

MORNING DEW

Notes:

Studio recording: *Grateful Dead* (March 17, 1967).

First documented performance: at the Human Be-In, January 14, 1967, in the Polo Field at Golden Gate Park, San Francisco. In the repertoire steadily thereafter.

Long before Weir and Barlow wrote their powerful condemnation of the arms race, "Throwing Stones," the Dead were regularly performing one of the most moving songs ever written about nuclear madness, "Morning Dew." **There is an interesting story behind this song, which was written by Canadian singer-songwriter Bonnie Dobson in the very early sixties.** On the Dead CDs where it appears, the song is credited to Dobson and Tim Rose, but in fact, Rose had no hand in writing the song. After months of searching, I finally tracked Dobson down at an address in London. What follows are comments about "Morning Dew" that she put down in a thoughtful, handwritten seven-page letter she penned in reply to a query I sent to her.

"I wrote 'Morning Dew' during my second or third engagement at the Ash Grove [the famous L.A. folk club] in 1961. When I'd go to Los Angeles I'd usually stay with my friend Joyce Naftulin, and it was in her apartment that I wrote 'Morning Dew.' I can't give you specific dates, but I do remember the circumstances. There had been a gathering of friends, and toward the end of the evening a discussion had ensued about the possibilities and the outcome of a nuclear war. It was all very depressing and upsetting. The following day I sat down and started putting together the song. **I had never written or even attempted to write a song before.**

Walk me out in the morning dew, my honey
Walk me out in the morning dew today
Can't walk you out in the morning dew, my honey
I can't walk you out in the morning dew today
I thought I heard a baby cry this morning
I thought I heard a baby cry today
You didn't hear no baby cry this morning
You didn't hear no baby cry today
Where have all the people gone, my honey?
Where have all the people gone today?
There's no need for you to be worrying about all
those people
You never see those people anyway
I thought I heard a young man mourn this
morning
I thought I heard a young man mourn today
I thought I heard a young man mourn this
morning
I can't walk you out in the morning dew today
Walk me out in the morning dew, my honey
Walk me out in the morning dew today
Can't walk you out in the morning dew, my honey
I guess it doesn't matter anyway
Well I guess it doesn't matter anyway

Words and music by Bonnie Dobson and Tim Rose

"It took the form of a conversation between the last man and woman—postapocalypse—one trying to comfort the other while knowing there's absolutely nothing left. When I'd finished, I recall phoning another friend and singing it to her over the phone. She said it was good, but maybe that's just ancient fancy at work. I think I sang it in public for the first time at the first Mariposa Folk Festival in Ontario. Anyway, I recall that the critic from the Toronto *Globe and Mail* described it as a 'mournful dirge.' I have that clipping, amongst others, stored away in a large trunk in Toronto.

"In February of 1962 I recorded an album at Gerde's Folk City in New York [*Bonnie Dobson at Folk City* on Prestige International] and 'Morning Dew' was the last track on side B. [The two songs that preceded it on the record were also anti-nuke tunes, grouped together as 'Two Carols for a Nuclear Age.']

"In 1964 I was contacted by Jac Holzman of Elektra Records, who told me that Fred Neil wanted to record 'Morning Dew' and that as I had not published it, would I like to do so with his company, Nina music. I signed a contract and Neil recorded the song. His is the original cover, on *Tear Down the Walls* by Vince Martin and Fred Neil. His singing of it differed from mine in that he altered the lyric slightly, changing 'Take me for a walk in the morning dew' to 'Walk me out in the morning dew.' He was also the first person to rock it. [Dobson's versions are definitely folk.]

"Among others who have recorded it are Jeff Beck, Lee Hazelwood, Lulu, Tim Rose, Nova, the Highwaymen, and, most recently, Nazareth. I'm probably leaving out a good many. I recorded it again on an album [*Bonnie Dobson*] for RCA in 1969.

"Now I must tell you about my involvement with Tim Rose. In 1967 while I was living in Toronto (from 1960 to

1965 I lived in the States), I had a call from Manny Greenhill, my agent, saying that Tim Rose wanted to record 'Morning Dew,' but that he wanted to change the lyric. I duly signed a new contract and Rose was written in as colyricist on the basis of his new lyric. Unfortunately, it wasn't till after the signing that I heard his 'changed' version. You can imagine that I was somewhat dismayed to discover that his new lyric was precisely the one that Fred Neil had recorded in 1964. So if anyone is entitled to be the colyricist, it is Neil and not Rose. You may be wondering why I signed the contract in the first place—some mistakes are only made once, and I guess I was pretty naive.

"In 1968, when Lulu released her single of 'Morning Dew,' a full-page ad was placed in *Billboard* referring to it as 'Tim Roses' Great Hit'—no mention of Ms. Dobson at all. From that time till now—particularly here in England—people have never believed that I had anything to do with the writing of 'Morning dew.' Rose never gave me any credit. Even Nazareth's single from 1981 has only him listed as composer. It has caused me a lot of aggravation and unhappiness. Even though I have and still do receive substantial royalties (75 percent as opposed to his 25 percent), it doesn't make up for the man's behavior."

She closed her letter with this:

"I always like the Dead's version of 'Morning Dew.' My one regret is that when they first appeared in Toronto—was it 1967 or 1968 at the O'Keefe Centre?—they didn't sing 'Morning Dew' in the concert I attended. I also regret that I was too shy to go backstage and meet them." (Jackson: *Goin' Down the Road*) 94