

## **The Weavers**

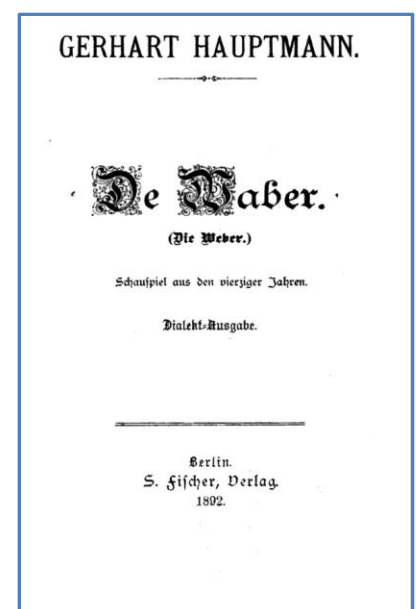
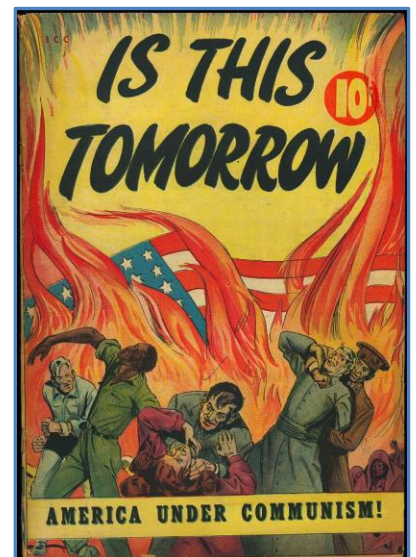
**1949-1953**

Pete Seeger was the driving force behind assembling the Weavers into a folk group. He and Lee Hays had founded the Almanac Singers in 1940 along with Woody Guthrie. On their own label in May 1941, they released *Songs for John Doe* – a groundbreaking album in the folk tradition that promoted both the American worker and the notion of staying out of World War Two. Approximately two months later, they released another album of cultural significance: *Talking Union* (Keynote 106). That same year, they released two more albums of folk tunes, one focused on sea chanteys and the other being folk songs about America, such as “House of the Rising Sun.” After the bombing of Pearl Harbor prompted the United States to enter the war, The Almanac Singers got together again to release *Dear Mr. President* in May 1942. Army Intelligence and the FBI labeled the Singers as Communists, and the group split up.

After the end of the war, Seeger and Hays founded People’s Songs, a group dedicated to promoting Socialist ideas and Racial Equality. Seeger continued to record his own music, and by 1947, he was associated with Charter Records – which released records via People’s Songs.

In fall 1948, Seeger and Hays began to sing for fun with Ronnie Gilbert and Fred Hellerman. At their first public appearance at a hootenanny in Manhattan on Thanksgiving, they became publicly known as the Weavers. Reportedly, they took their name from the 1892 play called *The Weavers (Die Weber)* – about an uprising of weavers in Silesia in 1844.

Although they were set up to begin recording for Charter Records – which was associated with the reorganized People’s Artists in 1949, the group was destined for bigger things – and to become one of the most influential American folk groups.



## *“The Peekskill Story”/“The Peekskill Story, Part 2”*

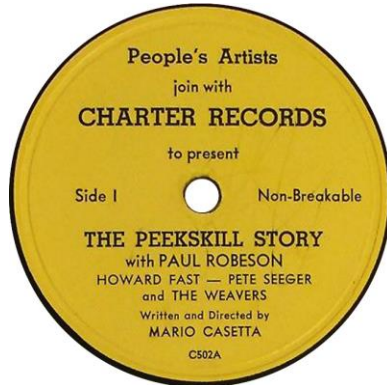
First appearance in trade magazines: no show  
Released: Late 1949

### Label 49

Charter

C502

Yellow label



One of the problems that is confronting America today is the so-called Negro problem. Even this problem is connected with the fight for peace and progress, not only in America but throughout the world. I would like to stress that the Negro problem is only one phase of the labor problem. Ninety-five per cent of the Negroes in America and other countries are laborers. The emancipation fight of the Negroes is closely connected with the fight of the labor class, because discrimination against Negroes is a desire to insure cheap labor. That is why the majority of the Negroes — except those few who are in the service of the imperialists and are enacting in Negro society the same role that the rightist union leaders are enacting in the entire labor movement — is in the camp for peace and progress.

Ask the Negro workers from the cotton plantations in Alabama, the sugar cane plantations in Louisiana, the tobacco districts of the South, the banana plantations of the West Indies, the African peasants who have been deprived of land in South Africa, and ask all the Negro inhabitants of the African continent if they want to fight for peace and cooperation with the Soviet Union and national democratic countries. Ask them whether they desire friendship with the Soviet Union, where the definition "backward colored nations" is just a hollow sound, where former colonial nations within the Soviet structure were able during one generation to rise to an incredible level of cultural and economic development. Ask the Negroes whether they want to join these forces of peace, or if they will allow themselves to be hurled into the abyss of a new war in the interests of those who are denying them the elementary rights of citizenship. Ask them if they desire to join the modern slave dealers, or whether they desire to fight for peace and progress. Obviously they will fight for peace and progress.



The Weavers' contribution to this record was the song, "Hold the Line."

Paul Robeson was a musician who became an activist for socialism and for equality for African-Americans. His speech in Paris on April 20, 1949, resulted in a direct investigation of Robeson by Congress — one in which baseball great Jackie Robinson condemned him. Robeson had made comments about black people wanting peace rather than war with the Soviet Union, and the Associated Press summarized those comments with words to the effect that black people would rather fight for the Soviet Union than for the USA. The printed comments outraged many Americans, and when Robeson scheduled a concert in Peekskill (New York) for August, at first they had to reschedule it for September 4<sup>th</sup>. On that day, there were protests against Robeson and against Communism, and some rioting took place. On the record released shortly thereafter, Mario Casetta documented the events revolving around what came to be called the Peekskill Riots.

## *“Wasn't That a Time”/“Dig My Grave”*

First appearance in trade magazines: no show  
Released: Early 1950

### Label 49a

Charter

503

White label with red print

The Weavers recorded five songs in November 1949. From these, Charter Records selected two tracks — forming the band's first single. Pete Seeger also recorded one song by himself, which Charter also issued as the B-side of a single from Mario ("Boots") Casetta.



***“The Hammer Song”/“Banks of Marble”***

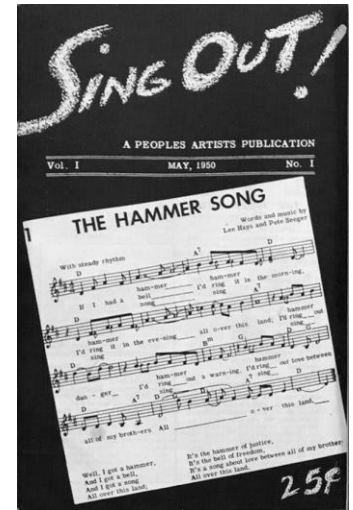
First appearance in trade magazines: May 1950  
Released: Spring 1950

**Label 50**

Hootenanny

101

Yellow label with no prefix.



The Weavers recorded their second proper single in December 1949. The A-side later became famous as “If I Had a Hammer,” but for the moment it sold only in circles associated with Socialist protest. The single wound up being reissued once (or twice) in 1952.

***“Train to the Zoo, Part 1”/“Train to the Zoo, Part 2”***

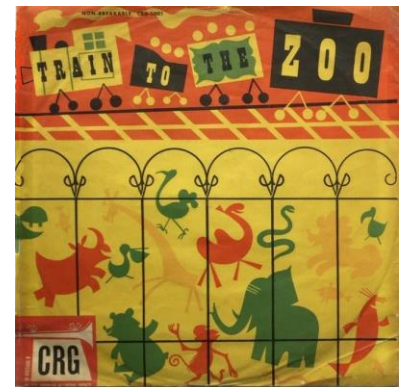
First appearance in trade magazines: April 1950

**Label 50**

Children’s Record Guild

CRG-1001

Light Blue, Black, and White label.



Copies from 1951 have a new backdrop and different colors. At least four picture sleeves exist as well. The first sleeve (above) has a large “CRG” logo in the lower left and does not mention any age group. Other copies feature a statement about being approved by boards of education. Still other copies also state that the recommended age group for the record is ages 2-4. Finally, there are copies that have a logo reading “Children’s Record Guild” in the lower left. By April 1951, the record was also available at the 45 RPM speed. Although the sleeve does not credit them, the songs on this record are by the Weavers.

**“Tzena, Tzena, Tzena”/“Around the World”**

First appearance in trade magazines: July 1, 1950

**Label 43**

Decca 27053

White and blue promotional label.



**THE WEAVERS**  
Decca 27053

**Tzena, Tzena, Tzena**  
A wonderful new group does the Hebrew original of the tune which they did in English so successfully with Gordon Jenkins. This is a thrilling record which art song collectors and Jewish nabes should want.

75--75--75--75

**Around the World**  
True folk material is this three-minute tour in pursuit of native folk dance music. An excellent and thrilling side.

73--76--73--70

“TZENA, TZENA, TZENA” (2:08)  
“AROUND THE WORLD” (2:40)  
THE WEAVERS  
(Decca 27053)

● Original rendition of the rapidly rising “Tzena, Tzena, Tzena” has their originators, The Weavers on deck here. This version is offered in Hebrew, with the group displaying their best on the side. Flip side is a folksy bit, with Pete Seeger telling the story. Top deck is the better of the pair.

Copies of the single pressed from September 1951 on mention its inclusion in a Weavers album.

Both sides of this record were recorded on May 4<sup>th</sup>, shortly after the Weavers signed their contract with Decca Records. The A-side of this record was in Yiddish. On May 26<sup>th</sup>, the Weavers returned to the studio with Gordon Jenkins and cut the sides of their next single. This time, the song was in English.

**“Tzena, Tzena, Tzena”/“Goodnight Irene”**

First appearance in trade magazines: June 17, 1950

**Label 43**

Decca 27077

Black and Gold label with DECCA in all caps.

**THE BILLBOARD PICKS:**

In the opinion of The Billboard music staff, records listed below are most likely to achieve popularity as determined by entry into best selling, most played or most heard features of the Chart.

**TZENA, TZENA, TZENA** .....Gordon Jenkins Ork & the Weavers..Decca 27077

An inspirational performance of a refreshingly original and unusual piece of material, this platter should soar fast. The melody is a Hebrew folk song, the lyric a Jenkins original. Tune, from the repertory of the exciting Weavers folk quartet, is done with vigor and sincerity to an irresistible rhythm. Flipover, using the same talent, is a haunting, warm rendition of a Negro folk tune by Hudie Ledbetter and Alan Lomax—should get good action.



Both sides of single 27077 were hits, and the Weavers (with Jenkins) had the definitive recording of "Goodnight Irene." The single was released at the "new" speed of 45 RPM also.

**"The Roving Kind"/"(The Wreck of the) John B"**

First appearance in trade magazines: December 2, 1950

**Label 43**

Decca 27332

Black and Gold label with DECCA in all caps.

<b>THE WEAVERS</b>	
<b>The Roving Kind</b>	<b>88--88--88--88</b>
DECCA 27332—Weaver's follow-up to "Irene" is a tangy folkie with a catchy refrain. They sell it zestfully. Could be a big item.	
<b>The Wreck of the John B</b>	<b>74--74--74--74</b>
Ballad from Carl Sandburg's "Song Book" is done in rumba. Charming item, but a bit on the cultist kick.	



The B-side was a faithful recording of the song that, more famously, the Beach Boys recorded as "Sloop John B." The first appearance of the lyrics in print was in *Harper's Monthly* magazine, December 1916, and the Weavers recorded both sides on November 3, 1950 – over 30 years later.

**"So Long"/"Lonesome Traveler"**

First appearance in trade magazines: December 23, 1950

**Label 43**

Decca 27376

Blue/white promotional label. Black/Gold label with DECCA in all caps.

SO LONG.....	The Weavers-Gordon Jenkins Ork and Chorus.....	Decca 27376
The fine vocal group plus Jenkins ork and chorus sell a stirring up-tempo folkie with much dash and vibrance. Recurring refrain (which is right in the current trend) is catchy and retentive.		





These songs were recorded on October 24, 1950 – prior to the selections for single 27332.

**“Across the Wide Missouri”/“On Top of Old Smoky”**

First appearance in trade magazines: March 24, 1951

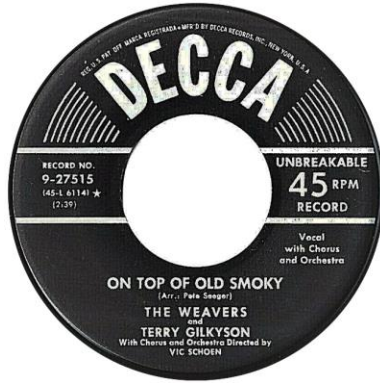
**Label 43**

Decca

27515

Blue/white promotional label. Black/Gold label with DECCA in all caps.

FLASH! FLASH! FLASH!  
 Watch For Decca Records Big “Surprise” Special Release  
**“ON TOP OF OLD SMOKY”**  
 by THE WEAVERS and TERRY GILKERSON  
 on Decca  
 NEW! UNIQUE! DIFFERENT!



The Weavers recorded these songs on February 25, 1951.

**“When the Saints Go Marching In”/“Kisses Sweeter Than Wine”**

First appearance in trade magazines: July 21, 1951



**Label 43**

Decca

27670

Blue/white promotional label. Black/Gold label with DECCA in all caps.



The Weavers recorded four songs on June 12<sup>th</sup>. These two were deemed to be the “best” and were released as a single shortly thereafter.

**Folk Songs of America and Other Lands**

First appearance in trade magazines: September 9, 1951

**Label 49**

Decca

DL-5285 = 9-151 = A-861

Black/Gold label *Microgroove* UNBREAKABLE.



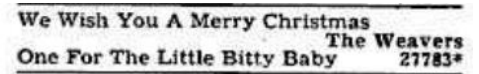




This album consists of tracks recorded between May 4, 1950, and May 4, 1951. While some of the songs had appeared on singles, others were brand new to the buying public.

***“We Wish You a Merry Christmas”/“One for the Little Bitty Baby”***

First appearance in trade magazines: October 13, 1951



**Label 43**

Decca

27783

Blue/white promotional label. Black/Gold label with DECCA in all caps.



This was the leadoff single from a new Christmas album by the Weavers. These two tracks come from a session on August 23<sup>rd</sup>.

**“Jig Along Home”/“Join Into the Game”**

First appearance in trade magazines: November 10, 1951



**Label 43**

Decca

K-37 = 9-161

White/Yellow label with DECCA in all caps.



This was the group’s second single recorded through for children – and their first for Decca.

**We Wish You a Merry Christmas**

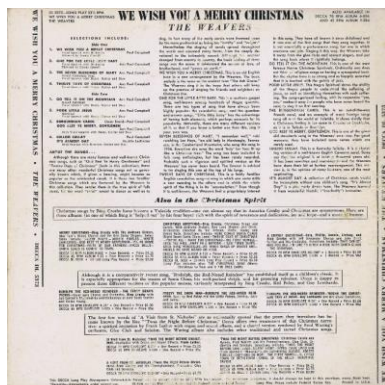
First appearance in trade magazines: December 29, 1951

**Label 49**

Decca

DL-5373 = 9-284 = A-896

Black/Gold label Microgroove UNBREAKABLE.



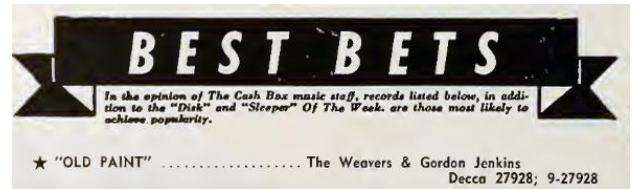


We Wish You a Merry Christmas Album—The Weavers (1-10") Decca (33) DL-5373; We Wish You a Merry Christmas; One for the Little Bitty Baby; The Seven Blessings of Mary; Twelve Days of Christmas; Go Tell It on the Mountain; Poor Little Jesus; Burgundian Carol; God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen; Lulloo Lullay; It's Almost Day.

Recorded in August and September sessions, this was the Weavers' contribution to the Christmas album market.

**"Old Paint"/"Wimoweh"**

First appearance in trade magazines: January 19, 1952



**Label 43**

Decca

27923

Teal promotional label. Black/Gold label with DECCA in all caps.

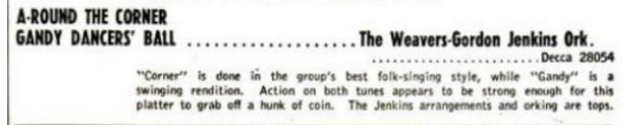


On other copies of the 45, the "vocal" information on side A is shifted to the right, and the song title and information below it are shifted down slightly.

Recorded on October 25, 1951, along with the then-unreleased “Midnight Special,” the single tracks seemed to be somewhat unremarkable to the trade magazines. The B-side, based on Solomon Linda’s recording of “Mbube” in 1939, wound up becoming influential to other artists. “Wimoweh” was played extensively in Seattle, was covered by other artists, and wound up being the basis for the Tokens’ hit single, “The Lion Sleeps Tonight.”

**“The Gandy Dancers’ Ball”/“Around the Corner”**

First appearance in trade magazines: March 8, 1952

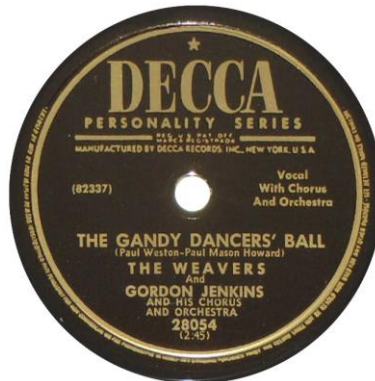


**Label 43**

Decca

28054

Teal promotional label. Black/Gold label with DECCA in all caps.



The Weavers’ first recording session of 1952, from February 27<sup>th</sup>, yielded just two songs – released almost immediately as a quick single.

**“Hard Ain’t It Hard”/“Run Home to Ma-Ma”**

First appearance in trade magazines: June 7, 1952

HARD, AIN'T IT HARD.....The Weavers .....Decca 28228  
A bright ballad, with a true folk flavor, receives an exciting vocal performance by the Weavers that should rack up healthy sales.

**Label 43**

Decca 28228

Teal promotional label. Black/Gold label with DECCA in all caps.



This time the B-side, “Run Home to Ma-Ma,” came from a session from June 12, 1951, while the A-side stemmed from a new session on May 6, 1952. This was an excellent and straightforward rendition of a Woody Guthrie song.

**“Goodnight, Irene”/“Midnight Special”**

First appearance in trade magazines: no show; Released: summer 1952 (?)

**Label 43**

Decca 28272

Black/Gold label with DECCA in all caps (exists)?



The A-side of this new single was actually the familiar Weavers song from 1950. The new part about this single was the B-side, which the group had recorded on October 25, 1951. Thinking this to be a reissue of an earlier record, the trade magazines did not pick it up, and it seems to have sold very poorly at first. The single began to sell in 1960, and I know of no copies of either 78 or 45 that date before 1955; therefore, I have shown a copy with Label 55.

**“Clementine”/“True Love”**

First appearance in trade magazines: October 25, 1952

**Label 43**

Decca 28434

Pink promotional label. Black/Gold label with DECCA in all caps.

**THE WEAVERS**  
**True Love** .....80  
 DECCA 28434—Folk ditty about the blandishments used to win romantic favor is projected with great appeal by the Weavers. A brisk and tuneful side many will enjoy.  
**Clementine**....79  
 Reading given the old favorite is in the distinctive Weavers' manner. Another effort that will bring pleasure to most listeners.



The recording session on September 17, 1952, produced two singles. The group’s treatment of “Clementine” as a peppy song is an interesting rendition – with the Weavers taking turns at the verses.

**“Down in the Valley”/“The Bay of Mexico”**

First appearance in trade magazines: January 24, 1953

**Label 43**

Decca 28542

Teal promotional label. Black/Gold label with DECCA in all caps.

**THE WEAVERS**  
**Down in the Valley**.....75  
 DECCA 28542—The Weavers have a new arrangement of the folk classic that’s great for audience participation. They sing it with unusual charm and warmth. Fine wax that could move with exposure.  
**The Bay of Mexico**....70  
 Simple folk-style ballad is projected easily by the group.

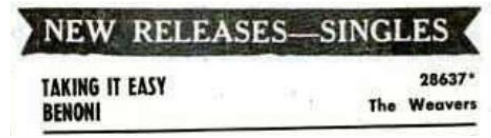




The other two songs recorded on September 17, 1952, did not fare so well as a single, although “Down in the Valley” came to be reissued later (backed by “Trouble in Mind”).

**“Taking it Easy”/“Benoni”**

First appearance in trade magazines: April 11, 1953



**Label 43**

Decca 28637

Pink promotional label. Black/Gold label with DECCA in all caps.



Prior to their first breakup, the Weavers assembled for the last time at Decca on February 26, 1953. That session yielded the band’s last two singles – this being one of them.

**“Rock Island Shuffle”/“Sylvie”**

First appearance in trade magazines: December 26, 1953

**Label 43**

Decca

28919

Pink promotional label. Black/Gold label with DECCA in all caps.

**THE WEAVERS**  
(Decca 28919; 9-28919)

© “SYLVIE” (2:43) [Folkways BMI—Ledbetter, Campbell] In their inviting manner, the Weavers send up a warm folk tune with a light air. Ok side.

© “ROCK ISLAND SHUFFLE” (2:34) [Folkways BMI—Newman, Campbell] The Larry Clinton ork again offers assistance for the crews’ peppy bounce version of a lively bit with a spiritual flavor. Fine blend of voices.



The Weavers had been contracted to Decca from early 1950 to early 1953. When their contract expired, the group disbanded. The group’s output had been varied, and their influence had been great among those interested in the Folk genre.

The Hootenanny single was reissued once on Hootenanny c. 1951-2 and then on Rita Records in late 1952. I know of no copies of the single on the Rita label, but the trade magazines mention it.

**Village Vanguard, New York**  
(Wednesday, January 25)

Capacity, 125. Price policy, \$2 minimum. Shows at 10:30, 12:30 and 2. Owner-op, Max Gordon. Booking, non-exclusive. Publicity, Jay Russell. Estimated budget this show, \$700. Estimated budget last show, \$900.

This spot is now down to one act, but if this one continues to do the business the joint doesn't need anybody else. The act, tagged the Weavers, has three boys, Pete Seeger, Lee Hayes and Fred Hellerman, and one girl, Ronnie Gilbert. Seeger uses a banjo and Hellerman is on guitar. All four do voices.

The act is rough, unpolished, needs costuming and better routining. But allowing for the individual shortcomings, the group has a drive and a spirit that indicates more than casual commercial value. In its present rough stage it would be a strong bet for TV and at least two of the Weavers' numbers, an African Zulu thing and an Israeli song, would make good recording candidates.

Seeger has been around for some time doing club and concert dates. The others are apparently newcomers. The act consists of an odd mixture of spirituals, folk songs (with audience participation), little-known blues and novelties. Each member of the Weavers gets a chance to solo and each shows latent talent.

The Clarence Williams Trio does the dance sessions. There's no music behind the Weavers. They do their own accompaniment. *Bill Smith.*

Mr. TAVENNER. Were you connected in any way with People's Songs?

(Witness consulted with counsel.)

Mr. TAVENNER. I mean in an official way.

Mr. HAYS. I am not aware that People's Songs was in existence during this period that the Weavers were in existence.

Mr. TAVENNER. During that period of time were you connected with the Weavers?

Mr. HAYS. As I said, it was 1949 through 1952, or early 1953. I may be wrong on those dates, but that is the best of my recollection.

Mr. TAVENNER. You say that you do not believe that the People's Songs was in existence during that period of time?

Mr. HAYS. It is the best of my recollection that it was not.