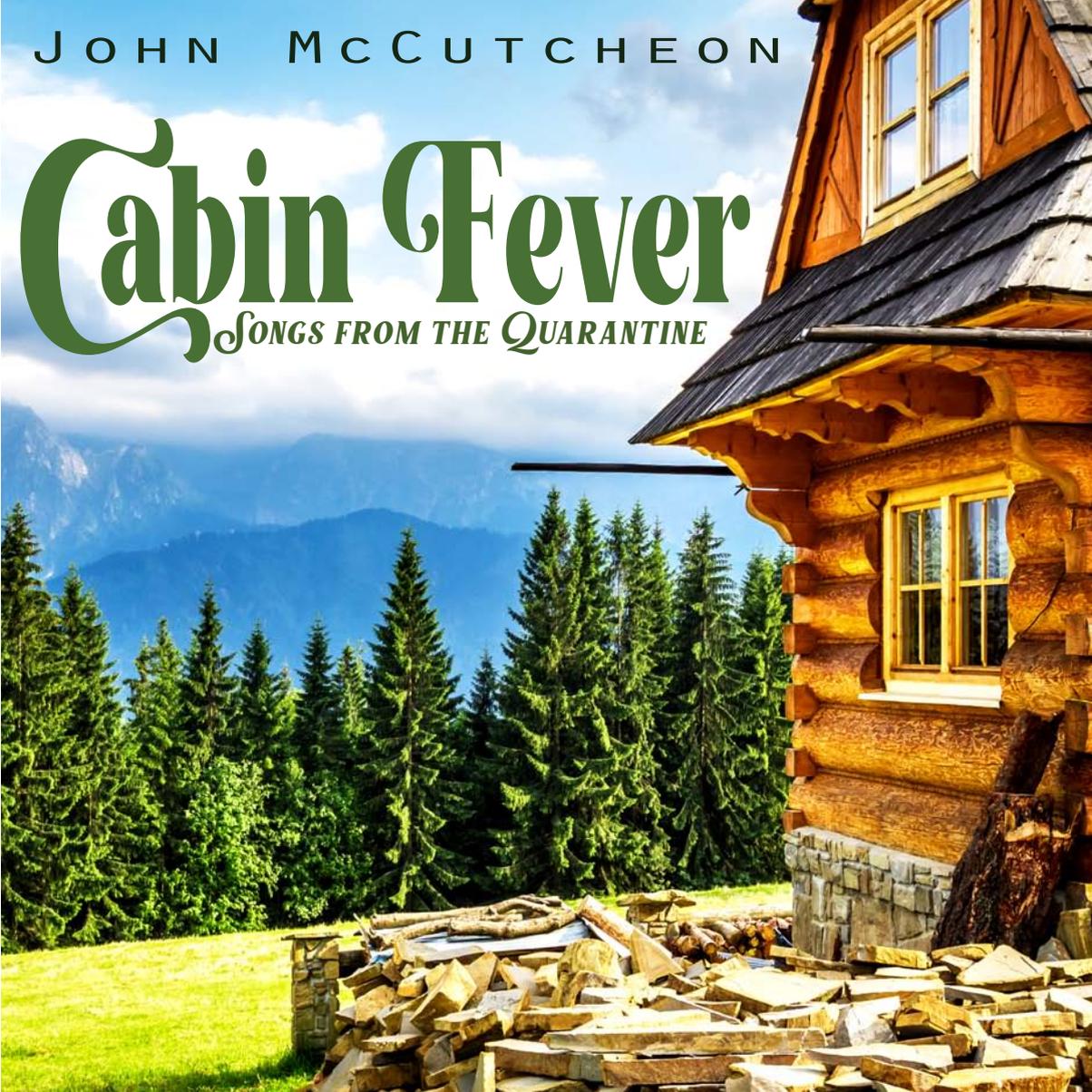


JOHN MCCUTCHEON

# Cabin Fever

*SONGS FROM THE QUARANTINE*



# Cabin Fever

## *SONGS FROM THE QUARANTINE*

John McCutcheon: all instruments and vocals

Guitar by Huss & Dalton Guitars, Staunton, VA

[hussanddalton.com/](http://hussanddalton.com/)

Resophonic Guitar by Mule Guitars

[www.muleresophonic.com/](http://www.muleresophonic.com/)

All songs by John McCutcheon

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Cabin Fever: Songs from the Quarantine

John McCutcheon

Appalsongs 2020

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# Cabin Fever

## SONGS FROM THE QUARANTINE

I returned from a tour of Australia on March 16, 2020 to find a whole new world in my country. As I'd traveled internationally, I self-quarantined at *Traveler's Rest*, our little log cabin in the north Georgia mountains. And there I began to write. These songs are some from that time. I began sharing these songs with friends whose conversations inspired them, with songwriting students of mine, hoping to encourage them to use this time creatively, with and for people who needed to know they were seen, heard, and honored. These are snapshots, moments in time. I'm still writing, still ruminating this strange, separate reality. I hope you find something herein that you deem helpful, or amusing, or at least a pleasant way to pass the time. Good luck. See you on the other side. Because there's always another side.

—John McCutcheon

April 2020

## Special Thanks

Special thanks to Carmen, Bah & Grolia, Maybelle, AFM Local 1000, and, always, to Katie, William, Ruby, Erin, Sam, Grace, Lillian, Brady, Chloe, Pedrito, and the Willard.

Extra special thanks to the many brave workers who keep us safe, healthy, and going in these times: folks who work in health care, grocery stores, pharmacies, delivery services, sanitation, first responders, and so many more. I am especially grateful for the many creative ways people have learned to stay connected and care for one another. May we remember how to do this "when all of this is over."



# Jan Fever Songs & Lyrics

## Songs From The Quarantine

### Front line

words & music by John McCutcheon

For the health care workers who brave the front lines of the fight against COVID-19.

I'm on a 12-hour shift  
A 7-day streak  
Haven't held my kids  
In over 2 weeks  
I could tell you more  
But I'm too tired to speak  
This is life on the front line

Not enough gloves  
Not enough masks  
Not enough hands  
And too many tasks  
When is help coming?  
Everyone asks  
This is life on the front line

Chorus  
On the front line  
There's no place to go  
Facing the foe  
Wherever it's found  
On the front line  
No time to be scared  
Pray you're prepared  
So you just stand your ground

Back in my training  
Infectious disease  
Was just an abstraction  
All dry expertise  
We never were trained  
To fight from behind  
But this is life on the front line Chorus

Bridge  
Scrub and gown up  
Pray and jump in  
Day after day  
Again and again  
A hopeless mission  
Or a noble last stand  
Sometimes it's as simple  
As holding a hand

At the end of my day  
Dead to my bones  
Sick in my heart  
When I finally get home  
I sleep in the basement  
It's safer alone  
This is life on the front line Chorus

I pray I'll stay healthy  
Though the chances are slim  
I pray it's a battle  
We'll finally win  
But tomorrow, no matter,  
I'll show up again  
'Cause this is life on the front line

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### Sheltered in Place

words & music by John McCutcheon

After a conversation with my dear pal, Richard Bresnahan.

The order came down from the top  
Everything normal must stop  
Well, you may not know  
That took place long ago  
For lots of us folks here in town  
Y'all just don't know that we're around

I'm one of the ones you forget  
When I finally get home  
No name and no face  
Just a small bit of space  
No address, no email, no phone  
And no chance that I am not alone

Chorus  
I've sheltered in place for years  
Nobody knows that I'm here  
I'm one of the many who just disappears  
I've sheltered in place for years

At the spotlight, with a small cardboard sign  
As I slowly walk down the line  
You stare straight ahead  
No word need be said  
As the windows roll up one by one  
And you head off to home when you're done Chorus

Bridge  
My own home, it isn't too far  
The underpass, a tent, if I'm lucky, a car  
No, it wasn't all like this, and won't be forever  
But I know there's no such word as "never"

The Dorothy Day House closed its door  
'Til this virus is over, can't stay there no more  
I don't know for sure  
But I doubt there's a cure  
For the worst things that drive us apart  
And that silently poison our heart Chorus

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### Control

words & music by John McCutcheon

I love birds  
I feed 'em every day  
I try to find a way  
To coax them to our yard  
In summer and the wintertime  
In autumn and in spring  
I love to hear them sing  
But one thing can make it hard

Squirrels  
They show up every day  
Steal half the seed away  
A most ingenious thief  
They used to drive me mad  
I'd holler, stamp, and shout  
Until I figured out  
It wasn't worth the grief

Chorus  
I cannot change the weather  
I can't hold back the sea  
The only role I can control  
Is how it is with me  
So I now fill the feeders  
More often than before  
These days the squirrels  
Don't bother me no more

I love corn  
My granddad once revealed  
Took me to the field  
We ate right off the stalk  
Planted row on row  
My neighbor Roy and I  
Can't wait for late July  
It's all that we would talk

But crows  
It's in their DNA  
I knew there was no way  
To thwart them from their task  
No, there weren't no scarecrow  
Could ever do the job  
They'd plunder half the cobs  
'What we gonna do?" Roy'd ask

Chorus  
I cannot change the weather  
I can't hold back the sea  
The only role I can control  
Is how it is with me  
Now I just plant twice as much  
As what I did before  
These days the crows  
Don't bother me no more

Facebook  
I used to find old friends  
But all to quick descends  
Into vitriol and bile  
No one has ever changed  
A single heart or mind  
By all the crap you find  
In a medium so vile

But the log out  
It is so satisfying  
Especially after trying  
To mediate some fight  
It's all at your command  
It is the power of no  
It is I have to go  
Good luck, y'all, good night

Chorus  
I cannot change the weather  
I can't hold back the sea  
The only role I can control  
Is how it is with me  
All the extra time I have  
I read and play and write  
Spend time with my family  
Get good sleep every night  
There are things that matter  
And most you can't control  
And figuring the difference  
Is a tonic for your soul

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### That's All

words & music by John McCutcheon

For Jerry Rainey

Who'd have thought it would be him  
Starting it my door  
Unexpected, unprepared  
Ready to give what for  
He heard about what happened  
Dropped everything and came  
Simply showing up  
Is what gives friendship its good name

Chorus  
No, I didn't have to ask  
And I didn't have to call  
He is just a friend  
That's all

He stood there smiling awkwardly  
And reached his hand to mine  
Lifted up a six pack  
Said, "I've just got this... and time"  
We went out back and sat in silence  
Staring at the stars  
Wondering at the folks you meet  
Exactly where you are Chorus

Bridge  
We're so afraid of what to say  
There is no right or wrong  
It's easier to stay away  
Too soon it's too long

I thought of all the other guys  
I expected would come round  
But in this long and lonesome hour  
They're nowhere to be found  
We clinked our bottle necks together

'Neath those starry skies  
I took and drank and thanked the Lord  
For beer and this surprise Chorus

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### Gespers

words & music by John McCutcheon

The sun hangs low  
In the sky tonight  
Paints these hills  
In a world of light  
This violet hour  
This waning day  
This is the prayer  
I will pray

Chorus  
Bless this world  
We hold so dear  
The ones who've gone before  
The ones still here  
All the joy and loss  
The pain and laughter  
We offer thanks  
Forever after

We pray for peace  
We rush to war  
From those with less  
We ask for more  
We hoard, we gather  
We give, we grieve  
And in our certainty  
Cannot believe Chorus

No, there is no map  
To show the way  
To guide our journey  
To the light of day  
But the stars are stories  
Hung clear and bright  
That the dawn will rise  
From the darkest night Chorus

Bridge  
Make me whole  
As from the start  
Heal the broken bones  
Of this broken heart  
Give me strength  
To do my part  
Is all I'm asking

As evening settles  
Without a sound  
The lights come on  
Across this mountain town  
Each holds a place  
Or two in soul  
Each is a pinpoint  
Of homely grace Chorus

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### When All of This Is Over

words & music by John McCutcheon

After a conversation with my friend, Tracy Hickman.

When all of this is over  
And we're given the all-clear  
When we venture back in public  
No longer have to fear  
As we look back on these past months  
And how it used to be  
I wonder if we'll jump back in  
Quite so eagerly

Cause we had time for reading  
For board games and for cards  
For getting in our gardens  
For cleaning up our yards  
We tried outrageous recipes  
Even learned how to bake bread  
Called our loved ones on the phone  
Spent lots more time in bed

Sure, we binge-watched too much Netflix  
Blew entire days  
And we drove each other crazy  
In a hundred different ways  
For supper we ate breakfast  
For breakfast had ice cream  
We learned how to be bored again  
Found the time to dream

So, when all of this is over  
And from quarantine set free  
I suspect there'll be some changes  
From how things used to be  
We can each get by with less  
We can each want so much more  
'Cause what matters truly matters  
When all of this is o'er

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### The Bean

by John McCutcheon

In quarantine, suddenly everyone discovered beans.

I'll ne'er forget the first time  
I was in a mountain kitchen  
The Kentucky town of Daisy  
T'was there at Roscoe Holcomb's house  
At supper time spread  
That Appalachian staple  
That is soup beans and cornbread

The bean is a question sweet  
The cornbread never sweet  
Add onions and some chow chow  
It's the finest thing you'll eat  
Some call 'em "miners' strawberries"  
Merle Travis wrote a song  
It was a favorite at our house  
When my kids came along

If you look close, every culture  
In the Americas it seems  
In the center of each meal  
Is the ever-present bean  
And you never use the canned ones  
They have to start our dried  
In Cuba it's the black bean  
And in Mexico refried

My mother used to bake them  
Using northern beans, so white  
For my wife's Colorados  
The red bean is just right  
Whether kidney, fava, navy  
Cannelloni, lima, a winter  
Nothing warms a wint'ers night  
As a nice hot bowl of bean

So I come to praise the humble bean  
Which plays so many roles  
Salvation for our hunger  
Solace for our souls  
Whether going vegetarian  
Or with a good ham bone  
You'll find, my friend, that in the end  
It always tasted like home

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### Earth

words & music by John McCutcheon

I recently heard an interview with the Cuban-American poet Richard Blanco. He recited his poem **Complains of El Rio Grande**. It inspired the perspective of this song.

You all listen up right here  
I'm gonna be perfectly clear  
It's getting mighty late now in the day  
You've been frittering away your time away  
I'm Earth and I got something to say  
So, you all listen up right here

I was here a long time before you  
In the Grand Scheme you're pretty new  
I survived asteroids and dinosaurs  
Ice Age, disco, a whole lot more  
But I ain't seen nothing like y'all before  
And I was here a long time before you

You act like you own the place  
Never learned that isn't the case  
You were born into a paradise  
Destroyed it without thinking twice  
Now you can't imagine there's a price  
When you act like you own the place

Don't say that I didn't warn ya  
Those fires in California?  
You're too divided to find a fix  
Poison everything with politics  
Ain't got the sense of a pile of bricks  
Don't say I didn't warn ya

But you're capable of such wonder  
As through my world you blunder  
I saw it right there from the start  
Your music, poetry, and art  
'Cause you're capable of such wonder

So, go ahead and go extinct  
You're much more expendable than you think  
Just eat up 'til you've had your fill  
You might worry 'bout me, and still  
I'll survive, but I doubt you will  
So, go ahead and go extinct

The Bible says after five days  
Things were good and going okay  
Then from what I understand  
On Day Six God created man  
Don't guess it worked out like He planned

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### The Night That John Prine Died

words & music by John McCutcheon

I met John Prine the way most people did: being gobsombed by his amazing songs. I was lucky enough to know John and performed with him a number of times. The verse about the bar in Cambridge was a night at the Cambridge Folk Festival in England. True story.

I had just returned from *Traveler's Rest* back home to *Smoke Rise* when my old friend Richard Bresnahan texted me the news.

In these times  
Each day feels like the next  
But just tonight my old friend Richard  
Sent a tearful text  
I could feel his sorrow on the screen  
Wondering if I'd  
Heard the news tonight  
That John Prine died

He seemed to pluck his songs  
Out of thin air  
They told our tiny triumphs  
And lives filled with despair  
Complex in their simplicity  
So honest and so true  
Just what every writer  
Wished that they could do

Chorus  
There's an angel from Montgomery  
That's finally taken wing  
And a place up there called Paradise  
Where even Sam Stone sings  
All the losers, lovers, loners  
Have gathered 'round the throne  
And in a mighty choir  
To welcome John Prine home

I remember a night, a bar  
In Cambridge town  
The band took a break, we took the stage  
And shut the whole place down  
It was Stevie Goodman's birthday  
Just eight years since he died  
We sang, drank, and remembered  
We laughed and then we cried  
Just like tonight when I heard  
John Prine died Chorus

Tonight I sit here thinking  
'Bout the stories we tell  
And the blessed few who really do  
Make heaven outta hell  
So, say hello to Stevie  
I ain't ready for you yet  
In the meantime, I know you'll enjoy  
That nine-mile cigarette Chorus

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### In Bristol Bay

words & music by John McCutcheon

I toured Alaska repeatedly in the 1980's and fell in love with the place and the people, especially the small commercial fishers in places like Cordova and Dillingham. My long-time best pal, Si Kahn, worked up there for years with the wide-spread grassroots efforts to stop the Pebble Mine, still an on-going fight. This one is for Si and for all those hard-working folks fighting to save their land, their waters, and their fish, and their livelihoods.

When I got home I'd seen it all  
And I didn't want no more  
So I took my time and made my mind  
To work Alaska's shore  
I love the quiet and I love to fish  
And I love I'm far away  
So I took my pension, bought a boat  
To sail in Bristol Bay

Chorus  
Oh, the skies at night  
There is gold and copper ore  
It'll take your breath away  
And the salmon run  
'Til the summer's done  
Up here in Bristol Bay

Oh, I made every mistake there was  
But I finally found my fisher  
Hired two good hands in Dillingham  
And joined the gill net fleet  
Down the Nushagak, past Clark's Point  
Clear to the Bering Sea  
The golden fish that grace your dish  
Are caught by folks like me Chorus

The word went down a few years back  
There is gold and copper ore  
Up the Kutchik to Illamna  
That drains down to the shore

The world's largest fishery  
Is standing in their way  
Our jobs, our lives, our kids, our wives  
Our world is Bristol Bay Chorus

Bridge  
It took me a while but I figured it out  
When I was in Iraq  
And I swore I'd never be used again  
If ever I got back  
For their thirst for oil and money, boys,  
They're willing to wage war  
You can bet they'll rob our home and jobs  
To get their goddam ore

Sometimes at night I sit on deck  
And watch the salmon run  
They spawn up river, swim to sea  
Come back home when they're done  
All their lives they know  
There is but one place they belong  
All the fish is when I proudly swear  
I'll fight my whole lifelong Chorus

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### One Hundred Years

words & music by John McCutcheon

For the past few years, especially since becoming a grandfather, I've been ruminating about where and who I am. I've always written about my own ancestors. This one looks through the other end of the telescope. A slightly earlier song that I rediscovered in quarantine.

100 years from now  
My great-great-grandchildren's time  
Will it bear any resemblance  
To this world of mind  
This place of boundless beauty  
Of wonders bright and bold  
I can't possibly imagine  
What the time ahead might hold

Each day I am more of the past  
The future is not mine  
I know what's been left me now  
Is for the next in line  
Have we packed well for their journey  
Or trying to be great again  
Forgotten to be good?

Bridge  
I saw the handprint on the cave wall  
Reaching from the past  
I wonder just what kind of ancestor  
I will be at last

100 years from now  
My great-great-grandchildren's day  
I hope they'll find the breadcrumbs  
I left along the way  
Just over the horizon  
A place I cannot go  
This message in a bottle  
From a century ago

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### Six Feet Away

words & music by John McCutcheon

My first, goofy song of this bunch.

I was a shut-in, like everyone else  
No work, and no school, and no bars  
By official insistence  
We each kept our distance  
As I went for a walk in the parks

Just as my hound, two souls on a leash  
Cooped at home day after day  
As homeward we steered  
And there she appeared  
I fell in love six feet away

Chorus  
Two people, two yards  
To have but not hold  
She held me complete in her sway  
I wanted so much  
But forbidden to touch  
So, I loved her from six feet away

Our eyes met, I nodded  
She nods in return  
My tongue froze, I'd nothing to say  
At that beautiful face  
I stared 'cross that space  
And loved her from six feet away Chorus

Bridge  
Don't think I can make it  
Don't think I can fake it  
Keeping these feelings at bay  
Two lost, lonely hearts  
Two meters apart  
Two wishing this sickness away

So, this is how love is  
2000 and 20  
The future's not like this, I pray  
But when this life is over  
And I'm neath the clover  
Once more I'll be six feet away Chorus

Coda  
How I longed to ask her  
To lift up her mask  
But I loved her from six feet away

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### Hallelujah Morning

words & music by John McCutcheon

The mothers drank on that great morn  
Everybody sing hallelujah  
The angels danced when the baby's born  
Everybody sing hallelujah

The baby crawled and the baby walked  
Everybody sing hallelujah  
The parents shouted when the baby talked  
Everybody sing hallelujah

Chorus  
On the hallelujah morning  
The bells will ring  
The lame will dance  
And the mute will sing  
The lion and the lamb lie down  
On the hallelujah morning  
Don't you hear that sound?  
Everybody sing hallelujah

The child read and then she learned to write  
Everybody sing hallelujah  
The parents smiled and they said, "All right"  
Everybody sing hallelujah

The children grew and they left their home  
Everybody sing hallelujah  
And learned to walk this world alone  
Everybody sing hallelujah Chorus

They laughed and they wept and they loved  
Everybody sing hallelujah  
And pledged their troth to God above  
Everybody sing hallelujah

Then the mothers pushed on that great morn  
Everybody sing hallelujah  
And another whole new world is born  
Everybody sing hallelujah Chorus

The sun goes up and the sun goes down  
Everybody sing hallelujah  
This old world keeps a spinning 'round  
Everybody sing hallelujah  
We rise until we each lie down  
We're lost until we're finally found  
Each heart will leap when we hear the sound  
Everybody sing hallelujah Chorus

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### My Dog Talking Blues

words & music by John McCutcheon

My dog, Maybelle, was my lone companion during my quarantine. This is for my, old gal. Good dog!

My dog don't know no quarantine  
She's just happy I'm around  
She'll fall asleep right at night feet  
And never make a sound  
Content that I can sit for hours  
Reading in my chair  
Sometimes she'll open just one eye  
To make certain I'm still there  
Or maybe eating something  
Maybe eating clumsily  
Clumsy enough to drop right here

No daily trips to gym or store  
We'll stay for days at home  
Where she directs the pace of life  
It's just she and I alone  
C'mon it's time to scratch my ear  
Now do the other one  
A belly rub would sure be nice  
When you are finally done  
Oh yeah, hat's it right there, good boy  
You are such a good boy

She has no watch but knows the time  
Right down to the minute  
When her supper should be served  
And that I'd best begin it  
She knows the hour of our walk  
And nags me 'til we go  
The route that we will take tonight  
Well, she will let me know  
Gotta check out her p-mail  
Reply to all  
Maybe leave an attachment

Back at home out on the porch  
There'll be a rawhide treat  
Then settle in to chair again  
And curl up at feet  
We'll sit up and feel the evening air  
My dog and my faithful hound  
My dog don't know no quarantine  
She's just happy I'm around

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### The Donkey

words & music by John McCutcheon

The nearest church to our little cabin (the mailing address is Ellijay, GA, though it is actually a good bit closer to Cherry Log, GA) is the Cherry Log Christian Church, founded by the remarkable Reverend Fred Craddock. I meet with the church's Contemplative Prayer group on the Wednesdays. I'm up there. At one gathering someone read the poem, **The Poet Thinks About the Donkey**, from Mary Oliver's **Devotions**. It is her poem that inspired this song, especially as I returned from my self-quarantine up in north Georgia on Palm Sunday.

Such a stray it was for the donkey  
The day he ever has seen  
It ends, as begun, tied to this post  
Ah, but the hours in between

They came, out of breath, in the morning  
Told my master their master had need  
And promised return by the evening  
Then they tugged me away by my lead

To the Mount of Olives, just outside of town  
The crowd there excited and gay  
They covered my back with blankets and cloaks  
And mounted me up straight away

His demeanor was calm and his burden was light  
More cloaks were laid out on the ground  
The procession was slow and the crowd seemed to grow  
As we made our way into the town

"Hosanna!" they cried, no word that I knew  
Still my brutal heart swelled up with pride  
For never a donkey had known such a job  
Or one like to given this ride

For I am no horse, free and fast in the field  
No ox, strong and sturdy with plow  
I am slow and obedient, patient and true  
Made for such duty, not

And like that it was over, my privilege fulfilled  
The ride, the crowds, the glory of grace  
To last me, sure, all of my days

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### Monet Refuses the Operation

words reworked & music by John McCutcheon

Inspired by and based on a poem of the same name by Lisel Mueller.

You say inspired by and based on  
'Round the streetlights in Paris  
An aberration of my old age  
And eye infirmity  
It's taken my whole life  
To find these gas lights are angels  
And to blur and soften edges  
You regret that I don't see

Fifty-four long years to learn  
What I call the horizon  
Does not exist and that the sky  
And sea are finally one  
That Parliament dissolves every evening  
In the Thames  
And the Rouen cathedral's built  
Of two mighty shafts of sun

Bridge  
But you say that you can cure me  
Fix this damaged vision  
Realign my top and bottom  
But respectfully I say

I will not return into a world  
Where things don't know each other  
As if the islands were not some  
Great continent's lost daughters  
A world in flux where light becomes  
Whatever that it touches  
Becomes the pond and the air  
The lilies on the waters

Then you could see how heaven  
Pulls earth into its arms  
Our mixed shapes, these verticals  
Burn to mix with air  
And how infinitely hearts expand  
To claim the world around about it  
Small fists passing sunlight  
To each other everywhere  
But you say that you can cure me  
Doctor, can't you tell  
It's taken all these years  
For beauty to find me

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### Traveler's Rest

words & music by John McCutcheon

My wife, Carmen, is a wonderful children's author who travels nearly as much as I do. *Traveler's Rest* is the name we gave to our north Georgia cabin where I was self-quarantined while I wrote these songs.

The harbor lights trail us  
Like stars at our stern  
All the girls in the town  
Will await our return  
With the wind at our backs  
And the salt in our face  
We'll live on the memories  
The sea can't erase

Chorus  
Goodbye to these waters  
It's goodbye to you  
Farewell to my shipmates  
Brave-hearted and true  
I'm off to the one  
That has loved me the best  
I'll hang up my hammock  
At Traveler's Rest

I sailed my first packet  
When only 16  
All the sights and the storms  
And the places between  
From an eager young lad  
To a tar, sick and sore  
Who swears that he'll never  
Go sailing no more Chorus

Bridge  
I've climbed all the rigging  
Set my last net  
I'm pulling up anchor  
'Cause I can't forget  
It's a life for the young  
And those out on their own  
Who'll never know hearth  
Or the longing for home

So think of me, lads  
When the wind's blowing fair  
Lost in your rum  
Or an island girl's hair  
May your nets all be heavy  
And calm be the waves  
And may you find rest  
At the end of your days Chorus

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