

Grand Junction, Colorado

## Brewer and Shipley gained notoriety by 'just kidding'

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When you hear the names Brewer and Shipley what do you think of?

I'll bet it is the song "One Toke Over the Line."

It might be "Witchi-Tai-To" or possibly "Don't Want to Die in Georgia."

But most folks would say "One Toke Over the Line" and who could blame them? That was really the duo's only single.

I have always been drawn to that type of harmony driven folk/rock. Other similar singles I remember from that time period — the late 1960s to the mid-1970s — are Ian Thomas with "Painted Ladies," the Stampeders and "Sweet City Woman," "Yellow River" from Christie, The Guess Who's "Share the Land" and Three Dog Night's "Out in the Country."

Being the music fan that I am, I still own all of those songs, on LP not 45, mind you.

I mainly bought LPs and really don't own any 45s, anymore.

Michael Brewer and Tom Shipley released nine records between 1968's "Down in L.A." and 1978's "Not Far From Free." I own six of them.

"Weeds" and "Tarkio Road" were my favorites.

Until 2004, the only thing that you could get on CD was "The Best of Brewer and Shipley," and it was lacking a few songs namely "Don't Want to Die in Georgia" from "Tarkio Road."

In 2004, Collectors Choice released two of Brewer and Shipley's LPs, "Weeds" and "Tarkio Road" on a single CD. The liner notes for the release were put together by Richie Unterberger, and there are some great quotes from the boys about their music. I want to share some of those with you.

“Both ‘Weeds’ and ‘Tarkio Road’ would be recorded in the San Francisco Bay Area with producer Nick Gravenites ... Gravenites was instrumental in assembling the backup musicians for ‘Weeds,’ who included guitarist Mike Bloomfield (who’d played with Gravenites in the Electric Flag); keyboardist Mark Naftalin, who’d played alongside Bloomfield in the Paul Butterfield Blues Band; violinist Richard Greene, who in the ‘60s played with bluegrass giant Bill Monroe, the Jim Kweskin Jug Band, the Blues Project, and Sea Train; and Nicky Hopkins, the most esteemed session keyboardist in ‘60s British rock, who’d played on important records by the likes of the Beatles, Rolling Stones, Kinks, and Who,” wrote Unterberger.

“The countrified feel to much of the record was supplied in part by ace pedal steel guitarist Red Rhodes, who played on such classics as the Byrds’ “The Notorious Byrd Brothers” and James Taylor’s “Sweet Baby James.”

Brewer wrote: “‘Weeds’ took on a life of its own; it kind of created sort of a hybrid music between our style and [the session musicians’] style. ‘Weeds,’ along with the Byrds’ ‘Sweetheart of the Rodeo,’ were two of the first albums of the time to incorporate more of a country thing.”

“We liked the sound of the pedal steel guitar played other than just a real twangy, hokey old-fashioned country ... the instrument itself, we thought, could be incorporated into more of a folk-rock genre,” Brewer wrote.

“Their next album, ‘Tarkio Road,’ boasted a similar sound, again with the help of session players and Gravenites. The most celebrated guest appearance was by Jerry Garcia, who contributed pedal steel guitar,” wrote Unterberger.

About “One Toke Over the Line” Brewer had this to say: “In fact, vice president Spiro Agnew named us personally on national TV one night as subversives to American youth, which we thought was hysterical.

“We made Nixon’s enemies list, which was a badge of honor we hold dear to our hearts to this day. So go figure. Who would have guessed? Much less that it would end up being a classic rock song still played all around the world, in movies and stuff. It cracks me up. ‘Cause we were just kidding, we were just entertaining ourselves. Other people chose to make a big deal out of it.”

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