

Tedd Browne Lives!

*A Lake George Album
by a Forgotten Folk
Singer of the Sixties is
Reissued as a CD*

By Anthony F. Hall

In the summer of 1964, guitarist and singer Tedd Browne was playing folk songs, spirituals and calypso tunes six nights a week at Lake George's Cosmic Theatre-Restaurant (formerly the Cosmic Coffee House) on Canada Street.

The Savannah, Georgia native, who had performed with comedian Dick Gregory and jazz pianist George Shearing, had shown up in Lake George the previous summer, playing twice at the Cosmic.

Legend has it that Shirley Caple, the owner of the Cosmic and the sister of former Mayor Sterling Caple, caught Browne's act at the Bitter End in New York and booked him for those two performances in Lake George; he then fell in love with the area.

Browne spent the winter in the North Country, performing at local high schools and in ski lodges around Killington, and, it later emerged, writing ballads based on Lake George legends and history.

When Browne returned to Lake George the next summer, he had enough material for an album, which he called "Lake George: A Musical Portrait." The album, which included songs about Fort William Henry, Isaac Jogues and Lake George Steamboats, was produced by Caple. Its cover was dominated by an aerial photo of the lake by Dick Dean and was printed by Adirondack Resorts Press, the publisher of the Lake George Mirror, which featured Browne prominently in its columns.

"Mr. Browne has the unusual ability to satiate most everyone's requirement for excellent entertainment," the Mirror wrote. "Those who are unfamiliar with folk tunes as well as people who are ardent folk music fans find his music to their liking. Mr. Browne possesses a harboring personality of human understanding, warmth and love for his fellowmen. These qualities infiltrate his performances as well as his

daily life."

The Mirror's assessment of Browne's personality and the quality of his performances is echoed by local residents who saw him perform at the Cosmic and came to know him that summer.

"His singing was heart-wrenching; it was very emotional," recalls Dennis Dickinson. "He was a big, strapping guy, but very gentle and great with kids."

He spent much of his time off stage fishing with the late David Grant, who would later become Dickinson's brother-in-law.

But Browne never returned to Lake George, and four years later, he was dead, killed in a random act of violence in Cleveland.

His "Lake George: A Musical Portrait," however, found its way into the hands of a number of collectors, and remained a favorite of those who had heard him perform in Lake George or who had purchased it as a souvenir of Lake George.

Among those who fell under the album's spell was Schenectady-based singer-songwriter Mark Mason.

"I discovered the album in my father's record collection, and I never stopped listening to it," said Mason. "As a kid, I loved the forts, Fort William Henry and Ticonderoga, and here was this guy whose haunting music took you back through time to the battles themselves."

Mason performed Browne's songs about Lake George himself but, he said, "it was always my dream to put Tedd Browne's music out there for a wider audience."

That dream has now been fulfilled. Last June, Mason released a digitally remastered version of Browne's album as a Compact Disc.

According to Mason, the original audio tapes have long since disappeared. But Weedgie Brothers of Weedgie Music-BMI located two

rare copies of the album and restored them onto CD. Using technology designed in Switzerland, Larry DeVivio of Silvertone Mastering remastered the original vinyl. The result is an acoustically flawless new CD, that, as Mason says, "keeps the warm vinyl sound. "It's very special music, very laid-back folk," says Margit Mitchell, a friend of Mason who encouraged him to complete the project and whose Lake George Village shop, the Gift Cottage, sells the CD.

Listening to the album is a great way to learn about the history of the region, says Mason.

But, he adds, it's not just a history lesson, or, for that matter, a kitsch-like artifact of the era satirized in the film "A Mighty Wind."

"The music stands on its own, and its getting a lot of airplay on radio stations' folk music shows. Someone said every one of his songs could have been sung by the Kingston Trio, and I agree with that," said Mason. "If he hadn't been killed, he would definitely have become a big name."

Mason is now in the process of re-releasing another album by Browne called "LBJ: A Musical Portrait," which champions the former president as a Civil Rights leader.

"Lake George: A Musical Portrait," can be purchased online from Weedgie Music or at the Gift Cottage on Canada Street in Lake George Village.

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