

Larry Carpenter, where have you been all my life?



By [Dwight Hobbes](#), [Sounding Off On Sound](#)
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There are good artists, great ones, and then there are those who come along every once in awhile and leave you just sitting there thinking things like, “Where’s this guy (or gal) been all my life?” That’s when you’re talking talent on the order of gifted troubadour Larry Carpenter. Carpenter sings in reflective storytelling style you warm to right away. And plays finger-picking guitar with a fascinating grace.



Across the Water, on the “tiny” Twin Cities label BT, is beautifully crafted on the order of once celebrated folksters like Tom Rush, Eric Anderson, Phil Ochs and such to make you feel like you’re welcoming home an old, long-lost friend. You can even pick out the historic strain on “Cold Missouri Water” where, among other singers, Paul Simon honed his ear for turning a deft phrase (Simon & Garfunkel did, after all, start out as a folk duo hustling up gigs in Greenwich Village.

“Poetic Justice,” for which Carpenter’s accompanied by a silken voiced Laura Moe in rich harmony, is a highlight—the melody carries well. The lyrics are wry, poetic, kind of Leonard Cohen-ish with “So I was not the one you wanted/ You can see I’m reconciled/ Must you be so disappointed/ Can you not carry on in style.” In the same vein is the subtle, somber, “Coming Down in the Rain.” Both are written by journeyman Buddy Mondlock and, fact is, the entire album is a collection of songs Carpenter gathered together after hearing somebody else sing them, including “Four Strong Winds” by minor folk figure from the 60s and 70s Ian Tyson. With his artful mastery of guitar and sure ear for melody, it’s a curiosity that he doesn’t write any of his own material. Not a drawback, just one of those “I wonder what it would sound like” notions.

Producer Bill Travers (who, with Moe and singer-songwriter Francis Duxbury III, make up St. Paul mainstays The Travelin’ Moberys) does a solid job capturing Carpenter’s intimate presence with crystal clarity, adding just the right extra touch here and there, no more (like Judy Taylor sitting in on flute).

Just in from performing a Midwest tour, Larry Carpenter’s taking it easy these days, poking his head out now and then to maybe play an open mic. If you want to catch him doing his set at a club, your best bet is to keep a close eye on him via [Facebook](#) as he doesn’t have a website and, in fact, doesn’t seem terribly interested in pursuing much of a profile. Otherwise there is, of course, this first-rate recording.

Photo courtesy Larry Carpenter