

LYRIC BOOK



BUCKET LIST

words & music by John McCutcheon

John: guitar & vocal

Jon Carroll: piano, organ, percussion, & vocals

JT Brown: bass

Stuart Duncan: fiddle

For my wife, Carmen.

In my younger days I compiled a laundry list
All the mighty dreams and daring deeds
My heart could not resist
The places I must visit
The feats that must be done
A bucket list to check off one by one
A bucket list

Stonehenge at the solstice
Grand Canyon's rim at dawn
The Opera House in Sydney
With the New Year coming on
Tierra del Fuego
With the salt sea in my face
The aurora in Alaska
Where you feel the press of space

A festival in Senegal
With the kora in the air
December in Michoacan
And monarchs everywhere
The labyrinth at Chartres Cathedral
The hush of vesper song
Dusk at Machu Pichu
When every soul is gone

Early morning on the Bitterroot
A rainbow on my line
The ancient plains of Tuva
Their throat-singing lost in time
A campfire at Clifftop
Fiddle music through the night
The Wailing Wall, Jerusalem
In early evening's light

To sit with honored elders
And hear their tales and songs
To find a place of peace at least
I know that I belong
Of everywhere I've ventured
Wherever I did roam
I never found a place
As sweet as home

So, turn the bucket over
I am done
I have traveled this earth over
And I've had a world of fun
The wonders I have witnessed
All the victories I've won
Of all life's great adventures
You're the one
Of all life's great adventures
You're the one
So, turn the bucket over
I am done

August 29, 2020
Ellijay, GA

©2020 John McCutcheon
Appalsongs (ASCAP)

JOHN McCUTCHEON



BUCKET LIST

BE STILL

words & music by John McCutcheon

John: guitar & vocal

Jon Carroll: piano, organ, & vocals

JT Brown: bass

Stuart Duncan: fiddle

Written for my lifelong friend, Rich Berquist, and my "spirit pal," Carrie Newcomer.

Midst the roiling of the world all around you

Be still

When everything conspires to confound you

Be still

When they offer one more lie

And you know you've had your fill

Be still

When you realize the fools will go to any length

Be still

And you need to find a way to gather up your strength

Be still

They don't understand true power

And you know they never will

Be still

When you feel your heart despairing

And you don't know where to turn

When you're looking for your bearing

As the waves upheave and churn

Nothing is more daring

Than the willingness to learn

Be still

Be still

Thomas Merton and the Buddha came before you

Be still

Offering examples to explore you

Be still

Emptiness to overflowing

If you only will

Be still

It is defense against the madness

That roars on every side

Relief against the sadness

That rolls in like a tide

If you seek a gladness

(That is) A sure and steady guide

Be still

Be still

If you need to rally the power of your force

Be still

You first must seek the center of your source

Be still

At the fringes of the fight

It might work against your will

Accepting that the battle

Will forever be uphill

It takes belief and patience

To muster all your skill

Be still

Be still

October 12, 2020

Ellijay, GA

©2020 John McCutcheon/Appalsongs (ASCAP)

JOHN McCUTCHEON

BUCKET LIST



It's Not

words & music by John McCutcheon

John: guitar & vocal

Jon Carroll: piano & Rhodes

JT Brown: bass

Stuart Duncan: fiddle

A small tribute to some of my many mentors and seminal moments. The names in the song are

Musicalia: annual old time music campout on the Maury River near Charlottesville, VA, held every year on "the third rainy weekend in May."

Roscoe: Roscoe Holcomb of Daisy, KY. Banjo player and ethereal singer.

Nimrod: Nimrod Workman of Chattaroy, WV. A primary mentor, singer, storyteller, union man, wild man.

Janette: Janette Carter of Hilton, VA. Daughter of AP and Sara Carter of the Carter Family. Amazing woman, musician, second mother.

I.D.: I.D. Stamper of Ison, KY. Wonderful old friend and the most amazing mountain dulcimer player I've ever heard.

Sunset Gap: community center in east Tennessee where I played fiddle for the monthly dance.

Van Arsdale: Paul Van Arsdale of North Tonawanda, NY. Dear friend and my hammer dulcimer "Yoda"

Brookside Mine: site of the famous Brookside Strike of 1973-74. I played on the picket lines many times, met Si Kahn on Thanksgiving Day 1973.

P9: Local P9, meatpackers union in Austin, MN. They struck in 1985-86. Some of the finest people I ever met.

Lefty's was the pro-union bar in town where we'd repair after events at the union hall.

Singing at the church house: site of many a shape-note singing, courtesy of the Knox County Old Harp Singers.

Dinner on the grounds: see above "singing at the church house"

It's not the way the mountain laurel
Blossoms here in June
It's not the way the song is sweeter
'Neath the Musicalia moon
It's not the rain upon a tin roof
(The) smell of biscuits in the morn
Home is more than just where you were born

It's not the memory of Roscoe
Singing old hymns in my car
Or the stories Nimrod wove
As we rose the morning star
Not the sweet voice of Janette
Thick as honey on the vine
That makes me take account this life of mine

Chorus

It's each and all
That I recall
And hold here in my heart
What they'd share
Was rich and rare
I knew it from the start
All these women
All these men
I'm older now than they were then
But every day they live again
If I but do my part

It's not the deep drone of the dulcimer
That comes from I.D.'s lap
Not the sugar on the dance floor
Every month at Sunset Gap
Or the joy there on Van Arsdale's face
The last dog at the jam
That makes me understand just who I am

It's not Thanksgiving with the men and women
At the Brookside mine
Or the cold beer down at Lefty's
With the heroes of P9
It not the singing at the church house
The dinner on the grounds
That recollect the wonders that I found **Chorus**

It's not the way the sunlight plays
Here in the maple, in the pine
That lingers in my memory
And takes me back in time
It's not a picture of the past
Or the boy I used to be
Just pieces of what made a man of me

It's not the way the mountain laurel
Blossoms here in June
It's not the way the song is sweeter
'Neath the Musicalia moon
It's not the rain upon a tin roof
(The) smell of biscuits in the morn
That tells me home is more than just where you were born
Home is more than just where you were born
Home

August 22, 2020

Ellijay, GA

©2020 John McCutcheon

Appalsongs (ASCAP)

JOHN McCUTCHEON

BUCKET LIST



FARMER

words & music by John McCutcheon

John: guitar & vocal

Jon Carroll: piano & Rhodes

JT Brown: bass

Stuart Duncan: fiddle

He tucked the small seed in the dirt
Stood up and wiped his brow
Looked back on the short row
As the light was fading now
He'd labored in the hot sun
As long as day allowed
But now it's done
With his hoe upon his shoulder
He heads again for home
Retracing the worn path
Past the promises he's sown
Surrounded by the future
Never felt so all alone
As anyone

He thinks back on the winter wheat
As far as eye could see
Born in to this Kansas dirt
Where he was meant to be
He never felt so captive
He never felt so free
Ain't no denying
He worked those hungry acres
As long he as he could
He hoped the kids might love it
But he knew they never would
Now it's a backyard and a garden
In a Winfield neighborhood
But he's still trying

Chorus

He'll be a farmer
Till his dying day
Can't think of himself
In any other way
On the far side of this bridge
Between his first cry and the clay
He stands thinking

Standing at the sink
He scrubs the land's dregs down the drain
Hoping there is some small part
Of life that might remain
Still he worries 'bout the market price
He worries 'bout the rain
Every day
But he's got no regrets and he's not the kind to mourn
Struggling at the stove
He opens up a can of corn
That was grown 5000 miles
From the place where he was born
And starts to pray **Chorus**

He tucked the small seed in the dirt
Stood up and wiped his brow
Looked back on the short row
As the light was fading now
He'd labored in the hot sun
As long as life allowed
But now it's done

November 1, 2020

Smoke Rise, GA

©2020 John McCutcheon/Appalsongs (ASCAP)

JOHN McCUTCHEON

BUCKET LIST





words & music by John McCutcheon
John: guitar & vocal
JT Brown: bass

A sequel to "She Just Dances" from my album Ghost Light.

Magic marker on the cookbooks
Crayon on the wall
A 30-inch reminder
Of when she was just this tall
Each day I find a new one
In one place or another
On the walnut chest of drawers
From my mother's mother
Didn't even try to blame it on her brother

Across five generations
These two will finally meet
No photograph, no story
Could ever be so sweet
One lovingly preserved
A memory held so dear
Then a mighty declaration
"I am here!"

And I stubbornly refuse
To remove a single one
A kid and a Crayola
It just had to be done
As bold as a Picasso, as lovely as Monet
Sure, it's messy, but I simply have to say
I wouldn't have it any other way
It's an urge as old as time
It was right there from the start

Take the calm and ordered
And muck it up with art
The bison on the cave wall
The David in the stone
The song inside the silence
The scrimshaw in the bone
We wrestle with our angels
Emerging with a prayer
The scars from that battle then
We litter everywhere
We will leave it to the ages
To decide what's false, what's true
But what else is a human being to do
Especially with a magic marker when you're only two?

September 15, 2020
Smoke Rise, GA

©2020 John McCutcheon/Appalsongs (ASCAP)

JOHN McCUTCHEON

BUCKET LIST



ATONEMENT

words & music by John McCutcheon

John: guitar & vocal

Jon Carroll: piano & Rhodes

JT Brown: bass

Stuart Duncan: fiddle

Tires crackle on the gravel
As I pull up to the place
Take a breath and step out
To meet history face-to-face
Stone chimney's all that's standing
The rest has gone to ground
Ain't been back here since the night
I burned the damn thing down

Oh, I was young and stupid
Sure and hard back then
The only lens I looked through
Was the color of my skin
Everything they taught me
Everything I heard
Led me on a one-way track
To what at last occurred

I didn't know no better
I was jobless and unschooled
Found a place to put my anger
I was ready to be fooled
Guided by my grievance
Force-fed my demands
They put hatred in my heart
And a gun into my hands

Now, twenty-five years later
I'm standing midst the truth
Paying for the crimes
That I committed in my youth
Prison would not be enough
To wash my sins away
The ashes of my actions
Surround me here today
The gravel crackles one again
A truck stops next to mine
The face behind the wheel is etched
By the patient hand of time
I haven't seen him since that night
I set his world aflame
And ran his family from this place
Didn't even know his name

I let him speak his peace
'Cause I knew he had the right
All we both had carried
Since that hateful night
The house he'd built with his own hands
Gone without a thought
It brought no satisfaction
When he learned that I'd been caught

I know what I had taken
Was more than just a home
I've been struggling for years
Finding some way to atone
I hope that maybe something good
Somehow had survived
I finished just about the time
The building crew arrived

September 22, 2020

Ellijay, GA

©2020 John McCutcheon

Appalsongs (ASCAP)

JOHN McCUTCHEON



BUCKET LIST

OUT HERE

words & music by John McCutcheon

John: guitar & vocal

Jon Carroll: guitar

JT Brown: bass

Stuart Duncan: fiddle & mandolin

Out here you can see things coming
Out here the air is clear
Out here you've gotta know your neighbor
And you lend a hand
Seems everybody can out here

Out here the sky is endless
Out here all the stars feel near
Out here we know the pride of hard work
And a little dirt and sweat
Ain't killed nobody yet out here

Out here is where you fly over
Out here is where you just pass through
Stop for gas or beer
It's the most that you might do out here

Out here we are not a destination
Out here we've got no souvenirs
Out here we are never breaking news
And we like it just that way
Living day to day out here

Out here it is a different country
Out here it's a different year
We still don't lock our doors
Ain't got no need to fear out here

Out here it ain't a place, really
Out here it's an atmosphere
Out here it's that small town deep inside
That we've wanted or have known
Where you feel welcomed home out here

September 26, 2020

Smoke Rise, GA

©2020 John McCutcheon/Appalsongs (ASCAP)

JOHN McCUTCHEON



BUCKET LIST

THE OTHER

words & music by John McCutcheon

John: guitar & vocal

Jon Carroll: piano

JT Brown: bass

Stuart Duncan: fiddle

I am the other
I am the neighbor you don't know
The quiet kid in high school
Who sat in the last row
The old woman with the pushcart
The stranger on the bus
The ones out at the edges
Who are never one of us

I am the other
I root for a different team
I pray in a different language
I wear clothes you've never seen
I tune to different stations
On TV and radio
I hear things that you don't hear
I know things you'll never know

I am the other
Returning home from work at dawn
I am the guy who drives a Prius
With a Trump sign in my lawn
I'm the one who sees the world
A little different than you
Still, I'll come if you're in trouble
I mean, what you gonna do?

I am the other
Waiting patiently in line
Watching others cut in front of me
And you think that's it's just fine
I am detained at the border
I am stopped by the police
I am wondering when all
This special treatment's gonna cease

I am the other
Every day just getting by
The one who got in Harvard
And never wondered why
I am Brooklyn in Topeka
Harlan in LA
I am seventh generation
I have just arrived today

I am the other
I am no great mystery
If wonder is the watchword
And compassion is the key
When we sit down at the banquet
This well no longer dry
We'll bow our heads in thanks
And eat our humble pie

October 10, 2020

Smoke Rise, GA

©2020 John McCutcheon/Appalsongs (ASCAP)

JOHN McCUTCHEON

BUCKET LIST



GHOST TOWN

words & music by John McCutcheon

John: guitar & vocal

Jon Carroll: guitar

JT Brown: bass

Stuart Duncan: fiddle

I walk these streets that all my life I have known
This place that I have long thought as my own
Shops and buildings I can clearly name
But this morning nothing is the same

Chorus

It is a ghost town
Empty, dark, deserted
Overnight
Entirely converted
All the ties that bind
Lie frayed and tattered on the ground
In this ghost town

In and of and by this place, the marrow of my bone
The placid, sheltered harbor that has always drawn me home
Now the lighthouse stands deserted, the fields are all picked clean
Nothing is forgotten, but nothing is foreseen Chorus

Bridge

He walked this place his whole life
'Cept the years of World War II
Now his ghost retraces
What he used to do
Born of this place, he loved this place
Until his final breath
Something died inside me
At his death

A photo on the mantel, a space upon the form
The answer to the question, "where were you born?"
The house, the room, the bed that I remember well
These days when I return, I sleep in a motel Chorus

October 1, 2020

Smoke Rise, GA

©2020 John McCutcheonAppalsongs (ASCAP)

JOHN McCUTCHEON



BUCKET LIST

USED TO

words & music by John McCutcheon

John: vocal

Jon Carroll: piano

JT Brown: bass

Stuart Duncan: fiddle

I used to run a marathon
Now I don't
I used to take all sorts of chances
Now I won't
I used to work on my own
car
Until I couldn't
I used to push my body hard
Until it wouldn't

I used to worry all the time
'Bout wasting time
I used to worry
If I wasn't next in line
I used to wonder
Why change was so damn slow
I used to doubt
Everything I used to know

Chorus

Now I'm used to
Taking time to get things right
I'm used to
Sitting on the porch most every night
I'm used to
Stopping much more often than I used to
And being thankful for the things that I got used to

I used to think that
Only outlaws broke the rules
I used to think that
Ignorance was cured in schools
I used to think
That hard work always saw reward
I used to think
That there was justice 'cross the board **Chorus**

Bridge

I used to follow
Every law down to the letter
I used to think good would prevail
Now I know better
I used to think
That we all made it on our own
I used to think
I would be better off alone

I used to think my life
Was just around the bend
I used to think about
When all of this would end
I used to feel the moment
As it slipped away
I used to wonder if there was a better way **Chorus**

October 25, 2020

Smoke Rise, GA

©2020 John McCutcheon/Appalsongs (ASCAP)

JOHN McCUTCHEON

BUCKET LIST



MOONSHINER

words & music by John McCutcheon
John: banjo & vocal

In the mid-1970's I was hired to be an artist-in-residence for a week at Alice Lloyd College in Pippa Passes, KY. I spent a day in their oral history archive where I came upon an interview with a third-generation moonshiner who spoke eloquently about how to make 'shine, how it was used in his community, how that community and his trade changed with increasing outside influences. Recalling that interview many years later, I found this song lurking in the recollection.

I am a moonshiner
I learned it from my Pa
How to make a good mash
How to hide out from the law
I'll go up some holler
And I'll set up my still
Sell you a gallon
For a \$20 bill

Now, you can't rush good whiskey
The mash it takes its time
Ferment it and distill it
With a good, clean copper line
Now the foeshot, and the head and tail
You've got to throw away
The heart is what you're waiting on
It's how you make your pay

Then the timber and coal men
They came in from outside
Show up at our play parties
No manners they'd abide
They'd get drunk and start fighting
Not pay our elders any mind
Pa served 'em up some foeshot
And run 'em off plumb blind

But then the government came
With the goddam government men
Trying to change all the ways
We'd been living up 'til then
Had to add the sugar
To hurry the mash
Made the men all mean as hell
Made the liquor turn to trash

So, I'll go up this mountain
Where the whippoorwill does sings
Draw me out some water
From a pure and bubbling spring
With corn and with the barley malt
Make a mighty brew
And pick on this here banjer
Just like we used to do

September 21, 2020
Ellijay, GA

©2020 John McCutcheon/Appalsongs (ASCAP)

JOHN McCUTCHEON

BUCKET LIST



PEEKABOO

words & music by John McCutcheon
John: guitar & vocal
Jon Carroll: piano and Wurlitzer piano
JT Brown: bass
Stuart Duncan: fiddle

I vaguely can remember
When everything was new
Sitting on my mother's lap
Playing Peekaboo
She'd pull my blanket to her face
Completely disappear
A confusing moment later
Why, she's right here

What did I think? Where had she gone?
She was the world I knew
It all was back to normal then
In just a breath or two
And I'd laugh each time she'd reappear
In pure relief and joy
This simplest of games
Played with her boy

Chorus

I'm right here
No, I'm gone again
I'm right here
Peekaboo
Trusting that you will return again
Peekaboo

I remember being 12 years old
Lying in my bed
I would pull the covers up
Over my own head
Believing, like my Mom's old game,
That I would disappear
In hopes I would go anywhere
But here

Chorus

These days with babies on my lap
I play this ancient game
I disappear and then return
It's still the same
Now thirty five long years are past
Since her last game is through
I long to see her face again
Peekaboo! Chorus

After all the things I've learned
All these many years I've yearned
Trusting that you will return again
Peekaboo

September 23, 2020
Ellijay, GA

©2020 John McCutcheon/Appalsongs (ASCAP)

JOHN McCUTCHEON

BUCKET LIST



MEDICINE GAME

words & music by John McCutcheon

John: guitar & vocal

Jon Carroll: piano

JT Brown: bass

Stuart Duncan: mandolin

Bill Miller: flute & chanting

I grew up in Wisconsin seeing Native kids playing pickup games of lacrosse. It was fascinating... and brutal. My youngest son, Peter, fell in love with the game in middle school and turned into a fantastic high school and college club player, and I fell in love with the game all over again.

So, this story on NPR caught my ear...

In '22, Alabama hosts the games
World Lacrosse today released the names
But among the eight teams there upon the list
It was clear to all that one group had been missed

Haudenosaunee, Iroquois to the French
The number 3 team in the world left on the bench
World Lacrosse explained the situation
To compete you must be a sovereign nation

They said, everything we understand conflicts
For we are not one sovereign nation, we are six
Seneca, Cayuga, Onondaga, Oneida, Mohawk, Tuscarora
Long before your lands were in the mix

Eeowenta and Peacemaker brought to be
Our Nations and the first democracy
People of the Longhouse is our name
It is we who were given Medicine Game

It's not the first time, nor will it be the last
That we are so disconnected from our past
All those lessons that we learned are long forgotten
And leave us in a place so misbegotten

The team from Ireland knew just what to do
"None of us would play this game, if not for you
"A true champion must compete with all the best
"Take our spot and take your place among the rest"

So, next year when the tournament comes 'round
Eight teams will gather on Muscogee ground
To play what's long been called Medicine Game
And prove that they are worthy of the name

October 6, 2020
Smoke Rise, GA

©2020 John McCutcheon/Appalsongs (ASCAP)

JOHN McCUTCHEON

BUCKET LIST



LE CHAMBON-SUR-LIGNON

words & music by John McCutcheon

John: guitar & vocal JT Brown: bass
Jon Carroll: piano Stuart Duncan: fiddle

Le Chambon-sur-Lignon is a small village in southeastern France that has been a sanctuary for refugees for centuries. That kind of "culture of resistance" is a model and worthy of at least one song. Check out Pierre Sauvage's film "Weapons of the Spirit" <https://weaponsofthespirit.com/>

Without thinking I stood up
And said, "I'll take them"
Like so many of my neighbors
Had before
I had no money, had to plan
But I had room and I had land
And I just could not do
Nothing anymore

In Le Chambon-sur-Lignon
It's what we do
And for four hundred years
It's been the same
From the violence and fear
We Huguenots came here
Seeking refuge on this
Isolated plain

The first came from
The Spanish Civil War
And when the Nazis and the Vichy
Came to power
Not a moment left to lose
We took in France's Jews
And hid them in
Our nation's darkest hour

We took them in our homes
And in our farms
The children sat in classrooms
Side by side
Despite all the threats and danger
No one was a stranger
And for five years
We resisted and defied

And when asked "why did you do it?"
How can we answer
Not so long ago
We sought refuge too
I guess it's easy to decide
With the gospel as your guide
To our history and our faith
We must be true
In Le Chambon-sur-Lignon
It's what we do

September 19, 2020
Ellijay, GA

©2020 John McCutcheon/Appalsongs (ASCAP)

JOHN McCUTCHEON

BUCKET LIST



THE SINS OF THE FATHER

words & music by John McCutcheon

John: vocal Jon Carroll: piano

I was twelve-years-old
When I saw the first small cracks
The fissures in the fortress
That had always been intact
By sixteen my father
Had completely lost his sway
I could see him get more ignorant each day

In my whole life I was never smarter
Than at age nineteen
An entire year of freedom
All the wonders I had seen
Away from home and family
The decisions were all mine
And all of them were brilliant all the time

But at Christmas and Thanksgiving
I was just a kid once more
Stripped of all experience
When I walked through that door
I hated it, I loved it
It was all I used to know
And I couldn't wait 'til it was time to go

And I never once considered
The example that I set
How easy to be leaving
How easy to forget
How the eldest and the elder
Had to battle tooth and claw
'Til the Lion King in rags was all I saw

They say we soften as we age
Now the father and the son
Have forgiven one another
For the damage each had done
Somehow, he started to get smarter
With every passing year
'Til he was wise when my own sons did appear

All the sins of the father
Are they passed down to the son?
Do we spend a lifetime paying
For the deeds that each have done?
And we pray that we remember
How to undo all we've known
And that the sins of the father
Are not our own
No, the sins of the father
Aren't our own

September 12, 2020
Smoke Rise, GA

©2020 John McCutcheon/Appalsongs (ASCAP)

JOHN McCUTCHEON

BUCKET LIST



THE HINGE

words & music by John McCutcheon
John: guitar & vocal

I reach for the handle and open the door
The old hinge cries out in the dark
Just like it has for the last year or more
A protest, metallic and stark
It's wakened the baby, the dog and the wife
Mocking my lack of attention
To tackle the countless, small tasks in my life
I utter words too coarse to mention

I remember my grandfather back in his day
The paper, the pipe, and the chair
Up before dawn, 'cause that was his way
Slowly descending the stair
He'd enter the room and settle on down
With sounds that were loud and uncouth
Completely unconscious of all those around
It was one of the joys of my youth

A veritable symphony right from his chair
It was gastrointestinal jazz
As he grunted and snorted with such savoir fair
As no one before ever has
My grandma weren't deaf, but I guess made the choice
And acted like she didn't hear
I suppose it's how aging gave bodies a voice
It's a memory that I hold most dear

These days, as I don the mantel of age,
I have my own offspring as well
And I take a tip from my grandfather's page
In hopes they'll have stories to tell
I creak and I grunt and I snort and I fart
Not trying to be impolite
No, I'm leaving a legacy, doing my part
A memory sure to delight

So, I go to the closet and I get out the can
Stand at the hinge with relief in my hand
And, for some reason, suddenly hear the old man
I smile and step back away

November 5, 2020
Ellijay, GA

©2020 John McCutcheon/Appalsongs (ASCAP)

JOHN McCUTCHEON

BUCKET LIST



FINALLY

words & music by John McCutcheon

John: guitar & vocal

Jon Carroll: piano & accordion

JT Brown: bass

Stuart Duncan: fiddle

Today the weather finally turned
It feels just right
I'll have to wear a sweater
Sitting out at night
After months of humid heat
Each year autumn is so sweet
And these mountains in a month
Will be a sight

There was a time I'd never noticed
Nor have seen
The hundred different, subtle
Shades of green
Or the changes in the air
That I now see everywhere
It's as though I never knew
Where I had been

But I was young and so it's
Really not surprisin'
That my focus was
Beyond the far horizon
The answer to my dreams were clear:
Had to get away from here
I was certain and there was
No compromisin'

Bridge

But the world was brutal
In the things she taught
Denying all the fortune
That I sought

She said, "Shut up and settle down
"Take a breath and look around"
Time was more forgiving
Than I thought

After all these years
I've come to be
Suspicious of
All forms of certainty
And I've come to understand
To make God laugh, say, "Here's my plan"
There are forces here
I cannot know or see

So, today the weather finally turned
It feels just right
I'll have to wear a sweater
Sitting out at night
After months of humid heat
Each year autumn is so sweet
And these mountains in a month
Will be a sight
Today the finally turned
It just feels right

September 18, 2020

Ellijay, GA

©2020 John McCutcheon/Appalsongs (ASCAP)

JOHN McCUTCHEON

BUCKET LIST



ZILPHIA'S PIANO

words & music by John McCutcheon

Zilphia Horton was the first cultural director of the Highlander Folk School (now known as the Highlander Center), 1935-1956. She was a fierce believer in the power of music to inspire and transform people, employing that belief in her work at Highlander and beyond. In 1947, a group of African American women from Charleston, SC, striking tobacco workers, brought a song they'd adapted from the hymn "I'll Be Alright Someday," and the song "We Shall Overcome" was born.

I first stumbled upon the Highlander Center in 1972, at the invitation of Guy Carawan, Zilphia's successor (along with his wife, Candie) as Cultural Directors. I returned to Highlander many times, inaugurating my Songwriting Camps there in 2013. Zilphia's piano played a central part in our Camps. In 2020 the many alumni of those Camps raised the money to restore and refurbish the piano. I oversaw its delivery back to Highlander 2020 and wrote this song for its installation.

For more about Zilphia, her amazing life and work, see Kim Ruehl's wonderful new biography, *A Singing Army: Zilphia Horton and the Highlander Folk School*.

Zilphia's piano
Today we celebrate
Built in Cincinnati
Back in 1928
It had to wait a while
Until it found a home
But the journey it would finally take
It never could have known

From the tobacco fields of Charleston
To the Cumberland Plateau
The women brought their songs & stories
All those years ago
In 1947
The battle was begun
And Zilphia's piano
First played "We Shall Overcome"

Now ninety-two years later
Its voice renewed once more
We gather all around her
As we oft' have done before
Still steadfast, we shall not be moved
Yes, we shall overcome
New voices and new songs will join
In all the years to come

Zilphia's piano
Finally did arrive
In Monteagle, TN
In 1935
It found its voice was loud and true
'Neath fingers sure and strong
The hymns and anthems shook hearts and hills
As we all sang along

Bridge
She knew the courage locked inside
The role that music played
And a new world waiting to be born
If we are not afraid

September 8-9, 2020
New Market, TN & Smoke Rise, GA

©2020 John McCutcheon
Appalsongs (ASCAP)

JOHN McCUTCHEON

BUCKET LIST

