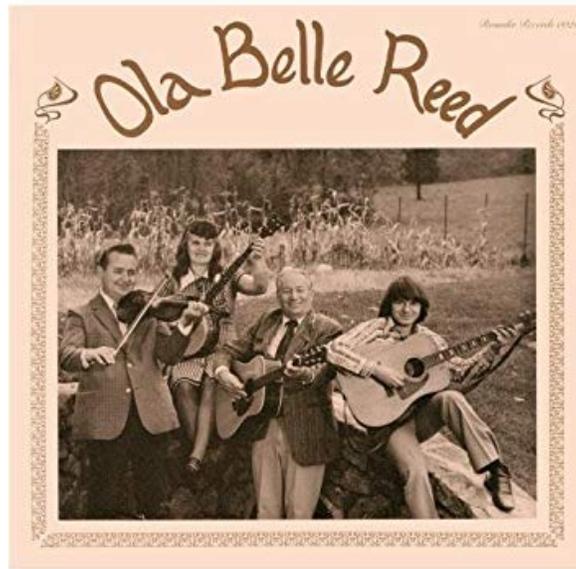


**These reminiscences by  
DAVID REED,  
musician and son Ola Belle Reed,  
were supplied to the Library of Congress  
on April 3, 2019**



*Album cover; David Reed at far right*

One day in either September or October 1972, we received a call from a man named Gei Zantzinger. He said he wanted to do some recording of Ola Belle and family which, at that time, included Ola Belle; her brother, Alex; her husband, Bud; and her son, David, plus other musicians of her choice. She chose John Miller, on fiddle, and Alan Reed (no relation to Ola Belle), on clawhammer banjo.

So when we came together on a date to start the recordings, we loaded our instruments and took off toward Gei's to make it happen. When we got there, we drove down Gei's lane to his house. From what I remember, it was a dirt road. When we arrived at his house we got a glimpse of a stone house from what I recall.

Gei greeted us with open arms of joy, kindness [and] with the utmost respect. Before we went in, we had no idea what kind of studio equipment or set-up Gei had. When we entered the door, to the left was his living room. Off to the right at the end of the living room was a track reel-to-reel recorder sitting pretty in the corner. I don't remember what kind it was but it looked so cool to me.

He must have had a small mixer for all the mics he used. I was thinking I was going to be a big time star and my future was set. [My brother] Alex didn't go to any of the recordings. Mom begged him to go but for whatever reason he backed out of going. Besides saying "hello," right after that that, the first question Gei asked was, "Where's Alex?" Gei was expecting Alex to come too but he didn't. Ola Belle and Alex were always a team and, for the first time ever, it was [going to be] Ola Belle minus Alex for this particular recording. Mom kept begging Alex to go but he just kept saying "no." Anyhow, the recording started and the reels started to roll as the

VU meters began to jump. Mom had the songs written down while some of the songs were not planned.

I was a young 19 year old gung-ho guitar picker. It was around Sept. or Oct. 1972 when these recordings were made by Gei. I had been flatpicking a guitar [for] about one and ½ years. A friend by the name of Victor Evdokimoff turned me on to bluegrass guitar by playing an all-gospel LP record. He played the whole album of Ralph Stanley's "Cry from the Cross." The one song that really stuck out was "Take Your Shoes Off Moses" which featured Keith Whitley taking a guitar break.

So I really took interest in bluegrass guitar picking. The only guitar instrumental on the ["Ola Belle Reed"] record was a song titled "Flop-Eared Mule" which also featured John Miller on fiddle. I learned that tune from watching a man by the name of Burl Kilby. He was a banjo player for Alex and Ola Belle from around 1964 or 1965 till the end of their career. We were in the band's dressing room once when he picked up the guitar and played the "Flop-Eared Mule." I watched his fingers and that really helped me learn the song. At the session, I was just itching to be heard, so I picked up the guitar and started picking. The next thing you know the song got recorded and ended up on the record!

Gei had a great personality and we all felt relaxed and comfortable and that gave us all confidence while we played our instruments. Once and awhile, he would nod his head and smile at us and that made us feel even better. When we were recording "Wayfaring Pilgrim," I was real nervous and worried about making a mistake so I concentrated on every note I played. On "God Put a Rainbow in the Clouds," John Miller played the rhythm guitar while I played the lead. Of course, Mom sang the lead and clapped her hands while I sang the tenor. By that time, my fingers had loosened up. I remember how good that felt.

On "Wayfaring Pilgrim," Mom skipped a beat on my instrumental break so I just went with it. I remember that very well.

I can remember Mom talking about the song "Go Home Little Girl." She would say, I wrote that song for Dave. I had an Ovation guitar and used it on almost all of the songs. Mom used her Gibson RB100 banjo that Dad bought for her in the mid to the later '50s. Dad played his 1968 Martin D-28 on the record. Alan Reed used his own banjo; I'm not sure what kind it was. From what I remember we sat on regular chairs and couches or whatever. Gei recorded some other songs that never got chosen to be put on the album. The only song I can remember [of those] was a song called "That's All." John actually sang that song and Gei recorded it. That song was a humorous one.

I remember recording the song "You Don't Tell Me That You Love Me Anymore." After listening to the words, I started thinking and wondered what Dad thought about that one. Of course, no one said a word. One day when mom wasn't around, he came out and said, "She wrote that about me."

On "Solider and the Lady," Mom tuned the banjo down to an Open D. John Miller played the fiddle; I played the guitar in a cross-picking style with the sixth string tuned from an E down to a D or drop-D tuning.

On "Rosewood Casket," John Miller was on fiddle; Bud Reed, my father, was on harmonica. Between the two, it really gave that song a beautiful background sound.

I was on the guitar on "Fly Around My Pretty Little Miss." I did a little flat picking with, again, the tuning in the drop-D tuning and John did some great fiddle too.

My dad told me he and my Mom were on the Whitetop Mountain and that's where she wrote "High On a Mountain."

"My Epitaph" was recorded with just me and mom. Mom did sing the song for me and I put the chords to it for her. This may sound strange but I didn't realize or remember us recording that song at those particular recordings sessions.

"My Epitaph" was written about a boy by the name of Ronnie Blevins. He got killed at the age of 16 while riding with his good friend by the name of Timmy Hayworth. They lost control of the car and it rolled on top of Ronnie and killed him. Mom wrote that song without picking up an instrument. She sang the song to me without a musical instrument. I put my own chords to the song.

The picture on the front was taken at Gei's homeplace. We were in front of a stone wall. I can remember those blue pants I wore that day. I can also remember the shoes I wore, too. I think I still have those blue pants somewhere. The guitar I was holding was Mom's Epiphone guitar that she bought back in the early '40s. I still have my guitar and banjo too. Around the house, I have a picture of just me taken the same day all those pictures were taken.

Gei took the recordings to Rounder and they decided to do them [release them] and the rest is history.

Some of my Mom's greatest influences, I believe, were her Grandfather, the preacher Alexander Campbell. He played the fiddle. Also her uncle Dockey (Doc). He also was musical.

As far as I know, she was influenced by her Uncle Dockey on the banjo [but] she learned mainly on her own.

Here is a list of artists that Mom and her brother Alex would comment on [on] their greatness:

- 1) Hank Williams, Sr.
- 2) The Carter Family
- 3) Bill Monroe
- 4) Lester Flatt-Earl Scruggs
- 5) Don Reno-Red Smiley
- 6) Stanley Bros.

Mom didn't teach me to play or sing, but the way she could connect with an audience influenced me to try to connect with a crowd in a similar way. I learned about tuning and how to pace a song better by things that she said.

The album was recorded at Gei Zantzinger's home in Devault, PA. It took us three days in a row.

Another time, she came to me and said, "I wrote some songs and I want you to help me with [them]. So we both sat down at the kitchen table and finished "Sing Me a Song" and "Tear Down the Fences." She wrote the words and I helped her put the chords to those songs. Most of the time she would sit in her chair and write different things and stash them with the rest of her writings. Most of her other songs she wrote...well, I'm not sure; she wrote a lot of them when I was real young. She could be anywhere anytime anyplace, home or wherever, to write a song. That's how it goes with songwriters. That's how it works with me, too. She would write a song partially and finish in about 10 or 15 minutes...or whenever.

I would say she would get her most inspiration in writing songs right here at home, sitting in her chair. She'd be wearing her glasses...

