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## Pickin' in the Dark Live Music Series 2005

### Brewer and Shipley

Concert Review of Saturday, July 23, 2005

Michael Brewer and Tom Shipley have written and recorded many of my favorite songs. We had hoped to have them play for Pickin' in the Dark in 2004, but things didn't work out that way. So their performance here on July 23, 2005 was much anticipated.

We enjoyed some good story-telling between songs. The crowd favorite was the one about The Happy Warrior, a lounge in Rochester, Minnesota. That's where the duo first presented, honed, and lengthened Jim Pepper's "Wichi Tai To" (to become one of their most popular songs) over a two-week stint at The Warrior because it was the only song, according to Shipley, they *"could sing that they didn't hate us for. The work guys came after work to hang out and drink way too much beer, and they took one look at us, and they hated us."* So they just kept on playing what they call *"the happiest song we know"* over and over and somehow survived. With about a fourth of our audience from Rochester (and apparently regulars at The Happy Warrior), the tale was very well received. Tom said, *"Don't tell me it's still there. Please tell me its lamp is dark by now!"*



Tom Shipley (left) and Michael Brewer, Americans

Second place would go to the explanation of how the song "(You Don't Have to) Make My Bed" (on the Shanghai album) started out with the title "All the Dogs Are Dead." That's actually no stranger than the long trip these guys have been on for almost four decades.

Other than "One Toke Over the Line" (the song that should probably have replaced the name of the group) and "Tarkio Road," the outstanding work on their first six albums from 1968 to 1974 did not receive the attention it certainly deserved. I highly recommend the

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following cd's to anyone who was born too late or missed them the first time around:

"Tarkio" (1971)

"Shake Off the Demon" (1972)

"Rural Space" (1973)

"ST-11261" (1974)

I also like their 1997 "Heartland" CD. You'll find one excellent song after another on all of these discs. The word "great" is perfectly appropriate to describe these guys as songwriters and recording artists.

A number of famed musicians played on Brewer and Shipley albums, including Jim Messina (Buffalo Springfield, Poco, Loggins and Messina), Leon Russell (another of my favorites, known to have stolen the show with Joe Cocker's Mad Dogs and Englishmen), Michael Bloomfield and Nick Gravenites and Al Kooper, Nicky Hopkins (Rolling Stones), Jerry Garcia (Grateful Dead, New Riders of the Purple Sage), Sneaky Pete Kleinow (just about everybody), Steve Cash and Steve Canady (Ozark Mountain Daredevils), The Eagles, and connections with Stephen Stills (Buffalo Springfield, Crosby Stills Nash and Young). Those names will mean different things to everyone who reads them, but there's a tremendous amount of quality music represented there.



Classic Rock stations like our local KQQL "KOOL 108" currently play "One Toke Over the Line" every day of the year. It was written in an afternoon, was an afterthought inclusion on the "Tarkio" album project, and was released as a single by their record label while the pair

vacationed. They came home to a hit that has kept hitting for 35 years. It has been both a crown on their heads and a millstone around their necks, a happenstance that came to determine the road they would travel, whom they represented and whom they could not represent, who would listen, and who would not. It has opened doors and built walls. It has both colored and tainted everything they have done since that afternoon. It is their crime. It is their heroic deed. No kidding, this is true: It landed them by name on President Richard M. Nixon's list of subversives at the same time it was being played as a gospel song on the Lawrence Welk Show (it says "Sweet Jesus" in there a couple times, I think). That's how strange it's been.

Actually, the Nixon/Welk polarity, while kind of cute, is two cases of bad aim. Tom Shipley and Michael Brewer don't seem to have ever been pegged right by anybody. They are folk-rocking singing songwriters with a hit that makes them too commercial to be welcomed by lots of other folkies, and perhaps too thoughtful, eloquent, polished, and exquisite in their craftsmanship to appeal to the audience that keeps stations playing "One Toke" over the radio.

Whatever they are is what they are, whatever that is. It has something to do with America and Freedom.

Before they sang "Song from Platte River" from the "Tarkio" album (a song I dearly love), Michael Brewer told the audience:

*"Over the years, Tom and I have written a lot of songs about America and our freedom. It seems to us that those freedoms are just gettin' harder to come by all the time. Topper and I were just talkin' about it in the trailer a while back. We want our America back.*

*You know, things have really changed. They're changin' fast, not necessarily for the better. Now we've got a Patriot Act. We have to...get ready for a totalitarian kind of regime. Seems like people are just linin' up these days, you know, to give up our hard-won freedoms.*

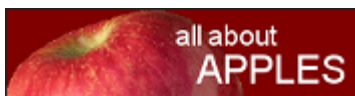
*Freedom is what America's supposed to be all about. It's really easy to give 'em up, but it's not easy to get 'em back."*

I'm including that statement now because only a handful of people have heard it. That's because Scott County, our local government, intimidated people from buying tickets to concerts at Minnesota Harvest. Brewer and Shipley were the last performers of the Pickin' in the Dark series before Judge Stacey shut us down. I guess we're on the same road of being misunderstood as Brewer and Shipley. We think we're just apple growers, up on the hill and back in the woods, mindin' our own business and playin' some tunes with our friends. But the county smells trouble, and I guess we're it.

"I Don't Want to Die in Georgia" is one of my favorite songs (from "ST-11261"), but that ain't gonna happen, is it.

Visit [www.brewerandshipley.com](http://www.brewerandshipley.com)

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