



The Seldom Scene Remains to Be Scene

Cat-Ref.	SFW40248
Barcode	093074024829
Release date	14.03.2025
Label	Smithsonian Folkways (LC-09628)
Style	Pop / Country / Bluegrass

The Seldom Scene is a bluegrass institution. Since 1972, the group has remained quintessential bearers of the tradition, releasing nearly two dozen albums that cast a wide net for inspiration and repertoire. *Remains to Be Scene* is no exception, delivering stirring takes on bluegrass standards and providing their signature interpretations on deep cuts from the likes of The Kinks, Bob Dylan, and Jim Croce. The album is the first to be released since the passing of founding member and trailblazing banjo player Ben Eldridge, who contributes impassioned liner notes to the release. Beneath the album's title lies a plain truth: more than fifty years in, The Seldom Scene are looking ever forward.

- First Seldom Scene album since the passing of Ben Eldridge
- Original Seldom Scene are Bluegrass Hall of Fame inductees
- “It goes without saying (but I’ll say it anyway), the Seldom Scene is one of the most influential and durable bands in modern bluegrass history.” — Bluegrass Unlimited

Fifty-three years into a legendary career, much has changed about The Seldom Scene, starting with the venerable progressive bluegrass quintet’s various lineup iterations over time. But even as band members have stepped in and out of various roles, what’s most important is what hasn’t changed: an undeniable knack for blending both old and new music and traditions without sacrificing what makes either potent and durable. The Scene’s twenty-fourth album, *Remains to Be Scene*, features a true blue lineup of guitarist mandolin player Lou Reid, bassist Ronnie Simpkins, banjoist and fiddler Ron Stewart, dobro player Fred Travers, and guitarist Dudley Connell (who was recently succeeded by Grammy award-winner Clay Hess). Released by Smithsonian Folkways, the album is as robust and compelling an album as they’ve ever made, showcasing tunes from across the stylistic spectrum molded into a singular sound that’s pure Seldom Scene. That singular sound is rooted in the Scene’s inventive takes on bluegrass music. Since they started up together in 1971, the band has dexterously performed original and traditional songs while presenting fiery and soulful reinterpretations of material by Merle Haggard, James Taylor, Bruce Springsteen, and more. *Remains to Be Scene* kindles this spirit, galavanting through songs by Jim Croce (“A Good Time Man Like Me Ain’t Got No Business (Singin’ the Blues)”) and Woody Guthrie (“Hard Travelin’”). The concept of bluegrass unshackling itself from a conservative, straight-ahead mindset seems like a given in 2024, when some of its biggest stars fill stadiums and cross over with mainstream audiences, but the continued presence of The Seldom Scene acts as a reminder that it wasn’t always so. Even if their playing style feels more at home in intimate clubs, where the audience can feel their exuberance radiating from the stage, the Scene’s elastic relationship to genre established an

important precedent that encouraged their contemporaries and allowed bluegrass bands to expand their repertoire in ways that laid the groundwork for today's bluegrass boom. There's still something thrilling about hearing this band's alchemical skill as they draw throughlines from Bob Dylan to Bill Monroe. Self-produced with engineering and mixing by Jim Robeson at his studio The Bar in Rockville, Maryland, *Remains to Be Scene* caps the end of an era for the group in many ways. The album is dedicated to the memory of Bluegrass Hall of Famer and Seldom Scene cofounder Ben Eldridge, who retired from the group in 2014. But Eldridge remained a major presence and friend to the band, penning heartfelt liner notes for this album before his passing in April 2024. Also notable, *Remains to Be Scene* marks the final album for Connell, another Bluegrass Hall of Famer as a member of the Johnson Mountain Boys. Connell wrapped up a Seldom Scene tenure of nearly three decades with his retirement at the end of 2024. "Twenty-nine years, dude, that's a long, long time," Connell says with a laugh. "No regrets, I've loved every minute of it, and it's been a real joy working with these guys for so long. But I want to get out while I still have my mobility and can travel, walk my dog, things like that." The Scene has turned over many times since its founding almost fifty-five years ago, bringing together bluegrass artisans from a spectrum of musical experience. Now, the band is thrilled to welcome Clay Hess, virtuosic flat-picker and former lead guitarist for Ricky Skaggs' Kentucky Thunder. Before departing, Connell eloquently captured the long arc of The Seldom Scene in the story of bluegrass: "Throughout its history, The Seldom Scene always kept a rollicking, playful free spirit where anything can happen. That's one of the joys of this band for us players in it, as

well as for the audience. And good material counts, too, of course. I think Seldom Scene material will outlive all of us. I think it's a band that has made an important contribution to the development of bluegrass by saying, 'Yeah, it's okay to record a James Taylor song and have the bluegrass audience accept it, so long as it's a good song and well-done.'" Setting the tone for the album is "Last of the Steam-Powered Trains," a Ray Davies song from the repertoire of fabled British rock band The Kinks. The song dates back to 1968's *The Kinks Are the Village Green Preservation Society*, and the Scene perfectly transpose the tune's blues-rock groove to driving bluegrass. Later in the album, we're greeted by an interpretation of Jim Croce's "A Good Time Man Like Me Ain't Got No Business (Singin' the Blues)," as well as a pair of songs by Bob Dylan: "Walking Down the Line" and "Farewell Angelina," the latter made famous by Joan Baez in 1965. Unearthing old, new, and unexpected material to cover has always been standard operating procedure for the Scene going back to the group's 1972 recorded debut *Act I*, which sported songs by then-current songwriters James Taylor and Steve Goodman. The original Seldom Scene quintet of banjo player Eldridge, resonator guitarist Mike Aldridge, mandolinist John Duffey, guitarist John Starling, and bassist Tom Gray first came together in Bethesda, Maryland, in 1971. Part of a wave of progressive bluegrass bands that began through the

1970s, the group's fresh approach to traditional roots music with a contemporary mindset resonated with audiences. "One comment we get quite a bit at shows is folks coming up to us with a happy face to relate a story how they were touched by the original band and relate that to something in their own life," says bassist Ronnie Simpkins, who has also logged time in the Virginia Squires and Tony Rice Unit. "You still have the same sound,' they say. That seems like the highest compliment we can get from fans, that you can still hear the original band in there. We try to keep that intact as best we can." Since those early days, more than a dozen members have passed through The Seldom Scene's ranks. In addition to Simpkins and Connell, the current lineup has Fred Travers on dobro, with Lou Reid and Ron Stewart on various instruments. All five members are featured as lead vocalists over the course of Remains to Be Scene's eleven songs. "I've been asked a time or two, 'Have you thought about the next generation, who to pass it on to?,'" says Simpkins when asked about the group's continued longevity. "I'm not sure. A couple of weeks ago, we got a call from a promoter regarding future bookings at his festival. It was reassuring to hear him say, 'You don't have to worry, The Seldom Scene is an institution.' It's great to hear that we're looked on in that way. When The Seldom Scene first came out in '71, I was moved by their approach to bluegrass. They opened doors to so many new bands that were starting out and kind of patterned themselves after that. It would be a great thing for that to continue. I hope it does."

Band member

Dudley Connell	Vocals, Guitar
Fred Travers	Vocals, Dobro
Lou Reid	Vocals, Mandolin, Guitar
Ron Stewart	Vocals, Banjo, Fiddle, Guitar
Ronnie Simpkins	Vocals, Bass

Tracklist

1.	Last of the Steam-Powered Trains M: Raymond Douglas Davis	03:47
2.	Crossroads M: David Aloysius Norris	02:46
3.	A Good Time Man Like Me Ain't Got No Business (Singin' the Blues) M: Jim Groce	02:09
4.	Hard Travelin' M: Woody Guthrie	02:56
5.	Farewell, Angelina M: Bob Dylan	04:01
6.	Walking Down the Line M: Bob Dylan	02:35
7.	Lonesome Day M: Bobby Love	02:36
8.	I Could Cry M: Don Reno	02:29
9.	White Line M: William P. Bennett	03:40
10.	Show Me the Way to Go Home M: Cullen Galyean	02:46
11.	The Story of My Life M: Wayne Walker	02:47