

TRIBUTE TO JOHN DUFFEY, AN
AMERICAN MUSICAL PIONEER

HON. DAVID R. OBEY

OF WISCONSIN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, January 9, 1997

Mr. OBEY. Mr. Speaker, it is a tradition of the House to take note of milestones and passages in our Nation. Mid-last year the world of music lost Bill Monroe, who was widely regarded as the founder of bluegrass. I take this occasion to call attention to the fact that sadly on December 10 we lost another giant in that musical tradition with the passing of John Duffey.

He was a remarkable singer of bluegrass, possessed of a powerful vocal instrument, one that could soar to impossibly high notes or become the soul of harmony and touch the heart. He was a good performer with mandolin and guitar, and he was the prince of wit and laughter.

He was a founding member of two bands that influenced string band musicians and singers across the Nation and around the world—the Country Gentlemen and the Seldom Scene. For more than 20 years, John Duffey and the Seldom Scene could be heard Thursday nights at the Birchmere in Alexandria. I had the pleasure of hearing them perform there often. When my constituents would come to town and asked me if there was something different they could see, I would always tell them if they wanted to see the people's music at its finest they should head down to the Birchmere and see John Duffey and his friends perform.

John Duffey did not like being boss and he liked being bossed even less, so these bands were composed of partners. A John Duffey comment about band structure can be applied to other aspects of life. He said, "Democracy doesn't work all that well, but it keeps a group happy longer than any other way of doing business." He knew that from spending almost 40 years in just two bands.

A flamboyant performer famed for spoofs of whatever needed spoofing and a general irreverence on stage, John was modest, genial, and almost shy off stage.

Like all great artists, John Duffey was aware of the beauty around him. He grew up in a family with a father who was a professional singer, performing at one point for the Metropolitan Opera. John seems to have never rejected any music that was in tune, and he had a good ear.

He heard and was attracted to the music of Appalachian migrants to the Washington area from the upland South. Music is judged as often for its social connection as its sound, and this music had no status. But Duffey was not concerned about such things and he gave this music a new milieu. Here was a tall man with a crew cut and rapier wit performing brilliant bluegrass and able to put any heckler in North America in his seat.

Duffey loved the Appalachian sound, but he was not from the area and did not care to pretend that he was. So he helped enlarge the reach of the music. He chose songs from modern and ancient sources; he worked on vocal harmonies new to the genre. Thousands of younger players were impressed.

In an interview on Washington's great WAMU radio station, host Jerry Gray recently

asked Duffey how he wished to be remembered. The answer was Duffeyesque: "Well, I hope no one will think I was a klutz."

When the passage of time allows a broader perspective, I believe John Duffey will be considered one of the most important creators of this music. Through his wit, laughter, extraordinary musical gifts and passionate performance, he said, "this is a great American working class music."

I extend condolences to his family, his fellow members of the Seldom Scene, and the thousands who will miss him as I will.

Mr. Speaker, I am inserting in the RECORD at this point four articles. The first, the obituary for John Duffey, written by Bart Barnes, which appeared in the Washington Post. Second, the accompanying newspaper article, written by Richard Harrington, which appeared in the Post that same day. Third, an article written for Bluegrass Unlimited by Dick Spottswood. And fourth, a tribute to John Duffey written by Dudley Connell for Sing Out! magazine. Mr. Connell is lead singer in The Seldom Scene, which was cofounded by Mr. Duffey.

[From the Washington Post, Dec. 11, 1996]

MUSICIAN JOHN DUFFEY DIES; LED THE GROUP
SELDOM SCENE

(By Bart Barnes)

John Duffey, 62, a singer and mandolin player who founded and led the Seldom Scene bluegrass group for 25 years, died Nov. 10 at Arlington Hospital after a heart attack.

Mr. Duffey, who was known to music lovers for a high, lonesome and lusty tenor voice that was once described as "one in a million," had been a fixture in Washington's musical community since the 1950s. The Seldom Scene was probably the premier bluegrass band in the Washington area, according to Pete Kuykendall, the publisher of Bluegrass Unlimited magazine and a former bandmate of Mr. Duffey's.

For 22 years, the Seldom Scene has played regularly at the Birchmere in Alexandria. The group also has toured overseas, played in most of the 50 states and produced dozens of recordings, tapes and compact discs.

The group's most recent album is "Dream Scene," released this fall. The Seldom Scene played with other bluegrass bands on the Grammy Award-winning "Bluegrass: The World's Greatest Show." Over the last quarter-century, the group has played for the likes of President Jimmy Carter and Vice President Gore, as well as for members of Congress.

The group was formed in 1971 by Mr. Duffey and four others: Tom Gray, who worked for National Geographic; Ben Eldridge, a mathematician and computer expert; Mike Auldridge, a graphic artist with the Washington Star; and John Starling, a physician and ear, nose and throat specialist.

The five men initially intended to sing and play together only occasionally, hence the name, Seldom Scene. "They started as a fun thing, like a Thursday night poker game or a bowling night," Kuykendall said.

But the group soon progressed from occasional basement gettogethers to regular Thursday night appearances at the Red Fox Inn in Bethesda, where they played to standing-room-only crowds, and, from there, to the Birchmere, where they became a weekly fixture.

The Seldom Scene's 15th-anniversary concert was held at the Kennedy Center, and it included a presidential citation from Ronald Reagan, whose press secretary, James Brady, was a regular at the Birchmere. It featured guest appearances by the likes of Linda Ronstadt and Emmylou Harris.

Mr. Duffey, a resident of Arlington, was born in Washington and graduated from Be-

thesda-Chevy Chase High School. His father had been a singer with the Metropolitan Opera, and the son inherited an exceptional singing voice with a range said to be three of four octaves.

As a high school student, the young Mr. Duffey developed a love for the bluegrass music he heard on the radio. His father taught him the voice and breathing techniques of a classical opera singer, despite what was said to have been the elder Duffey's lack of enthusiasm for "hillbilly music."

As a young man, Mr. Duffey worked at a variety of jobs, including that of printer and repairer of stringed instruments. But his avocation was music, and it soon became his vocation as well.

In 1957, with Bill Emerson and Charlie Waller, Mr. Duffey founded the Country Gentlemen, a bluegrass and folk music group that for about 10 years rode the wave of folk music enthusiasm that surged through the 1960s. The group disbanded in the late 1960s, and Mr. Duffey went to work as an instrument repairman at a music store in the Cherrydale section of Arlington, which was how he was making a living when the Seldom Scene was formed.

"When we started the Seldom Scene, we all had jobs and we didn't care if anybody liked what we did or not," Auldridge told The Washington Post's Richard Harrington last year. "We just said, 'We're going to do some bluegrass because we love it, and some James Taylor or Grateful Dead, and if people buy it, great. If they don't, what do we care?'"

Mr. Duffey was a large and imposing man with a precise and soulfully expressive voice, and his singing was invariably moving. But he also had an engaging, irrepressible and sometimes off-the-wall style of stage chatter and a superb sense of timing that could break up an audience with a one-liner.

"What people love about him is that you know he's one of these guys stuck in the '50s, but he's so happy with himself, so confident, and he's also nuts," Auldridge said in 1989.

In the quarter-century since its formation, the Seldom Scene built its reputation on flawless harmony, instrumental virtuosity and a repertoire that included traditional bluegrass and modern popular music, rock tunes, swing and country, gospel and jazz.

Over the years, there would be changes in the group's composition, but until last year, the instrumental core remained the same: Mr. Duffey on mandolin, Eldridge on banjo and Auldridge on dobro. But Auldridge left the group in December, leaving only two original members.

In September, Mr. Duffey was inducted along with the original Country Gentlemen into the International Bluegrass Music Association's Hall of Fame.

Survivors include his wife, Nancy L. Duffey of Arlington.

[From the Washington Post, Dec. 11, 1996]

JOHN DUFFEY: A MANDOLIN FOR ALL SEASONS

(By Richard Harrington)

The National Observer once dubbed John Duffey "the father of modern bluegrass," a paternity that suited the muscled, buzz-cut mandolinist and high tenor who was cofounder of both the Country Gentlemen in 1957 and the Seldom Scene in 1972. Those two seminal acts not only helped popularize bluegrass worldwide but made Washington the bluegrass capital of the nation in the '60s and '70s.

Already reeling from the recent death of bluegrass patriarch Bill Monroe, the music and its fans may be excused for feeling orphaned right now. Duffey who died yesterday at the age of 62 after suffering a heart attack

at his home in Arlington, was, like Monroe, a towering figure, physically and historically.

Duffey was also one of the most riveting and riotous personas in bluegrass, as famous for his (generally politically incorrect) jokes and onstage shenanigans as for ripping off fiery mandolin solos and then flinging his instrument behind his back when he was done—because, well, he was done.

"John was one of the half-dozen most important players ever in this industry," fellow musician Dudley Connell said yesterday. "He helped redefine how people looked at bluegrass, made it acceptable to the urban masses by his choice of material and style of performance."

Connell, founder of the critically acclaimed Johnson Mountain Boys, joined the Seldom Scene just a year ago when several of that band's longtime members left to devote themselves to a band called Chesapeake. That changeover represented a third act for John Duffey, the Washington-born son of an opera singer whose forceful and unusually expressive voice was once described—quite accurately—as "the loudest tenor in bluegrass."

"John Duffey had such a presence onstage you just had to watch him," noted bluegrass and country music radio personality Katie Daley. "It wasn't just that high tenor, either. He had such flair that he made the music a joy to watch . . . at a time when so many bluegrass groups would just stand straight-faced at the mike."

In terms of stubbornness and steel will, Duffey was not unlike Bill Monroe, but where Monroe was a tireless proselytizer for bluegrass, Duffey chose a different course that left him far less famous.

"He was proud but didn't want to pay any of the prices—interviews, travel, rehearsing, recording," says Gary Oelze, owner of the Birchmere, the Virginia club put on the world entertainment map by virtue of the Seldom Scene's 20-year residency there on Thursday nights.

"He hated to rehearse, and would only pull out his mandolin when it was time to play," Oelze recalled yesterday. "And he hated the studio, where his theory was, 'If I can't do it right in one take, then I can't do it right at all.' He's like Monroe in that both were set in their own ways. John was a big dominating character and cantankerous old fart. It's hard to imagine the big guy gone."

John Starling, a Virginia surgeon who was for many years the Seldom Scene's lead singer, concedes that Duffey was "sometimes difficult to deal with from a professional standpoint, but he was also true to himself and he never changed. John was one of a kind."

Starling first encountered Duffey while in medical school at the University of Virginia in the mid-'60s; at the time, Duffey was with the Country Gentlemen and Starling would venture to Georgetown to catch them at the Shamrock on M Street. "I never dreamed one day I'd play in the same band," Starling says, adding that "everything I know about the music business—especially to stay as far away from it as possible—I learned from John."

"Left to our own devices, the Seldom Scene would have cleared a room in 10 minutes without John," Starling says with a chuckle. "He was the entertainer, the rest of us were players and singers. He did it all."

Duffey's career began with a care wreck in 1957 that injured a mandolin player, Buzz Busby, who fronted a bluegrass group. Busby's banjo player, Bill Emerson, quickly sought substitutes so the band could fulfill a major club date.

Emerson found a young guitar player named Charlie Waller and a young mandolin player named John Duffey. And so on July 4

1957, what would soon be the Country Gentlemen played their first date, at the Admiral Grill in Bailey's Crossroads. They liked their sound, and decided to strike out on their own. It was Duffey who came up with the name, noting that a lot of bluegrass bands at the time were calling themselves the so-and-so Mountain Boys. "We're not mountain boys," he said. "We're gentlemen."

And scholars. At least Duffey was, spending hours at the Library of Congress's vast Archive of Folk Song, looking for unmined musical treasures. Duffey was a product of the first American folk revival, which had introduced urbanites to rural culture. And he in turn passed it on. "John was one of those people who brought rural music to the city," says Joe Wilson, head of the National Council for the Traditional Arts. "He was concerned with authenticity even though he didn't share the [rural] background."

What came to be known as the "classic" Country Gentlemen lineup was settled in 1959 with the addition of guitarist-singer Eddie Adcock. Duffey (high tenor), Waller (low tenor) and Adcock (baritone) created one of the finest vocal trios in bluegrass history. The band's repertoire deftly melded bluegrass, folk and country tunes in a way that was both tradition-oriented and forward-looking. And they began adapting popular songs in the bluegrass style.

Duffey "gave bluegrass accessibility to lawyers and accountants and people who worked on Capitol Hill," says Wilson. "He was an interpreter in the finest sense of the word, bringing grass-roots culture to an elite."

Along with Flatt and Scruggs—a duo introduced to mass television audiences by the "Beverly Hillbillies" theme song—the Country Gentlemen probably made more bluegrass converts in the '60s than Bill Monroe himself. They were criticized in traditional bluegrass circles for being too "progressive"—for playing what was dismissively dubbed "newgrass." But on the emerging bluegrass festival circuit and in venues as un-Shamrock-like as Carnegie Hall, their approach made them the music's most successful ambassadors.

By 1969, however, John Duffey was frustrated with traveling, terrified of flying, and generally down on the music business. He retired to an instrument-building and repair business in Arlington. In weekly gatherings at Bethesda's tiny Red Fox Inn, he played with other gifted musicians who didn't want to give up their day jobs. These sessions blossomed, in 1972, into a band with a modest name: the Seldom Scene.

The Country Gentlemen survived Duffey's departure, enduring 40 years around Waller, its lone survivor. Perhaps the Seldom Scene will go on, too. But John Duffey was so much the focus, the showman, the entertainer—that huge man with his fingers flying over his tiny mandolin—that it's hard to imagine the band, or bluegrass, without him.

[From *Bluegrass Unlimited*, Dec. 10, 1996]

JOHN H. DUFFEY

March 4, 1934—December 10, 1996

John Humbird Duffey died today. He was 62.

I had to write that down and stare at it for a few seconds to clear my mind and force myself to acknowledge that unthinkable and, for now, unacceptable fact of life. His death came from a massive heart attack at 10:20 a.m. at Arlington Hospital, after being taken in early this morning following some breathing problems. Though he had a history of minor heart problems, his health had otherwise been good—good enough for a successful Seldom Scene performance in the New York City area this past weekend.

Those are the simple, immediate facts, the ones we enumerate when grief makes it difficult to think beyond them. John was a commanding presence in the Washington, D.C. area, where he was born, raised and hardly ever left. His sheer size and bulk would have made him stand out in any crowd. On stage, when he went to work on that comparatively tiny mandolin, it never looked like a fair match, especially since John always made music look so deceptively easy.

John also played resonator guitar on a number of early Starday singles, including his notable "Traveling Dobro Blues." He was good at it too, but one can manage just so much, and John abandoned the instrument early. Not so his finger-style guitar, which has replaced or supplemented the mandolin in John's arrangements many times over the years.

John Duffey's voice was his other superb instrument. His father had been a professional singer, serving for a time in the Metropolitan Opera chorus. John learned a few vocal secrets from him, especially the arts of breathing and singing from the diaphragm. They served John well. His vocal agility, remarkable range, distinctive vocal harmonies, and lovely intonation remained with him right up to the end, and his voice was as instantly recognizable as any on the planet.

Many will remember John's incredible gift for comedy, which grew out of the bad boy persona he cultivated on stage. He was a child of the suburbs and his wit was hip and urbane rather than country. John's irreverence never served to diminish his music, but he could and did ad-lib as skillfully as a professional comic. It was an attitude which had been foreign to bluegrass. Before the Country Gentlemen appeared in 1957, hillbilly comedy had been the provenance of bass-players who specialized in rube routines, blackened teeth, and ill-fitting costumes. Their comedy at its best was crude and wonderful but it was no match for John Duffey, whose unrepentantly loud, tasteless clothes and flat-top haircut made him look like a comic relic in the '90s, much as Cousin Mort, Chick Stripling and Kentucky Slim appeared to be rural leftovers in the '50s.

The Country Gentlemen formed as a result of a 1957 auto accident involving the band of another bluegrass veteran, singer/mandolinist Buzz Busby. Buzz's band had contracted a July 4th engagement; to fill it, banjo player Bill Emerson engaged Charlie Waller, John Duffey and a temporary bass player. The result pleased everyone so much that they gave themselves a new name and kept right on working, even after Bill bequeathed the banjo chair to Pete Kuykendall, who subsequently turned it over to Eddie Adcock in 1959. Pete and John became fast friends, and Pete continued to work behind the scenes for the Gentlemen, composing new songs for them, introducing them to old ones, and producing their records for several years. Bass player Tom Gray joined the group later creating the Classic Country Gentlemen.

This unique combination of skills transformed the band virtually overnight. Charlie Waller had always been at home with mainstream country music as well as bluegrass. John and Bill Emerson's knowledge extended to country, pop, jazz, blues and classical music. The Country Gentlemen's first Starday release in 1958 clearly showed the way: "It's The Blues," neither blues nor bluegrass, was an experimental song which would have then seemed challenging even to Nashville professionals. Its reverse, "Backwoods Blues," was a jazzy reprise of the 1920s pop standard "Bye Bye Blues" (which wasn't blues either).

Marshall McLuhan once defined art as "anything you can get away with," which

precisely matched John Duffey's attitude towards bluegrass. John's respect for the classic Monroe model was exceeded by no one's but the Monroe musical constraints which defined classic bluegrass were only one option for him. The Country Gentlemen's eclectic LP collections proceeded to span the gap from ancient hymns and tragic songs to Ian and Sylvia, Tom Rush, Lefty Frizzel, and Bob Dylan pieces, woven into a broad and usually seamless fabric by a versatile and inspired group of musicians.

It turned out to be a perfect formula for those times. Mike Seeger pitched the Gents to Moe Asch, whose Folkways label published four LPs by them. Those recordings quickly wound up in the hands of urban folk music buffs, becoming bluegrass primers for many in northern cities and on college campuses. This new audience in turn was receptive to John's adventurous music, and it helped pave the way for the Gentlemen's growing international following in the 1960s.

As their career heated up, John grew tired of the necessary travel and retired from music in 1969. But the hiatus proved brief; in 1971 he joined Tom Gray, Mike Aldridge, and Ben Eldridge to form the Seldom Scene, whose name indicated that it was a group whose ambitions were limited. But lightning struck again. With John Starling, a singer whose abilities matched John's, the group quickly achieved the status and respect previously accorded the Country Gentlemen.

By then, the Duffey approach had been labeled "progressive bluegrass," a label which encouraged others to follow John's example and even exceed it, with pop tunes and rock arrangements which often became tangential to the classic models. John's selections and arrangements sought to take alien material and bring it towards bluegrass rather than force bluegrass to conform to other popular musics. It was the right approach; the "newgrass" bands have come and gone while the Seldom Scene has prospered and endured.

John Duffey wasn't a sentimental person, and he'd probably be embarrassed by an outpouring of emotion. But it's hard to envision bluegrass without him, hard for those of us of his generation and beyond not to remember many evenings at the Crossroads, the Shamrock, the Cellar Door, the Red Fox and the Birchmere, local joints which may not have been up to the standard of the downtown cocktail lounges, but where John, the Gents and the Scene enjoyed extended engagements over the past 40 years. That's not to say that John wasn't influential beyond his home environs. He traveled when he had to, to many parts of the globe, sharing the stage with everyone from Linda Ronstadt to Bill Monroe—who uncharacteristically, rarely failed to crack a smile in John's presence. John Duffey offstage was a modest and unassuming person, who nevertheless was a loyal friend to many, professionals and fans alike. Even those of us who weren't close to him can attest to the way his art touched our lives and made them better. His death will be hard for the many music professionals whom he inspired, informed and befriended. There hasn't been much that's taken place in bluegrass since the 1950s that he hasn't influenced one way or another.

Survivors include John's wife Nancy who, among other things, has been a loyal, appreciative spouse, a daughter, Ginger Allred and three stepchildren: Donald Mitchell, Richard Mitchell and Darci Holt.

Goodbye, John, and thank you from the bottom of our hearts. Like the ads say, your gifts will keep on giving.

[From Sing Out!]

The following tribute to John Duffey written by Dudley Connell for Sing Out! maga-

zine. Mr. Connell is lead singer in the Seldom Scene, co-founded by Mr. Duffey.

When John Duffey died on December 10, 1996, he left an imposing and very important forty year musical legacy.

John was a big guy with commanding stage presence. With his 1950s style flattop hair cut, multicolored body builder paints and unmatched bowling shirt, he left an indelible impression. When he arrived at the stage with his trademark mandolin and home made cup holder, complete with a special clip ready to attach to an unattended microphone stand, you knew John was ready to go to work.

His huge hands flew expertly across the neck of his tiny mandolin at a speed that seemed impossible. He made it look so easy. John would occasionally invite other players in the audience to sit and play his mandolin. They invariably found its high and tight action intimidating. Akira Otsuka, a long time Washington area player and John Duffey disciple, once looked at me after attempting a break on John's mandolin and asked, "How does he play this thing?"

John's most remarkable instrument, however, was his powerhouse tenor voice. There has never been any voice in bluegrass more unmistakable or capable of such range as that of John Duffey's. It seemed to ignore human bounds. His voice could range from the soft and delicate, "Walk Through This World With Me", to the aggressive and powerful, "Little Georgia Rose". Even at age 62, his voice was both challenging and inspiring to accompany.

John Duffey was as well known for his entertaining stage swagger as for his incomparable musical abilities. He was like a loose cannon on stage. Unlike many performers who have been entertaining for a long period of time, John did not work from scripted stage patter. Anything and anybody was fair game. There were many times John would hook onto a unsuspecting heckler in the audience and send the rest of the band members scurrying for cover. But with that unpredictable tension came a certain excitement and unpredictability that was fuel for the fire of all Seldom Scene stage shows.

In his forty years in the bluegrass music, John was unique and fortunate to have been the catalyst in forming two landmark bands. The first came by accident, literally.

On July 4th, 1957, Buzz Busby, a legendary Washington area mandolin player and tenor singer, was contracted to play a gig at a local night spot. When he was involved in an automobile accident and was unable to make the show, the group's banjo player, Bill Emerson, started making phone calls and arranged for Charlie Waller and John to fill in. The resulting sound was pleasing to everyone that they decided to give themselves a new name and continue playing together.

Never one to follow trends, John felt that a band from Washington DC should choose a name that reflected its own heritage and not use a "So and So and the Mountain Boys" or some other name that suggested they were from somewhere they were not. The name John chose was The Country Gentlemen, then a very urbane name for a bluegrass band. His former colleague in that group, Charlie Waller, continues to tour and perform with that band.

Due to the interest of Bill Emerson and John, tunes that were country, pop, blues, jazz, and classical became fair game for the Country Gentlemen who became noted for pushing the envelope of the existing bluegrass repertoire. John said, "There were enough versions of 'Blue Ridge Cabin Home' and 'Cabin in Caroline' to go around." He was looking for something different. Hence the Country Gentlemen's song bag included John's jazzy mandolin interpretation of

"Sunrise", Bob Dylan's "Its All Over Now Baby Blue", and a mandolin version of the theme from the movie "Exodus".

John also recognized the importance of the Folk Revival in the early 1960s and spent a considerable amount of time at the Library of Congress, researching material and achieving considerable success in composed melodies for old poems he found during his research. Songs entering the Country Gentlemen's repertoire in this manner include the classic, "Bringing Mary Home" and "A Letter to Tom". In addition to collecting and arranging old songs and poems, John composed and dedicated to his wife Nancy, "The Traveler", and the haunting "Victim to the Tomb", along with many others.

But by the late 1960s John had tired of all the traveling necessary to sustain a bluegrass band. "I just got tired of saving up to go on tour," he said. In 1969 Duffey left the Country Gentlemen with no intentions of performing again. During the 1969 to 1971, John operated a musical instrument repair shop.

But in 1971 John again found himself involved with music business, and again, by accident. He was joined in a informal group by former Country Gentlemen bassist Tom Gray, and by Ben Eldridge, Mike Aldridge and John Starling. This band would go on to be known as the Seldom Scene.

As the name implies, this group of musicians did not form with the intention of touring and playing music for a living. All the members had day jobs and simply wanted an outlet for their music. John said it was, "Sort of a boy's night out, like a weekly card game." The group started out in a member's basement, playing for fun, and then moved to the small Red Fox Inn outside Washington, DC. The group would later move across the Potomac River to a weekly Thursday night time slot at the Birchmere, in Northern Virginia.

Not being driven by the financial constraints to adhere to any of the rules normally associated with a professional touring group, the Seldom Scene did the music they wanted to do the way they wanted to do it. John's feeling was that "If people enjoy what we do, fine. If they don't, that's okay, too." With this freewheeling attitude, the group continued to stretch their musical reach by recording tunes from the Eric Clapton catalog, "Lay Down Sally" and "After Midnight", to long improvisational numbers with extended jams like "Rider".

This continuing tendency to incorporate influences from outside of the traditional sources made it easier for the urban audiences around Washington to identify with bluegrass. It also expanded the group's popularity to far beyond the doors of the local DC club scene. And the experimentation continued. In the weeks before his death, the current band was in rehearsals for their next recording project and were working on an arrangement to the Muddy Waters classic, "Rollin' and Tumblin'". John Duffey and the Seldom Scene continued to be active up to the end, playing in Englewood, New Jersey, just days before John's death.

John Duffey's influence on generations of musicians cannot be overstated. Noted music historian, Dick Spottswood, said, "There hasn't been much that's taken place in bluegrass since the 1950s that he hasn't influenced one way or another."

John Duffey is survived by his wife Nancy and daughter, Ginger Allred. He also has three stepchildren: Donald Mitchell, Richard Mitchell, and Darci Holt.