

Tim O'Brien – Bio

Tim O'Brien was born on March 16th 1954 in Wheeling, West Virginia home of the long running WWVA Jamboree radio programme [aka Jamboree USA]. As O'Brien entered his teen years, The Beatles invaded the States and he was immediately smitten. Tim began playing guitar at the age of 12. However, after watching Doc Watson on television and buying a Flatt & Scruggs instrumental album, acoustic music became his main focus. By his mid-teens Tim was already performing in public with his sister Mollie. Aged 16 one of his aunt's lent him a fiddle but he struggled to master it, but a couple of years later he enjoyed more success with a mandolin his father gave him. Following graduation from high school O'Brien enrolled as a Literature major in a Maine college but soon abandoned his studies for a career in music. By this stage he had become an adept fiddle and mandolin player.

O'Brien lived and worked in Jackson Hole for a time, then moved to Boulder, Colorado, as the mid nineteen-seventies approached, because of the active bluegrass music scene there. He joined the Ophelia Swing Band with whom he cut a couple of albums [he also played in a band called The Bluebirds], and made his solo recording debut on the Colorado based Biscuit City label in 1977 with "**Guess Who's In Town.**" By 1978 O'Brien had met guitarist/vocalist Charles Sawtelle, banjoist Pete Wernick, and bassist/vocalist Nick Forster, and that quartet went on to form the bluegrass group Hot Rize [*]. Their self-titled debut recording was released in 1979 by the Chicago based label, Flying Fish [+]. Hot Rize went on to record another six albums over a period of a quarter of a century. In 1990 the group won the first IBMA Entertainer of the Year award but disbanded soon afterwards. The track "Colleen Malone" from "**Take It Home**" was voted IBMA Song of the Year in 1991. Hot Rize reunited in 1996 for a show at the Boulder Theatre and recorded their performance. It was eventually released in 2002 as "**So Long A Journey.**" To celebrate that release the band reunited for a short tour with Bryan Sutton on guitar, Charles Sawtelle having passed away a few years earlier. During the early nineteen-eighties Hot Rize evolved the side project Red Knuckles and The Trailblazers whose particular musical bent was western swing. Among their releases the latter aggregation cut an album in France during 1984.

Through the late nineteen-eighties and into the closing decade of the twentieth century, Tim cut three album with his sister Mollie. With the appearance of "**Odd Man In,**" O'Brien's third solo album, he re-ignited his solo career. Originally meant to be an RCA Victor release, all the songs were re-recorded for the album that was released by Sugar Hill. "**Oh Boy! O'Boy!**" and "**Rock In My Shoe**" were credited to O'Brien and the O'Boys – the O'Boys being jazz and bluegrass guitarist Scott Nygaard and bassist Mark Schatz. The Grammy nominated "**Red On Blonde**" featured Dylan songs, while "**Songs From The Mountain**" was a collaboration by O'Brien, Dirk Powell and John Herrmann that saw them perform traditional music in tribute to Charles Frazier's novel "Cold Mountain." "**The Crossing**" [1999] and "**Two Journeys**" [2001] found O'Brien paying tribute to his Irish roots. "**Traveler**" and "**When No One's Around**" were singer-songwriter collections, while the duo album "**Real Time**" was recorded in Darrell Scott's living room.

No slouch when it comes to writing songs, fellow West Virginian Kathy Mattea cut O'Brien's "Walk The Way The Wind Blows" and scored a # 10 Country Chart single with it in 1987. She included Tim's "Untold Stories" on "**Untasted Honey**" [1987] and scored a # 4 Country Chart single with the song. Originally included on the latter album, their duet of Tim's "Battle Hymn Of Love" peaked at # 9 on the Country Singles Chart in the summer of 1990. The song was also included on Mattea's 1990 retrospective "**Collection Of Hits.**" O'Brien's songs have been covered by the Dixie Chicks and Nickel Creek and he has produced recordings by the Yonder Mountain String Band and Balfa Toujours. O'Brien has been nominated for a total of three Grammys and in 1993 won the International Bluegrass Music Association Male Vocalist of the Year award. In 1996 Tim and his wife Kit, and two sons, relocated from Boulder to Nashville. A Tim O'Brien and Darrell Scott co-write "When There's No One Around" appeared on the 1997 Garth Brooks album "**Sevens.**"

Darol Anger [mandolin/fiddle] was the driving force behind the album cut by the bluegrass super-group NewGrange. He recruited Mike Marshall [guitar/mandolin], Phil Aaberg [piano/accordion], Tim O'Brien [mandolin/banjo/bouzouki/vocals], Alison Brown [banjo/mandolin] and Todd Phillips [mandolin/bass] and their self-titled, and to date only, album was recorded in a mere three days. Anger, Marshall, O'Brien and Aaberg had recently appeared on Darol's project recording "**Heritage**" [1997] and the following year, augmented by Brown and Phillips, they contributed to the "**A Christmas Heritage.**" In 2003 O'Brien was

invited to serve as president of the IBMA. In the late summer of 2005 Sugar Hill Records simultaneously released the albums **“Cornbread Nation”** and **“Fiddler’s Green.”**

Note.

[*] – Original guitarist Mike Scap left the band after three months and Nick Foster was recruited.

[+] – Now part of the Rounder Records group of labels.

Discography :

with Ophelia Swing Band : **“Swing Tunes Of The 30's And 40's”** [1974] ; **“Spreading The Rhythm Around”** [1975] :

with Mollie O'Brien : **“Take Me Back”** [1988] ; **“Remember Me”** [1992] ; **“Away Out On The Mountain”** [1994] :

with Darrell Scott : **“Real Time”** [2000] :

with Hot Rize : **“Hot Rize”** [1979] ; **“Radio Boogie”** [1981] ; **“In Concert”** reissued in 1984 on “2 for 1” Rounder CD with Hot Rize **“Hot Rize Presents Red Knuckles & The Trailblazers”** [1984] ; **“Traditional Ties”** [1985] ; **“Untold Stories”** [1987] ; **“Take It Home”** [1990] ; **“So Long Of A Journey”** [2002] :

with Red Knuckles and The Trailblazers : **“Hot Rize Presents Red Knuckles & The Trailblazers”** reissued in 1984 on “2 for 1” Rounder CD with Hot Rize **“In Concert”** [1982] ; **“Honky Tonk Swing Music - The French Way”** [1984] ; **“Shades Of The Past”** [1988] ;

with NewGrange : **“NewGrange”** [1999] :

Solo : **“Guess Who's In Town”** [1977] ; **“Hard Year Blues”** [1985] ; **“Odd Man In”** [1991] ; **“Oh Boy! O'Boy!”** with the O'Boys [1993] ; **“Rock In My Shoe”** with the O'Boys [1995] ; **“Red On Blonde”** [1996] ; **“When No One's Around”** [1997] ; **“Songs From The Mountain”** with Dirk Powell and John Herrmann [1998] ; **“The Crossing”** [1999] ; **“Two Journeys”** [2001] ; **“Traveler”** [2003] ; **“Cornbread Nation”** [2005] ; **“Fiddler’s Green”** [2005] :

Arthur Wood

Kerrville Kronikles 08/05 & 09/05

[885 words]