



Brewer & Shipley **"Weeds"** / **"Tarkio"** Collectors Choice Records

"Weeds" and **"Tarkio"** were originally released in 1970 and were this male duo's most commercially successful albums. "One Toke Over The Line," the opening track from the latter collection, gave them a Top 10 pop single in early 1971. Stylistically Michael Brewer's and Tom Shipley's music is best described as harmony rich folk-rock, and both albums were produced by Nick Gravenites [Electric Flag], and recorded at Wally Heider's San Francisco studio. The guest players on **"Weeds"** include Michael Bloomfield [Electric Flag] and Richard Greene [Jim Kweskin, Blues Project, Seatrain], while **"Tarkio"** features the late Jerry Garcia [pedal steel].

Both albums featured ten cuts, and the cover songs on **"Weeds"** are "All Along The Watchtower" and Jim Pepper's Native American influenced number "Witchi-Tai-To," which had given the band Everything Is Everything a minor chart hit in 1969. The former song appeared on Bob Dylan's 1967 comeback album **"John Wesley Harding"** and Jimi Hendrix scored a Top 20 single in 1968 with the tune. The penultimate cut on **"Tarkio,"** the soulful "Seems Like A Long Time" penned by Theodore Anderson is the only cover on that collection, and the song later appeared on Rod Stewart's **"Every Picture Tells A Story"** [1971].

As for compositions jointly penned by Michael Brewer and Tom Shipley, seventeen examples feature here, and lyrically many are clearly date stamped *circa 1970*. As a result, they're trapped forever in time. "Rise Up [Easy Rider]" was clearly inspired by the 1969 Peter Fonda/Dennis Hopper/Jack Nicholson film of the same name. In Richie Unterberger's specially commissioned liner notes, he quotes Brewer as saying of duo's lives at the time *"We pretty much were living **"Easy Rider"**."* The end of the Vietnam War was still a couple of years away, and at home America was experiencing riots in its streets – Watts [1965/66], Kent State [1970] and more. "Don't Want To Die In Georgia" and "Pigs Head" reflect the times with commentary on that social unrest. The latter lyric includes reference to *"Get off the streets the killing's begun."* The lyric to the goodtime sounding "Oh Mommy [I Ain't No Commie]," the B-side of the "One Toke" single, furnishes another social snapshot of the era. The lyric includes a name check for Mr. Nixon [then, the serving U.S. President - 1969/74], and the narrator goes on to mention his long hair and that he looks like Jesus Christ, then clarifies his state of mind by stating that he's *"Laying around the house and smoking marijuana."*

Also subjectively weed related, "One Toke Over The Line" was supposedly composed as a lightweight piece for the duo's own personal entertainment. They first performed the song in public as an encore at Carnegie Hall, where they were opening for Melanie. "Too Soon Tomorrow" and "Song From Platte River," in the vein of "Witchi-Tai-To," pursue Native American themes. The almost seven minute long dirge "Fifty States Of Freedom", another *time capsule* social commentary, closes **"Tarkio,"** and lyrically features little more word-wise than consistent repetition of the song title. As for songs about brotherhood and spirituality "People Love Each Other." and "The Light" plug that gap, while, here, that standard fallback for songwriters - love ballads, include "Lady Like You," "Indian Summer," "Oh, Sweet Lady" and "Ruby On The Morning."

Brewer & Shipley's music is far from unpleasant aurally, but, sadly, much of it is lyrically mundane and frozen in time. Next.....

Folkwax Rating 5 out of 10

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