
I see you in the backyard checking on me,
And hear you sing a simple song of hope.

Who are you redbird- sitting on a limb?
A long lost loved one-
or dear departed friend?
You keep coming back to see me-
every now and then...
Who are you redbird- sitting on a limb?

You have a way of knowing
where to find me
When I'm fighting battles
out here on my own;
You stay just long enough to remind me
That I'm never really alone.

Who are you redbird- sitting on a limb?
A long lost loved one-
or dear departed friend?
You keep coming back to see me-
every now and then...
Who are you redbird- sitting on a limb?

Larry Brittain – Guitars & Vocals
Billy Clockel – Bass
Jeff Schmich – Mandolin, Lead Vocals
Kirsti Holson – Lead and Harmony Vocals
Jimmy Heffeman – Dobro

Those Memories

- Alan O'Bryant

Those memories of you still haunt me,
Every night when I lay down.
I'll always love you, little darling,
Until the day they lay me down.

In dreams of you, my body trembles.
I wake up and call your name.
But you're not there, and I'm so lonely.
Without your love, I'd go insane.

I close my eyes, and you're there with me.
Your kiss I feel, your face I see.
It's not your lips now, that drive me crazy;
It's just your haunting memory.

Those memories of you still haunt me,
Every night when I lay down.
I'll always love you, little darling,
Until the day they lay me down.

Those memories of you still haunt me,
Every night when I lay down.
I'll always love you, little darling,
Until the day they lay me down.

Larry Brittain – Guitar & Lead Vocals
Billy Clockel – Bass
Jeff Schmich – Mandolin, Vocals
Jimmy Heffeman – Dobro
Dan Hickey – Percussion
Gary Oleyar – Violin

Try, Try, Try

- Michael Veitch

Through the years it looked like rain
on the windshield,
And all those hands were fit to be tied.
They were wringing you out
until you were all in tatters,
What matters is you try, try, try;
Each day we just try, try, try.

Should have taken that left turn
sooner than later;
Instead of waiting for all those years to fly.
Even with every high beam
making you blind,
What matters is you try, try, try;
Each day we just try, try, try.

Leavin' behind another lonely lifetime;
The suitcase packed with memories.
Leavin' the rest along the roadside;
We only get one ticket to ride.

She woke you up this morning
with a sunrise,
And a table spread
with all her dreams and smiles.
It may have taken years,
but you are here, and you survived.
What matters is you try, try, try;
Each day we just try, try, try.

Larry Brittain – Guitars & Lead Vocal
Billy Clockel – Bass
Kirsti Gholson – Vocals
Dan Hickey – Drums
Joshua Pearl – Piano

The Rumor

- Robbie Robertson

Now when the rumor comes to your town;
It grows and grows, where it started,
no one knows.
Some of your neighbors will invite it right in.
Maybe it's a lie,
Even if it's a sin,
They'll repeat the rumor again.

Close your eyes, hang down your head,
Until the fog blows away— let it blow away.
Open up your arms and feel the good,
It's a-comin', a brand new day.

Big men, little men... turned into dust;
Maybe it was all in fun,
They didn't mean to ruin no one,
Could there be someone,
Someone here, among this crowd—
Who's been accused,
Had his name so misused,
And his privacy refused?

Close your eyes, hang your head;
Until the fog blows away, let it blow away.
Open up your arms, and feel the good—
It's a-comin', a brand new day!
No, no, no...

Now all you vigilantes wanna make a move.
Maybe they won't...
You know I sure hope they don't.
For whether this rumor, proves true or false,
You can forgive, or you may regret,
But he will never ever forget.

Close your eyes, hang down your head,
Until the fog blows away... let it roll away.
Open up your arms and feel the good,
It's a-comin', a brand new day!

Larry Brittain – Guitars & Lead Vocals
Billy Clockel – Bass
Kirsti Gholson – Lead Vocals
Dan Hickey – Drums
E'lissa Jones — Vocals
Professor Louie – Organ & Piano

New Morning

- Bob Dylan

Can't you hear that rooster crowing?
Rabbit running down across the road,
Underneath the bridge
where the water flowed through.
So happy just to see you smile
Underneath the sky of blue...
On this new morning, new morning,
On this new morning with you.

Can't you hear that motor turning?
Automobile coming into style,
Coming down the road
for a country mile or two.
So happy just to see you smile,
Underneath the sky of blue,
On this new morning, new morning
On this new morning with you.

The night passed away so quickly—
It always does when you're with me...

Can't you feel that sun a-shining?
Groundhog running
by the country stream,
This must be the day that
all of my dreams come true.
So happy just to be alive,
Underneath the sky of blue,
On this new morning, new morning,
On this new morning with you

On this new morning,
On this new morning,
On this new morning with you.

Larry Brittain – Guitars & Lead Vocal
Billy Clockel – Bass
Jeff Schmich – Mandolin
Dan Hickey – Drums
Professor Loule – Organ & Piano, Vocals

My Life

- Iris DeMent

My life, it don't count for nothing;
When I look at this world, I feel so small.
And my life, it's only a season,
A passing September that no one will recall.

But I gave joy to my mother ,
And I made my lover smile.
And I can give comfort to my friends
when they're hurting;
And I can make it seem better, for a while.

And my life, it's half the way traveled,
And still I have not found my way out of this night.
And my life, it's tangled in wishes,
And so many dreams that just
never turned out right.

But I gave joy to my mother,
And I made my lover smile.
And I can give comfort to my children
when they're hurting...
And I can make it seem better,
I can make it seem better ,
I can make it seem better, for a while.

Larry Brittain – Guitar & Lead Vocals
Billy Clockel – Bass
E'lissa Jones – Vocals, Cello
Professor Louie – Accordion
Gary Oleyar – Violin



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