

LOS ANGELES TROUBADOURS: THE POLITICS OF THE
SINGER-SONGWRITER MOVEMENT, 1968–1975

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ABSTRACT

Christa Anne Bentley: Los Angeles Troubadours: The Politics of the Singer-Songwriter Movement
(Under the direction of Jocelyn R. Neal)

Between 1968 and 1975, the political rhetoric and activist strategies of United States social movements transitioned from communalism and mass protests to a language of individualism and personal politics. This dissertation argues that the contemporary singer-songwriter movement in Los Angeles provides a window into the major cultural and political shifts of the 1970s. Its musical aesthetic, which promoted confessional songwriting and self-reflection, encapsulated this rise in individualism. Using ethnographic research with participants of the singer-songwriter movement, I construct a cultural history that demonstrates how this music played a significant role shaping the personal politics of the women's movement and anti-war ideologies. Chapter 1 traces the singer-songwriter movement as an extension of the acoustic performance practices established during the United States folk revival. Chapter 2 explores the local music scene in Los Angeles that fostered the singer-songwriter movement, investigating how live performance practices influenced the discourses of authenticity surrounding the singer-songwriter as intimate, vulnerable, and personal. Chapter 3 compares the personal narratives of confessional songs to the organizing strategies of second wave feminisms, showing how music by singer-songwriters acted as a form of consciousness-raising within the context of the U.S. women's movement. Chapter 4 examines personal rhetoric in a second social movement—anti-Vietnam War protests—illustrating the ways in which confessional songs mirrored the new language of dissent among anti-war activists. Chapter 5 examines the impact of the 1970s singer-

songwriter movement on the present day Los Angeles scene and looks at the legacy of the political work singer-songwriters engage in the twenty-first century. Such an examination reveals how the singer-songwriter movement articulated highly politicized sentiments through their personal songwriting, shaping the discourses of protest in the United States during the 1970s.

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INTRODUCTION

“*Let’s talk about Me.*” This sentence encapsulates journalist Tom Wolfe’s exasperation with the “soul-searching” trend pervading the 1970s. Throughout his 1976 *New York Magazine* essay entitled “The Me Decade,” Wolfe mocked New Age encounter sessions and Sunbelt Christianity alike for what he viewed as narcissistic (and ultimately unproductive) introspection.¹ Wolfe criticized a younger generation for its unseemly obsession with the self, writing, “You had finally focused your attention and your energies on the most fascinating subject on earth: *Me*. Not only that, you also put *Me* up on stage before a live audience.” Wolfe’s characterization echoes criticisms of the contemporary singer-songwriter movement. Certain critics derided the music for its indulgent personal narratives and deemed this narcissism an apolitical shift from the socially-engaged music of the previous decade. For example, *Chicago Tribune* critic Lynn van Matre reviewed one of Joni Mitchell’s concerts in 1972, saying “Joni leaves the canyons of my mind empty with her journeys into her own.”²

In spite of such critics’ derision, in Los Angeles, the city that cradled the emergent singer-songwriter movement, these artists found an audience hungry for music that directed listeners into this state of self-reflective personal growth. *Los Angeles Times* journalist Robert Hilburn lauded the same qualities social critics loathed to explain the value in singer-songwriter Neil Young’s 1972 album, *Harvest*. As Hilburn explained, “Personal vision, in many ways, is the

¹ Thomas Wolfe, “The Me Decade,” *New York*, 23 August 1976, accessed 1 February 2016, <http://nymag.com/news/features/45938> (emphasis in original).

² Lynn Van Matre, “Joni’s Inward Journeys,” *Chicago Tribune*, 22 February 1972, A3.

most important quality a singer-songwriter can bring to his music. It is the special ability to look at the same scenes each of us sees, but apply one's own experiences and insight to those scenes so that their shadings and subtleties are presented in a fresh, hopefully instructive way."³ Hilburn identified "searching" as a significant theme in Young's music, pinpointing the songs "Heart of Gold," "Old Man," "Out on the Weekend," and "The Needle and the Damage Done" as examples of Young's own search for self. Hilburn asserted that, "Through Young's music...there is a comfort gained by a listener in knowing someone has gone through troubles, a reassurance that the problems can be endured (if not always overcome), a strength in knowing someone else is engaged in searching."

This dissertation argues that the singer-songwriter movement provides a window into the political shifts of the 1970s. Its musical aesthetic, which promoted confessional songwriting and self-reflection, encapsulated the rise in individualism that characterized the social movements of the era. Using ethnographic and archival research, I construct a cultural history of this movement that demonstrates how this music played a significant role in forming personal politics and guiding journeys of "self-discovery," particularly among white, middle-class audiences in the U.S. This research adds a new and significant narrative to histories of 1970s America, showing how a musical movement shaped the political perspectives of a generation of listeners. Furthermore, the questions I ask in this dissertation show how musical protest works in the private sphere, creating a new axis of scholarly engagement with music and protest by broadening the understanding of political discourse in music. This approach reveals how the division of public and private life has affected the way in which we, as scholars, delimit the boundaries of what music is considered politically active.

³ Robert Hilburn, "The Quality of Young's Personal Vision," *Los Angeles Times*, 22 February 1972, G7.

The Singer-Songwriter

The term singer-songwriter came into common parlance in the music industry around 1968, as a recognizable movement coalesced in Laurel Canyon, an eclectic and artistic Los Angeles neighborhood in the hills immediately north of Hollywood's Sunset Strip. There, a group of performers began to self-identify as singer-songwriters, including Joni Mitchell, Jackson Browne, Carole King, and James Taylor alongside Young. On the surface, the term indicates the artist's dual-role as a composer and performer, emphasizing the high value the movement placed on authorship and presentation. Upon further inspection, however, the phrase signals more than a musician who writes and performs original music.⁴ The term has accrued layers of meanings based in audience perceptions of intimate performance, story-telling, displays of artist vulnerability, and a sense of immediacy between the listener and the artist's persona. Consider this example from Mark Bego's 2005 biography of singer-songwriter and lifelong Angeleno Jackson Browne, which opens with a description of one of Browne's contemporary performances:

There is only one chair set up center stage tonight...With the exception of a large area rug on which his chair is resting, the stage is unadorned...This is no "pretender", this is pure unadulterated Jackson Browne, bare bones, singing his songs of love, or loss, or disappointments...Tonight there is no band. There is no opening act. There are no guest stars. It is just Jackson, casually dressed, yet emotionally naked. He sits alone: a troubadour and his songs.⁵

Bego paints a picture of the singer-songwriter as a solo, acoustic performer who needs no extravagant set design, and whose most important quality in performance is the ability to bare it all emotionally on stage. This image contains the signifiers and values wrapped up in the singer-

⁴ This is the definition espoused by Praeger's Singer-Songwriter Series and the *Cambridge Companion to the Singer-Songwriter*, Katherine A. Williams and Justin Williams, eds. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

⁵ Mark Bego, *Jackson Browne His Life and Music* (New York: Citadel Press, 2005), 1–2.

songwriter identity that have persisted for more than four decades. Famous songs like Joni Mitchell's "Both Sides Now" (1968) and James Taylor's "Fire and Rain" (1970) epitomize the aesthetic of this movement. Presenting introspective reflections told through first-person pronouns and accompanied by a soothing acoustic musical style, singer-songwriters offered audiences a glimpse into the personal experiences of the artists and encouraged listeners to partake in this soul-searching.

This introspective, first-person musical story-telling is indeed summarized by the term "troubadour," as Bego quips, pointing to singer-songwriters' predecessors in folk practices. Before the advent of commercial recordings, the singer-songwriter identity has roots in ballad singing found in earlier American folk traditions and music brought over from England and Scotland, and can even be traced back further through the practices of the traveling troubadour or bardic singing.⁶ Artists in the 1970s channeled this tradition through the name of the movement's premier venue (Doug Weston's Troubadour), through the use of traditional instruments (such as the Appalachian dulcimer), and through a folk presentation in both performance and personal appearance. Many folksingers from the 1960s, including Bob Dylan, Nina Simone, and Joan Baez, continued their careers as singer-songwriters in the 1970s, showing a clear connection between these traditions. Dylan and Simone, for example, who always composed their own material, began writing from a more personal, subjective stance compared to their songs from the

⁶ Cecil Sharp was instrumental in tracing English and Scottish ballads in Appalachian music. His *English Folksongs from the Southern Appalachians* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1917) inspired many folklorists to look for the remnants of English music in Appalachia. His collections of English folksongs, *English Folk-Carols* (London: Novello, 1911), *English Folk-Chanteys* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent & Co., 1914), and *One Hundred English Folksongs* (Boston: Oliver Ditson, 1916) similarly attempt to preserve English traditional music. Judith Ann Peraino traces the perception of personal story-telling in troubadour songs in *Giving Voice To Love: Song and Self-Expression from the Troubadours to Guillaume de Machaut* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). J. Martin Daughtry's dissertation maps characteristics of intimacy and emotion in contemporary Russian bardic singing in "The Intonation of Intimacy: Ethics, Emotion, Metaphor, and Dialogue among Contemporary Russian Bards," PhD diss., University of California Los Angeles, 2006.

earlier folk revival, and Baez, who had been known solely as a performer, took on a new role composing her own material in the 1970s.⁷ Furthermore, the mode of presentation contrasted with the emerging styles of progressive rock and psychedelia, whose instrumentally dense textures, rhythmic drive, and over the top stage personas were starkly differentiated from the simple arrangements and sincere presentation valued in singer-songwriter performance. These artists, then, became affiliated with the emerging singer-songwriter movement as genres changed with the waning folk revival and rise of new rock styles.

The Seventies: Themes and Periodization

As Wolfe pointed out in his *New York Magazine* essay, self-discovery grew into a major craze during the 1970s. New Age philosophy, organic food, encounter sessions, and self-help literature stand as just a few examples of the ways self-discovery saturated popular culture and consumer products.⁸ Consumers were not the only ones swept up in this craze, as social critics became equally focused with identifying growing narcissism throughout the U.S. Joining Wolfe, a cadre of “Me Decade social critics,” including sociologist David Riesman and investigative journalist Jim Houghan, published on what they considered the newest pathology harming the American ethic.⁹ To these critics, narcissism spurred gratification and indulgence—threats to an

⁷ Tammy Kernodle, “‘I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel to Be Free’: Nina Simone and the Redefining of the Freedom Song of the 1960s,” *Journal for the Society of American Music* 2, Issue 3 (August 2008): 295–317.

⁸ Micki McGee, *Self Help, Inc.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 50–52.

⁹ Philip Slater, *The Pursuit of Loneliness: American Culture at the Breaking Point* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970); Henry Malcolm, *Generation of Narcissus* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971); Marie Coleman, ed. *The Narcissistic Condition: A Fact of Our Lives and Times* (New York: Human Sciences Press, 1977); Aaron Stern, *ME: The Narcissistic American* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1979); Richard M. Restak, *The Self Seekers* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1982); David Riesman in Kenneth Woodward, “The New Narcissism,” *Newsweek*, 30 January 1978.

American society that values hard work and restraint.¹⁰ By the end of the decade, this preoccupation culminated in Christopher Lasch's best-selling book, *The Culture of Narcissism*, and President Jimmy Carter's "malaise speech," in which he blamed consumerist attitudes for the disillusion with American politics.¹¹

In fact, studies of narcissism also grew in the clinical world throughout the 1970s, and, as historian Elizabeth Lunbeck points out, the world of psychiatry found both normalizing and pathological aspects to narcissism.¹² Viennese-American psychologist Heinz Kohut viewed narcissistic qualities as healthy and desirable, arguing that it promoted ambition, creativity, and maturity.¹³ On the other side of the coin, Otto Kernberg's study connected narcissism to borderline personality disorders, exhibiting characteristics of manipulation and aggression. Lunbeck demonstrates that most social critics deployed the data from both studies incorrectly to fuel their arguments about the detriments of narcissism to American life. This portrayal—combining notions of self-assurance and esteem with the negative qualities put forward by social critics—begins to paint a more complex picture of the changes occurring in Americans' conception of the self during this decade.

The Culture of Narcissism has dominated 1970s historiography. This interpretive framework has also substantiated attacks against the decade's cultural products. The pet rock, disco, and self-help, in addition to jabs against narcissism, stand as symbols of frivolity proving

¹⁰ Edwin Schur, *The Awareness Trap: Self-Absorption Instead of Social Change* (New York: Quadrangle/New York Times Book Co., 1976).

¹¹ Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York: Norton, 1978); Christopher Lasch, "The Narcissist Society," *New York Review of Books*, 30 September 1976; Daniel Horowitz, *Jimmy Carter and the Energy Crisis of the 1970s: The 'Crisis of Confidence' Speech of July 15, 1979* (Boston: Bedford/St Martin's, 2005).

¹² Elizabeth Lunbeck, *The Americanization of Narcissism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), 5.

¹³ Heinz Kohut, *The Search for the Self: Selected Writings of Heinz Kohut, 1950-1978* (London: Karnac, 2011); Lunbeck, *The Americanization of Narcissism*, 5.

these accounts of consumption and decline.¹⁴ Marilyn H. Coleman explained how the specter of capitalism impacted this narrative, writing that products in the 1970s were “sold, advertised, and consumed as if self-realization were only one purchase or therapy away,” combining the sins of narcissism and materialism.¹⁵ Historian Bruce J. Schulman, however, offers a different analysis, deeming the seventies a period crucial for understanding shifts in the politics, economy, and culture of the United States.¹⁶ Several scholars have joined Schulman’s initiative to redeem the vapid characterization of the “Me” decade.¹⁷ These works highlight three themes prevalent during the 1970s: introspection, fracture, and disillusion.

Introspection characterizes the inward turn and rise in individualism in the 1970s. In *The 1970s: The Great Shift in American Culture*, Schulman demonstrates how throughout the decade, Americans “constructed, and relied on, alternatives to the public sphere,” bolstering such concepts as private enterprise and holistic alternative medicine that each created new, private solutions—in political parties on the right and left—to the problems assessed in public life.¹⁸ Another history of the decade, Stephen Paul Miller’s *The Seventies Now: Culture as Surveillance* highlights the decade’s self-scrutiny, identifying a transition from external to internal surveillance during Nixon’s presidency that mimics this broader inward turn.¹⁹ Schulman defines

¹⁴ Christopher Booker, *The Seventies* (New York: Stein and Day, 1980); Howard Junker, “Who Erased the Seventies,” *Esquire*, December 1977, 154; Charlie Haas, “Goodbye to the ‘70s,” *New West*, 19 January 1979, 29.

¹⁵ Marilyn J. Coleman, *The Social History of the American Family* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2014), 851.

¹⁶ Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture* (New York: The Free Press, 2001), xii.

¹⁷ Edward D. Berkowitz, *Something Happened: A Political and Cultural Overview of the Seventies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006); Judith Stein, *Pivotal Decade: How the United States Traded Factories for Finance in the Seventies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010); Gerard J. DeGroot, *The Seventies Unplugged: A Kaleidoscopic History of a Violent Decade* (London: MacMillan, 2010).

¹⁸ Schulman, *The Seventies*, xvi.

¹⁹ Stephen Paul Miller, *The Seventies Now: Culture as Surveillance* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 1.

fracture as a leading trope in seventies history through the splintering of political coalitions that left both Republican and Democratic parties weakened.²⁰ Rick Perlstein's *Nixonland: The Rise of a President and the Fracturing of America* illustrates the controversial president's role in creating this divisive culture, using fracture as a way to chart the polarizing ideologies between political parties, beginning in the 1960s through Nixon's term in office.²¹ Furthermore, the shift in the 1970s from integration to diversity, wherein Black Power, Red Power, the women's movement, and even a Grey Power movement for senior citizens all gained momentum, supports the claim that society, and the fight for social equality, became more and more fragmented. Lastly, disillusion describes the large-scale mistrust of the dominant institutions in society. Shulman frames this lack of faith as a distinct shift in attitudes in the wake of the 1960s and the legacy of the decade's idealistic social movements.²² Edward Berkowitz cites a 1975 national opinion survey in which 70% of Americans polled agreed with the statement: "Over the last ten years, this country's leaders have consistently lied to the people."²³ Beyond government, Peter Carroll asserted that citizens lost faith in doctors, lawyers, and corporate leaders.²⁴ In light of this widespread disillusion, the turn to alternative medicine, self-help, and personal politics each allowed citizens to avoid institutions considered incompetent and untrustworthy.

These attitudes impacted art and music along with the rest of society. Alice Echols's seminal work *Hot Stuff: Disco and the Remaking of American Culture* and Mitchell Morris's *The*

²⁰ Schulman, *The Seventies*, 8.

²¹ Rick Perlstein, *Nixonland: The Rise of a President and the Fracturing of America* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014).

²² *Ibid.*, 2.

²³ Berkowitz, *Something Happened*, 6.

²⁴ Peter Carroll, *It Seemed Like Nothing Happened: America in the 1970s* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 234–240.

Persistence of Sentiment: Popular Music during the 1970s each demonstrate how musical genres previously condemned by the Seventies narrative are precisely the locus of these cultural shifts. Echols interprets disco as the manifestation of the new social lives of gay men, African Americans, and women following the changes in identity politics early in the 1970s. The music, she argues, “broadened the contours of blackness, femininity, and male homosexuality.”²⁵ Morris, too, views the music of Barry White, Karen Carpenter, Barry Manilow, and Cher as representations of new conceptions of race, gender, sexuality, and class emerging in American society.²⁶ Still, scholars have yet to connect this framework to the confessional songwriting practices of the singer-songwriter movement.

Periodization presents an issue for scholarship on the 1970s, as history rarely follows the neat outline of a decade. For some historians, the 1970s begin in 1968, while for others, they don’t kick into gear until after the completion of the Vietnam War in 1974.²⁷ My study covers the period of time during which a significant number of singer-songwriters moved to and called Los Angeles home. The years 1968–1975 conveniently outline Richard Nixon’s presidency, the figurehead for the type of society that this group of popular musicians united against.²⁸ This also follows Shulman’s timeline for the “start” of the 1970s, based on significant events in history, particularly the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy in 1968.

Throughout this period, the United States was at war, allied with the South Vietnamese fighting

²⁵ Alice Echols, *Hot Stuff: Disco and the Remaking of American Culture* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010), xxv.

²⁶ Mitchell Morris, *The Persistence of Sentiment: Display and Feeling in Popular Music of the 1970s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013).

²⁷ See Berkowitz, *Something Happened*, 1. This is also the periodization that historian Arthur Marwick uses in *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy, and the United States c. 1958–1974* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

²⁸ This is consistent with Schulman’s timeline for the “start” of the 1970s, based on significant events in history, particularly the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy.

the Viet Cong empire in North Vietnam—a microcosm of Cold War politics—with hopes of holding off another country from “falling” to communist rule. I do not delve any farther than 1975, due to the declining presence of the singer-songwriter movement on popular charts. This means that many of the other political crises that define the end of the decade—Jimmy Carter’s presidency, the country’s economic dissolution due to massive inflation, and the oil embargo—go untouched in my dissertation.

Los Angeles History

I frame my study of the singer-songwriter movement in Los Angeles as a critical center for the formation of this identity, both for its vital local scene and for this scene’s role in inspiring the national discourse about singer-songwriters through its inextricable links to the music industry. The singer-songwriter movement joins a rich history of popular and commercial music thriving in the City of Angels. Furthermore, the singer-songwriter movement’s ties to the local community helped establish Los Angeles as the center of the music-entertainment industry.

Colonized in the eighteenth century, Los Angeles grew from mission to small town. Spanish missionary Junipero Serra established the San Gabriel mission, the area’s first, in 1771.²⁹ After Mexico gained independence from Spain in 1821, Mexican governor Pio Pico founded the city as the capital of the Alta California region.³⁰ At the end of the Mexican-American War in 1847, the United States annexed this territory, and California was accepted into

²⁹ Kevin Starr, *California: A History* (New York: Modern Library, 2005), 17–42; Vincent Brook, *Land of Smoke and Mirrors: A Cultural History of Los Angeles* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2014), 25.

³⁰ Starr, *California: A History*, 43–70. The territory of Alta California included the land today known as the states of California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, and the western parts of Colorado and Wyoming.

the union in 1850 as a free state, preventing the spread of slavery.³¹ At California's statehood, Los Angeles had a grand population of 1,610 people, known as a small, quaint Western town. The discovery of oil in 1892 launched Los Angeles' oil rush, and by the turn of the century, Los Angeles' population reached 102,000 people.³²

The rise of industries, including oil drilling, and the construction of new infrastructure allowed Los Angeles to grow and flourish in the twentieth century. The Los Angeles Aqueduct, constructed in 1913, enabled the desert city to support a growing populace.³³ Local developers campaigned to get residents back east to come live in the temperate climate with plentiful jobs, drawing on romanticized images of California as a Mediterranean paradise.³⁴ The flourishing world of Hollywood drew even more attraction to the area.³⁵ The film industry became one of Los Angeles' greatest economic supporters, and by 1922, the city was known as the international hub for filmmaking, producing 84% of films shown in the U.S. and two-thirds of those worldwide.³⁶ By 1962, California surpassed New York as the most populous state.³⁷

The entertainment industry in Los Angeles soon expanded beyond the realm of filmmaking. Songwriters Johnny Mercer and Buddy DeSylva opened Capitol Records in 1942,

³¹ David Samuel Torres-Rouff, *Before L.A.: Race, Space, and Municipal Power in Los Angeles, 1781–1894* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 2; William Deverell, "The 1850s," in *Companion to California History*, 161–174.

³² Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (New York: Verso, 2006), 55.

³³ Les Standiford, *Water to the Angels: William Mulholland, His Monumental Aqueduct, and the Rise of Los Angeles* (New York: Ecco, 2015).

³⁴ Starr, *California: A History*, xi-xii; Brook, *Land of Smoke and Mirrors*, 67–68; William Francis Deverell and Greg Hise, *Eden by Design: The 1930 Olmsted-Bartholomew Plan for the Los Angeles Region* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

³⁵ Brook, *Land of Smoke in Mirrors*, 9.

³⁶ Hillary A. Hallett, *Go West, Young Women!: The Rise of Early Hollywood* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 7.

³⁷ Starr, *California: A History*, x.

establishing Los Angeles as the West Coast center for the music industry.³⁸ In the early 1960s, Los Angeles studios and session musicians strengthened their reputations, with signature production techniques such as Phil Spector’s “Wall of Sound” and Gold Star Studios drawing artists and bands to cut their records in Los Angeles. The rise of surf music and popularity of the Beach Boys put the romanticized image of southern California on radio waves across the country. After the “death” of rock and roll and before the British Invasion, these styles figured prominently on top popular music charts. Los Angeles also experienced the folk boom during this time, after the Kingston Trio exploded onto the national scene in 1958. Although scholarly accounts of the folk revival tend to focus their narratives on cities in the Northeast, Los Angeles was a hub for traditional performers touring on the West Coast. For example, the Ash Grove club was part of a circuit for folk musicians, and soon Los Angeles developed a web of folk venues that rivaled Greenwich Village.³⁹ In the mid-1960s, the Los Angeles based band the Byrds helped solidify the sound of folk rock, which included electric instruments in the arrangement of folk-inspired compositions. A prime example of this comes from the Byrds’ cover of Dylan’s “Mr. Tambourine Man” (1965), which helped to bridge L.A.’s folk world with the rock scene, and this style of “folk rock” would permeate Los Angeles’ musical aesthetic in the late 1960s. Other bands such as the Mamas and the Papas—with their hit single “California Dreamin’”—memorializing the prominence of Los Angeles—the Lovin’ Spoonful, and the Association made Southern California a spot for folk rock to flourish. I discuss the influence of the folk revival and folk rock in Los Angeles in more detail in Chapters 1 and 2.

³⁸ Glenn T. Eskew, *Johnny Mercer: Southern Songwriter for the World* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2013), 193–228.

³⁹ Mary Katherine Aldin, interview with author, Los Angeles, CA, 7 August 2013.

The emergence of the singer-songwriter movement existed alongside other popular styles of the early 1970s, namely the sound of California country rock, popularized by bands like the Eagles, Poco, Linda Ronstadt. As such, Los Angeles provides the backdrop for a number of flourishing creative worlds, many of which remain unexamined in academic contexts.

Historiography and the Singer-Songwriter

This dissertation is the first to examine the Los Angeles singer-songwriter scene. The bulk of the extant literature on the singer-songwriter movement consists of pop histories, trade biographies, and artist autobiographies. Books like Michael Walker's *Laurel Canyon* and Barney Hoskyns's *Hotel California* paint vivid pictures of the Los Angeles rock scene, showing the network and relationships between singer-songwriters, country rockers, and psychedelia in Los Angeles' rock scene.⁴⁰ Biographies of singer-songwriters, like Sylvie Simmons's *I'm Your Man: The Life of Leonard Cohen*, Mark Bego's *Jackson Browne: Timeless Troubadour*, and Michelle Mercer's *Will You Take Me As I Am?: Joni Mitchell's Blue Period* grant insight into individual careers. The commonalities across such narratives create a picture of how singer-songwriters move through the music industry in similar channels.⁴¹ Many artists have penned their own memoirs, such as Carole King's *A Natural Woman* and Neil Young's *Waging Heavy Peace*, which show the authentication narratives put forward by the artists themselves.⁴² Finally, Morgan Neville's 2011 documentary, *Troubadours: The Rise of the Singer-Songwriter*

⁴⁰ Barney Hoskyns, *Hotel California: The True-Life Adventures of Crosby, Stills, Nash, Young, Mitchell, Taylor, Browne, Ronstadt, Geffen, the Eagles, and Their Many Friends* (Hoboken: Wiley & Sons, 2006); Michael Walker *Laurel Canyon: The Inside Story of Rock-and-Roll's Legendary Neighborhood* (New York: Faber and Faber, 2006); Harvey Kubernik, *Canyon of Dreams: The Magic and Music of Laurel Canyon* (New York: Sterling, 2012).

⁴¹ Mark Bego, *Jackson Browne: His Life and Music* (New York: Citadel Press, 2005); Michelle Mercer, *Will You Take Me As I Am?: Joni Mitchell's Blue Period* (New York: Free Press, 2009); and Sylvie Simmons *I'm Your Man: The Life of Leonard Cohen* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2012).

commemorates the special place of the venue central to my dissertation in the Los Angeles scene.⁴³

The scholarly discourse on the singer-songwriter covers three main areas of academic inquiry: first, identity discourses surrounding gender, race, and class; second, the construction, meaning, and roles of authenticity and (auto)biography; and third, the role of political consciousness within the movement.

Identity Discourses: Gender, Race, and Class

Within the extant literature, a large amount of scholarship on singer-songwriters addresses gendered identity. The predominant interpretation of the singer-songwriter, both by scholars and audiences, casts the genre as a feminine space. However, there are two different impulses informing the interpretation from the audience and the discourse of academia. The audience interpretation of the singer-songwriter movement fits within a broader gendered discourse of popular music, in which the soft, sensitive singer-songwriter movement is placed in opposition to the masculinized virtuosity and bravado of contemporary styles like psychedelia and progressive rock.⁴⁴ The singer-songwriter movement at this time was predominantly male, including artists such as James Taylor, Paul Simon, Cat Stevens, Bob Dylan, John Lennon, Jackson Browne, and Leonard Cohen. However, the singer-songwriter movement also became a space for a number of female artists. Journalist Sheila Weller's *Girls Like Us* (2009) addresses

⁴² Carole King, *A Natural Woman: A Memoir* (New York: Grand Central Pub. 2012) and Neil Young, *Waging Heavy Peace: A Hippie Dream* (New York: Blue Rider Press, 2012).

⁴³ *Troubadours: The Rise of the Singer Songwriter*, dir. Morgan Neville, Tremolo Productions, 2011.

⁴⁴ For more on discourses of masculinity in rock music, see Simon Frith and Angela McRobbie, "Rock and Sexuality," in *On Record: Rock, Pop and the Written Word*, ed. Frith and Goodwin (New York: Pantheon Books, 1990); Sheila Whiteley, ed., *Sexing the Groove: Popular Music and Gender* (New York: Routledge, 1997); and Robert Walser, *Running with the Devil: Power, Gender, and Madness in Heavy Metal Music*, (Hannover: University Press of New England, 1993).

the issue of identity by tracing the biographical similarities in the lives of Joni Mitchell, Carole King, and Carly Simon. Weller's cast of characters epitomize the typical profile of the singer-songwriter—white females from middle-class families—and throughout the book, Weller relates the movement to an accessible idea of femininity. These readings influenced the construction of masculinity within the movement, as well. A vicious review by legendary rock critic Lester Bangs titled, "James Taylor Marked for Death" exposes the gendered biases of the hyper-masculine rocker culture that was pervasive in the early 1970s.⁴⁵ Many in the rock scene considered male singer-songwriters too sensitive and effeminate to be labeled rock artists, reducing them to the style "soft rock."⁴⁶ Popular rock author Dave Thompson's history, *Hearts of Darkness: James Taylor, Jackson, Browne, Cat Stevens and the Unlikely Rise of the Singer-Songwriter* (2012) provides a biographical counterpart to Weller's discussion of female singer-songwriters. In many ways, Thompson's book can be read as a reaction to Bangs's emasculating review, retrospectively redeeming male singer-songwriters as dark, mysterious, and deeply thoughtful rather than Bangs's derogatory feminization.

The scholarly impulse responsible for the bulk of research on women in the singer-songwriter movement comes from the push in musicology to focus on women and gender.⁴⁷ Scholars looking to address women's contributions to popular music found the singer-songwriter movement a valuable site for analysis. Beyond the mere participation of women, scholars showed interest in the singer-songwriter movement as a moment when women could retain

⁴⁵ Bangs's review, originally published in *Who Put the Bomp?* in 1971, can be found in *Psychotic Reactions and Carburetor Dung: An Anthology*, ed. Greil Marcus (New York: Knopf, 1987), 53–81.

⁴⁶ Judy Kutulas writes about the development of the "sensitive male" within the singer-songwriter movement in "You Probably Think This Song Is About You: 1970s Women's Music from Carole King to Disco Divas," in *Disco Divas Women and Popular Culture in the 1970s* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 178.

⁴⁷ The call for critical studies of gender begins in the discipline of musicology with Susan McClary's *Feminine Endings* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).

greater agency in the music industry as songwriters. Women who both wrote and performed their music kept more control of the business aspects of their career and also maintained power over the way that they were represented in their lyrics. Scholars such as Charlotte Greig, Sheila Whiteley, and Lucy O'Brien thus focused on the singer-songwriter's ability to disrupt the male power structure of the music business and claim agency within the male-dominated music industry.

Charlotte Greig and Sheila Whiteley first addressed the singer-songwriter movement of the 1970s as a moment when women began to exercise greater authority in the music industry by retaining control of their songwriting. In her chapter of *Sexing the Groove: Popular Music and Gender* (1997), Greig discussed the way that women in the 1970s incorporated women's issues into their work as songwriters across the various genres of pop, country, and folk music.⁴⁸ Sheila Whiteley also examined agency in her case study on Joni Mitchell in her seminal work *Women in Popular Music: Sexuality, Identity and Subjectivity*, which traces instances of women's struggles against sexist attitudes in the music industry from 1960 to 1999. But taking her discussion one step beyond the issue of agency, Whiteley began to interpret how Joni Mitchell's position as a singer-songwriter challenged gendered norms. For example, Whiteley examines Mitchell's ambivalence towards the institution of marriage in her song, "My Old Man" (1971).⁴⁹

In her other case studies, Whiteley looks beyond the 1970s and demonstrates how the singer-songwriter challenges gender roles in a variety of genres and styles, including chapters on Patti Smith, Tracy Chapman, Tori Amos, Annie Lenox, and k.d. lang.⁵⁰ Ronald Lankford, Lori

⁴⁸ Charlotte Greig, "Female Identity and the Woman Songwriter," in *Sexing the Groove*, 168–177.

⁴⁹ Whiteley, *Women in Popular Music: Sexuality, Identity, and Subjectivity* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 79–80.

⁵⁰ Whiteley, *Women in Popular Music*, chapters 6 (on Joni Mitchell), 7 (on Patti Smith), 10 (on k.d. lang), 11 (on Tracy Chapman), and 12 (on Tori Amos). In addition to songwriting, Whiteley addresses performance as a space

Burns and Melisse LaFrance follow Whiteley in their arguments that women singer-songwriters in the 1990s used their music to subvert dominant perceptions of gender. In *Women Singer-Songwriters in Rock: A Populist Rebellion in the 1990s*, Ronald Lankford claims that at this time the more “hard-rock” musical aesthetic of women singer-songwriters like PJ Harvey’s “Dry” (1992) and Alanis Morissette’s “You Oughta Know” (1995) allowed the artists to express greater frustration towards gender inequity than their predecessors in the 1970s, who remained in a soft, acoustic (and therefore feminized) musical aesthetic. The collaborative book between music theorist, Lori Burns and cultural theorist, Méliisse LaFrance, uses the music of Tori Amos, M’Shell Ndegeocello, PJ Harvey, and Courtney Love to theorize methods for discussing women in popular music through the respective disciplinary realms of music theory and cultural studies in *Disruptive Divas: Feminism, Identity and Popular Music* (2002). Relying on authorship as a key parameter for selecting the artists they discuss, Burns and LaFrance offer close readings and musical analyses to demonstrate how these artists use music to react against dominant discourses of sex, race, and gender.

Scholar and political activist Angela Davis also looks at women singer-songwriters who challenge gender roles, but extends the singer-songwriter identity to the tradition of classic blues singers. Her book *Blues Legacies, Black Feminism: Gertrude “Ma” Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holliday* (1998) provides an interpretation of the blues written and performed by Bessie Smith and Ma Rainey as expressions of feminist consciousness from working-class black communities.⁵¹ Davis brings out the themes expressed in Rainey and Smith’s blues, which she

where women negotiate and subvert gendered norms in her chapters on Madonna, the Spice Girls, k.d. lang, and Janis Joplin.

⁵¹ Angela Davis, *Blues Legacies, Black Feminism: Gertrude ‘Ma’ Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1998). In addition to Davis’ work on Rainey, Smith and Holliday, Melanie E. Bratcher’s *Words and Songs of Bessie Smith, Billie Holiday, and Nina Simone: Sound Motion, Blues Spirit, and African Memory* (New York: Routledge, 2007), which offers a perspective of their work as a part of the African diaspora.

argues articulate their independence, their sexual subjectivity and express a position against domestic violence.⁵²

Works by Leigh H. Edwards and Gareth Palmer counter the construction of the singer-songwriter as women's territory by applying the core identity to men and linking it to a cultural projection of masculinity. Still, even when extending the singer-songwriter label to figures like Johnny Cash in the country tradition and Bruce Springsteen in the genre of rock, gendered identity remains central to Edwards's and Palmer's arguments, connecting their writing to the larger discourse on gender. Edwards' *Johnny Cash and the Paradox of American Identity* (2009) examines Cash's music through the lens of Southern, white, working-class masculinity. Edwards claims that Cash asserts his authenticity by exerting this particular brand of masculinity, which she analyzes through both the themes in his lyrics and through performance elements (such as Cash's "man in black" persona and low voice). Edwards also casts Southern working-class masculinity as a "marginalized masculinity," emphasizing how Cash's songs cast the self-made man as the antagonist, privileging the experiences of hobos, sharecroppers, and other working-class male characters.⁵³ Palmer similarly identifies the role of "work" in defining Springsteen's masculinity, apparent through the characters of Springsteen's songs and his blue collar persona.⁵⁴

LaShonda Barnett's *I Got Thunder: Black Women Songwriters on Their Craft* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2007) addresses the ideas of race and gender, publishing biographies of African American women songwriters.

⁵² Davis, *Blues Legacies, Black Feminism*, xi, 18, 20–22.

⁵³ Leigh H. Edwards, *Johnny Cash and the Paradox of American Identity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 69–75. Edwards' draws the concept of marginalized masculinity from Connel and Kimmel, who cast working-class masculinity against the bourgeois ideal of the "self-made man."

⁵⁴ Gareth Palmer, "Bruce Springsteen and Masculinity," in *Sexing the Groove*, 100–117.

Authenticity and (Auto)Biography

In the documentary, *Troubadours*, Jackson Browne states that an important quality of singer-songwriter movement was “the authenticity of someone telling their own story.”⁵⁵ This idea of authenticity—which is one of the most problematized terms and concepts in all of popular music studies—has been a major characteristic of the singer-songwriter’s identity throughout the history of the tradition. As defined by Allan Moore, the singer-songwriter constructs this authenticity through the projection of an unmediated experience.⁵⁶ Scholarly literature investigates how audiences ascribe this formation of the authentic or unmediated to the music and lyrics of singer-songwriters.

On the most basic level, scholarship emphasizes the singer-songwriter’s lyrics coming from personal experiences: that the person singing is also the person who lived the experience and wrote it into a song informs the notion of the unmediated experience. Music journalist Michelle Mercer’s biography of Joni Mitchell, *Will You Take Me As I Am: Joni Mitchell’s Blue Period* (2009), addresses the importance of autobiographical lyrics as a hallmark of the singer-songwriters’ style. Connecting the practice of writing autobiographical songs with traditions of confessional writing since Rousseau initiated the modern autobiography in 1765, Mercer claims that Mitchell, along with Bob Dylan and Leonard Cohen, ushered in the practice of writing personal songs in the 1970s.⁵⁷ However, Mercer does not justify this claim, neglecting to

⁵⁵ *Troubadours*, dir. Morgan Neville, 2011.

⁵⁶ Moore, “Authenticity as Authentication,” *Popular Music*, 21 (May 2002): 213. Moore theorizes a model for understanding authenticity as something ascribed to music rather than inscribed in the work. In Moore’s framework, the singer-songwriter draws on what he calls “first-person authenticity” because the audience perceives the music as an unmediated expression, coming directly from the singer-songwriters experiences to the listener.

⁵⁷ Mercer, *Will You Take Me As I Am*, 15–48. Pamela Fox distinctly opposes the idea of conflating autobiographical songs and autobiographical writing, holding that each work “establishes unique conditions of authorship and reception,” in “Recycled Trash: Gender and Authenticity in Country Music Autobiography,” *American Quarterly*, 50 (June 1998): 237.

mention the tradition of autobiographical songs in the blues or country music (both in the personal songs of Hank Williams and Johnny Cash or the contemporary trend of autobiographical songs by Dolly Parton, Tammy Wynette, and Loretta Lynn in the 1970s). Also adhering to the idea of autobiographical songs, Donald Brackett's book, *Dark Mirror: The Pathology of the Singer-Songwriter* (2008), shows that he believes that the singer-songwriter's creative process requires the artist to channel the darkest moments of their personal lives. To Brackett, this ability to channel life experiences into a musical product is what creates "authentic" songs.⁵⁸ Although Brackett approaches his argument uncritically, his text points out a popular conception of the singer-songwriter by voicing the idea that this pathologized creative process bears emotionally compelling songs.

Not only do the lyrics of the singer-songwriter speak to the personal experiences of the artists, but the lyrics also prompt listeners to identify their own experiences in them. Mercer and Brackett both bring out this element in their work as well. Mercer quotes Mitchell, saying "The people who get the most out of my music see themselves in it."⁵⁹ Similarly, Brackett suggests that for the singer-songwriter's audience, part of the listening experience is not only hearing about the life of the songwriter, but also reflecting on their own life experiences.⁶⁰

A second strand of thought connected to the idea of autobiography and authenticity are works that focus on the individuality of a singer-songwriter. Many authors approach their singer-songwriter subjects as unique individuals instead of writing to place the artist in a broader cultural context or within a musical style. In *The Music of Joni Mitchell* (2008), Lloyd Whitesell

⁵⁸ Brackett, *Dark Mirror: The Pathology of the Singer-Songwriter* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2008), x-xiii.

⁵⁹ Mercer, *Will You Take Me as I Am?*, 3.

⁶⁰ Brackett, *Dark Mirror*, xiv.

develops a set of analytical frameworks specific to Mitchell's music rather than creating a method that could expand to other artists in the singer-songwriter movement. Similarly, Dai Griffiths' article "Internal Rhyme in 'The Boy with a Moon and Star on His Head,' Cat Stevens, 1972" (2012) discusses internal rhyme specific to Cat Stevens rather than expanding his argument to discuss rhyme scheme within a broader musical style.

Reading across these arguments, the similarities in their approaches to Stevens's and Mitchell's work reveal certain characteristics about the musical style of the singer-songwriter movement. Namely, Whitesell and Griffiths both place strong emphasis on lyrical analysis, highlighting aspects of rhyme, meter, and form that liken the words of the singer-songwriter to poetry.⁶¹ This impulse also reflects the common perception of the music of singer-songwriters as "high art," which reinforces the notions of artistic genius implicit in many studies of songwriters as individuals.⁶² The arguments about the artistic merits of particular singer-songwriters reaffirm the idea of individuality prevailing in the scholarly discourse of the singer-songwriter. Edwards's monograph on Johnny Cash, Palmer's work on Bruce Springsteen, and Dai Griffiths' monograph on Elvis Costello also adopt this method of working on a singer-songwriter individually.

The Praeger Singer-Songwriter Series also follows this line of inquiry into the singer-songwriter as an individual. The series looks beyond what they call the "introspective singer-songwriters" of the 1970s and adopts a general definition of the term singer-songwriter as

⁶¹ Lloyd Whitesell, *The Music of Joni Mitchell* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 16–17, 40–116 and Dai Griffiths, "Internal Rhyme in Cat Stevens 1972," *Popular Music* 31, (2012): 392–393. Many scholars discuss the works of singer-songwriters as poetry, including David Boucher's *Dylan and Cohen: Poets of Rock and Roll* (New York: Continuum, 2004) and Betsy Bowden's *Performed Literature: Words and Music by Bob Dylan* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982). Several singer-songwriters have published collections of their lyrics as poetry, such as Joni Mitchell's *Joni Mitchell: The Complete Poems and Lyrics* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1997) Paul Simon's *Lyrics 1964–2008* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008), and Leonard Cohen's *Leonard Cohen: Poems and Songs* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 2011).

⁶² Whitesell speaks extensively about a fine line between "art music" and "pop music" in *The Music of Joni Mitchell*, 6-10.

someone who writes and records “commercially successful and/or historically important music *and* lyrics at some point in their careers.”⁶³ With this broad definition, the collection brings in artists across a wide spectrum of time periods and genres to include Prince, Patti Smith, Dolly Parton, Bob Marley, and Ice Cube. The intended audience for the series is a class of readers in between the fan and the scholar, but given the dearth of scholarly writing on this general topic, each volume provides useful points of entry into source materials and recordings for each artist and valuable encapsulations of fans’ perceptions. A typical volume chronicles the entirety of an artist’s work, album-by-album, track-by-track. The volumes interweave biographical material with the descriptions of the music; they include minimal historical context, however. For example, *The Words and Music of Carole King* (2006), James E. Perone offers brief descriptive statements of each song but no analysis or discussion of reception.

The final segment of scholarship that contributes to notions of authenticity and personal experience are the singer-songwriter biographies and autobiographies themselves. This genre constitutes a large amount of the literature on the singer-songwriter. As Simon Frith wrote in a 1987 review surveying sixteen autobiographies of rock musicians in the popular press (many of them considered singer-songwriters), scholars can use these texts as hagiography, to understand how authors cast singer-songwriters’ lives as legends.⁶⁴ Frith also sets up a dichotomy between fan biographies and critic biographies, arguing that fan biographies humanize the artists by providing mundane and trivial detail of their lives, whereas critic biographies play up the scandalous stories and try to expose the artists. Two biographies of Hank Williams serve as examples of this dichotomy. In *Sing a Sad Song: The Life of Hank Williams* (1981), Roger M.

⁶³ James Perone, “Series Foreword” in *The Words and Music of Carole King* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2006).

⁶⁴ Simon Frith, “Essay Review: Rock Biography,” *Popular Music*, 3 (1983): 277.

Williams begins by setting up the legend of Williams's death ending his four-year career in the spotlight of country music, but the rest of the book pays detailed attention to his family, childhood, musical training, songwriting, and career, all in line with a basic interpretation of Williams's life by a dedicated fan. Nashville journalist, Chet Flippo's *Your Cheatin' Heart: A Biography of Hank Williams* (1981), however, explores aspects of Williams' life that make for a sensationalized story, paying extra attention to his addictions to alcohol and narcotics and exposing songs credited to Williams that may have involved a co-writer. To increase the excitement of his story, Flippo includes scenes of fictionalized dialogue, and ultimately paints a tragic picture of Williams' life and career.

Beyond the constructions of authenticity in the biographies, the autobiography of the singer-songwriter functions as an extension of their songwriting persona. To many fans, there is no better source for discovering the "authentic" singer-songwriter than reading it in their own words for that very reason.⁶⁵ In their autobiographies, then, singer-songwriters perform a version of themselves consistent with the identity that audiences construct from their songs.

Carole King's memoir, *A Natural Woman* (2012) downplays her ability as a performer and asserts that she prefers her identity as a songwriter. Her stories and anecdotes sustain her persona as the "earth mother" type, emphasizing her love for living close to nature, her relationship with family and friends, the benefits of organic food, and her political endeavors to preserve the Rocky Mountains. Playing up these parts of her persona convinces her audience that

⁶⁵ Additionally, a number of autobiographical compilations prove the importance placed on reading the experiences of songwriters in their own words; volumes such as *Songwriters on Songwriting*, ed. Paul Zollo (New York: Da Capo Press, 2003) and *Solo: Women Singer-Songwriters In Their Own Words* ed. Marc Woodworth (New York: Delta, 1998) contain interviews with songwriters in which the artists provide insight into their creative processes, their struggles in the business, and provide advice for aspiring songwriters.

she is as sincere as her songs, “Beautiful” or “So Far Away,” and opposed to the artificial world of the popular mainstream, befitting of a “natural” woman.⁶⁶

Political Associations

Beginning with Woody Guthrie inscribing the words “This machine kills fascists” onto his guitar, the singer-songwriter identity has been linked with political activism and protest throughout the 20th century. Many scholars write about the connection between the singer-songwriter and political movements, such as the labor movement of the 1930s and the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s. The alignment between the folk singer and left-wing politics early in the century becomes a more general attempt by singer-songwriters to set themselves in opposition to popular or mainstream culture later in the century. Finally, singer-songwriters make political statements through asserting their own agency, particularly in discussions of gender and racial equality.

The most direct connections between the singer-songwriter and politics come through the tradition of protest songs and political activism, beginning with Woody Guthrie and his labor protests, through the folk revival and the civil rights movement. Starting in the 1930s, the identity of the singer-songwriter was connected to leftist politics. Will Kaufman’s *Woody Guthrie: American Radical* (2011) analyzes Guthrie’s position within the broader political climate of the 1930s and argues that his lyrics gave voice to the plight of migrant workers displaced by the conditions of the Dust Bowl. In *When We Were Good* (1996), Robert Cantwell emphasizes the problems for singer-songwriters associated with the Left through the lenses of Cold War politics, paying particular attention to the effects of McCarthy’s blacklist on Pete

⁶⁶ “So Far Away” and “Beautiful” come from King’s 1971 album *Tapestry*; also see King’s version of the song, “(You Make Me Feel Like) A Natural Woman” on *Tapestry*. Although this was originally composed for Aretha Franklin, the “natural” idea becomes a big part of King’s persona, even inspiring the title of her memoir.

Seeger's career, who was called before the House Un-American Activities Committee as a result of his leftist political leanings.⁶⁷ Michael Denning writes about the marriage of culture and politics during the 1930s in his book, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (1997). In a chapter about music in New York City's cabaret scene, Denning examines Josh White's Piedmont blues as a part of the politically charged musical scene of the Popular Front. Writing against accounts of the Café Society in Harlem that characterize black cabaret performers as apolitical, Denning argues that Josh White's albums *Harlem Blues* (1940), *Chain Gang* (1940), and *Southern Exposure: An Album of Jim Crow Blues* (1941) embodied a vernacular mode of political rhetoric and a blues style both based in White's experience of organized protest in the Piedmont region of North Carolina.⁶⁸

The 1960s saw a revival of the topical song, a protest song based on current events. *Broadside* magazine, edited by Agnes "Sis" Cunningham, published monthly volumes of protest songs, some by amateur songwriters, and others by the major songwriting figures of the folk scene, including Bob Dylan, Pete Seeger, Phil Ochs, Malvina Reynolds, and Nina Simone.⁶⁹ In *Rainbow Quest* (2002), Ronald Cohen's account of the folk revival from 1940 to 1970, *Broadside* serves as an index for the reception and success of folk songwriters. Cohen uses *Broadside's* reviews of contemporary songwriters and topical songs as a gauge for a songwriter's

⁶⁷ Robert Cantwell, *When We Were Good* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 153–88, 241–268.

⁶⁸ Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Verso, 2010), 338. Denning cites White's connections to the protests against tobacco and textile factories prominent in the urban centers of Durham and Winston-Salem, claiming the Piedmont region was one of the most organized areas for union strikes among African Americans during this time. For more on Josh White's biography, see Elijah Wald's *Josh White: Society Blues* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000).

⁶⁹ The Broadside Collection, 1962–1991 in the Southern Folklife Collection holds every publication of *Broadside* magazine in addition to materials from the *Broadside* offices. The Ronald D. Cohen Collection, also at the Southern Folklife Collection, has material from Cohen's interviews with Cunningham for the joint autobiography with her husband, Gordon Friesen, *Red Dust and Broadside*s, edited by Cohen (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999).

relevance to the folk movement. For example, based on reviews and comments published in *Broadside*, Cohen interprets Bob Dylan's career "falling flat" in the folk community around 1963, at which point Phil Ochs assumes the position of the most prominent folk songwriter of the times.⁷⁰ In this way, *Broadside* becomes an interesting way to index the changing values of the folk movement and trace the history of the singer-songwriter crossing stylistic boundaries from the folk revival to the folk rock scene.

With many topical songs centering on struggles for racial equality during the early 1960s, the singer-songwriter holds strong associations with the civil rights movement.⁷¹ Tammy Kernodle focuses on Nina Simone's contributions to protest music during the civil rights movement in "'I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel To Be Free': Nina Simone and the Redefining of the Freedom Song of the 1960s," (2008) arguing that Simone's songs signaled a shift in the freedom song from a collective expression, usually spirituals and gospel songs, to the words of an individual with songs like Simone's "Mississippi Goddamn" (1964), "Four Women" (1969) and "To Be Young, Gifted, and Black" (1970).⁷² Kernodle also notes that this change reflects a shift in civil rights activist groups (SNCC and CORE) from the Martin Luther King's rhetoric of non-violence to the Black Power movement's ideas of self-defense. Beyond the specific political shifts of the civil rights movement around the late 1960s, Kernodle's argument for individualism also reflects the development of a specific singer-songwriter identity around this time.

⁷⁰ Ronald Cohen, *Rainbow Quest: The Folk Music Revival and American Society, 1940–1970* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002), 187.

⁷¹ Songs like Bob Dylan's "The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll" and "Only a Pawn in Their Game" are both based on stories of racial violence. Dylan and Joan Baez performed at the March on Washington in 1963, embedding the image of the singer-songwriter with idea of the civil rights movement.

⁷² Kernodle, "I Wish I Knew How It Felt To Be Free," 296.

A counter argument from Ingrid Monson in *Freedom Sounds: Civil Rights and Jazz Call Out to Africa* (2007) questions the validity of the notion that merely writing political lyrics—the contribution of many *Broadside* songwriters—makes for political music. She foregrounds the music of activists and those involved in direct-action causes, such as the freedom songs of civil rights activists who were on the front lines of protest.⁷³

A second contesting view comes from scholarship on womyn’s music—a separatist movement of music by and for women exclusively coming from the ideology of women’s liberation in the 1970s.⁷⁴ According to Boden Sandstrom and Eileen Hayes, who have each conducted ethnographic research at the Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival (the largest festival within the womyn’s music scene), the singer-songwriter is not considered the voice of the movement. Rather, the festival features an assorted mix of genres and styles from around the world, celebrating diversity in this music.⁷⁵ The most well known group emerging from the womyn’s music movement is Sweet Honey in the Rock, started by SNCC Freedom Singer Bernice Johnson Reagon.⁷⁶ Hayes even condemns the singer-songwriter as homogenous “white girls with guitars” (wggw), targeting the specific identity and privilege associated with the singer-songwriter movement of the 1970s.⁷⁷ The womyn’s music movement still has artists who

⁷³ Ingrid Monson, *Freedom Sounds: Civil Rights Call Out to Jazz and Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁷⁴ “Womyn” is the preferred spelling upheld by members of the womyn’s music community because it eschews the presence of men in their performances.

⁷⁵ Boden Sandstrom, “Performance, Ritual, and Negotiation of Identity in the Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival,” PhD diss., University of Maryland, College Park (2002): 79–85.

⁷⁶ Sweet Honey in the Rock is an all-female African American a cappella group who sings gospel-inspired music. The group performs wearing traditional African clothing, and also has a member who performs the songs in sign language.

⁷⁷ Hayes, *Songs in Black and Lavender: Race, Sexual Politics, and Women’s Music* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 65.

fit the mold of the singer-songwriter, defined as an individual artist who writes personal lyrics, but breaks out of the normative identity and stylistic associations of the singer-songwriter movement.

Another political element of the singer-songwriter tradition comes from the singer-songwriter's attempt to establish him or herself in opposition to popular or mainstream culture. Related to the discussion of individuality in the previous section, singer-songwriters set themselves apart from mainstream culture by highlighting their own uniqueness. The idea of an individual voice speaking against a dominant culture invites the political interpretation of singer-songwriters, even when an artist is not engaged in direct-action political protest. This oppositional stance comes through in many of the arguments about gender discussed in the first section. Bringing back Sheila Whiteley's discussion of Joni Mitchell's "My Old Man" (1971), the example shows Mitchell separating herself from mainstream culture by rejecting the institution of marriage, which can be understood as a political position against mainstream culture.

However, the singer-songwriters in the 1970s constantly negotiated the oppositional aspect of their identity. This tension comes through in Carole King's autobiography as she plays up her separation from the establishment despite her record-breaking album sales for *Tapestry*.⁷⁸ Because her music was so commercially successful, King asserted certain aspects of her life, such as her isolated retirement to Idaho, in order to appear resistant to mainstream commercialism.

One more way that the the singer-songwriter movement sets itself in opposition to the dominant culture was through their visual connections to the 1960s folk revival and

⁷⁸ *Tapestry* is certified diamond by the Recording Industry Association of America having sold more than 25 million copies worldwide.

counterculture. The image of the singer-songwriter has its roots in the folk revival, particularly the fashions of female folk singers. Two articles in *Time* magazine report the development of an image called “the guitar girl.” The 1962 article titled “Sibyl With Guitar” pinpoints Joan Baez’s arrival on the national scene as the paradigm for the image of the female singer-songwriter. Her simple dress, long and straight hair, and lack of makeup would continue to inform artists in the role of singer-songwriter as well as their audiences.⁷⁹ In her book *Fashion and Music* (2011), Janice Miller traces the legacy of this fashion in her study of, what she calls, the “witchy” look of female singer-songwriters in the 1980s and 90s, in addition to the way that fashion becomes a powerful vehicle for identity formation in fan culture.⁸⁰ By visually fashioning themselves in connection with the folk revival and counterculture, singer-songwriters from the 1970s on could signal their resistance to mainstream feminine fashion.

Methods

The research for this dissertation combines ethnographic fieldwork, archival research, and an exploration of media from this era, including recordings and print. This multipronged approach brings out the perspectives from those inside the singer-songwriter scene and shows how the artists saw the movement’s connection to the political ethos of the era. I provide the historical and cultural contexts for these insider stories by drawing on a reception history constructed from newspapers and magazines, connecting the ideas that stemmed from practitioners to the critical and cultural reception of this music. Finally, I weave in close readings

⁷⁹ “Sibyl With Guitar,” *Time*, 23 November 1962: 56–65; The author also comments on the striking increase in guitar sales accompanying the popularity of folk music at this time, citing that 400,000 guitars sold in 1961.

⁸⁰ Janice Miller, *Fashion and Music* (New York: Berg Publishers, 2011), 51–70.

of the songs from the singer-songwriter movement analyzed through the cultural context of the 1970s.

The ethnographic portion of this research came from nine months of fieldwork in Los Angeles in summer 2013 and spring 2014. Embedding myself in the music community and forging connections with key participants of the singer-songwriter movement, I conducted interviews with forty participants, including artists, audience members, music critics, venue impresarios, recording engineers, live sound technicians, arrangers, and session players. In addition to conducting these interviews, I analyzed performance practices in the singer-songwriter tradition by attending concerts and weekly open mics and investigated the role of the geography and spatial construction in important venues throughout the scene.

I complement my fieldwork by drawing on products of material culture such as media from this era, including recordings and print media, daily newspapers, fan publications, and trade magazines. Finally, I draw from archival research in special collections housed at the University of California at Los Angeles, the University of California at Irvine, the Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America at Harvard University, the Library and Archives of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland, the Southern Folklife Collection at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C.

I interpret these materials through a number of methodological lenses by analyzing U.S. political history and drawing on the theoretical frameworks of feminist scholarship. The perspective of political theory is particularly useful to enlighten the political nature of the private sphere as a space inhabited through performance and discourse. This impulse to politicize the private is intimately connected to feminist politics of the period, and therefore, feminist criticism

grounds my theoretical approach to this repertoire.⁸¹ Feminist constructions of the voice, in particular, can provide an illuminating theoretical framework to confront the multilayered performance of political and social identity through spatiality. Philosopher Adriana Cavarero has argued that vocal expression, or vocality, represents a feminine alternative to the masculinized written word.⁸² From a musical perspective, studying the voice relies on this sounding subject instead of the written musical texts. Musicologist Suzanne Cusick has demonstrated that musicians perform gender through their voices, describing the voice as a “badge” of the gendered and sexed bodies in the act of singing.⁸³ Furthermore, she theorizes the voice as a channel between the interior and exterior.⁸⁴ In my interpretation, vocality combines the sounded voice and the authorial voice of the singer as a way to access the interior, private workings of the subject. Studies of vocality—the sounding of this interiority—therefore, powerfully subvert the hegemonic focus on the written word and public sphere as political and cultural expressions. Cavarero has further connected vocality to human understandings of uniqueness, configuring the perception of another human through the sonic as a unique and individual other in relation to the self.⁸⁵ The connections between the singer-songwriter movement and 1970s discourses of self-

⁸¹ Valerie Bryson lays out the relationship between patriarchy, private life, and feminism in *Feminist Political Theory* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 175–195. While a liberal democratic outlook holds that politics must remain separate from private life to maintain an ideal of freedom, feminists view the separation of public and private as a mechanism of patriarchy that prevents women from full participation in the political system.

⁸² Adriana Cavarero, *For More Than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2005). Cavarero’s claims extend on the work of philosopher Hannah Arendt. For an application of Cavarero’s vocal to musicology, see Ryan Dohoney, “An Antidote to Metaphysics: Adriana Cavarero’s Vocal Philosophy,” *Women & Music* 15 (2011): 70–85.

⁸³ Suzanne Cusick, “On the Musical Performances of Gender and Sex,” in *Audible Traces: Gender, Identity, and Music*, Elaine Barkin and Lydia Hamessley, eds. (Los Angeles: Carcciofoli, 1999), 25–50.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 29–31.

⁸⁵ Cavarero, *For More Than One Voice*, 174–175.

discovery, then, provide a way to understand how this manifests musically through sung articulations of the self.⁸⁶

My methodology also relies heavily on the concept of local music-making, as I chose to focus on the musical activity of singer-songwriters in Los Angeles and their relationship to political movements in the United States. This self-imposed limitation offers the advantage of in-depth study of a specific place and time. The choice in the scope and scale of my project, however, brings with it two significant boundaries. The first is geographical: singer-songwriter traditions are active around the globe, and their activities have drawn abundant scholarly attention. My work is situated in this field of study and informed by the research questions that scholarship has brought to bear in other national contexts as well as in first forays into comparative approaches to the field.⁸⁷ Secondly, minority musicians are underrepresented in this study, given the demographic makeup of the neighborhoods in which the singer-songwriter

⁸⁶ In *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood*, Cavarero first lays out the concept of uniqueness and the practice of self-narration (New York: Routledge, 2000). In telling one's own story, using the pronoun "I" presumes that there is a "you," an equally unique subject, which shows how self-narration exists in community with other voices, rather than in isolation. For more on storytelling and feminist politics, see Audre Lorde, "Self-Definition and My Poetry," in *I Am Your Sister* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought* and Clare Hemmings *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminist Theory* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

⁸⁷ Peter Hawkins, *Chanson: The French Singer-Songwriter from Aristide Bruant to the Present Day* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2000); Martin Daughtry's dissertation on contemporary Russian bards, "The Intonation of Intimacy" (2006); Jane Bernstein on Mercedes Sosa in "Thanks for My Weapons in Battle—My Voice and the Desire to Use It": Women and Protest Music in the Americas," in *Women's Voices Across Musical Worlds* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2004), 166–186; Juan Carlos Ureña's work on Central American political songwriters, "The Mockingbird Still Calls for Arlen: Central American Songs of Rebellion, 1970–2010," in *Song and Social Change in Latin America*, ed. Lauren Shaw (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2013), 49–76; Andrea Bohlman writes on the Polish tradition of sung poetry in "Activism and Music in Poland, 1978–1989," PhD diss., Harvard University, 2012; Michael Figueroa discusses singer-songwriters in Israel in "Music and the Jerusalem Question: Song, Poetry, and Politics in Israel, 1967–present," PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2014; Isabelle Marc and Stuart Green, eds., *The Singer-Songwriter in Europe* (New York: Routledge, 2016). In 2015, two conferences convened for the purpose of bringing together international scholars of sung poetic traditions: "Songs of Social Protest" at the University of Limerick in Limerick, Ireland, and "Communities of Song: Performing Sung Poetry in the Modern World" at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. I have also benefitted from conversations about singer-songwriters in Colombia by Joshua Katz-Rosene (City University of New York) and in Brazilian contexts by Schuyler Whelden (University of California Los Angeles) based on the research for their forthcoming dissertations.

movement developed in the 1960s and 1970s. Mike Davis has discussed the racist housing practices in Los Angeles that have resulted in segregated neighborhoods, which he calls the “white wall”: the creation of white, middle- and upper-class neighborhoods in Hollywood, Santa Monica, Orange County, and the San Fernando Valley.⁸⁸ As is widely understood by scholars and the public alike, these urban environments were separate not just physically but also culturally from such black neighborhoods as Watts and Compton or Latino ones in East Los Angeles. As a musical movement that coalesced in white neighborhoods, the scene consisted of majority white artists who performed for mostly white audiences. This is not to say that there were, or are, no minority singer-songwriters. In fact, two black artists, Bill Withers and Valerie Simpson, had great success in this L.A. market. I attribute their success to the legacy of Motown (to which both artists are connected), and the label’s strategy to market black music to white audiences. Yet by focusing this study on Los Angeles in that period, the majority of musicians present in this story come from a white and often privileged background. Such social segregation also led to musical difference. Indeed, in Los Angeles, the singer-songwriter movement emerged as a white musical practice, distinct from black styles in Los Angeles during the 1970s, such as soul and funk, or the Latino punk scene in East L.A.⁸⁹

Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter 1 traces the roots of the singer-songwriter movement from the United States folk revival in 1950s New York City to Los Angeles, where it evolved to reflect the rhetoric of new

⁸⁸ Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (New York: Verso, 2006), 160–168.

⁸⁹ See chapter on Stax Records’ music festival, Wattstax, in Los Angeles in 1973 in Robert Gordon’s *Respect Yourself: Stax Records and the Soul Explosion* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 289–307, and in Pat Thomas, *Listen Whitey!: The Sights and Sounds of Black Power, 1968–1975* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2012); for more on music in East Los Angeles, including a chapter on the punk scene, see Steven Joseph Loza, *Barrio Rhythm: Mexican American Music in Los Angeles* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993).

social movements. Different versions of Joni Mitchell's "Both Sides Now" from 1968 to 1971 show how the singer-songwriter sound restored a simple acoustic style to the folk revival, which had been interrupted by the electric and percussive sounds of rock. Within the context of the catastrophic events of 1968, these cover versions further demonstrate how the singer-songwriter movement adopted new, introspective songwriting strategies to reach a disillusioned political base.

Chapter 2 explores how Los Angeles audiences embraced singer-songwriters for their ability to capture the spirit of this political climate. Analysis of Los Angeles's cultural geography in the 1960s and 1970s shows how the development of the singer-songwriter identity crystallized within the local popular music scene, shaped by the performance spaces, industry practices, and recording studios in Hollywood. The Troubadour, a venue central to scene, forged the connections between the music and performance practices that frame the music as intimate and personal. Artists who moved to Los Angeles adopted their music to this local aesthetic, as evidenced in narratives on James Taylor and Carole King, allowing audiences to interpret songs like Carole King's "Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow" and James Taylor's "Fire and Rain" through this personal and political lens.

Chapter 3 applies the singer-songwriter's confessional songwriting practices to the women's movement in the United States. Like the intimate performance settings fostering the Los Angeles singer-songwriter scene, much of the activism in the women's movement took place at small consciousness-raising meetings. Activists opted for this more personal setting instead of staging large public protests. The work of singer-songwriters acted as a type of consciousness-raising, similar to the organizing practice championed by second-wave feminisms. Songs by Joni Mitchell, Carole King, Valerie Simpson, and Cris Williamson serve as examples of women

voicing private concerns in the public arenas of performances and recordings. Reception history of these songs reveals how audiences viewed the music acted as empowering feminist statements.

Chapter 4 considers the impact of individual agency on the rhetoric of anti-war protests in the 1970s, identifying the subjective songs of singer-songwriters as a way for individuals to dissent the United States' foreign policies. The right to control one's own body, rhetoric similar to the individualistic language of the women's movement, fueled new protests of the war in Southeast Asia. Many men who viewed the Vietnam War as immoral and unjust protested the war by refusing to fight. Veterans offered their individual stories as witness of the war crimes committed by the United States. Additionally, activists protested the escalation of aerial combat, claiming that the impersonal nature of new technology desensitized citizens from the staggering civilian casualties. The singer-songwriter movement's emphasis on individuality influenced this protest of nationalist patriotism in the U.S. through its personal storytelling that provided a remedy to the alienating effects of the war. Close readings of music by Neil Young, Jackson Browne, Bill Withers, and Jesse Winchester shows how the singer-songwriter identity reflected the new rhetoric of individuality prevalent in anti-war protests.

Chapter 5 concludes the dissertation by tracing the impact of the singer-songwriter movement since the 1970s. New venues have joined the Troubadour to continue keeping Los Angeles the vibrant center of the singer-songwriter tradition, and today, singer-songwriters still draw on the tropes established by their predecessors. The practitioners I have interviewed remain active in a vibrant community of songwriters and performers living in Los Angeles and continue to view their work as a political act. In fact, promotional materials for the release of Jackson Browne's latest album, *Standing in the Breach* (September 2014), touted his ability to "merge

the personal and the political.” The analyses I present throughout this dissertation demonstrate the power of personal songs as a method of musical protest. Contrary to definitions of protest song that rely on lyrics that actively confront social issues, personal songs give voice to the impact of social inequalities on individual experience. The introspection fueling the 1970s allows for the investigation of personal songs within a specific historical context that valued subjective narratives over communal organizing, and thus, provides a powerful illustration of how musicians have used personal messages to confront social problems.

**CHAPTER 1: “BOTH SIDES NOW”:
SINGER-SONGWRTERS AND THE UNITED STATES FOLK REVIVAL**

In 2009 the NPR program Folk Alley posted a list of the “100 Most Essential Folk Songs” on their blog. The list contained many standard folk tunes—Woody Guthrie’s “This Land Is Your Land” (1940), Pete Seeger’s “If I Had a Hammer” (1949), and Bob Dylan’s “Blowin’ in the Wind” (1962)—outlining the classic United States folk-revival narrative from the 1930s Labor Protests to the 1960s civil rights struggle.¹ This narrative has been set out in scholarship in works such as Robert Cantwell’s *When We Were Good* (1996), Ronald Cohen’s *Rainbow Quest* (2002), and Gillian Mitchell’s *The North American Folk Music Revival* (2007).² But beyond this established story of the folk tradition, Folk Alley’s list mentioned numerous songs from the singer-songwriter movement, including Leonard Cohen’s “Suzanne” (1967), Jackson Browne’s “Fountain of Sorrow” (1974), and Joni Mitchell’s “Both Sides Now” (1968). These inclusions might make the most dedicated folk-enthusiasts of the 1960s cringe. As American Studies scholar Michael F. Scully has noted, the term “singer-songwriter” serves as “the imperfect pejorative that divides the folk world to this day, which some folk partisans use to malign artists

¹ “Folk Alley’s 100 Most Essential Songs,” NPR.org, 19 June 2009, accessed 5 April 2013, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=105677068>.

² Robert Cantwell, *When We Were Good: The Folk Revival* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996); Ronald Cohen, *Rainbow Quest: The Folk Music Revival and American Society* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002); Gillian Mitchell, *The North American Folk Music Revival: Nation and Identity in the United States and Canada, 1945-1980* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2007). Other accounts include Benjamin Filene, *Romancing the Folk: Public Memory and American Roots Music* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000) and Rachel Clare Donaldson, *“I Hear America Singing”: Folk Music and National Identity* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2014).

for the twin signs of self-absorption and commercial ambition.”³ Yet this analysis does not fully account for the widespread audience perception that singer-songwriters fall under the broader umbrella of folk music.

This division informs much of the scholarly writing on the folk revival, in which studies often focus on the established center of the folk canon and end their narratives in the late 1960s, neglecting to account for changes in the following decade. In the late 1960s, accusations of singer-songwriters’ introspection and mainstream appeal spewed from critics in folk magazines who represented a particular vantage point, rooted in deeply held beliefs about the political nature of folk music espoused by folk proponents during the McCarthy era. Scholarly narratives have thus perpetuated these views as the downfall of the folk revival and valorized these political perspectives. In addition to accusations of introspection and commercialism, the limited scope of what defined a protest song within the revivalist community excludes the music of the changing political landscape of the late 1960s. As such, scholarship does not presently account for the changing historiography of folk music, as evidenced by NPR’s list.

This chapter constructs an alternative history of the folk revival in which the singer-songwriter movement played a central role in maintaining its acoustic musical style and in articulating contemporary political rhetoric through song, thereby extending the revival into the 1970s. The singer-songwriter movement brought folk ideals back into a folk revival interrupted by the sounds and popularity of rock. Joni Mitchell’s famous song “Both Sides Now” navigates these transitions in the folk scene. The lingering tensions the song is placed into offer a case study of how performance practices represent the revival’s social values. The folk community eventually welcomed personal songwriting as an acceptable form of folk practice, so long as the

³ Michael F. Scully, “American Folk Music Revivalism, 1965–2005,” PhD diss., University of Texas at Austin, 2005, 124.

message was accompanied by a simple, acoustic style, as a way to grow their dwindling audience base. Finally, the parallels between personal songwriting and the political landscape of the late 1960s suggest that the new climate necessitated these shifts in songwriting practices, and therefore, personal songs by singer-songwriters maintained their political currency.

The United States Folk Revival

In his 2005 memoir, Dave van Ronk described the regular Sunday jam sessions held in Greenwich Village's Washington Square, which served as a breeding ground for the United States folk revival.⁴ Van Ronk characterized various huddles of acoustic musicians present in the Square: a string band of Old Timers playing fiddle tunes, ballad singers, blues guitarists, a group singing communal people's songs.⁵ This inventory of folk styles embraces the array of musical practices encompassed by the United States folk revival, beginning with ballad collectors and extending through Greenwich Village in the 1960s. Van Ronk's soundscape simultaneously captures the competing sounds within folk practice, which fill the history of the revival with tensions between varied but intensely held beliefs about the meaning and message of folk music. Throughout the revival's history, changes in trends, styles, and performance practices have raised questions of legitimacy in the folk revival, and these questions, in turn, interrogate the folk revival's shifting social values.

The folk revival's classic narrative begins in the late nineteenth century, as ballad collectors advocated for the preservation of vernacular culture in Great Britain and the United States. Harvard professor Francis James Child sought to capture the differences between written

⁴ Dave van Ronk, *Mayor of MacDougal Street: A Memoir of the '60s Folk Revival* (Cambridge: Da Capo, 2005), 41

⁵ *Ibid*, page 41–43.

and spoken word, cementing orally transmitted ballad texts in print volumes through his classic collection, *English and Scottish Popular Ballads* (1882).⁶ The British collector Cecil Sharp searched for remnants of these ballads preserved in rural communities tucked away in the Appalachian Mountains. His publication of *English Folk Songs from the Southern Appalachians* (1917) used the connection between the musical practices of the British Isles and the United States as evidence of America's Anglo-Saxon cultural heritage.⁷ The contemporaneous development of the academic discipline of folklore extended the preservationist impulse of ballad collectors into the twentieth century. Folklorists such as John Lomax pursued the search for American vernacular traditions not grounded in European culture by gathering tunes from rural and working class communities, publishing his volume *Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier Ballads* (1910) and field recordings of such blues singers as Huddie Ledbetter.⁸

Musicians in the 1930s used folk music to connect to American rural life, embracing the traditions of the Dust Bowl and the working class.⁹ During the Great Depression, a substantial labor movement in the U.S. fought against growing unemployment, attempting to protect both jobs and wages. Musicians used the music of the working class as a vital way to fight institutional power, and similarly championed rural, agrarian culture as a critique of growing industrialization and urbanization.¹⁰ Woody Guthrie embodied the identity of Dust Bowl

⁶ Scott B. Spencer, *The Ballad Collectors of North America: How Gathering Folksongs Transformed Academic Thought and American Identity* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2012), 6; Francis James Child, *English and Scottish Popular Ballads* (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, 1965).

⁷ Cecil Sharp, *English Folk Songs from the Southern Appalachians* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1917).

⁸ John Lomax, *Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier Ballads* (New York: Sturgis and Walton Company, 1910); Charles K. Wolfe and Kip Lornell, *The Life and Legend of Leadbelly* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), 58.

⁹ Cohen, *Rainbow Quest*, 22.

¹⁰ Jane S. Becker, *Selling Tradition: Appalachia and the Construction of an American Folk, 1930–1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 96; Cohen, *Rainbow Quest*, 19. Both Becker and Cohen note attempts by the Works Progress Administration to preserve agrarian culture in the face of growing industrialization.

migrants in his songs, such as “Talking Dust Bowl Blues” and “This Land Is Your Land,” through his lyrical language, accented voice, and physical appearance.¹¹ Guthrie performed as a part of a folk group called the Almanac Singers, who were involved in union organizing and incorporated the music of working-class people in labor protests.¹² Just as Guthrie inscribed his guitar with the words “This machine kills fascists,” scholars mark this period for forming an indelible connection between folk revivalism and leftist political thought.¹³

After World War II, the political stances espoused by many folk musicians created problems during the Cold War red scare, which demonized leftist thought. Pete Seeger, who had used folk music to organize labor protests with the Almanac Singers since the 1930s, remained unwaveringly devoted to performing communal songs against war and big business. Throughout the McCarthy era, performance venues and radio stations blacklisted performers with these leftist affiliations, leaving many artists unable to sustain careers as performers. Seeger was even called before the House of Representatives Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) in 1955 where members of Congress questioned Seeger’s communist affiliations.¹⁴ Seeger’s and other musicians’ unwavering devotion to folk music at damaging costs to reputations and careers informed the deeply held beliefs about the connections between folk music and politics, fueling resentment toward any folk sub-genres that appeared to disrespect this commitment.

¹¹ Will Kaufman, *Woody Guthrie: American Radical* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011), 30–54; “Talking Dust Bowl Blues” was released on the LP *Talking Dust Bowl*, Smithsonian Folkways FP11, 1950.

¹² Lee Hays, *“Sing Out, Warning! Sing Out, Love!”: The Writings of Lee Hays* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003).

¹³ Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Verso, 2010); Elijah Wald, *Josh White: Society Blues*. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000).

¹⁴ Cohen, *Rainbow Quest*, 177; “Pete Seeger: Summary of Government Charges, 1955–1957” in *Pete Seeger Reader* (New York: Oxford University Press), 128–130.

Tempered by the threats of John Birch conservatives, by the 1950s, a stream of the folk revival entered the American mainstream. This outpouring of folk songs into popular culture began with the Kingston Trio's recording of "Tom Dooley," a nineteenth-century North Carolinian murder ballad first recorded by folklorist Frank Warner in 1938, which became a Top 40 hit in 1958.¹⁵ To the generation of folk musicians scarred by McCarthyism, this particular presentation of "Tom Dooley" appeared whitewashed and stripped of folk music's political meanings, particularly when the group began to appear in commercials promoting the soft drink 7UP.¹⁶ To a generation of college students who had grown up on rock and roll, however, the Kingston Trio's version of the classic tune served as a gateway into the folk world. Young people began consuming folk records with the same enthusiasm they had Elvis Presley's "Hound Dog" three years earlier. "Tom Dooley" received a Grammy Award for Best Country and Western Performance in 1959, a public endorsement of the song's success that sparked the creation of a new award category for folk musicians.¹⁷

Scholars regard the years following the Kingston Trio's breakout as the Great Folk Boom. Young people dressed like Tom Joad, wielding guitars and renditions of "Barbara Allen," infiltrated such urban neighborhoods as Greenwich Village in New York City and Harvard Square in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Basement coffee houses began to line MacDougal Street in the Village, where folk performances extended into the midnight hours at institutions such as the

¹⁵ Robert Cantwell, *When We Were Good*, 3–5.

¹⁶ Cohen, *Rainbow Quest*, 151; William J. Bush, *Greenback Dollar* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2013), 172–173. Bush reports that the Kingston Trio were paid \$255,000 from 7UP do a series of print advertisements, TV, and radio spots. On these advertisements, the Kingston Trio altered the lyrics of their folk songs to include the name of the product and would conclude the song with the 7UP jingle.

¹⁷ Benjamin Blake, Jack Rubeck, Allan Shaw, *The Kingston Trio on Record*, 33; Bush, *Greenback Dollar*, 177.

Gaslight and Café Wha?.¹⁸ College campuses across the nation mimicked the Greenwich Village scene, where neighborhood coffee houses and university-sponsored clubs fostered vibrant folk scenes.¹⁹

Some of the biggest names in the revival emerged out of this explosion of folk music in mainstream culture. Peter, Paul, and Mary (a trio consisting of Peter Yarrow, Noel Paul Stookey, and Mary Travers) began singing Pete Seeger tunes in close harmony for the major label Warner Brothers in 1962. Likewise, Joan Baez reinvigorated classic mountain ballads like “Black Is the Color of my True Love’s Hair” (1962) on Maynard and Seymour Solomon’s Vanguard label.²⁰ Both of these artists contributed significantly to the success of Bob Dylan’s career: Peter, Paul, and Mary’s recording of “Blowin’ in the Wind” (1963) put the new songwriter on the map, and Joan Baez invited Dylan to sit in on her set at the 1963 Newport Folk Festival. Bob Dylan’s first recordings on Columbia Records adhered to folk tradition, with Dylan performing with a nasal quality, affected accent, and acoustic accompaniment.

During the Great Boom, the folk revival also regained its activist impulse—quieted by folk artists during the Cold War—and took up the civil rights movement as its main cause. Folk revivalists developed this political sensibility by working with black artists involved with direct-action protests of the civil rights movement, most notably the Freedom Singers, a part of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). The Freedom Singers composed new lyrics to spirituals and gospel hymns, songs deeply entwined with the history of slavery and

¹⁸ Bob Dylan, *Chronicles* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004), 9,15; Dave van Ronk, *The Mayor of MacDougal Street*, 141-156; Cohen, *Rainbow Quest*, 123.

¹⁹ David Blake, “Bildung Culture: Elite Popular Music and the American University, 1960–2010,” PhD diss., State University of New York at Stony Brook, 2014.

²⁰ Mark Samples, “A Package Deal: Branding, Technology, and Advertising in the Twentieth and Twenty-first Centuries,” PhD diss., University of Oregon, 2011, 63.

racial oppression in the United States, that spoke to the current plight of black Americans about segregation and racial violence. Revivalists Guy and Candie Carawan worked closely with the Freedom Singers' leader, Bernice Johnson, to help bring their songs and cause to all areas of the folk revival.²¹ The civil rights movement also reinvigorated the topical songwriting practice from the 1930s, as performers began writing songs that made specific reference to current events regarding racial violence in the United States. Nina Simone composed "Mississippi Goddam" after the murder of NAACP activist Medgar Evers in Jackson, Mississippi, in 1963 and the bombing of a black church in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1964 that killed four children. Simone performed the song at the march from Selma to Montgomery organized by Martin Luther King, Jr. for voting rights the next year.²² Bob Dylan also championed this topical song practice, writing "A Pawn in Their Game," which called for an end to acts of racial violence following Evers' murder. Other white folk artists, including Baez and Peter, Paul and Mary, performed frequently at rallies for racial equality, including the March on Washington in 1963 and Mississippi Freedom Summer activities to register African American voters in 1964.

The idealistic vision of the Great Folk Boom came crashing to a halt in the summer of 1965 following Dylan's appearance at the Newport Folk Festival. In his third consecutive year performing at the festival, audiences came to Newport expecting the acoustic songwriter they loved, but Dylan walked on stage flaunting a Fender Stratocaster and backed by the Paul Butterfield Blues Band.²³ Dylan played the electric guitar driven "Maggie's Farm," a song that

²¹ Kristen Meyers Turner, "Guy and Candie Carawan: Mediating the Music of the Civil Rights Movement," M.A. Thesis, University of North Carolina, 2011.

²² Tammy Kernodle, "'I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel to Be Free': Nina Simone and the Redefining of the Freedom Song of the 1960s," *Journal for the Society of American Music* 2, no. 3 (August 2008): 295–317.

²³ Accounts of Dylan's performance at the 1965 Newport Folk Festival found in Cohen, *Rainbow Quest*, 236–237, 239–240; Robert Cantwell, *When We Were Good*, 20–21, 308–309; and Rachel Clare Donaldson, *I Hear America Singing* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2014), 161.

sounded more like the blues-influenced rock band the Rolling Stones than Woody Guthrie, and the sound elicited a negative response from the audience, according to legend.²⁴ Folk revivalist Theodore Bikel recalls the event in his memoir, commenting not on the act of amplification itself, but the musical style, saying:

“We [the folk revival] had used amplification for only one purpose: to make sure that the performers would be heard...This was different. This music did not exist apart from the amplification. I remember saying to Pete [Seeger] that I was sure this kind of music had a place somewhere, but that the place was not here.”²⁵

Bikel’s diplomatic comment begins to unmask the ways that the folk establishment drew sonic boundaries between folk practice and other genres. Even though accounts imbuing Dylan with the ability to disrupt the entire folk revival by picking up an electric guitar are often overblown, the event epitomizes the feelings of betrayal experienced by the folk revival audience when prominent musicians appeared unfaithful to folk music’s acoustic performance practices.²⁶

Following Dylan’s electrification in 1965, artists began to emulate his new sound on *Bringing It All Back Home* (1965), creating a new hybrid genre: folk rock. The genre combined the intellectual heft of lyrics penned by folk songwriters with more radio-friendly musical forms and rock timbres. Simon and Garfunkel’s “The Sound of Silence” navigated this transition, as the duo’s producer re-released their 1964 acoustic song about the assassination of President John F. Kennedy with new arrangement including electric guitar and drums, appealing to mainstream

²⁴ For writing on the central myth of Dylan’s electric set at Newport in 1965, see Wade Hollinghaus, *Philosophizing Rock Performance* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2013), 19; Hank Bordowitz, *Turning Points in Rock and Roll* (New York: Citadel Press, 2004), 125–133; Sean Willentz, *Dylan in America* (New York: Doubleday, 2010), 75.

²⁵ Theodore Bikel, *Theo* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002), 271–272.

²⁶ Michael Jones writes on Dylan’s rejection from the folk community in “Judas and the Many ‘Betrayals’ of Bob Dylan,” in *The Political Art of Bob Dylan*, ed. David Boucher and Gary Browning (Charlottesville: Imprint Academic, 2009), 75–76. For more on folk reactions to folk rock at the 1965 Newport Folk Festival, see Elijah Wald’s details of the confrontation between Albert Grossman and Alan Lomax at Newport 1965 in *Dylan Goes Electric!, Seeger, Dylan, and the Night that Split the Sixties* (New York: Dey St., 2015), 219–223.

sensibilities.²⁷ The Byrds, a California band consisting of Gene Clark, David Crosby, Chris Hillman, and Roger McGuinn, fused tunes composed by Dylan and Seeger with the rock style of the Beatles on “Mr. Tambourine Man” (1965) and “Turn, Turn, Turn” (1965).²⁸ Beyond the new instrumentation, the Byrds reconfigured Dylan’s tunes with more pop-friendly song forms. Their version of “All I Really Want to Do,” for example, converts Dylan’s strophic ballad into a pop hit, reharmonizing the third strophe to form a contrasting bridge, creating the standard song form (AABA). Packaging the sound and form of folk music in these contemporary ways helped engage a broader audience.

Even though the boost of folk rock’s amplification had helped reach new audiences, the folk establishment remained concerned about whether this new style could sincerely convey folk music’s political messages. *Broadside* editor Gordon Friesen wondered, “Are the lyrics getting through to the listeners, these young kids? Or are they just going with the beat?”²⁹ Friesen questioned if the sound of the music would detract from the potency of folk’s radical political messages. Some even found that the message of folk rock had turned away from socially engaged messages. Theodore Bikel assessed that folk rock brought changes to both the sound and lyrics of the folk revival, explaining that even though the music “blared outward, the texts had turned inward.”³⁰

²⁷ “The Sound of Silence” was initially released in 1964 on *Wednesday Morning, 3 A.M.*, Columbia CL 2249, 196. Producer Tom Wilson re-recorded the song incorporating drums and electric guitar in 1965 without permission from Paul Simon or Art Garfunkel (Columbia CBS-201977, 1965).

²⁸ The Byrds integrated the distinct “jingly-jangly” sound of the electric 12-string Rickenbacker George Harrison played in the outro of “A Hard Day’s Night” (1964); James Grier, “Ego and Alter-Ego: Artistic Interaction Between Bob Dylan and Roger McGuinn,” in *Sounding Out Pop: Analytical Essays in Popular Music*, eds. Mark Spicer and John Covach (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 43; Michael R. Frontman, *The Beatles: Image and the Media* (Oxford: University Press of Mississippi, 2009), 79.

²⁹ Gordon Friesen, “An Interview with Phil Ochs,” *Broadside* 63, 15 October 1965, 3, accessed 6 September 2015, <http://singout.org/broadside/issues-p3/>.

³⁰ Theodore Bikel, *Theo*, 272.

As the folk tradition in the United States has changed over the past 150 years, revivalists persistently debate the legitimacy of new trends and developments in the genre. During the 1960s, the issues of folk music's communal identity, its political imperative, and its songwriting practices created sets of contrasting values that co-existed in tension. These tensions frame the discourses that the singer-songwriter movement is placed into at the turn of the decade and call into question the role of the singer-songwriter in folk practice.

Communal Identity

The first of these issues surrounds the perceived communal origins and identity of folk tradition contrasted with the role of individual innovation and composition. While some practitioners viewed folk music as emerging from the people, espousing a communalist view of the tradition, others were more willing to identify the contributions of individual artists and songwriters. This debate is grounded in the intellectual history of ballad collectors stretching back to the nineteenth-century and the foundations of the discipline of folklore, and continue to manifest in performance practices such as participatory group singing.

D.K. Wilgus' study of nineteenth-century American ballad collectors, *Anglo-American Folk Song Scholarship Since 1898* (1959), presents the development of two schools of thought surrounding the issue. First, Francis Barton Grummere's ballad collections demonstrated allegiance to literary evolutionism, a school that equated folk culture with communal creation and claimed it was a phase for primitive cultures, which eventually developed into individualist art cultures.³¹ The second school, aligned with Emersonian individualistic principles espoused by

³¹ D.K. Wilgus, *Anglo-American Folksong Scholarship Since 1898* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press), 11–13.

ballad collectors at Harvard University, held that individuals created folk poetry but communities incorporated individual works into continuing traditions.³²

These questions persisted for twentieth-century folklorists, who sought to subsume individual contributions within broader communal sentiments. Song collector John Lomax sided with the communalist definition of a ballad as a song that “tells a story, is of community or group authorship, is handed down by word of mouth, and is impersonal in tone.”³³ Folklorist John Greenway made another aesthetic judgment about what constitutes political folk music in his history *American Folksongs of Protest*, writing “Whether they are ballads composed and sung by an individual, or rousing songs improvised by the picket line, they are imbued with the feeling of communality, or togetherness.”³⁴ Regardless of a song’s origin, for Greenway, the music must convey a sense of communalism.

In addition to the perceived communal origins of folk songs, many folk artists believed that performance practice could instill a sense of unity through communal singing. In the 1950s, Pete Seeger championed this idea of group singing, composing songs that were simple enough to teach as he performed and compelling the audience to sing with him. Beginning with his work as a union organizer, Pete Seeger envisioned communal songs as creating the class solidarity that was essential to the labor movement.³⁵ *Sing Out!* magazine explained that in performance, Seeger could “‘move’ the audience into a mood of such ‘reluctance’ to remain silent that it

³² Ibid, 7, 69. Wilgus notes that one of these individualists, Frances James Child, denounced the communal origin of ballads by denying that 1) ballads were dance songs 2) ballads stemmed from “group authorship” and 3) “ballads originated among the peasantry.”

³³ Ibid, 81.

³⁴ John Greenway, *American Folksongs of Protest* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1953), 10.

³⁵ Allan M. Winkler, *“To Everything There Is a Season”: Pete Seeger and the Power of Song* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 26.

follows that they join in the choruses,” adding that this form of community singing facilitated the feeling of belonging in one’s society and nation.³⁶

Still, many folk artists performed as individuals on stage without the accompaniment of a singing audience. Ballad singers, blues singers, and many instrumentalists appeared as solo acts. Ballads and the lyrics of 12-bar blues convey their stories through personal experiences, even if the stories are meant to elucidate societal problems, elevating the individual artist’s persona and story above the participatory communal ethos. These contrasts provide a way to view singer-songwriters as an extension of folk’s tradition of individual performers, rather than deviation from its communal ethos.

Political Imperative

A second theme in the revival presents legitimate folk music with a leftist political imperative. Many traditionalists believed that folk music existed for political, not commercial purposes, and frowned upon artists perceived to sell out their values for profit. In his book *Rainbow Quest*, historian Ronald Cohen explicitly defines the genre as “non-commercial people’s music,” explaining that, “while popular (that is, commercial music) has generally avoided overt political content, particularly of a left-leaning sort, certain musical subcultures [folk music] have not shied away from complaints about controversial subjects.”³⁷ American Studies scholar Michael Scully similarly explains that those who believed in folk music’s potential for social change “grew furious at the specter of capitalist interests co-opting their ideals for the purpose of profit.”³⁸ As such, this definition creates opposition between music

³⁶ *Sing Out!* 11, no.1 (February-March 1961), 4–5. Annegret Fauser notes that this attitude toward communal singing was influential during World War II in *Sounds of War: Music in the United States During World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 107, 113–120.

³⁷ Cohen, *Rainbow Quest*, 19, 264.

³⁸ Scully, “American Folk Music Revivalism, 1965–2005,” 93.

perceived to entertain and music that remains committed to its radical political stance even at the risk of monetary success. Stories surrounding college folk clubs and Joan Baez' career during the Great Boom illustrate how commercialism and politics existed in conflict.

The Great Boom saw the intersection of the repertoire of left-leaning folk musicians and mainstream popular culture.³⁹ When these industry forces were made visible to the folk community, it precipitated a sense of loss in the music's legitimacy. A story told by Joe Hickerson to Ronald Cohen in his book *Wasn't That a Time* encapsulates this phenomenon. "I have observed chagrin and consternation when a folk song escapes our grasp and becomes incorporated into mainstream popular music," Hickerson explained.⁴⁰ He continued to recall a story from 1956 when a student at Oberlin College ran into the local coffeehouse with "tears streaming down her cheeks":

She had just heard the million-selling recording by Lonnie Donegan of "Rock Island Line," and she was screaming, "They've taken 'Rock Island Line' away from us! What will they take next, 'Midnight Special?'" In fact, it was "Tom Dooley."⁴¹

Considering the high risk for a folksinger to remain committed to left-wing ideology during the height of the McCarthy Era, it is easy to see how the perceived removal of songs like "Rock Island Line" from its political context instilled the sense that artists had sold-out for commercial gain.

Commercially successful folk artists could navigate this quandary by actively renouncing the music industry's influence, thereby assuring their audience of the sincerity of their left-wing agenda. Joan Baez perpetuated this idea that folk tradition should value political commitment

³⁹ Cohen, *Rainbow Quest*, 200.

⁴⁰ Ronald Cohen, *Wasn't That a Time: Firsthand Accounts of the Folk Music Revival* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2002), 19.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

above commercial success. *Time* magazine reported that as Baez grew in commercial appeal, her response was to “turn down \$100,000 worth of concert dates in a single year. ‘Folk music,’ says she, ‘depends on intent. If someone desires to make money, I don’t call it folk music.’ To ensure that she does not make too much, she tours only two months a year, mostly on college campuses.”⁴² For Baez, the perception that she remained committed to her civil rights and anti-war advocacy was a critical aspect of her legitimate place in the folk tradition. This contrast between standing up for political values and selling out for profit influenced the perception of the singer-songwriter movement, whose mainstream appeal and music-industry backing stood in opposition to the folk revival’s left-wing narrative.

Songwriting Practices

More specific tensions surrounding folk music’s political imperative manifested in beliefs about the revival’s songwriting practices. Many revivalists held that newly composed folk songs should contain a political message, making the connection to current events and political causes clear to the listener through explicit calls to action. This type of song, defined by folk practitioners as a “topical song,” has its history in labor protests and made a resurgence in folk music during the 1960s revival. The primacy placed on this specific definition of a protest song influenced the community’s understandings of what constituted political engagement, delimiting the idea of “politics” to what was explicitly stated in song lyrics.

This particular definition of politics as it relates to songwriting began with the music of early twentieth-century labor organizers. The International Workers of the World (IWW) incorporated folksongs into their *Little Red Songbook* published in 1909.⁴³ IWW songwriters

⁴² “The Folk Girls,” *Time*, 1 June 1962, accessed 16 September 2012, <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,938392,00.html>.

⁴³ Cohen, *Rainbow Quest*, 19.

composed new lyrics to well-known songs that explicated the plight of union laborers. Beyond the lyrical content, the songs in the *Little Red Songbook* served a utilitarian purpose, specifically meant for group singing at the site of protest, an aspect that ties into the revival's communal sensibility.⁴⁴ These tunes entered the folk canon through performances by the Almanac Singers and through folklorist Archie Green, who specialized in both folk music and labor history.

In the 1960s, topical songwriting made comeback, led by former Almanac Singer Agnes 'Sis' Cunningham. Cunningham and her husband, journalist Gordon Friesen, began a topical song magazine titled *Broadside* in 1961. The title recalled nineteenth-century ballads about current events inexpensively printed and easily distributed on single sheets of paper.

Cunningham connected the magazine to this historical practice of topical songwriting in the first issue, writing, "Topical songs have been an important part of America's music since early colonial days."⁴⁵ She used this history to draw parallels with a living tradition, reminding readers that, "Many of our [the folk revival's] best songs were topical songs at their inception. Few would deny the beauty and lasting value of Woody Guthrie's songs. Old or new, 'a good song can only do good.'"⁴⁶ *Broadside* provided a platform for new compositions about current events, claiming that the most important folk songs in the canon of American traditional music were songs that educated audiences about social injustices.⁴⁷ Cunningham advocated for the active addition of new songs to the folk canon, so long as they worked for social good. Malvina

⁴⁴ Greenway, *American Folksongs of Protest*, 179.

⁴⁵ Agnes Cunningham, *Broadside*, #1, 1961 in the Broadside Collection #20289, Southern Folklife Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ For more on the connections between folk music and protest see Greenway, *American Folksongs of Protest*; Donaldson on the folk revival and the New Left in "Illusion and Disillusionment," in *I Hear America Singing: Folk Music and National Identity*, 76–84; and Hardeep Phull on "We Shall Overcome," in *Story Behind the Protest Song: A Reference Guide to the 50 Songs That Changed the twentieth Century* (Westport: Greenwood Publishing, 2008), 1–6.

Reynolds and Phil Ochs, along with Dylan and Seeger, contributed new songs regularly.

Broadside's readership could purchase the monthly magazine and learn to perform songs about the latest newsworthy issues.

Each of these instances places importance on how songs lyrics form explicit connections to current events. Connecting to the previous discussion of folk music's political imperative, revivalists believed that the specificity of the message meant that listeners could not misconstrue a folksong as entertainment instead of social involvement. Furthermore, these songs subsumed the author's individual voice into the communal sentiment. When singer-songwriters introduced personal narratives into this tradition with an established practice of topical songwriting, it called the performer's political commitments into question.

The End of the Folk Revival?

Through their evaluations of these issues, existing scholarly narratives conclude that the singer-songwriter movement remains either outside the realm of folk practice or a bastardization of folk values. Cohen describes the folk revival as emerging from the 1960s "scarred and battered," concluding that the singer-songwriter movement played it safe by writing personal songs that avoided overt political messages.⁴⁸ Similarly, in Gillian Mitchell's assessment, the advent of the singer-songwriter movement caused the folk revival to lose its political edge, explaining, "as a result of changing political, social, and cultural trends, American songwriters who had begun their careers during the folk revival were no longer willing to associate themselves with political crusades or commentary on American society." Both of these accounts use the singer-songwriter movement in a narrative of decline, placing the movement at the end of the revival's history and creating a sense that the movement had irreparably damaged the folk

⁴⁸ Cohen, *Rainbow Quest*, 278.

revival. However, further research reveals that several well-respected artists in the folk world viewed the singer-songwriter movement as a source of inspiration that could revitalize the dwindling folk audience after the turn to folk rock.

Let's Sing Out!

Joni Mitchell's early career as a folksinger establishes her place in the center of these discourses. Furthermore, her initial performance on the program *Let's Sing Out!* contradicts narratives that paint the singer-songwriter movement as a competitive, commercial alternative to the folk scene. Rather, on this program, Mitchell is constructed as a remedy to new trends—a traditionalist who could bring the folk back to a revivalist soundscape interrupted by folk rock.

Mitchell grew up in Saskatoon, a prairie town in the Canadian province of Saskatchewan. She taught herself how to play guitar using Pete Seeger's instructional record, *The Folksinger's Guitar Guide*, released on Smithsonian Folkways in 1955.⁴⁹ After dropping out of her art program at the Alberta College of Art and Design, Mitchell began performing folksongs in Calgary coffeehouses, eventually finding work within the rich folk scene fomenting in Toronto's Yorkville neighborhood.

Mitchell's work as a folksinger culminated with her appearances on *Let's Sing Out!*, a Canadian television program broadcast from college campuses hosted by veteran folksinger and songwriter Oscar Brand. Mitchell's first *Let's Sing Out!* appearance in 1965 illustrates the mix of traditional music, folk rock, and new compositions that characterized the folk scene at this moment. Filmed at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg, this particular program featured guest artists Dave van Ronk and the new folk rock band the Chapins—fronted by songwriter Harry Chapin—alongside Mitchell and Brand. After the full roster of guest artists joined Brand

⁴⁹ Pete Seeger, *Folksinger's Guitar Guide: An Instructional Record*, Smithsonian Folkways FQ 8354, 1955.

in singing the title music “Let’s Sing Out!” Brand opened the show by apologizing for the loud sounds of a new instrument appearing on the show, saying, “That loud cymbals and the bass you heard came from a drum, which is new to our program, but is being handled by the capable Mr. Chapin.” Knowing that the inclusion of rock instruments on the folk program might anger traditionalists, Brand reassured the audience of the drummer’s capability to try and ameliorate the audience’s discomfort toward infiltrating rock instrumentation as he introduced the Chapins’ performance of their single, “Walkin’ Talkin.”

After the Chapins performed, Brand introduced Mitchell, then using her maiden name Anderson, to sing an original composition titled “Born to Take the Highway.” The song’s topic echoed stories of the Great Depression and folk ramblers, a theme familiar to revivalist audiences. “Born To Take the Highway” is a strophic composition, each strophe ending with the refrain “Anything is what I’ve seen,” a moment with sing-a-long potential amid otherwise wordy verses. Mitchell uses personal pronouns in her lyrics. But in this case, the use of first person narrative was not marked as transgressing folk composition’s communal nature because it fit the protagonist’s rambling persona in the song.

After Mitchell’s original, Brand reintroduced the Chapins for their second number, a song about “the way of a man with a maid,” which opened with a prominent cadence on the rim of the snare drum, another reminder of the intruding instrument. Brand and Mitchell followed the performance with a tune about “the way of a maid with a man.” Brand took another opportunity to draw attention to the Chapins’ contemporary style, saying, “While theirs [the Chapins’ song] is new, ours—Joni’s and mine—is very, very ancient.” Brand and Mitchell performed “Blow Away the Morning Dew,” a composition deeply embedded in the history of ballad collecting. The tune comes from Child’s collection of ballads, there published as “The Baffled Knight,”

which Child himself cites back to Thomas Ravenscroft's *Deuteromelia*, a manuscript from the early 17th century containing ballads about English royalty and Robin Hood.⁵⁰ The lyrics Brand and Mitchell performed on *Let's Sing Out!* appear in Cecil Sharps *English Folksongs of the Southern Appalachians*, with Brand singing the verses and Mitchell adding harmonies to the refrain.⁵¹ Compared to the sounds of folk rock on this program, Mitchell appears with Brand as a tradition-bearer. While Mitchell was an important figure for innovations to folk songwriting, the simplicity of her acoustic style tied her music to more centrist visions of the folk establishment.

Reinventing the Folk

The excitement surrounding folk rock during the mid-1960s sent certain folk revivalists into a panic. Some used this moment to reinscribe folk music's traditional sound and values, just as Oscar Brand had as folk rock invaded his television program. Others, espousing the same investment in the continuation of the folk tradition, urged the revival to lean into folk rock's momentum and create new sounds and songs. Mostly, critics and audiences debated the sound best suited for folk's political messages, questioning the validity of musical influences from rock and pop.

During this time, the pages of *Sing Out!* magazine, established in 1950 by Irwin Silber, served as a space where clashing opinions prescribed various solutions for the perceived loss of folk tradition. Artists in an older generation of folk musicians used this pivotal moment to reinscribe the folk movement with the trappings of tradition, particularly its non-commercial

⁵⁰ Frances James Child, *English and Scottish Popular Ballads* Vol. 4, 239; Thomas Ravenscroft, *Deuteromelia* (Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey, 1992).

⁵¹ Cecil Sharp, *One Hundred English Folk Songs* (New York: Dover Publications, 1975), 46–47; first edition published in 1916.

status. An editorial printed on the inside cover of the magazine in the summer of 1967, presumably penned by Silber himself, made the magazine's opposition to commercialism clear, saying that folk music consisted of "manmade, not machine made songs...Songs which are written for a purpose which goes beyond the mere making of money or popular success."⁵² By implying that songs in the folk tradition were "man-made," rather than churned out by popular songwriters, the author positioned the folk revival in opposition to the commercial music industry. As rock music occupied the space on the charts previously held by folk musicians during the Great Boom, the revivalist community defended the now-less-popular version of folk music by praising its commitment to social involvement at the expense of monetary gain.

Beyond the discussion of commercialism, writers at *Sing Out!* noted the rise of individualistic "singer-instrumentalists" within the folk scene and expressed concern about how an elevated sense of individualism might impact the folk community. The founding editors at *Sing Out!* felt that this opposed folk music's primary commitment to political songwriting and communal engagement. Individualistic performances compromised these values, detracting from community by promoting indulgent self-reflection rather than calls to political action. The jazz critic Nat Hentoff pondered this concept and the continuing validity of a single, "folk" sound in a *Sing Out!* article titled "The Future of the Folk Renaissance," writing:

I wonder, moreover, in terms of American performers to come, whether the term "folk" itself may soon be generally obsolete. Or rather "folk" in its customary connotations. At first "folk" meant communal creations. If strong individual personalities had helped shape a particular piece, their identities became lost in time and their contributions blurred into the community continuum. Later "folk" increasingly—and at last, dominantly—meant individual singer-instrumentalists. But these were ineluctably part of a communal culture. Or subculture, to be more precise. Leadbelly and Woody Guthrie, Almeda Riddle and the Staple Singers were all distinctly, as well as distinctively "folk" in this fundamental sense. But what of the future?...If "folk" as a term is to have any operative (rather than merely

⁵² "Editorial," *Sing Out!* 17, no. 3, June/July 1967, 1.

promotional) meaning, it will have to be redefined. And considerably elasticized. It will have to allow for broad heterogeneity of material and musical interests in a single performer, united by a firmly personal stamp of conception and style.⁵³

Hentoff's assessment exhibits the basic tension between individualism and communalism that place the singer-songwriter movement and folk revival at odds. Hentoff also shows more nuanced attention to redefining folk practice as the genre, along with the political and social landscape of the United States, transformed.⁵⁴ As a jazz critic, Hentoff similarly facilitated conversations between jazz traditionalists and avant-garde performers who were fighting for a place in mainstream jazz.⁵⁵

Hentoff's specific attention to "individual singer-instrumentalists" likely stemmed from a collection of new compositions released by Elektra Records in 1965 titled *Singer-Songwriter Project*.⁵⁶ The compilation included original songs by four writers—Richard Fariña, Patrick Sky, Bruce Murdoch, and David Cohen (later known as a singer-songwriter by the name David Blue)—produced by Paul Rothchild. The structure of the album is consistent with other Elektra albums of this era, such as *Folk Banjo Styles* and *The Blues Project*, compilations that study a particular folk sub-genre.⁵⁷ *Singer-Songwriter Project* included liner notes by Fariña, which critiques the naïveté of the folk revival's sincerely held connections to a rural past, writing:

Folk music...fooled us into certain sympathies and nostalgic alliances with the so-called traditional past. The Thirties. The Highways and Open Roads. The Big West. The Southern Mountains. The Blues. Labor Unions. Child Ballads. All of which left their mark, even on this record.⁵⁸

⁵³ Nat Hentoff, "The Future of the Folk Renaissance," *Sing Out!* 17, no. 1, February/March 1967, 11–13.

⁵⁴ See John Gennari, *Blowin' Hot and Cool: Jazz and Its Critics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 166–167, 171.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 225.

⁵⁶ Various, *Singer-Songwriter Project*, Elektra EKL-299, 1965.

⁵⁷ Various, *Folk Banjo Styles*, Elektra EKL-217, 1962; Various, *The Blues Project*, Elektra EKL-264, 1964.

⁵⁸ Richard Fariña, Liner notes to *The Singer-Songwriter Project*, Elektra EKS-7299, 1966.

To Fariña, the most important strand of the folk revival lay in new compositions. Rather than stress the communal benefices of topical songwriting, as Sis Cunningham did in *Broadside*, Fariña found the “intensely personal” nature of songwriting its most compelling aspect:

A number of people began adding their own songs to otherwise derivative repertoires and finding astonishing response from their listeners. That the songs were intensely personal in their grievance or celebration was inevitable but in nearly every case the audience was not only ready for the new compositions but anxious to have its own sensibilities strengthened through such an unaffected medium. The love songs, if they were good, were love songs of the times, implying a recognition of station wagons, thruways, and television sets instead of sketching a cop-out idealized, pastoral picture. The protest songs lost their earlier occasional subject matter and were ambitious enough to take on concerns like the military-industrial complex, which made its money by preparing for a war of blistering absurdity. The satire was quick and to the uneasy point, having gained the best from the psychiatrists’ and musician’s private vocabularies.⁵⁹

Fariña’s analysis points to newfound acceptance of personal rhetoric in folk songs, incorporating “private vocabularies” and favoring songs whose subjects took activist stances against new topics like “the military industrial complex.”

Paralleling the *Singer-Songwriter Project* and Fariña’s observation of the changing musical landscape, several other artists embedded in the established center of the revival advocated for new directions in the folk scene. Judy Collins, for example, started her career singing traditional music with her first album release, *A Maid of Constant Sorrow*, on Elektra in 1963. Collins was well respected in folk circles, and she became a partial owner of *Sing Out!* in 1967 and served on the Board of Directors for the Newport Folk Festival.⁶⁰ At the same time that she accepted these institutional obligations, she entered a more experimental phase of her performing career. Collins searched for ways to bring the folk world out of, in her term,

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ *Sing Out!* owner Irwin Silber restructured the magazine from his individual ownership to thirteen stockholders and an editorial advisory board. See “A New Chapter Begins,” 17, no. 4, August/September 1967.

“Lomaxland,” or the reinterpretation of a limited canon of work songs and mountain ballads such as those gathered by the American folk revivalists John and Alan Lomax.⁶¹ Like Fariña, Collins had grown disenchanted with overused nostalgic tropes pervading the revival and wanted to incorporate more mainstream pop sounds.

Collins found her new direction by cultivating new songwriting talent and expanding the sonic palate considered acceptable in the folk genre. Both of these gestures can be seen in her 1966 album *In My Life*. This album featured lavish orchestrations arranged by classical artist Joshua Rifkin and compositions by a brand new Canadian poet and songwriter, Leonard Cohen.⁶² Collins recalled in her memoir that her publicist, Nancy Carlin, “tried her best to prepare me [Collins] for what she saw as the possible fallout from my rebellion against the expected. I didn’t worry, but I tend to be an optimist about my work...She was right to worry. The critics got out their long knives.”⁶³

As Carlin had predicted, *Sing Out!* did not take the changes in Collins’s output well. An anonymous review of the record called any appreciators of the album “fair weather” folk fans, saying, “This is a record for those who are sick and tired of hearing singers accompanied only with guitar. It will come as a breath of fresh air for the many urbanites who reluctantly went along with the folk thing because it was ‘in,’ and perhaps a bit fresh, but who could not fundamentally accept its musical standards and have been impatient to move on.”⁶⁴ *Sing Out!* saw this change in style as an indicator that Collins and her audience were straying from folk

⁶¹ Jac Holzman, *Follow the Music: The Life and High Times of Elektra Records* (Santa Monica: First Media Books, 1998), 140.

⁶² Sylvie Simmons, *I’m Your Man: The Life of Leonard Cohen* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2012), 147.

⁶³ Judy Collins, *Sweet Judy Blue Eyes* (New York: Crown Archetype, 2011), 206.

⁶⁴ “Review: In My Life, Judy Collins,” *Sing Out!* 17, no. 2, April/May 1967, 34.

music's values. *Village Voice* critic Richard Goldstein felt similarly affronted by Collins stylistic transition, recommending, "Judy Collins should take a deep breath of country air and a long look at her guitar—just her guitar." He further insulted Collins's pop sensibility, writing, "Judy Collins's transition from Joan Baez's kid sister to Barbra Streisand's chambermaid is regrettable." Comments in both reviews echo revivalist debates about commercialism, indicating that folk purists saw Collins's new directions as "selling out" for mainstream taste.

Judy Collins's "Both Sides Now"

The first recording of Joni Mitchell's song "Both Sides Now" by Judy Collins shows an artist fully entrenched in the folk establishment adopting introspective, confessional lyrics and also significantly altering the sound of folk music. Reactions to Collins's recording focused mainly on these sonic, not lyrical, transgressions, demonstrating that performance practice remained the more important issue among revivalists post-1965.

Despite the negative reaction to *In My Life* from folk revivalists, Collins's album reached number 46 on Billboard's pop albums chart.⁶⁵ Collins persisted in her unconventional pursuits, viewing her chart success as an indication of promising opportunities for her new sound.⁶⁶ Collins began gathering songs by new writers for another record, and, following Leonard Cohen's advice, started composing her own material.⁶⁷

Collins first heard "Both Sides Now" through a late night phone call with Mitchell, the song's author. Mitchell had recently moved from her days on Canada's *Let's Sing Out!* to

⁶⁵ "Hot 100," *Billboard*, 16 November 1968, 72.

⁶⁶ Judy Collins, *Sweet Judy Blues Eyes*, 207.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 213.

Greenwich Village to work as a folksinger. There, Mitchell met rock musician Al Kooper, who contributed the organ part to Dylan's "Like a Rolling Stone" (1965). Kooper was inspired by Mitchell's original compositions and called Collins to inform her of a songwriter new to the scene. Kooper prompted Mitchell to sing "Both Sides Now" with Collins on the line, and Mitchell struck a deal allowing Collins to record the song by the end of the over-the-phone performance.⁶⁸

The song itself showcases the confessional songwriting practices that precipitated the singer-songwriter movement, featuring autobiographical stories, personal pronouns, and introspective lyrics. "Both Sides Now" (Figure 1.1) follows a verse-chorus form with lyrics that describe events from two perspectives. The three verses grow increasingly broader, spanning topics of clouds, love, and life respectively. Each verse contains two phrases, which present the two contrasting perspectives. Clouds, for example, are first presented as imaginative sources for daydreaming and then the objects that obscure the sun. After each iteration of the verse, the chorus transforms to match the theme. In the final verse (lines 25–32), when the protagonist looks at life from both sides, the song turns into an ode to the type of self-reflection promoted by the singer-songwriter aesthetic. The verse melody is relatively straightforward, but its simple character masks the demanding leaps required of the vocalist in the third phrase (lines 3, 7, 15, 19, 27, and 31) of each verse. During the chorus, the melody utilizes a wide range, transcribed in Figure 1.2. The first phrase of the chorus leaps into the singer's high register ("I've looked at clouds from both sides now") while the final line plunges low in the singer's range ("I really don't know clouds at all"). The chorus spans an octave and a half range, containing the sense of sweeping lyricism that accompanies the transcendent quality of her self-discovery.

⁶⁸ Sylvie Simmons, *I'm Your Man*, 171–172.

Figure 1.1: “Both Sides Now”—Joni Mitchell

1	<i>Verse 1</i> Rows and flows of angel hair And ice cream castles in the air And feather canyons everywhere I’ve looked at clouds that way	First phrase: Perspective #1
5	But now they only block the sun They rain and snow on everyone So many things I would have done But clouds got in my way	Second phrase: Perspective #2
10	<i>Chorus 1</i> I’ve looked at clouds from both sides now From up and down, and still somehow It’s cloud’s illusions I recall I really don’t know clouds at all	
15	<i>Verse 2</i> Moons and Junes and Ferris wheels The dizzy dancing way you feel As every fairy tale comes real I’ve looked at love that way	First phrase: Perspective #1
20	But now it’s just another show You leave ‘em laughing when you go And if you care, don’t let them know Don’t give yourself away	Second phrase: Perspective #2
	<i>Chorus 2</i> I’ve looked at love from both sides now ...	
25	<i>Verse 3</i> Tears and fears and feeling proud To say “I love you” right out loud Dreams and schemes and circus crowds I’ve looked at life that way	First phrase: Perspective #1
30	But now old friends are acting strange They shake their heads, they say I’ve changed Well something’s lost, but something’s gained In living every day	Second phrase: Perspective #2

Chorus 3

I've looked at **life** from both sides now

...

Figure 1.2: Melody from chorus of “Both Sides Now”

The image shows two staves of musical notation in 4/4 time. The first staff contains the melody for the first line of the chorus, with lyrics: "I've looked at clouds from both sides now from up and down and still some-how it's". The second staff continues the melody, with lyrics: "clouds il-lu-sions I re-call I real - ly don't know clouds at all". The notation includes various note values, rests, and a fermata over the final note of the second staff.

Collins’s arrangement deviated from the acoustic style typically accompanying a singer-songwriter’s confessional songs. Collins re-enlisted Rifkin to create an original arrangement for Mitchell’s song. At this time, Rifkin performed Renaissance and Baroque music and studied with musicologist Gustave Reese at New York University.⁶⁹ Outside of classical circles, Rifkin was known for his album of Beatles tunes arranged in the style of George Friedrich Handel released on Elektra’s sister-label, Nonesuch.⁷⁰ Rifkin’s arrangement for “Both Sides Now” also makes use of a Baroque instrument, centering on the harpsichord, which provides the track with its delightful, seemingly electrified sound. Rifkin builds up a lavish texture, beginning with the solo harpsichord and adding more instruments to the orchestration with each verse/chorus pair. This culminates with a full orchestra glissando into the final chorus along with extra energy from the drum-set (see Table 1.1).

⁶⁹ Mary Katherine Aldin, interview with author, Los Angeles, CA, 7 August 2013. The folk revival coincided with a resurgence of Renaissance and Baroque music in the U.S. and Europe, known as the Early Music revival. See Nick Wilson, *The Art of Re-Enchantment: Making Early Music in the Modern Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 66–68. Releases of early music on folk labels act as evidence of the overlapping audiences for the folk and early music scenes. See Pierre Chaillé and La Société de Musique D’Autrefois, *A Treasury of Music of the Renaissance*, Elektra EKL-229, 1963 and Jean-Paul Kreder Ensemble, *Chants de la Renaissance de Claude LeJeune*, Nonesuch H-71001, 1964.

⁷⁰ Holzman, *Follow the Music*, 99. Nonesuch began as an Elektra subsidiary in 1964 reissuing classical recordings by European ensembles; *Chants de la Renaissance* was the label’s first release.

Table 1.1: “Both Sides Now” on Judy Collins’s *Wildflowers* (1968), arr. Joshua Rifkin

<i>Timing</i>	<i>Form</i>	<i>Lyrics</i>	<i>Arrangement</i>
0:00	Introduction		Harpichord, bass
0:05			Drums, hi-hat
0:08	Verse 1	“Rows and flows of angel hair...”	Collins’s voice enters, using vibrato popular in folk performance in the early 1960s, similar to Joan Baez; Harpichord; Drums
0:40	Chorus 1	“I’ve looked at <i>clouds</i> from both sides now...”	Electric organ added to harpichord and drums; arpeggiated harpichord hook comes back at 0:58
1:04	Verse 2	“Moons and junes and ferris wheels...”	Harpichord, drums, joined by large string orchestra; counter-melody in the violins
1:37	Chorus 2	“I’ve looked at <i>love</i> from both sides now...”	Strings in harmony with Collins’s melodic line;
2:03	Verse 3	“Tears and fears and feeling proud...”	Chimes added to the full ensemble
2:35	Chorus 3	“I’ve looked at <i>life</i> from both sides now...”	Glissando into the final chorus; drum shifts from accenting off-beats to hitting beats 1–4; harpichord riff reappears at 2:43, ends with a fade out

“Both Sides Now” became the single for Collins’s 1967 album, *Wildflowers*, produced by Mark Abramson. In addition to her interpretations of songs by Mitchell and Cohen, Collins recorded three original songs: “Since You Asked,” “Sky Fell,” and “Albatross.” *Rolling Stone*’s review of the album alerted listeners to Collins’s new sound on *Wildflowers*. The review specifically noted the lavish orchestration and mélange of new compositions by Collins and others:

Judy Collins’s new album, *Wildflower* [sic] will be a considerable change for the versatile folk singer. For the first time she has written her own material for a record. The album will feature three of her original songs. There will be a great deal of orchestration involved in her arrangements. On one cut she is backed by a 46-piece orchestra. The album also features new songs by Canadian poet and novelist Leonard Cohen, “Sisters of Mercy” and “Priests” and some new tunes by a friend of Judy’s, a young Canadian composer, Joan Mitchell. The album also includes a Jacques Brel song, which Judy sings in French. *Wildflower* [sic] will be out at the end of November.⁷¹

⁷¹ “Review: *Wildflowers*,” *Rolling Stone*, 23 November 1967. Collins’s inclusion of the Jacques Brel song recorded in French stems from the folk revival’s familiarity with Brel’s output, which was commonly included in *Sing Out!* in its original French and in translation. A more eclectic choice on the album was Collins’s performance of “Lasso! di

Looking back, Collins identified these shifts as “a departure” for both her public image and the folk scene. In her 1998 memoir, she recalled, “There was not a guitar in evidence. I had gone all the way with my belief in Rifkin, the sounds of the orchestrations, the texture of the instruments. I was no longer a girl with only a guitar.”⁷² The departure brought Collins incredible success in mainstream markets beyond the folk world. Album sales reached number five on the *Billboard* Top 200 for Pop Albums in 1967, and Collins earned a Grammy for Best Folk Performance with “Both Sides Now” in 1968.

Just like the story of “Tom Dooley” cited earlier in this chapter, Collins’s success in channels typical for mainstream popular music unsettled commercial-leery folk revivalists. More importantly, this recording of “Both Sides Now” signaled Collins reluctance to return to a basic acoustic folk aesthetic despite the condemnation of revivalists. Collins’s recording fit well within the styling of folk rock at this time, and to rock audiences, the harpsichord would have been a clear connection to the Beatles recording of Lennon and McCartney’s song “In My Life” (1965). Furthermore, a succession of cover versions by easy listening and soft rock artists demonstrated how easily Collins’s sound transitioned into these spheres of commercial music. The recordings by Frank Sinatra, Andy Williams, Bing Crosby, Glen Campbell, and Neil Diamond each capitalized on Rifkin’s exact recipe for building up the texture with drums and orchestra verse by verse, highlighting what the folk community viewed as a formulaic approach to commercial recordings.⁷³

donna,” a ballata by Francesco Landini (performed in Italian), which demonstrated her knowledge of western classical music but likely stemmed from Rifkin’s interest in early music.

⁷² Judy Collins, *Singing Lessons* (New York: Pocket Books, 1998), 149.

⁷³ Frank Sinatra, *Cycles*, Reprise FS 1027, 1968; Bing Crosby with the Jimmy Bowen Orchestra and Chorus, *Hey Jude/Hey Bing!*, Springboard SP 4008, 1968; Andy Williams, *Raindrops Keep Fallin’ On My Head*, Columbia CS

At the same time that Collins sought new musical directions for the folk scene, several folk record labels also needed to expand their artist rosters with more popular artists in order to keep the companies afloat. Columbia Records saw boosted sales from folk-rock releases such as Dylan's *Highway 61 Revisited* (1965), the Byrds' *Mr. Tambourine Man* (1965), and Simon & Garfunkel's *Sounds of Silence* (1966). Maynard and Seymour Solomon's Vanguard Records, the classical label that signed Joan Baez with incredible success in 1960, added the rock group Country Joe and the Fish in 1967.⁷⁴ Elektra similarly sought more rock acts, signing the psychedelic bands Love and the Doors along with the garage rock group MC5 between 1966-1968.⁷⁵ The expansive sound of Collins's albums during this time can be interpreted as experimenting with the folk sound, but also an attempt to broaden the audience-base for folk music by appealing to a more pop-oriented aesthetic. Despite *Sing Out!*'s desire to side with folk tradition, the magazine similarly suffered from diminishing readership, and would eventually change its own rhetoric, hoping to revive an audience for folk music.

Dave van Ronk's "Clouds"

A second folk figurehead, Dave van Ronk, recorded "Both Sides Now" in the same year as Collins. Van Ronk's version meets the sonic expectations of traditional folk performance. Still, van Ronk's discussion and performances of "Both Sides Now" demonstrate that he hoped Mitchell's innovative introspective tone would capture new audiences, showing how the impulse

9896, 1969; Glen Campbell, *Try a Little Kindness*, Capitol Records SW 389, 1970; Neil Diamond, *Rainbow*, MCA Records MCA 2103, 1973.

⁷⁴ Country Joe and the Fish were featured on the cover of a double issue of *Sing Out!* 18, no. 2 and no. 3, June/July 1968.

⁷⁵ Holzman, *Follow the Music*, 161, 262–266.

to commercialize reached even the most dedicated and supposedly anti-commercial corners of the folk revival.

Van Ronk, like Collins, established himself as a folksinger during the height of the revival in the early 1960s. In Van Ronk's telling, when Mitchell played him "Both Sides Now," he felt he had found a tune that "couldn't miss," and he decided to record it immediately. "I put together a nice, subtle arrangement...and I sang it very plainly so people could really hear the lyric."⁷⁶ Van Ronk changed the title of the song to "Clouds," arguing that it accentuated the motif of the song.⁷⁷ The track appeared on *Dave van Ronk and the Hudson Dusters*, released on Verve Records in 1967.⁷⁸

Van Ronk's story echoes the arguments that writers in *Sing Out!* made about the best way to achieve "personal expression" through folk song. For example, *Sing Out!* editor and guitarist Ed Badeaux argued that the benefits of folk expression came from simplistic arrangements, writing, "The freedom of the idiom, the emphasis on direct statement and communication, the simplicity of accompaniment, all made it easy for the talented performer to express himself and find his audience."⁷⁹ Van Ronk's predilection towards simplicity in the arrangement and a direct quality in vocal production comply with the folk scene's standards for an expressive performance.

Van Ronk believed his version would have been a commercial success had he been with a different label and Collins not eclipsed him on the charts. His producers at Verve Records

⁷⁶ Dave Van Ronk with Elijah Wald, *The Mayor of MacDougal Street* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2005), 221.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Dave van Ronk and the Hudson Dusters, *Dave van Ronk and the Hudson Dusters*, Verve Forecast FTS-3041, 1967.

⁷⁹ Ed Badeaux, "The Spectacle Moves On," *Sing Out!* 17, no. 4, August/September 1967, 10.

devised a marketing plan to break the single in one market at a time.⁸⁰ According to van Ronk, his version was climbing up the charts in Cleveland when Collins's released her version.⁸¹ The team at Verve, on the verge of bankruptcy, could not compete with the marketing power of Elektra, knocking out van Ronk's hopes for chart success.⁸²

Van Ronk still reaped the benefits of Collins's success, deploying "Both Sides Now" as a way to keep his audience's attention during performances. During a 1968 concert performed at the 23rd St. YMCA in New York City, van Ronk programmed the tune as his encore. Van Ronk's audience would have expected to hear "Both Sides Now," well known from Collins's version. Yet, he withheld the song until after he performed his own originals, "Head Inspector" and "Cocaine Blues" and multiple songs by Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill, likely knowing that his audience would hold on through this less well-known material to hear the popular tune. In doing so, van Ronk also utilized the changing trends and the mainstream appeal of confessional songwriting to reinvigorate folk's audience.

Joni Mitchell's "Both Sides Now"

Joni Mitchell's own version of "Both Sides Now" combined the sonic and lyrical qualities of confessional songwriting with the authority of her own personal experience. The mainstream music industry viewed Mitchell's music as a new outpouring of folk in popular music and marketed Mitchell's album heavily to folk audiences. The results of Mitchell's aesthetic and her label's marketing sparked revivalists' approval, who deemed her introspective doctrine an acceptable form of folk practice, so long as it was accompanied by a more traditional acoustic

⁸⁰ Dave van Ronk, *The Mayor of the MacDougal Street*, 221.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Van Ronk signed with Polydor for his next album, *Van Ronk*, released in 1971.

arrangement. Mitchell's music offered a redemptive alternative to the over-produced sounds of rock and pop infiltrating the folk scene, and revivalists hoped that Mitchell's mainstream appeal would enliven folk's dwindling audience base.

The marketing plan behind Mitchell's first album significantly affected audience's understandings of her music as a part of the folk genre. Mitchell recorded her first album, *Song to a Seagull*, in 1967 at Sunset Sound studios in Los Angeles. The album was released in March of the following year on Reprise Records. By September 1968, Mitchell's album had sold 36,000 copies, receiving "minor airplay" after Reprise launched an "underground ad campaign."⁸³ With meager sales, Reprise's head of merchandising Joel Friedman called a meeting with a team that included label president Mo Ostin, national sales manager Richard Sherman, and advertising director Stan Cornyn. The meeting, according to Friedman's memo, was meant to "augment the sales of this album [*Song To a Seagull*]."⁸⁴ The team decided to market *Song to a Seagull* to folk audiences, explaining how young people, in particular, understood Mitchell as a part of the genre. Friedman identified the markets where album sales had picked up, noting that Mitchell had a "high degree of acceptance amongst underground-folk artists." Sherman explained that the success of Mitchell's album, therefore, was "extremely meaningful in terms of the company's own reputation among the folk-rock milieu."⁸⁵

Friedman's emphatic solution to market Mitchell's work was to "lean on [folk] distributors...to hype sales of this LP."⁸⁶ With this recommendation, national sales-manager Richard Sherman pushed the album with distribution companies in key folk markets, writing

⁸³ Memo (10 September 1968), Box 13 Folder 57, Mo Ostin Collection, Library and Archives, Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum, (emphasis in original).

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

letters to Reprise's distributing partners in Chicago, Minneapolis, Seattle, Dallas and St. Louis. In the letters, Sherman petitioned the distributors to increase their orders of Mitchell's album, campaigning that the album resonated with underground and folk audiences:

I've been reviewing your performance on the Joni Mitchell album RS 6293 and find it difficult to believe that you've only purchased 595 units. Joni, as you probably know, is an extremely important artist for us not only because of the potential sales she can generate, but because of her universal acceptance by those in the underground and folk bag....I specifically need your help in getting this LP exposed in your important accounts. Results indicate that she sells well in those areas that take a personal interest.⁸⁷

With this plan in place, Reprise created a plan around Joni Mitchell's albums that placed her music in markets traditionally successful for folk artists.

Mitchell recorded her own version of "Both Sides Now" two years after Collins recording. She placed her own interpretation on her second album, *Clouds*, drawing on Van Ronk's titular change to "Both Sides Now." Mitchell recorded the project shortly after moving to Los Angeles' Laurel Canyon neighborhood, an eclectic array of bungalows and cabins tucked into the hills immediately north of the Sunset Strip. Mitchell recorded *Clouds* at A&M records, co-producing the project with Paul Rothchild, the former house producer for Elektra Records who worked on the *Singer-Songwriter Project* in addition to albums by the Doors. Mitchell released the album on Reprise Records, a boutique label founded by Frank Sinatra in 1960 and acquired by the major company Warner Bros. Records in 1963.

Despite circumstances that signal commercial trappings, such as Hollywood, a major producer, and a fancy recording studio, Mitchell maintained a folk presentation in her public image. Mitchell matched every aspect of the female folksinger image prescribed in "The Folk-Girls," an article profiling Joan Baez published in *Time* magazine in 1962. The article

⁸⁷ Letter from Richard Sherman to Ralph Kick (17 September 1968), Mo Ostin Collection, Library and Archives, Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum.

recommended that to become a “folk-girl,” “It is not absolutely essential to have hair hanging to the waist—but it helps. Other aids: no lipstick, flat shoes, a guitar.”⁸⁸ With waist long hair, handmade clothes, toting an acoustic guitar, and singing with a light, airy soprano, Mitchell displayed an indisputable likeness to Baez. In performance, critics also recognized Mitchell as the next female folk singer following Collins’s and Baez’s legacy.⁸⁹

Mitchell’s folk image is consistent with her own recording of “Both Sides Now.” In her interpretation, Mitchell follows Van Ronk’s formula for simple accompaniment and direct statement, aesthetically aligning her sound with the musical preferences of the folk establishment. Mitchell accompanies herself with only guitar, and the tempo is significantly slowed from Collins’s upbeat rock track. The singer-songwriter movement came to be identified not only by confessional lyrics but also by this acoustic, or folk, sound. When asked what distinguished the singer-songwriter movement, Dickie Davis, who ran the lights at the Los Angeles folk club the Troubadour, explained:

It was in contrast to the over-produced folk music that was coming out at the time...I remember listening to the radio and thinking, ‘What *is* this? It’s so over-produced. So predictable. So tedious and bland compared to what music was like five years ago. And then when James Taylor, when Carly Simon, when Joni Mitchell...I mean, those are the albums that I had. That was what I was listening to then because they were so personal!⁹⁰

Davis’ recognition of the music as an alternative to the over-produced sounds emerging from major folk artists shows how singer-songwriters like Mitchell restored the sonic qualities of folk practice in the early 1960s.

⁸⁸ “The Folk Girls,” *Time*, 1 June 1962, accessed 16 September 2012, <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,938392,00.html>; also see Susan Gordon Lydon’s depiction of Mitchell, “In Her House, Love,” *New York Times*, 20 April 1969, D19.

⁸⁹ John S. Wilson, “Joni Mitchell Sings Songs of City in Central Park,” *New York Times*, 25 July 1969; Pete Johnson, “Canadian Singer in US Debut,” *Los Angeles Times*, 7 June 1968, G18.

⁹⁰ Dickie Davis, interview with author, Los Angeles, CA, 7 August 2013.

Like Davis' recollection of the music, Reprise advertised the record as deeply personal, which subsequently, allowed listeners to purge themselves in such emotion. A *Rolling Stone* advertisement for *Rolling Stone* with copy written by Stan Cornyn quoted Mitchell describing her introspection, saying, "If you are sad, then you should feel sad. The French are good at that. They show what they feel and in that way purge themselves of it. My next album will be even sadder. It gets into the pain of the heart."⁹¹

Reviews of Mitchell's *Clouds* reveal that the folk community approved of her personal approach. In a 1969 article, Happy Traum, the newly appointed chief editor at *Sing Out!*, contributed an article to *Rolling Stone* about the state of folk music. To illustrate folk's vibrant future, Traum described upcoming singers and songwriters, including Mitchell, as "successful both in terms of a larger market and in terms of maintaining their own independence of identity. They have successfully fused the folk and the pop worlds with their own personalities, and have created a new, individual kind of folk music."⁹² Coming from an arbiter in the folk community, this article shows that just two years after Collins's experimental-phase, the ever-changing folk scene had become more amenable to introspective songwriting. Traum continued the article with an in-depth look at Mitchell's early songs, saying, "the music... features a lighter, more lyrical style of writing... Nowadays it's the personal and the poetic, rather than a message, that dominates."⁹³ Traum's statement christens the elevated sense of individuality seen in Mitchell's work as an acceptable form of songwriting for folk performance and a way to revitalize the diminishing folk revival.

⁹¹ Advertisement in *Rolling Stone*, 26 July 1969.

⁹² Happy Traum, "The Swan Song of Folk Music," *Rolling Stone*, May 1969, insert page 6.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

Pete Seeger's "Both Sides Now"

While Collins and van Ronk were crucial in launching Mitchell's career, when folk elder statesman Pete Seeger recorded "Both Sides Now," it signaled the inclusion of confessional songs as a part of the folk canon. Seeger further inculcated Mitchell's song in "the folk process"—the transformation and adaptation of traditional material—by writing his own fourth verse.⁹⁴ Seeger's performance with Mitchell in 1970 acts as an embrace from the well-respected folksinger, and yet the lyrics of Seeger's new verse, which return to the communal "we," illustrate that confessional songwriting remained the practice of a younger generation of folk songwriters.

The platform provided by well-respected folk artists became a springboard for many singer-songwriters. Mary Katherine Aldin, who worked at the Los Angeles folk club the Ash Grove explained, "Judy Collins and Tom Rush became catalysts for upcoming singer-songwriters. They would do an album cut on them and suddenly, Wow! That's how you find a Leonard Cohen. That's how you find Joni Mitchell."⁹⁵ Many of the big revival-artists from earlier in the 1960s got started through this same process of discovery. According to Art Podell, a part of the Greenwich Village folk-duo Art & Paul, "The biggest example of all was Bob Dylan! Dylan didn't have a career until Peter, Paul, and Mary recorded 'Don't Think Twice, It's Alright' and 'Blowin' In the Wind.'"⁹⁶ Following Collins's hit, Buffy Sainte-Marie and Tom Rush recorded several of Mitchell's songs between 1967 and 1970, including "Chelsea Morning," "The Circle Game," and "Urge for Going." In 1967, Jackson Browne signed a

⁹⁴ Pete Seeger, Rob Rosenthal, and Sam Rosenthal, *Pete Seeger: In His Own Words* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2012), 67; David King Dunaway and Molly Beer, *Singing Out!: An Oral History of America's Folk Music Revivals* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 14.

⁹⁵ Mary Katherine Aldin, interview with author, Los Angeles, CA, 7 August 2013.

⁹⁶ Art Podell, interview with author, Los Angeles, CA, 7 August 2013.

publishing deal with Nina Music, a division of Elektra Records.⁹⁷ Rush, an Elektra artist, recorded his tunes “Shadow Dream Song.” and “Colors of the Sun,” through this deal. Rush also championed tunes by newcomer James Taylor, recording both “Sunshine, Sunshine” and “Something in the Way She Moves.”

Once artists launched these songwriters, a second wave of endorsements came when more established figures recorded the tunes. Theodore Bikel and Pete Seeger each recorded Mitchell’s songs, and these performances stood as endorsements of confessional songwriting from the folk community. With Mitchell’s permission, Seeger penned a fourth verse/chorus pair in 1969, which appear in Seeger’s *Sing-a-long Memoir*. Seeger’s glorification of “the folk process,” wherein the “best [folksongs] will be remembered, changed, [and] added to,” further suggests that Seeger viewed “Both Sides Now” as a song worthy of this tradition. Seeger’s added verse, however, illustrates that perhaps the older generation was still hesitant to give up the topical songwriting practices and calls to action that inspired the pinnacle of folk revivalism. Just by performing the song, Seeger’s authority in the folk community endorses Mitchell’s tune. But Seeger’s fourth verse (Figure 1.3) defaults to the songwriting practices of the topical song, bringing the lyrics back to the communal participation of the folk revival:

⁹⁷ Mark Bego, *Jackson Browne: His Life and Music* (New York: Citadel Press, 2005), 32.

Figure 1.3: Fourth verse of “Both Sides Now”—Pete Seeger

	<i>Verse 4</i>		
	Daughter, daughter,	}	Phrase #1: Endorses Mitchell in folk music’s lineage
	don’t you know		
	You’re not the first to feel just so		
	But let me say before I go		
40	It’s worth it anyway		
	Someday <i>we</i> all may be surprised	}	Phrase #2 and Chorus: Shifts to collective pronouns
	We’ll wake and open up our eyes		
	And then <i>we</i> all will realize		
	The whole world feels this way		
	<i>Chorus 4</i>		
45	We’ve all be living upside down		
	And turned around with love unfound		
	Until <i>we</i> turn and face the sun		
	Yes, all of <i>us, everyone</i> ⁹⁸		

Seeger avoids the first-person singular and moves to the collective “we” in the second phrase of the verse (marked in bold). Seeger also takes on the tone of an omniscient observer rather than Mitchell’s focus inward. Steeped in the practices of topical songwriting with his anti-war song “Where Have All the Flowers Gone?” and the civil rights anthem “We Shall Overcome,” Seeger’s new verse highlights the ways that the singer-songwriter aesthetic had changed folk practice. Still, Seeger grants his approval by choosing “Both Sides Now” as a worthy song to build upon, and calling Mitchell “daughter” (line 37) in his added verse affirms the notion that the singer-songwriter movement extended a new branch from folk music’s lineage.

The two performed a duet version of the song as a part of a TV-special on KCOP-TV in Los Angeles in October of 1970, an event that added a further stamp of approval on Mitchell’s personal song from the folk establishment. In the performance, Mitchell leads the first three verses, with Seeger singing along but taking a back. Seeger comes to the forefront to lead his own verse, and Mitchell joins humming a descant harmony during Seeger’s chorus. The two

⁹⁸ Pete Seeger, “Both Sides Now” in *Where Have All the Flowers Gone: A Sing-a-long Memoir* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2009), 139.

come back together to hum a final verse/chorus pair together as the song's outro. Just like the duet that Mitchell performed with Brand on *Let's Sing Out!*, the pairing of a tradition bearer with new songwriter created a sense of unity within the folk revival in spite of the stylistic differences of their songwriting practices.

1968

The events of 1968 precipitated these changes towards communal identity in United States culture and politics. American responses to these current events mark new attitudes towards their government and nation, wherein civilians experienced a sense of mistrust, disillusionment. Significantly, this disillusion gave rise to a newfound spirit of individuality, distinct from the communal organizing that prompted the idealistic towards meaningful change earlier in the decade. Young people, in particular, felt that their organizing efforts had not effected significant changes in society, and turned to discourses of personal growth as the way to effect large-scale societal change. Among the daily news, conversations surrounding four major events shaped the growing sense of disillusionment throughout the United States: the Tet Offensive, the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., the assassination of presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy, and subsequently, the 1968 presidential elections.

American involvement in the Vietnam War began in 1963 when Lyndon B. Johnson sent U.S. troops to aid the democratic state South Vietnam in their civil conflict against the communist North Vietnam.⁹⁹ Not only did Johnson go back on his campaign promise to remain uninvolved in South Asia, he quickly escalated the number of U.S. soldiers fighting in Vietnam,

⁹⁹ Marilyn Young, *The Vietnam Wars* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991), 108–110.

increasing troops from 3,500 in March 1965 to 200,000 in December of the same year.¹⁰⁰

Citizens at home grew increasingly concerned for the safety of U.S. soldiers as the North Vietnam's army staged a series of surprise attacks against South Vietnam and the United States beginning in late 1967.¹⁰¹ North Vietnam initiated this series of attacks as a strategy to force the United States to de-escalate the war.¹⁰² The Tet Offensive brought the fighting into Vietnamese cities, affecting highly concentrated areas of civilians, and North Vietnamese forces even attacked the United States Embassy in Saigon, leaving the nation feeling vulnerable.¹⁰³

The Tet Offensive became a surprise to citizens on the home front, not only because of the sudden attacks, but because it contradicted the optimistic stances reported by U.S. officials on the ground.¹⁰⁴ At home, coverage of the Tet Offensive in print media created sensationalized accounts of the attacks against the South, which heightened the sense that the U.S. had lied about the realities of the war's effectiveness. In his history of the year 1968, *New York Times* journalist Charles Kaiser points specifically to the photograph of a public execution happening in the streets of Saigon, captured by photographer Edward T. Adams, as an image that amplified the aura of chaos pervading these accounts.¹⁰⁵ These newspaper articles and photos made Americans feel like U.S. presence in Vietnam was hurting, rather than helping, efforts to resolve the Vietnamese civil conflict.¹⁰⁶ According to Gallup polls, 50 percent of Americans believed that

¹⁰⁰ See Tom Paxton's "Lyndon Johnson Told the Nation" as the folk revival's response to Johnson's politics.

¹⁰¹ Marilyn Young, *The Vietnam Wars*, 216.

¹⁰² Loc cit.

¹⁰³ Ibid, 227.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 220.

¹⁰⁵ Charles Kaiser, *1968 in America: Music, Politics, Chaos, Counterculture, and the Shaping of a Generation* (New York: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1988), 69.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 68.

the U.S. was making progress in Vietnam in November of 1967. In the months following the Tet, that figure had dropped to 33 percent.¹⁰⁷

The presence of the Vietnam War on television further contributed to the nation's sense of degradation by showing atrocities committed by American troops against Vietnamese civilians.¹⁰⁸ As producer and arranger Van Dyke Parks explained to me, "Babies were burning with napalm from American bombs...*on the news at dinnertime*. So Americans—I'm talking about the flyover states—all of America was watching bombs drop on Vietnam."¹⁰⁹ He continued, "There was something very wrong going on. It was a tremendously unsavory and unsettling era."¹¹⁰ These persisting images in United States' media would continue to alarm Americans about violence pervading the broader world. The coverage of the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. would awaken this consciousness to the turmoil in their own society.

On April 4, 1968, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was shot and killed in Memphis, Tennessee. One of the most public voice from the civil rights movement, King's campaigns had successfully led to the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which outlawed discrimination based on race, color sex, religion, and national origin, and the 1965 Voting Rights Act, which protected the voting rights of black and non-English speaking Americans. King promoted non-violent protest, so his death at the hands of a violent perpetrator amplified the tragedy.¹¹¹ This irony contributed greatly to the perception that non-violence and idealism did not have the large-scale effect

¹⁰⁷ Young, *The Vietnam Wars*, 226.

¹⁰⁸ Kaiser, *1968 in America*, 61; Kaiser notes that satellite technology and absence of censorship created this sense of blunt reporting and immediacy.

¹⁰⁹ Van Dyke Parks, interview with author, Pasadena, CA, 18 August 2013.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Another prominent leader in the black freedom movement, Malcolm X, was assassinated three years prior to King's murder on 21 February 1965;

activists had hoped for throughout the civil rights movement. The riots that broke out in 110 cities across the U.S. in the weeks following King’s death further demonstrated the widespread dissatisfaction with continued conditions of poverty and racial violence experienced by black Americans.¹¹²

Following King’s assassination, some leaders called for the passage of further civil rights legislation, just like King had fought for, as the solution to persisting racial inequality.

Interviewed in the *New York Times*, National Urban League executive director Whitney M. Young stated, “The only possible answer now is for the nation to act immediately on what Dr. King has been fighting for—passage of the civil rights and anti-poverty bills and a true and just equality for all men.”¹¹³

Yet others viewed legislation, such as the acts that King had fought to pass, as unable to protect African Americans from persisting racism. Civil rights lawyer Charles Morgan, Jr. criticized the government’s lack of protection, saying, “It is terrible to think that the President could not protect the life of a single American who asked for the rights that the President himself had.”¹¹⁴ Morgan’s comment resonates with the mounting distrust of government effectiveness.

The *Los Angeles Times* saw King’s death as a moment that required deep reflection—not at the national level, but for individuals—to examine persisting racist attitudes. The reporter sought vindication, writing, “The attack on him, like any criminal act, demands justice. Beyond that—and let this be the fervent aim of all persons of decency—it demands the most sober

¹¹² Jessica Elfenbein, Tomas L. Hollowak, Elizabeth, *Baltimore ‘68: Riots and Rebirth in an American City* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011); Rebecca Burns, *Burial for a King: Martin Luther King Jr. ’s funeral and the week that transformed Atlanta and Rocked the Nation* (New York: Scribner, 2011); Kaiser, *1968 in America*, 146.

¹¹³ Lawrence van Gelder, “Dismay in Nation: Negroes Urge Others to Carry on Spirit of Nonviolence,” *New York Times*, 5 April 1968, 1.

¹¹⁴ “Shocked Johnson Bids U.S. Reject Acts That Killed King,” *The Sun*, 5 April 1968, A1.

reflection, the deepest national self-examination.”¹¹⁵ Beyond national examination, the reporter called every individual citizen to change themselves, writing, “We most solemnly believe that all Americans have a stake in determining what kind of society we are, and what kind we are to become. This is why we say the occasion of this despicable bloodletting is a time for national assessment, a time for introspection.”¹¹⁶

Two months after King’s assassination, Senator and presidential hopeful Robert F. Kennedy was shot and killed at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles. *Los Angeles Times* reporter Robert J. Donovan pointed out how unsafe the election had become, writing, “If the United States has reached a point where candidates for the Presidency are retired by gunfire, the stability of the American political process is in jeopardy.”¹¹⁷ Donovan’s assessment echoed the nation’s growing disillusion.

Civil rights leaders also saw Kennedy’s assassination as further indication of the nation’s despondent state. Following King’s assassination, Kennedy served as a voice of hope for the civil rights movement, and much of his platform to become the democratic nominee for president demonstrated his commitment to furthering civil rights legislation. After the shooting, Betty Washington of the black newspaper the *Chicago Daily Defender* interviewed local government candidates who were leading the cause for racial equality in Chicago, who viewed the tragedy as an extension of King’s death. She quoted local politician A.A. Rayner who stated, “If further evidence were needed that America has degenerated into an unprecedented social malaise, the

¹¹⁵ “The Murder of Dr. King,” *Los Angeles Times*, 5 April 1968, B4.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Robert J. Donovan, “Shooting May Alter Nature of Campaign,” *Los Angeles Times*, 5 June 1968, 3A.

brutal attempt at assassination of Sen. Robert F. Kennedy makes the point clearly and tragically.”¹¹⁸

No demographic was more dismayed by the tragedy than young people, who made up the energetic majority of Kennedy’s electoral base. In an article in the *Los Angeles Times* after Kennedy underwent surgery, during the uncertain hours before his death, journalist Linda Matthews explained that for young Americans, Kennedy had appeared as their greatest hope to be heard and understood by older generations, stating, “Despondent young people in classrooms and college dormitories throughout California reacted numbly Wednesday to the shooting of Robert F. Kennedy...For many, the youthful New York senator seemed their most sympathetic and effective liaison with the over-30 generation.”¹¹⁹ Matthews continued to explain the state of desperation experienced by young voters, writing:

The tragedy that befell him early Wednesday brought despair, a wave of nihilism, and hysteria. He and his chief opponent in Tuesday’s primary election, Sen. Eugene J. McCarthy, had been credited with reawakening political interest among the young. Many saw their hopes for a “new politics” dashed by the would-be assassin...“Everything we tried to do now seems so futile,” said Gary Townsend, 21, Southern California chairman of Youth for Kennedy. “All the time, all the work directed in useful channels, intended to change the country, is gone, snap, with one man with a gun. All of us are left asking one question: ‘Is politics really worth it?’ I just don’t have my heart in this year’s election any more.” Expressing the sentiments of many others, Allan Mann, 21, a McCarthy worker and managing editor of the *UCLA Daily Bruin*, said, “The whole youth movement for Kennedy and McCarthy came about because of our disillusionment and disgust with the country. I have a sort of gut feeling, deep inside, that this shooting and whatever happens to Kennedy will make young people completely unreachable.”

In the same article, Matthews spoke to Stanford political science professor Kenneth Prewitt, who predicted, “Oh, this will bring the usual demands for gun laws and a lot of church going...but I don’t think there will be any real change.” The most grim response from Matthews’s interviews

¹¹⁸ Betty Washington, “Black Candidates Here Shocked Over Shooting,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, 6 June 1968, 4.

¹¹⁹ Linda Matthews, “Despair Grips Youthful in Wake of Shooting,” *Los Angeles Times*, 6 June 1968, i1.

came from an eighth grader, who asked, “If we have to shoot our politicians, why have elections at all?...Why bother? We could just have cowboy shoot-‘em-ups to decide who will govern.”¹²⁰

No more than three months after Kennedy’s assassination, a herd of protestors disturbed the National Democratic Convention in Chicago, and the protest erupted in police violence. Over 10,000 people rallied against the Vietnam War in Chicago’s Grant Park, where the protestors were met by police clubs and tear gas. The violent police response against American civilians would continue throughout the rest of the decade, culminating with the deaths of four students at Kent State University in 1970, and shade young people’s perception of mass protest’s ability to effect social change.

In November, voters elected Richard Nixon as president, a victory won by a very small margin in the popular vote that attested to divisions in the nation.¹²¹ Nixon ran on a campaign of order, appealing to older and more conservative generations who viewed the liberal agendas of youth movements as the cause of the contemporary chaos. Even still, Nixon’s promise to bring order rang of introspection. His campaign ad opened, “It is time for an honest look at the problem of order in the United States,” imploring the electorate to exercise the same type of honest self-examination that activists had following King’s assassination.¹²²

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Perlstein, *Nixonland: The Rise of a President and the Fracturing of America* (New York: Scribner, 2008), 354. Nixon received 301 electoral votes compared to Democratic candidate Humphrey’s 191, but the popular vote had Nixon at 43.42 percent and Humphrey at 42.72 percent, with the third candidate George Wallace making up the other 13 percent of voters.

¹²² Ibid, 233.

New Modes of Communication

The changes in American responses to current events echoed the reception of folk music during this time. With the rise of individualism pervading American attitudes towards their nation, artists had to develop new modes of interacting with a disillusioned society. Precisely because they drew on notions of personal understanding, compositions by singer-songwriters gained political currency in this new climate.

At the same time that the events in Vietnam were changing U.S. attitudes towards the war, an interview with Judy Collins published in the *Washington Post* confirms how the message of the folk revival, influenced by the singer-songwriter movement, shifted from overt to covert political messages. “The era of blatancy for protest songs is over,” Collins declared.¹²³ Explaining why she stopped singing protest songs like Tom Paxton’s “Lyndon Johnson Told the Nation,” Collins said, “Music and poetry can produce a catharsis that involves everybody: That’s much more what I’m after,” and then, quoting English playwright John Osborne, “I want to put my audience through an emotional experience and let them think about it after.”¹²⁴ Collins viewed the corrosion of trust in American institutions as the impetus for this shift, observing the “confusion, and sadness, and lack of direction” in the sentiments of young Americans, and claiming that these emotions were guiding people to a “conscience revolution—a reassessment of the life we lead, and where the world is going.”¹²⁵ Musically, Collins explained that her turn to personal songs provided her this alternative to blatant protest, claiming that “The true performer...presents himself as a human being and his politics show in his attitude, in the material he presents. The material and the person should be inseparable. That’s what I want to

¹²³ William Rice, “Protest Songs Aren’t Enough,” *Washington Post*, 14 January 1968, H1.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

achieve.” Collins’s personal approach to her musical political messages, beginning with “Both Sides Now,” demonstrates how the folk revival and broader climate began to process social problems in new ways that reflected the discourses of individuality found in reports of current events.

Discourse surrounding Leonard Cohen’s second solo album released in 1969 shows how this rise in individualism affected not only songwriting practices but listening practices for audiences of personal songs. The copy for an advertisement in *Rolling Stone* for Cohen’s *Songs From a Room* described retreating from life to one’s room, alone with one’s thoughts and feelings, and Leonard Cohen’s songs:

From time to time you get the feeling that you want to disengage yourself from your life. Because you’re no different from anyone else. And because your life is filled with the same love and the same hate and the same beauty and the same ugliness as everyone else’s. You want to withdraw into some kind of solitary contemplation—a locked room or a quiet corner of your mind—just to think about everything for a while. You. Her. It. That. Them. If you put it all down on paper, according to a form of meter and line, you’re called a poet. And if you’re a poet who sets it all to music, then your name is Leonard Cohen. And this is your second album of—for want of a better word—songs. And these are your songs from a room. On Columbia Records.¹²⁶

The text reveals that withdrawing from society stemmed from a state of disillusion following the cultural turmoil of the late 1960s. With the pervading sense that social engagement had failed to bring about the widespread societal change that young people had hoped for, retreating to contemplate the state of the world became a way to engage it. In this way, audiences in the late 1960s viewed a meditation on thoughts and feelings as an extension of the discourses of societal change, only the optimism from the previous decade was shaded with cynicism.

The growth of individualist attitudes in society influenced conceptions of authorship, and audiences granted primary authenticity to recordings of artists singing their own songs. In

¹²⁶ Advertisement, *Rolling Stone*, 17 May 1969.

traditional folk practice, when a song is composed, it enters the cannon of vernacular and traditional songs—many of anonymous authorship—available for widespread performance. In this vein, topical songwriters publishing in *Broadside* intended for other folksingers to learn and perform their songs. For the singer-songwriter movement, however, the sense that the song conveys the subjective thoughts of the songwriter meant that audiences found greater value, meaning, or authenticity when songwriters performed their own songs.

Journalist Susan Gordon Lydon discovered this sense of ownership towards “Both Sides Now” in the story she published in the *New York Times* after visiting Joni Mitchell and her then-boyfriend, Graham Nash, in her Laurel Canyon home. Lydon conducted the interview while Mitchell was recording *Clouds* and played Lydon a cut of “Both Sides Now.” Lydon described that Mitchell’s version was “mellowed by the experience of having written it and having sung it many times, and by the meanings added to it by Dave Van Ronk and Judy Collins, it sounded infinitely rich and definitive.”¹²⁷ Lydon reported that after playing the tape, Graham Nash kissed Mitchell on the cheek and bragged, “She’s the only one who can sing this song.”¹²⁸ While the musical practice of covering still exists in the singer-songwriter movement, this story shows how the discourse surrounding the songwriter’s own recording strengthens the connection between artist and autobiography, bringing a sense of song ownership to the movement not often expressed in folk circles.

Even though Traum and Seeger accepted the singer-songwriter movement’s new songwriting style, they may have been hesitant see that “Both Sides Now,” too, has a message.

¹²⁷ Susan Gordon Lydon, “In Her House, Love,” *New York Times*, 20 April 1969, D19.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

Reflecting on Mitchell's track, *Rolling Stone* critic Bud Scoppa explained that the song's message lay in the act of subjective expression itself:

The first person singular becomes the universe of the song; and she is sort of figuratively cavorting clouds; the line of the refrain says it all. That sets up the whole movement. The elevation of the I-ness, the self—it's an almost algebraic equation in that song...Sure there's a lot of examples of that sort of thing in Dylan, but for him it's more playful and less direct. There's something transparent about Joni doing it...It's not just lyrics either—it's the way the way the melodies *carry* the lyrics and the incredibly authentic delivery of the vocals. It conveys something that...it's clearly truth. The subjective kind of truth.¹²⁹

Scoppa and his milieu saw this song as a search for truth that could not be answered by the folk revival's prescribed method of social engagement. "Both Sides Now" set up this search for the self that was becoming crucial to political thought in the 1970s. Scoppa recognized "Both Sides Now" as a song that successfully conveyed this message and inspired others to sing their own subjective statements.

Singer-songwriters viewed their subjective stance and musical contributions as intimately related to the new changes in American culture. In an interview with Jackson Browne, he explained to me that the underlying perception of persisting problems in American society connected him to other artists in the singer-songwriter movement,

The thing that we all shared was this widespread distrust of the American establishment. That was just the ground...a basic fact...So the one thing that we all had in common was the recognition that things were changing. And we had a deep sense of being on the right side. Being on the side of change. On the side of upheaval and disruption against an unjust status quo...That was in my music before I could address any specific political questions. But it was always there.¹³⁰

Browne acknowledges that his early songs do not contain overt references to current events or political causes, but views the songs as participating in his generation's desire for change.

¹²⁹ Bud Scoppa, interview with author, North Hollywood, CA, 19 August 2013.

¹³⁰ Jackson Browne, interview with author, Santa Monica, CA, 6 June 2014.

Paul Simon, the main songwriter for Simon & Garfunkel who embarked on a solo career in 1972, similarly spoke about the connection between his desire for self-reflection and the current state of society. In an interview with Lorraine Alterman for *Rolling Stone* in 1970, Simon remarked on changes in his songwriting, declaring:

Everybody's woken up. We're right in the middle of a nightmare; everybody is wide-awake...I'm just writing the way I feel and the way I feel reflects the part of society that I'm in. It's not a teaching thing, or I'm not trying to hip somebody to something they don't know because everybody knows that.¹³¹

Historian Gillian Mitchell has used this quote to show that folk artists had abandoned political commitments after the folk revival.¹³² However, in the context of a changing political climate, Simon's statement indicates that he was adopting new strategies to communicate effectively with listeners. Audiences no longer connected with the optimism of communal singing, and topical songs that sought to educate listeners of the world's injustices were unnecessary for a generation that was so aware of continuing problems after the 1960s-protests. Rather, songs of personal reflection spoke to the shared belief that in the midst of the cultural nightmare, the best way to impact change was to improve one's self.

* * * * *

This chapter has laid out the foundations of the singer-songwriter movement as an extension of the United States folk revival. The singer-songwriter movement helped deliver the folk revival back to its acoustic roots and, through this style, extended the revival into the 1970s. Singer-songwriters' acoustic arrangements renounced the influences of rock and pop prevalent in the folk revival, and therefore, several arbiters in the folk community were able to position the

¹³¹ Lorraine Alterman, "Paul Simon: The *Rolling Stone* Interview," *Rolling Stone*, 28 May 1970.

¹³² Gillian Mitchell, *The North American Folk Revival in United States and Canada*, 162–163.

singer-songwriter movement as a way to revitalize their audience base, which had been largely lost to rock music. This narrative has been eclipsed by accounts of the folk revival, scholarly and popular, that take as their premise the political nature of folk music, using evidence of public sphere engagement in the lyrics of topical songs as their gauge for measuring a song's political awareness.

This chapter has also provided a new social context for the confessional lyrics found in the singer-songwriter movement. Musically, the singer-songwriter movement's simple delivery helped to communicate their message clearly, although their lyrics had turned inward, deviating from the overt political messages found earlier in the folk revival. Interpreted through the historical context of 1968, the singer-songwriter's rhetoric of self-examination echoed the language Americans used to process the multitude of catastrophic current events occurring in the late 1960s. Singer-songwriters' introspective messages intersected with the new sense of individuality and self-reflection in American society. This societal shift allowed the personal narratives in confessional songs to maintain a political currency valued by the folk revival even though the lyrics deviated from traditional topical songwriting practices.

The reception of Joni Mitchell's "Both Sides Now" illustrates these changes in the folk genre and reveals how revivalists viewed singer-songwriters' new sound and songwriting style as a way forward for the folk revival. Cover versions by Judy Collins, Pete Seeger, and Dave van Ronk testify to its place in the folk tradition, such that for audiences today, Mitchell's work—along with the canon of songs produced by singer-songwriters in the 1970s—have become an accepted part of the folk repertory. In its essence, the singer-songwriter movement revitalized the folk revival with its own acoustic roots, and thus earned credibility as a politically relevant folk music itself.

**CHAPTER 2: “YOU’VE GOT A FRIEND”:
FORGING THE SINGER-SONGWRITER IN LOS ANGELES**

In 2007, singer-songwriters Carole King and James Taylor reunited on stage in Los Angeles to commemorate the fifty-year anniversary of the venue that had launched their careers: Doug Weston’s Troubadour. For both King and Taylor, the club held extra significance as the place where they first collaborated on King’s song, “You’ve Got a Friend” (1971). Explaining his first encounter with the song, Taylor said, “This is a Carole King tune—a pure Carole King tune. I heard it for the first time standing right there,” pointing to the sound booth lofted above the stage. “I worked it up on the guitar and got a version of it, and in an amazing act of generosity, she let me cut this tune first. I was amazed because she was cutting *Tapestry* at the time, and that she would let go what I thought was maybe one of the best pop tunes ever written.” Then Taylor joked, “I didn’t realize at that time that I would be singing that song every night for the rest of my life. But it’s a great song to be known for, and I thank Carole for it.”¹ To close the concert, the two performed a duet version of the tune. King added a counter-melodic tag to the end of the song, singing:

*Here we are at the Troubadour
We never thought we would do this anymore,
But this was the place that opened the door.*

This concert launched an international 47-city King and Taylor “Troubadour Reunion Tour” in 2010 and a documentary about the venue called *Troubadours: The Rise of the Singer-Songwriter*

¹ Carole King and James Taylor, *Live at the Troubadour*, Hear Music, HRM-32053, 2010.

in 2012.² Such distinct ties between singer-songwriters and a specific place prompt the questions: how did Los Angeles influence the development of the singer-songwriter movement? What role did clubs like the Troubadour play shaping the meaning of the singer-songwriter identity? And how did artists translate this experience to recorded mediums?

This chapter demonstrates how the singer-songwriter movement crystallized within the Los Angeles music scene, forever tying the ideas of intimate performance, an artist's vulnerability, and the perception of a personal connection between artist and audience to the meaning of the singer-songwriter identity. Throughout the chapter, I map the significance of Los Angeles in singer-songwriter narratives, demonstrating how artists transformed their music to fit the aesthetics of the singer-songwriter movement through a network of local clubs and recording studios. I call these stories authentication narratives, referring to the processes artists undergo in order to be understood as legitimized performers within a given musical culture. Through this analysis, I demonstrate the constructedness of the singer-songwriter identity as one that appears to be natural, sincere, and unmediated, even though it is carefully curated by the artists and surrounding industry structures.³ I have defined this construction a "genuine persona," intentionally pairing the juxtaposed terms to indicate that the singer-songwriter's sincerity is a calculated performance in line with their artistic persona. The constructed nature of this identity, however, in no way undermines the fact that the notions of authenticity ascribed to singer-songwriter performances were powerful discourses to the audiences that consumed the music. I follow Allan Moore's work on the subject of authenticity, which holds that "'Authenticity' is a

² "James Taylor and Carole King announce Troubadour Reunion World Tour," CaroleKing.com, 7 November 2009, accessed 10 August 2015, <http://www.caroleking.com/news/james-taylor-and-carole-king-announce-troubadour-reunion-world-tour-2010-full-article>; *Troubadours: The Rise of the Singer-Songwriter*, dir. Morgan Neville, 2012.

³ Richard A. Peterson provides a similar analysis of country music, showing how industry surrounding country music characterized its performers as "unaffected" and "genuine"; see *Creating Country Music: Fabricating Authenticity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 192–199.

matter of interpretation which is made and fought for from within a cultural and, thus, historicized position. It is ascribed not inscribed.”⁴ This chapter, then, outlines the ways that Los Angeles audiences ascribed values to particular sounds and performance practices generated within the singer-songwriter movement.

The first section identifies how performance practices cultivated in the Los Angeles club scene shaped the singer-songwriter identity, specifically through a history of the Troubadour drawing on methods from cultural geography in addition to historical and musical analysis. The second part of the chapter establishes the role Los Angeles recording studios played codifying the singer-songwriter movement’s stripped-down aesthetic. I attribute the changes between studio techniques in James Taylor’s first two albums to his arrival on the L.A. scene, demonstrating how Los Angeles studios derived the sound of his records from his live performance aesthetic. In this way, recordings reproduced the intimacy associated with the club environment. The chapter culminates with Carole King’s transition from staff songwriter to solo performer in Los Angeles, showing how King developed anti-commercial rhetoric that legitimated her as a singer-songwriter despite her commercial success.

Setting the Scene

“Like Paris was to the Impressionists and the post-Impressionists, L.A. was the hotbed of all musical activity. The greatest musicians in the world either live here or pass through here regularly,” Joni Mitchell explained, with some degree of hyperbole, to interviewer Malka Marom in 2012.⁵ “I think that a lot of beautiful music came from it,” Mitchell continued, “and a lot of

⁴ Allan Moore, “Authenticity as Authentication,” *Popular Music* 21, no.2 (May 2002): 210.

⁵ Malka Marom, *Joni Mitchell: In Her Own Words* (Toronto: ECW Press, 2014), 51.

beautiful times came through that mutual understanding.” Paralleling Mitchell’s West Coast relocation, many artists migrated to Southern California throughout the 1960s, magnetized by the burgeoning music scene in Los Angeles. During this time, the city grew as a powerful music industry center. Several recording companies relocated to West Coast offices and entrepreneurs opened new venues, creating opportunities for live performance. The Troubadour club in Hollywood represented one of the staple hangouts for members of the Los Angeles music industry, and its reputation as a meeting place for industry insiders attracted up-and-coming artists such as Mitchell, hoping to rub elbows with record executives and get their music heard.

These interactions formed the basis of a vibrant musical scene, a premise first developed by Will Straw in the field of communication studies to show how networks of people direct the development of new musical styles.⁶ Straw distinguished a musical scene from a musical community, explaining that the latter has “a relatively stable composition and the music(s) performed should be rooted in some sort of geographic heritage.”⁷ Alternatively, Straw defined a music scene as a “cultural space in which a large range of musical practices coexist, interacting with each other within a variety of processes of differentiation and according to widely varying trajectories of change and cross-fertilization.”⁸ My use of the term similarly encompasses the full range of genres generated in Los Angeles, including California country rock, psychedelia, mainstream pop, and traditional folk music alongside singer-songwriters. Under the umbrella of the Los Angeles scene, I identify the singer-songwriter movement (using parlance commonly observed in my interviews) as the people who formed or subsequently adopted modes of

⁶ Will Straw, “Systems of Articulation, Logics of Change: Communities and Scenes in Popular Music,” *Cultural Studies* 5 (1991): 373.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

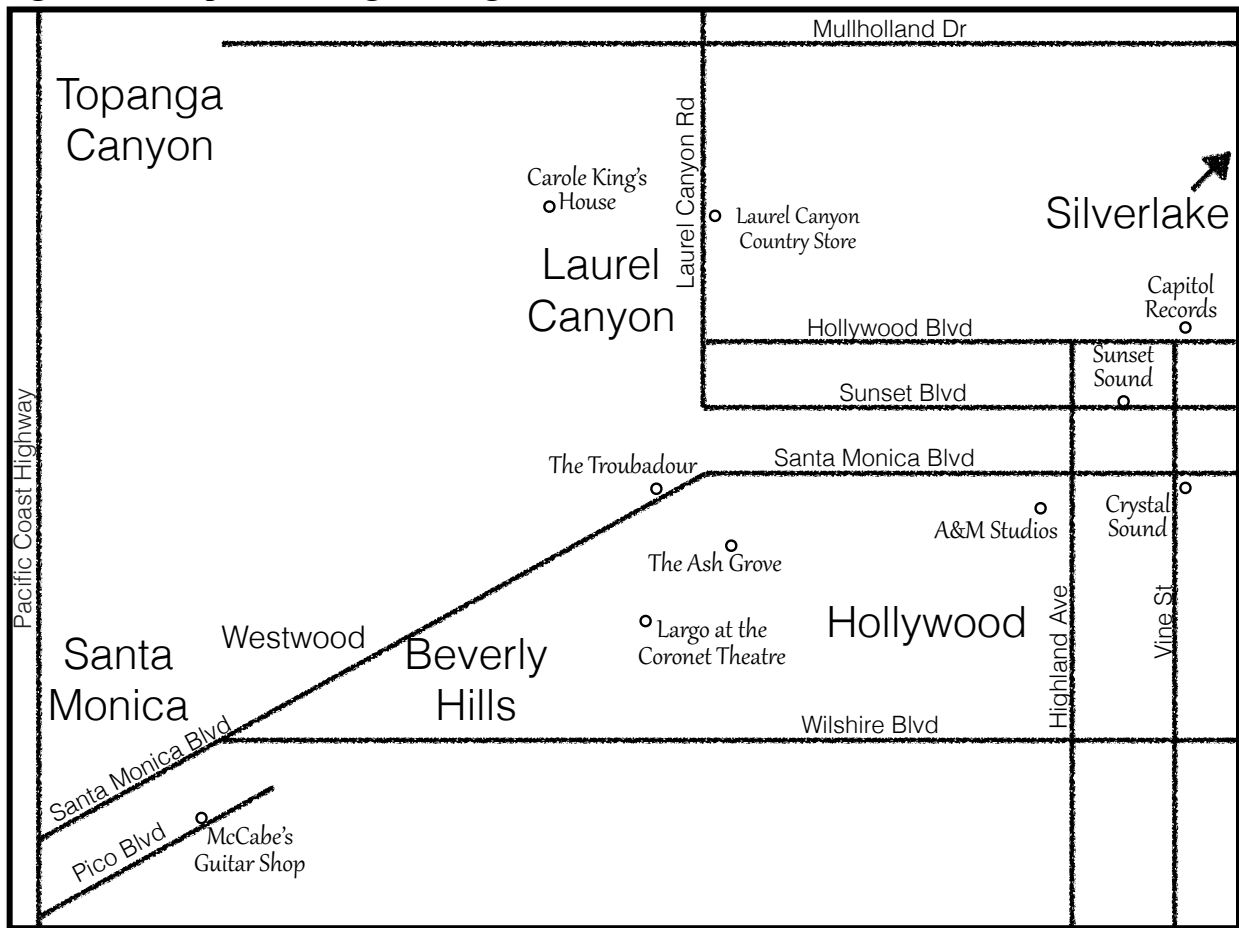
presentation involving the notions of intimate performance, artist vulnerability, and personal songwriting.

The specific scene cradling the singer-songwriter movement developed in the northwest area of Los Angeles between Hollywood and Santa Monica (Figure 2.1). As discussed in the introduction, this region (north of Wilshire Boulevard, extending from Hollywood to the Westside) was a predominantly white and affluent part of the city, and remains so today.⁹ For the most part, record labels and recording studios were located in Hollywood. Venues lined the Sunset Strip—a portion of Sunset Boulevard—and scattered throughout the rest of Hollywood and Santa Monica. Hollywood was too expensive for an aspiring musician’s budget, so many songwriters resided in Laurel Canyon, Silverlake, and Topanga Canyon—eclectic enclaves in the hills immediately north of the city that were, in the 1970s, more affordable places to live. Through my interviews, I observed practitioners from this scene using the term “Laurel Canyon” in reference to any of these hippie neighborhoods on the fringe of Hollywood. This section of L.A. brought the popular music industry together with the cultural intermediaries that inform the industry’s marketing structures.¹⁰ These neighborhoods likewise served as the nexus of artists from the Los Angeles canyons and record executives working in Hollywood.

⁹ Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (New York: Verso, 2006), 55; Allen J. Scott and Edward W. Soja, eds., *The City: Los Angeles and Urban Theory at the End of the Twentieth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 10. The U.S. Census reported that in 2010, while Los Angeles as a whole had a 28.7% non-Hispanic white population, the City of West Hollywood (incorporated in 1984)—where the Troubadour is located—had a 77% non-Hispanic white population; see “West Hollywood (city) Quickfacts,” United States Census Bureau, accessed 11 April 2016, <http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/0684410>.

¹⁰ This idea is consistent with Adam Krims’s work on urban geography and popular music; see “Reception and Scenes,” in *The Ashgate Companion to Popular Musicology*, ed. Derek B. Scott (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), 399.

Figure 2.1: Map of Los Angeles Neighborhoods



However, the geography and urban development of Los Angeles complicates many studies of music scenes, wherein a confined geographic center delimits the boundaries of any particular scene. Living in Los Angeles—a sprawling metropolis even in the 1960s—singer-songwriters travelled across town for gigs in Pasadena and Orange County (around 40 miles away), congregating back in Hollywood bars after their performances. As James Taylor described it, “Los Angeles feels like a big spread out place. But people put together a city—they assemble a city—and they connect the dots with their automobile. It felt small to me... It was a small, tight-knit community.”¹¹ Taylor’s comments show how people often navigate the

¹¹ James Taylor, interview with Barney Hoskyns, *Hotel California: L.A. from the Byrds to the Eagles*, dir. Chris Wilson (2007).

structures of cities, frequently defining community through common interests and identity affiliations, demonstrating how geographic boundaries constitute only one aspect of scene formation.¹²

Just as these artists formed tight-knit connections amid the urban sprawl, both artists and audiences outside of the Los Angeles area developed an affinity with the values projected by the singer-songwriter movement. Through national and international record distribution, articles in the print media, and touring circuits, listeners across the United States could absorb the cultural products defining singer-songwriter practice. Sociologists Richard A. Peterson and Andy Bennet define these constructions as translocal and virtual scenes, noting the influence of print or media culture in the absence of a singular, physical location.¹³ Los Angeles based singer-songwriters drew inspiration and new directions from singer-songwriters in other urban hubs, including Chicago, Nashville and New York. Such exchange occurred when touring Angelenos performed in clubs like the Bitter End in New York City, and similarly when New Yorkers played L.A. clubs, creating a translocal connection between singer-songwriter clubs across the United States. Furthermore, the national audience for the singer-songwriter movement interacted with the singer-songwriter movement on a virtual level, consuming recordings, publicity materials, and articles by rock journalists that each communicated the values associated with the movement to listeners beyond Los Angeles' borders.

These concepts each illustrate how venues and recording studios, in combination with circles of producers, musicians, and fans, can shape the development of new musical styles. The

¹² Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 2006); Anthony P. Cohen, *The Symbolic Construction of Community* (New York: Routledge, 1989); Kay Kaufman Shelemay, "Musical Communities: Rethinking the Collective in Music," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 64, no. 2 (Summer 2011): 349–390.

¹³ Richard A. Peterson and Andy Bennet, *Music Scenes: Local, Translocal and Virtual* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2004), 7–8.

formation of this richly textured musical scene dates back to the Los Angeles folk venues in the late 1950s, as major folk artists passed through Los Angeles between San Diego and San Francisco on a circuit of folk clubs that continued up the California coast and into Oregon and Washington.¹⁴

Los Angeles Folk Clubs

As the Kerouac-inspired Beat generation hitched their way West, new coffeehouses sprouted throughout Southern California. Producer and arranger Van Dyke Parks described the diverse range of activities that might take place during an average evening at one of these “hangs” in his recollection of a coffeehouse called the Insomniac in Hermosa Beach:

The Insomniac on the beach was an example of the eclecticism of the era. ... Coffees were served along with saspirillas and other non-alcoholic beverages. Art was sold. Art would be on *all the* walls. A beat poet might stand up and extemporize for an hour. Perhaps an out-of-work poet, if there is such a thing as an in-work poet, with a Smith Corona typing up personal histories. Observations of character and so forth would be authored on the spot for a buck.¹⁵

Parks emphasizes the miscellaneous character of the shops and captures the influence of Beat-eclecticism on the scene. Folk clubs in California continued to draw their ambience from the Bohemian expressive culture that percolated in these coffeehouses throughout the next decade.

Among Los Angeles clubs, select venues contributed greatly to the rhetoric of authenticity that characterized the singer-songwriter movement. Particularly, this authenticity drew on the sense that the venue was “about the music,” contributing to the idea that audiences experienced unmediated performances in these legitimized spaces. Some of these performance

¹⁴ Mary Katherine Aldin, interview with author, Los Angeles, CA, 7 August 2013.

¹⁵ Van Dyke Parks, interview with author, Pasadena, CA, 18 August 2013; for more information on the Insomniac also see Valerie J. Nelson, “Bob Hare Dies at 80; Owner of Hermosa Beach Coffeehouse that Drew Beat Artists,” *Los Angeles Times*, 26 December 2011, accessed 15 July 2015, <http://articles.latimes.com/2011/dec/26/local/la-me-bob-hare-20111226>.

spaces even referred to themselves as “listening rooms.” The moniker indicates the club’s belief that music should be absorbed through intent listening and focused attention, an antidote to the excess typically associated with a rock venue’s Dionysian environment. The construction of these small venues as listening cultures creates a powerful image of the ways audiences “think with the ear,” a key concept of ethnomusicologist Veit Erlmann’s work on aurality.¹⁶ Such a construction, along with the ways the culture of the singer-songwriter movement valued listening and silence, stand as evidence as to how music and listening were central to the ways members of this community processed the world in which they lived.

The first of these venues, the Ash Grove, was considered the pinnacle of the Los Angeles folk establishment. Ed Pearl opened the venue in 1958 as a performance space for traditional music that doubled as a meeting hall for socialist organizing. Unfortunately, Pearl’s dedication to offering his venue as a meeting space for socialist organizations brought great controversy from rivaling political factions, and the club was burnt to the ground on three separate occasions, finally closing in 1973.¹⁷ During its tenure as the premiere Los Angeles venue for roots music (1958–1973), the Ash Grove presented heroes of American vernacular styles, from rural southern music legends such as Doc Watson, Elizabeth Cotten, Muddy Waters, and Flatt and Scruggs to folk revivalists including Odetta and Pete Seeger.¹⁸

The Ash Grove maintained its identity as an establishment for traditional music by drawing a hard distinction between traditional folk music and new styles. This oftentimes meant that the Ash Grove denied musicians who played contemporary songs the chance to perform. As

¹⁶ Veit Erlmann, *Reason and Resonance: A History of Modern Aurality* (New York: Zone Books, 2010), 24.

¹⁷ Mary Katherine Aldin, interview with author, Los Angeles, CA, 7 August 2013; Robert Hilburn, “Sand Runs Out on the Ash Grove,” *Los Angeles Times*, 15 December 1973, B9.

¹⁸ Ronald Cohen, *Rainbow Quest: The Folk Music Revival and American Society, 1940–1970* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002), 119.

a young artist, singer-songwriter Jackson Browne sought advice from Pearl to see how he could book his own performance at the Ash Grove. Pearl turned Browne down and sent him to the Troubadour, the Hollywood club known for more commercially oriented music.¹⁹ As discussed in Chapter 1, the divide between accusations of commercial motivation and the perception of a pure folk tradition initially precluded many traditionalists from seeing the singer-songwriter movement as an outgrowth of the folk scene.

Although contemporary songwriters did not find the Ash Grove a welcoming performance space, many still credit the venue for their exposure to the roots of folk music. Even the Rolling Stones frontman Mick Jagger viewed the club as a critical part of his musical education, as evidenced through a story Robert Hilburn published shortly after the club closed:

On his way out of the Ash Grove one night, Mick Jagger, a frequent visitor to the club, shook Pearl's hand in gratitude. He simply wanted to thank Pearl for all the entertainment—and no doubt musical education—the club had given him. It's a gesture a lot of us should make. The Ash Grove's contribution to this city's musical heritage was invaluable.²⁰

Singer-songwriters maintain that hearing traditional performers at the Ash Grove was crucial to developing their acoustic style and dedication to songwriting.

Other Los Angeles folk clubs were more willing to let new musicians perform. McCabe's Guitar Shop opened in Santa Monica in 1959, offering instrument repair services. As a part of the United States folk boom, guitar and banjo sales increased exponentially.²¹ Original owner Gerald L. McCabe saw a business opportunity to repair guitars from the emerging market. Many people in southern California purchased their guitars just across the Mexican border in Tijuana,

¹⁹ Jackson Browne, interview with author, Santa Monica, CA, 6 June 2014.

²⁰ Robert Hilburn, "Sand Runs Out on the Ash Grove," *Los Angeles Times*, 15 December 1973, B9; also see www.ashgrovemusic.com, accessed 2 October 2014.

²¹ Cohen, *Rainbow Quest*, 166. Cohen cites a *Newsweek* article demonstrating a 500% increase in banjo sales between 1958 and 1959.

and McCabe's business plan provided repairs for the burgeoning customer base and influx of cheap instruments.²² Expanding beyond repairs, McCabe's began selling instruments in 1960 (Figure 2.2). The shop kept up with contemporary folk trends, adding 12-string guitars, electric guitars, drums, and records to their inventory.²³ Such popular artists as Ry Cooder and Taj Mahal frequented McCabe's, checking out new gear and fiddling around with the instruments for hours on end.

Figure 2.2 McCabe's Guitar Shop, 3101 Pico Blvd, Santa Monica, CA (2013)



Photograph by Author, 12 June 2013. Present day photo of the McCabe's Guitar Shop storefront on Pico Blvd. in Santa Monica, CA, illustrating its multi-functional space as an instrument emporium, music school, and performance venue.

McCabe's held its first concert in 1969. Storeowner Bob Riskin was asked to host a performance by Pete Seeger and Elizabeth Cotten after a last-minute venue cancellation. Riskin

²² Bob Riskin, interview with author, Santa Monica, CA, 6 August 2013.

²³ Ibid.

opened the shop's doors after hours and set up a concert space in the back room, lining up rows of chairs and creating a makeshift stage amid the merchandise.²⁴ Following the successful performance, Riskin decided to make live music a regular part of McCabe's. Riskin hired Bobby Kimmel, guitar player in the Stone Poneys, as the store's concert manager. Kimmel began booking a regular concert series in McCabe's back "listening room." The store gained a reputation for its engaged audience that was as interested in traditional roots music as much as confessional originals from Jackson Browne or the country stylings of Linda Ronstadt. As singer-songwriter Loudon Wainright III explained, "Your agent will tell you, 'It's a listening room'—that means they won't be drunk. The sound is always good, and if you've forgotten your capo, you're in luck—you're at McCabe's!"²⁵

Doug Weston's Troubadour

A third folk club, the Troubadour, became the nexus for new music in the Los Angeles scene. The Troubadour became such a legendary location because it was a space where artists, even from beyond the borders of Los Angeles, converged, and producers could funnel the talent into the music industry. Artists and executives interacted on a day-to-day basis, bringing the commercial faction of the recording industry into the folk performance space.

Owner Doug Weston opened the club on Hollywood's La Cienega Boulevard in 1953. He maintained the venue in a simple room next to the Hollywood-era Coronet Theatre, a small space that could seat no more than sixty audience members.²⁶ The club's name evokes a romantic

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ *McCabe's The First Fifty Years: A Commemorative Album*, accessed through the personal collection of Bob Riskin, 12.

²⁶ Myrna Oliver, "Doug Weston, Troubadour Founder, Dies," *Los Angeles Times*, 15 February 1999, accessed 5 June 2014, <http://articles.latimes.com/1999/feb/15/local/me-8369>. Since 2009, the Coronet Theatre serves as the

image of Medieval wandering poets, a moniker applied to travelling folk musicians and Beatniks alike. Catering to both audiences, esteemed folk and jazz artists such as Woody Guthrie and John Coltrane performed on the Troubadour's stage. After four years, Weston relocated the venue to a larger space on Santa Monica Boulevard that could hold up to 300 people (Figure 2.3).²⁷ But even in the larger space, Weston maintained the intimate atmosphere created in the original tiny room.

This new space created a comfortable atmosphere that contributed to the construction of the singer-songwriter identity. Inside the performance space, tables filled the room, while wooden beams ran across the ceiling, adding warmth to the relatively unadorned space. To the right hand side, as patrons entered the room from Santa Monica Boulevard, stood the stage. The stage, approximately 16 by 26 feet, was large enough to hold a small ensemble even though many artists opted to perform solo acoustic sets. In front of the stage, the audience would sit at tables topped with red-checked gingham tablecloths and flickering candles, creating a “shabby-chic” ambience. Behind the tables stood a second bar and kitchen, from which servers delivered patrons' orders off a menu featuring wines and cheese plates.²⁸ Weston created more seating in a loft above the kitchen, where audience members could squeeze-in on church pews. Even from this vantage, the stage was not far away, giving listeners a sense that they were still up close to the music. The sound and lighting booth sat at the back section of the loft next to the dressing room and Doug Weston's office, where performers would access the stage by descending a

new location for Largo at the Coronet, a music and comedy club owned by Mark Flanagan, who keeps the original Troubadour open as “The Little Room.”

²⁷ Today, this neighborhood is known as West Hollywood, incorporated as its own city in Los Angeles County in 1984.

²⁸ Menu accessed through the personal collection of Henry Diltz, housed at the Grammy Museum's Laurel Canyon Exhibit, May 2014.

wooden staircase that led from the office. Each of these elements brought out the idea of warmth and intimacy crucial to the singer-songwriter identity.

The Troubadour's allure came from the way Weston set up the Santa Monica Boulevard location as a bar and social scene more than any specific musical catalyst. The new venue was in close proximity to Hollywood recording studios and Laurel Canyon. In addition to the prime location, the Troubadour bar offered the perfect mix of socializing and music that differentiated it from other Hollywood venues. Because many folk clubs only served coffee, adding a bar to the Troubadour catered to Hollywood's nightlife. However, Weston separated the bar from the social space by creating two rooms within the venue (Figure 2.4). This offered him the perfect advantage among Hollywood rock clubs, where the bars were integrated into the performance space. According to Jackson Browne, "A lot of people came on Monday night just to go to the bar. And they would only come inside [the performance space] if there was something to hear."²⁹ An elite crowd of music industry executives and insiders began frequenting the bar, where people could hang out for the price of a beer, carry on conversations, and not have to pay admission to the venue. Furthermore, Weston could maintain the idea that the performance space was "about the music" by sequestering chatty patrons in the tavern.

²⁹ Jackson Browne, interview with author, Santa Monica, CA, 6 June 2014.

Figure 2.3: Doug Weston's Troubadour, 9081 Santa Monica Blvd, West Hollywood, CA (2013)



Photograph taken by author, 6 June 2013. View of the Troubadour from Santa Monica Boulevard that opened in 1958. The venue's sign elicits the romantic images of the travelling Troubadour through its antiquated script.

Figure 2.4: Bar entrance for the Troubadour



Photograph taken by author, 6 June 2013. View depicting the bar entrance, one of two entrances into the venue, that facilitated the separation of the social environment from the performance space.

The Troubadour had a fluid clientele comprised of a core group of artists, producers, and critics based in Los Angeles and a rotating cast of musicians who came through town on tour or while recording. Regulars at the Troubadour came from the Los Angeles folk and folk rock scenes, such as the Byrds' David Crosby, the Mamas and the Papas' Cass Elliot, and the New Christy Minstrels' Barry McGuire. The social atmosphere in the bar provided a space for these people to meet, exchange ideas, and forge collaborative partnerships. As Kate Taylor—recording artist and sister to James Taylor—explained to me, she could find her friends there on any given night.³⁰ Remembering the feeling of familiarity walking through the club's doors, Taylor recalled,

It was this very intimate and comfortable place where you could see a lot of the same folks there every night, a lot of friends...It always seemed like it was crowded, and everyone always seemed excited...We were all very sociable and excitable, and we would talk about gigs, songs, records, and the news of the day.³¹

Taylor's memories of the friendly environment demonstrate how quotidian interactions fostered the scene's sense of community.

Beyond the friendships fostered by the social scene, Troubadour regulars used the venue to form industry partnerships. Well-known producers Lou Adler and David Geffen brokered recording deals for many of the major names from the club's growing singer-songwriter constituency. In addition to California-based artists, singer-songwriters from across the country would perform at the club when they came through town. For example, Chicago native John Prine went to the Troubadour for his first gig outside his hometown.³² Similarly, New Yorker Laura Nyro performed at the club whenever she came into town, and audiences piled into the

³⁰ Kate Taylor, interview with author, Santa Monica, CA, 6 April 2014.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Robert Hilburn, "Prine Stealing the Show at the Troubadour," *Los Angeles Times*, 18 December 1971, B6.

performance space, “sitting on the stairs...and huddled even tighter than usual in the narrow aisles,” for a chance to hear her.³³

The Troubadour’s Business Practices

“Bring your axe or whatever you swing with!” read an advertisement for the Troubadour’s weekly open mic, called a “Hoot night” (Figure 2.5).³⁴ This regular Monday night event was one of the premiere ways singer-songwriters connected with industry executives. Weston began the hoots in the early 1960s to fill a dead night on the calendar. Unlike contemporary concert culture, in which artists perform one night in each city on a tour, the Troubadour used to book an act for a six-night engagement, playing two shows a night Tuesday through Sunday. This left Monday night available for the open mic, which required minimal advance planning.

³³ Robert Hilburn, “Laura Nyro Sings Variety of Styles,” *Los Angeles Times*, 15 August 1970, A6; Pete Johnson, “Laura Nyro at Troubadour,” *Los Angeles Times*, 31 May 1969, A6.

³⁴ Advertisement accessed through the personal collection of Tracy Newman, 12 August 2013.

Figure 2.5: Flier Advertisement for the Troubadour (1962)

the incomparable

TRAVIS

EDMONSON



of band & travis

A VIBRANT NEW SOUND FOR THE 60's
 fusing the traditions of yesterday . . . the tempo of today . . . the restlessness and challenge of tomorrow

"A SINGER OF EMINENCE AND DISTINCTION" the new yorker

"STANDING ROOM ONLY" blue angel - new york
 mr. kelly's - chicago

"BEST SINGER-GUITARIST" the hungry i - san francisco
 playboy - variety - downbeat

"BEST CONCERT PERFORMANCE OF 1961" u.c.l.a.

jean durand

ACCOMPANIED BY GABOR SZABO

"dynamic haitian folk-singer with a
 voice like the deep tones of a trombone"

CALIFORNIA EAGLE

OPENING

JANUARY 5

HOOT*

with
RANDY BOONE

monday nights at nine
 ADMISSION ONLY 50¢
 performers & 1 guest free

**BRING YOUR AXE OR WHATEVER
 YOU SWING WITH**

folk music jam session*

The Troubadour Cafe

MECCA OF CONTEMPORARY FOLK ENTERTAINMENT

reservations
CR 4-9634

SHOW TIME

9:00 * 11:00 * 12:30

TUESDAY THRU SUNDAY

ATTILIA de LADO

From the personal collection of Tracy Newman. Advertisement in bottom left corner provides information for the Troubadour's Monday open mic "Hoot" nights. This flier serves as a microcosm of the folk revival in the early 1960s, as discussed in Chapter 1, presenting both Travis Edmonson—an artist from the Great Folk Boom—and Haitian folksinger Jean Durand—global vernacular music. That the Troubadour was called the "Mecca of Contemporary Folk Entertainment" shows how the singer-songwriter movement, which would coalesce at the venue six years after the distribution of this flier, fits into both the folk tradition and new trends in the genre.

The title of the event conjured imagery of folk traditions. However, the term has no basis in folk traditions prior to the 1930s. In the early twentieth century, “hootenanny” was a synonym for “thingamajig,” or a nonsense placeholder.³⁵ Pete Seeger and the Almanac Singers adopted the term as the official name for their rent parties in New York City, conjuring both the miscellany and folk roots of the etymology.³⁶ By the 1950s, venues used the term for events with a variety of performers.³⁷

Although advertised as a “folk jam session,” the Troubadour hoot functioned like a formal showcase. Starting Monday afternoon, hopeful songwriters and other entertainers would cue up outside the venue in a line that wrapped around Doheny Drive, hoping to get a spot on the set list. According to Jackson Browne, who got his own start as a part of the Monday night shows, you could easily get on the list if you had a recording contract, because “Record companies would get you on that list so that they could see what you were like on stage.”³⁸ Those without recording contracts faithfully showed up expecting a spot on the show, Browne explained, continuing, “But normal people who wanted to play would wait there in the afternoon from 3 o’clock until whenever they opened the window...A lot of people would sing and play there [in line] so you’d get to know each other and get to know who was going to be playing that night.”³⁹ Booking agents auditioned the acts as they waited in line and picked the top candidates

³⁵ “Hootenanny,” Oxford English Dictionary Online, September 2015, accessed 15 September 2015 (Oxford University Press), <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/88354?redirectedFrom=hootenanny..>

³⁶ Agnes Cunningham and Gordon Friesen, *Red Dust and Broadsides: A Joint Autobiography* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), 211; Ronald Cohen, *Rainbow Quest*, 43. Smithsonian Folkways released recordings from two of Pete Seeger’s hootenannies on *Hootenanny Tonight!*, FW02511, 1959.

³⁷ Ronald Cohen, *Rainbow Quest*, 27; Gillian Mitchell, *The North American Folk Music Revival: Nation and Identity in the United States and Canada* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2007), 60.

³⁸ Jackson Browne, interview with author, Santa Monica, CA, 6 June 2014.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

to perform three songs during the 9 p.m. show. Eventually, Browne attended the Hoots with such regularity that the Troubadour staff told him, “Look, just put yourself on the list. You don’t have to wait.”⁴⁰ Producing such famous artists as Browne, the hoot created an eager audience at the Troubadour each Monday night.

Along with the hoot, Weston constantly sought undiscovered acts for his weekly bookings, scouring through unreleased albums to find artists on the verge of breaking into the industry.⁴¹ Weston’s willingness to take a chance on an unknown name, compounded with the mix of powerful industry voices, magnified the venue’s profile, as Robert Hilburn explained:

The Troubadour could ignite careers because performers were, in many ways, auditioning for the entire record industry when they stepped on that small wooden stage. Every Tuesday night, some 300 to 400-industry insiders, including radio station programmers, critics, and concert bookers, showed up to pass judgment.⁴²

Even though Hilburn exaggerates the probable ratio of industry members present at Troubadour performances, having these discerning voices present in the audience elevated the idea of a Troubadour debut. Because these producers were able to influence opinions in the music industry, successful sets in this particular space were said to be instrumental in propelling a relatively unknown artist into the national spotlight.

Weston’s own comments about the Troubadour reveal how he viewed the venue as a discerning space, particularly through the club’s small size and comfortable atmosphere. When Hilburn interviewed Weston for the *Los Angeles Times* in 1970, Weston affirmed the importance

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Mary Katherine Aldin, interview with author, Los Angeles, CA, 7 August 2013.

⁴² Robert Hilburn, “A Legend Rocks On,” *Los Angeles Times*, 25 December 2007, accessed 10 May 2014, <http://articles.latimes.com/2007/dec/25/entertainment/et-troubadour25>.

of an intimate performance setting for establishing “validity.” During the interview, Weston pointed to a list of performers printed on the Troubadour’s menu and explained:

We [the Troubadour] like to think of that list as a sort of hall of fame...It represents some of the finest talent of our times. And we didn’t bring them to the Troubadour with just money. We can’t compete with the Santa Monica Civic Auditorium or Las Vegas or a college concert date in bidding for talent. What we do offer an entertainer is a place where he can check up on his own validity. All performers remember the days when they played to small houses. They remember the waves of emotion they felt in small clubs. The Troubadour gives them a chance to get back to that atmosphere and make sure their music is still valid. It is so much more satisfying than the big concert halls where the closest person in the audience is 50 to 100 feet away. The people who play our club are sensitive artists who have something to say about our times. They are modern day troubadours. It is important for them to get away from the crowds and check their own validity once in a while.⁴³

Weston saw the club’s size, which allowed the audience to experience the immediacy of the performance and for the artist to receive audience feedback, as the key to becoming a space that dictated an artist’s validity. His comments reveal gendered bias, referring to the singer-songwriter using male pronouns, but his comments also illustrate the singer-songwriter movement’s notion of artistry: namely, that a “valid” or “sensitive” artist is more concerned with performing “valid” music to a few people than derivative work to a large crowd. This perception heightens the sense that the Troubadour, and singer-songwriters, were more interested in music as a listening experience than as a mode of achieving fame, and therefore more genuine artistically. In this way, the space and atmosphere of the Troubadour informed the values guiding the singer-songwriter movement.

Infamous in Hollywood for driving a hard bargain, Weston also imposed strict control over his new talent, requiring artists who played the Troubadour to sign his “options.” This contract restricted performers from playing larger venues during subsequent performances in the

⁴³ Robert Hilburn, “Atmosphere, Talent Key To Club’s Success,” *Los Angeles Times*, 2 August 1970, M1.

Los Angeles area.⁴⁴ Therefore, if an artist earned national attention after playing an initial set at the club, the artist was contractually obligated to play the Troubadour a second time regardless of the artist's ability to sell out venues three times the size. From an outsider's perspective, this made the Troubadour appear as the preferred venue for singer-songwriters regardless of their popularity or ability to play to larger houses, further promoting the perception of an artist's genuine persona. In actuality, this repeat business came from Weston's grip on his new acts.

Producer Peter Asher had a more generous take on Weston's entrepreneurial spirit, arguing that Weston's contracts kept the club in business. Asher explained that artists could, in fact, play larger clubs but the contract required an artist to cut Weston in as a co-promoter. Expounding on the backlash, Asher insisted, "It wasn't a big deal! Some people got all outraged about it like it was *slavery*. But it kept the club alive! It meant that if you did get someone huge, James [Taylor] would be selling out the [Santa Monica] Civic Auditorium and Doug would be getting a chunk of change for the Troubadour. It's not bad at all."⁴⁵ Weston's business practices allowed him to play both games. He could maintain that his club was dedicated to intimate performance in spite of the money, but still benefit from the capital generated in large arenas and compete with industry giants.

"People Got Quiet for Her"

Within the Troubadour's distinguished walls, the audience performed a set of rituals that acted as validation of the artists in this space. These rituals intensified the rhetoric of authenticity

⁴⁴ Mary Katherine Aldin, interview with author, Los Angeles, CA, 7 August 2013; see also, Myrna Oliver, "Doug Weston, Troubadour Founder, Dies," *Los Angeles Times*, 15 February 1999, accessed 5 June 2014, <http://articles.latimes.com/1999/feb/15/local/me-8369>. Carole King claims not to have known about the contracts in *A Natural Woman: A Memoir* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2012), 225.

⁴⁵ Peter Asher, phone interview with author, 5 January 2015.

constructed as a part of the singer-songwriter identity. In many venues, when “the crowd goes wild,” the volume of shouts and applause indicate the audience’s enthusiasm, and performers across many genres have used this reaction to gauge audience approval. But at the Troubadour, the crowd developed a new set of practices to deem a performance legitimate. Of course, audiences clapped for a good performance, but the true mark of a successful set at the Troubadour was a silently enraptured audience during a singer-songwriter’s performance. The audience reaction became one of the most influential markers of authenticity for the singer-songwriter identity, and critics would convey this aspect of the performance in their reviews, implying that the power to initiate an artist as a singer-songwriter came from the audience.

The layout of the venue and logistics of navigating the social scene at the club generated these practices. Beginning with Weston’s layout for the performance space, the slight distance between the audience and the performer on stage primed the listener to expect the sense of immediacy generated through a singer-songwriter’s persona. Comparing the venue to the Ash Grove, the multi-instrumentalist Chris Darrow, a regular on the Troubadour stage, remarked, “[The Troubadour] was a little bit more intimate than the Ash Grove, in a different kind of way because the room was set up differently, but it was about the same size.”⁴⁶ In his opinion, the difference came from the “state of the room,” describing how the rectangular shape of the Troubadour made for fewer rows that were longer, which allowed listeners to feel close to the stage even from the last row.

Even in the small space, patrons had to travel between the two sections of the Troubadour, which inspired unique ways for the audience to demonstrate their engagement with the music. As servers navigated the small space to deliver drinks throughout the night, it caused a

⁴⁶ Chris Darrow, interview with author in Claremont, CA, 6 May 2014.

great amount of noise within the audience. Many patrons would even carry on conversations during the performance, escalating the noise level in the room. However, if an artist captivated the audience amid the noise and commotion, a quietude came over the audience that served as a tacit approval of the performer.

Such an ability to command silence from the audience became an important factor in Joni Mitchell's authentication narrative when she first arrived in Los Angeles. When Mitchell made her Troubadour debut in August of 1968, Darrow commented, "She had a presence, and people got quiet for her. She didn't have to ask for it. It came as a result of the presence that she had. She was obviously going to do something."⁴⁷ *Billboard* reported on the performance the following week, writing, "Singer Joni Mitchell displayed much strength in making her [West] Coast debut at the Troubadour, Tuesday," and placed a similar emphasis on the tacit approval of the audience, demonstrated through their silence, writing, "Miss Mitchell achieved rapport with her audience. They sat attentively as she spun stories based on human experiences and personalities which have inspired her writing."⁴⁸ When Mitchell played the club again six months later, reviews revealed that she had gained a national following. Stephen Braitman of the *Van Nuys News* reported, "The crowd was larger, more expectant this time, as they waited for Joni Mitchell to mount the Troubadour stage Tuesday night and begin her return engagement. Since her last opening here...a virtual cult of Joni Mitchell followers has grown and moved the Canadian-born songstress into national prominence."⁴⁹ For Mitchell and others, silence signaled

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Eliot Tiegel, "Joni Mitchell Clicks in 'Turned On' Act," *Billboard*, 15 June 1968, 18.

⁴⁹ Stephen Braitman, "Joni Mitchell Starring at Troubadour," *Van Nuys News*, 24 January 24 1969, accessed 20 June 2014, <http://jonimitchell.com/library/view.cfm?id=1480>.

the audience's respect and connection to the songs and stories of the artist and promoted an optimal environment for listeners to experience the immediacy of the performance.

Another indication of audience engagement unique to the Troubadour's layout arose from the club's limited restrooms. The entire venue had only one set of bathrooms, which were located in the back hall of the performance space. As country-rock singer and Troubadour regular Linda Ronstadt described in her autobiography, *Simple Dreams*:

That meant everyone from the bar had to travel through the room where the stage was in order to visit the plumbing. Even if you were an up-and-coming hopeful hanging out in the bar but too broke to pay the admission fee, you could get a rich sampling of what was happening on the stage every time nature insisted.⁵⁰

Beyond the chance happening of needing to use the restroom, patrons would flood into the listening room on the auspices of "visiting the bathroom" when the music inside sounded promising—a request that the bouncers could not deny even to bar patrons who had not paid the admission fee. As Jackson Browne recalled to *Los Angeles Times* music critic Richard Cromelin, "If there was somebody everybody was waiting to see, the bar would empty out into the room for that person's set...If you could empty the bar into the house for part of your set, that was doing pretty well."⁵¹ Audience members and critics perpetuate the importance of this method of granting credibility as they retell the story of Elton John's debut performance, one of the most often mythologized stories of a Troubadour debut.

John's first performance at the Troubadour in August of 1970 was also his premiere in the United States. According to legend, on the first night of his weeklong gig in Los Angeles, the young British artist accompanied himself on the piano to a small audience sitting in the

⁵⁰ Linda Ronstadt, *Simple Dreams* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2013), 117–118.

⁵¹ Richard Cromelin, "Living Up To Their Legends," *Los Angeles Times*, 20 February 2009, accessed 13 May 2014, <http://articles.latimes.com/2003/feb/20/news/wk-cover20>.

performance space. The rest of the patrons were packed into the bar area. However, when John played his song “Take Me To the Pilot,” the bar crowd began to pour into the venue, captivated by his earnest performance and entertaining musicianship.⁵² The next morning, Hilburn published an unrestrained review in the *Los Angeles Times*: “Rejoice. Rock music, which has been going through a rather uneventful period lately, has a new star. He’s Elton John, a 23-year old Englishman whose United States debut Tuesday night at the Troubadour was, in almost every way, magnificent.” Hilburn declared John’s music “staggeringly original,” comparing the artist’s uniqueness to other Troubadour favorites Randy Newman and Laura Nyro and acknowledging John’s rightful place in the canon of singer-songwriters to emerge from the club. Hilburn concluded, “By the end of the evening, there was no question about John’s talent and potential. Tuesday night at the Troubadour was just the beginning. He’s going to be one of rock’s biggest and most important stars.”⁵³ Almost forty years later, Hilburn qualified, “John’s colorful set was especially dramatic because the Englishman was largely an unknown; his debut album hadn’t even been released in this country.”⁵⁴ The way that the story of John’s premiere has lived on in the oral history of the venue reinscribes the importance of the event in addition to the methods the audience used to validate John’s artistry.

This history reveals how the Troubadour became the premiere establishment for singer-songwriters, and in turn, how that institution has framed the perception of the singer-songwriter. Initially, the mixture of powerful industry voices at the Troubadour and its reputation as a proving ground drew artists to the venue. Meanwhile, the club’s atmosphere, curated by the

⁵² Steve Martin interviewed by Morgan Neville, *Troubadours: The Rise of the Singer-Songwriter*, dir. Morgan Neville, 2011.

⁵³ Robert Hilburn, “Elton John New Rock Talent,” *Los Angeles Times*, 27 August 1970, D22.

⁵⁴ Robert Hilburn, “A Legend Rocks On,” *Los Angeles Times*, 25 December 2007, accessed 10 May 2014, <http://articles.latimes.com/2007/dec/25/entertainment/et-troubadour25>.

management, reinforced the values connected with the singer-songwriter identity for the audience. The identity forged within the Troubadour's walls solidified the values of personal music, authenticity, vulnerability, and intimate performance as the defining mark of artists deemed singer-songwriters, and continues to inform the listener's perception of this category.

Los Angeles Recording Studios

Beyond the walls of the Troubadour, audiences outside of Los Angeles could experience singer-songwriter aesthetics via recordings. Consider rock journalist Joel Vance's reaction to three singer-songwriter singles, published in the *New York Times* in 1972:

James Taylor singing "Fire and Rain," Joni Mitchell singing "Both Sides Now," ...or Cat Stevens singing "Morning Has Broken" produce the same effect on the audience: the singer is singing to *me* in a personal way; the singer knows my life and I know his; the singer knows the times I live in; I wanna hug him/her till he/she squeaks.⁵⁵

This example highlights how recordings garnered the same feelings of personal connection between artist and audience that listeners experienced in live performance settings. Titled "Today's New Rock Crooners," Vance's text drew comparisons between a singer-songwriters' vocal style and the crooning technique used by Frank Sinatra and Bing Crosby. Both singer-songwriters and crooners demonstrate how recording technology constructed the notions of immediacy valued in each genre. For crooners, the advent of microphone technology heightened audience perceptions of intimacy, where listeners reported feeling like the singer was whispering to them.⁵⁶ In the singer-songwriter movement, studio techniques foregrounded the voice above

⁵⁵ Joel Vance, "Today's New Rock Crooners," *New York Times*, 10 December 1972, D36.

⁵⁶ Albin Zak, *The Poetics of Rock: Cutting Tracks, Making Records* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Paula Lockheart, "A History of Early Microphone Singing, 1925–1939," *Popular Music and Society* 26, no. 3 (2003): 367-385; Allison McCracken, "'God's Gift to us Girls': Crooning, Gender, and the Re-Creation of American Popular Songs 1928–1933," *American Music* 17, no. 4 (Winter 1999): 365-395; Timothy Taylor discusses the construction of intimacy through the development of the radio in "Music and the Rise of Radio in 1920s

all other arrangement elements and created similar feelings of closeness between artist and listener, and this studio aesthetic was codified in the same Los Angeles scene.

Pre-dating the singer-songwriter movement, the signature sound emerging from Los Angeles had boasted full textures, lavish orchestration, and heavy use of echo. This production was present in styles ranging from mainstream pop to easy listening, but the recording techniques centered around two main studios: Gold Star and A&M. Phil Spector's Wall of Sound technique, produced at Gold Star Studios, exemplifies this treatment on "Be My Baby" (1963) by the Ronettes and "You've Lost That Lovin' Feelin'" (1964) by the Righteous Brothers. The easy listening arrangements emerging from A&M Records through Herb Alpert's work with the Tijuana Brass also placed great importance on reverberant, expansive orchestrations, such as their 1968 album, *The Beat of the Brass*. Even the more avant-garde pop creations recorded at Gold Star Studios, such as the stylings of the Beach Boys' Brian Wilson on "Good Vibrations" (1964), centered around dense, layered harmonies and Spector's distinct echo.

By the end of the decade, however, a new sound coalesced in Los Angeles, featuring trimmed-down production more appropriate for the singer-songwriter movement's simpler aesthetic. This sound emerged from three main studios—A&M, Crystal Sound, and Sunset Sound (see map in Figure 2.1)—and a handful of recording engineers—Henry Lewy, Hank Cicalo, and Bill Lazerus. These engineers helped create a recorded sound that aurally reproduced feelings of intimacy and immediacy constructed in local live performance spaces by guiding the focus of the listener to the artist's voice (and therefore the lyrics).⁵⁷ Two elements created this

America: Technological Imperialism, Socialization, and the Transformation of Intimacy," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio, and Television* 22 (2002): 436–40.

⁵⁷ Eliot Bates designated this function as one of the principal roles of recording studios in his study "What Studios Do" in *Journal on the Art of Record Production* 7 (November 2012), accessed 15 July 2015, <http://arpjournal.com/what-studios-do/>.

new studio aesthetic. First, artists used a small group of session musicians to fill in simple arrangements on their recordings. The similarity in personnel on their albums created a de facto house band for the singer-songwriter movement. This added a level of consistency across the recordings emerging from Los Angeles, even though they were created by different sound engineers, recorded at separate studios, and produced on varying labels. Second, the engineers placed the singer-songwriter's voice front and center in the mix, lowering the levels of all other instruments present on the recording and relegating the arrangement to the background.⁵⁸ The effect of the recording produced the perception that the artist was performing in a small room and standing close to the listener, emulating the ambience of Los Angeles' small club environments.⁵⁹ This studio mix influenced the reception of James Taylor's second album, *Sweet Baby James*, after he arrived in Los Angeles in 1970.

James Taylor's Sweet Baby James (1970)

In 1969, James Taylor spoke to *Rolling Stone* magazine about what he viewed as the record-making "translation process," explaining, "There's a larger and larger translation process that takes place between my making music and its coming out on a record. I hope my next album will be simpler. It has to be, because the music is simple and a big production job just buries all my intentions."⁶⁰ This quotation demonstrates how Taylor viewed the sound of the record as a critical aspect of his songwriting process: simple songs required simple production. Such an

⁵⁸ Ruth Dockwray and Alan Moore, "Configuring the Sound-Box, 1965–1972," *Popular Music* 29, No. 2 (2010): 131–197. Dockwray and Moore demonstrate the shift in recording practices that placed the voice front and center of the mix from 1966–1969, consistent with my findings in the singer-songwriter movement, 187.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* Dockwray and Moore further discuss the development of studio mixes through the concept of the sound box: a model for the configuration of recorded sounds within a three-dimensional space. Their argument shows that sounds placed up front in the mix create a sense of proximity for the listener.

⁶⁰ Jerry Hopkins, "James Taylor: 'The Same Old Craperoo,'" *Rolling Stone*, 23 August 1969, 1.

equation speaks to the perceptions of immediacy constructed through singer-songwriter recordings. Taylor discovered the studio aesthetic that fit his songwriting style—one that seemed to eschew this “translation” process but was mediated nonetheless—when he moved to Los Angeles shortly after this interview.

Taylor’s disillusioned attitude toward record production stemmed from his initial recording contract with the Beatles’ Apple Records in 1968. When Taylor signed with Apple, he stepped into the tensions between the band and their management, as well as between the band members themselves, that would eventually lead to the band’s breakup in 1970. After the loss of their manager, Brian Epstein, who died of a drug overdose at age 32 in 1967, the Beatles went into business with fraudulent manager Allen Klein and suffered the consequences. At the same time in 1968, the Beatles took on a new project, forming their own label, Apple Corps and its subsidiary, Apple Records. These new directions only exacerbated the corrosive dynamic between the band members and those working at Apple. The climate at Apple created a stressful environment for Taylor’s producer, Peter Asher, but ultimately, the production values at Apple were incompatible with Taylor’s acoustic style.

Apple Records was meant to be a place where the “little guy” could make it. The company advertised that anyone could mail in a picture, a tape, and a letter in order to catch their break.⁶¹ Paul McCartney hired Peter Asher as Apple’s head of A&R.⁶² Apple received more than 400 tapes after their advertising campaign, and Asher selected the young country-folk singer James Taylor as the first artist he signed to the label.⁶³

⁶¹ Bruce Spizer, “Apple Records,” *Cambridge Companion to the Beatles* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 145.

⁶² *Ibid.* Asher had been a part of a successful rock duo, Peter and Gordon, who recorded the McCartney song “A World Without Love” (1964), which became a number one single on the *Billboard* Hot 100 chart.

The production on James Taylor's self-titled debut recording provides a glimpse into the sonic world of Apple, where the recording techniques resembled those employed in late Beatles albums. One Taylor track in particular, "Carolina In My Mind" bears a striking resemblance to the Beatles' production on their albums *Magical Mystery Tour* (1967) and *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* (1967). For the track, Asher enlisted friend Richard Hewson, a jazz trumpeter and composer, to write an arrangement that would "fill the musical interstices" between melodic lines.⁶⁴ This approach to the arrangement explains the heavy presence of strings and horns throughout the album.⁶⁵ Hewson would later work with the Beatles on their arrangements for "The Long And Winding Road" and "Across the Universe" on their final studio album, *Let It Be* (1970).⁶⁶ Joining Taylor in studio, Paul McCartney on bass and George Harrison's back-up vocal, add an indelible connection to the Beatles' sonic signature.

The introduction to "Carolina In My Mind" begins with only a harmonica and acoustic guitar (Table 2.1). This simple texture is immediately interrupted when Taylor sings the initial chorus, and the tempo picks up to a buoyant 95 BPM. Backup vocals create a dense layering of sound and the hard hits from the drum set on the second and fourth beats create a peppy, upbeat feel. The bright timbre of the background vocalists produced with obvious overdubbing creates a jarring juxtaposition against Taylor's relaxed and carefree delivery. Continuing into the second chorus, the texture proceeds to build as the track adds strings that outline the harmonic

⁶³ Peter Asher, "James Taylor," AppleRecords.com, accessed 28 November 2014, http://www.applerecords.com/#!/albums/Album_JamesTaylor; Bruce Spizer, "Apple Records," *Cambridge Companion to the Beatles*, 142–152.

⁶⁴ Peter Asher, phone interview with author, 5 January 2015.

⁶⁵ Peter Asher, "James Taylor," AppleRecords.com.

⁶⁶ In addition to work with the Beatles, Hewson has arranged for the Bee Gees, Diana Ross, and Herbie Hancock. Hewson's credits listed at AllMusic.com, accessed 3 December 2014, <http://www.allmusic.com/artist/richard-hewson-mn0001084923/biography>.

progression and a tambourine during the bridge. Finally, during the outro, the strings add a shimmering descant to the overall texture reminiscent of the Beatles “All You Need Is Love” (1967).

Table 2.1: “Carolina In My Mind,” on James Taylor’s *James Taylor*, arr. Richard Hewson

<i>Timing</i>	<i>Form</i>	<i>Lyrics</i>	<i>Arrangement</i>
0:00	Introduction		Guitar and harmonica
0:05	Chorus 1	“In my mind I’m goin’ to Carolina	Guitar, bass, drums, lead vocals, back-up vocals
0:26	Verse 1	“Karen she’s a silver sun...”	Guitar, bass, lead vocals, back-up vocals, no drums
0:46	Verse 2	“There ain’t no doubt in no one’s mind...”	Drums return, light in background
1:07	Chorus 2	“In my mind I’m goin’ to Carolina”	Harder drum hits, strings
1:28	Verse 3	“Dark and silent late last night...”	Guitar, bass, lead vocals, back-up vocals, drums, no strings
1:49	Bridge	“Now with a holy host of others standin’ round me...”	Solo cello joined by full strings, tambourine, bass, guitar, drums, back-up vocals
2:10	Chorus	“In my mind I’m goin’ to Carolina”	Full texture
2:31	Repeats	“In my mind I’m goin’ to Carolina”	Full texture plus descant strings
2:52	Outro	“Gotta get back to Carolina soon” (vamp)	Full texture, fade out

Like the dense instrumentation of Collins’s recording of “Both Sides Now” discussed in Chapter 1, journalists criticized the track for obscuring the meaning of the song. *Rolling Stone* critic Jon Landau reviewed the album in April of 1969, picking up on some of the inconsistencies between the supposed folk nature of the lyrical themes with the Apple-style arrangement and production. Despite his praise for the songwriting and Taylor’s vocal delivery, Landau found the production of the album “superfluous,” writing, “There are a few string arrangements that serve no real function. The horn arrangements sound a bit too British. And on

some cuts, James' voice is not as 'up front' as it should have been."⁶⁷ The *Los Angeles Times* music critic Pete Johnson took a similar position. In his opinion, the unnecessary orchestral accouterments obscured the core sound of Taylor's voice and guitar picking. He wrote, "The record's instrumentation is dominated by Taylor's guitar playing...which augments his almost off-handed delivery to give it a folk feeling, but some of the songs use brass sections, harps, string quartets, and even a full orchestra."⁶⁸ Landau and Johnson could not deny the Beatles' influence on the arrangement, and found the production incompatible with the simple values promoted in the lyrics, folk guitar picking, and vocal styling.

At the same time as Taylor's release, Apple Records was declining as quickly as it had cropped up. The band hired Allen Klein immediately following the formation of Apple Corps, after Lennon introduced Klein to the other band members in 1969.⁶⁹ Klein stands as one of the most controversial figures in the Beatles narrative, and is often faulted for causing a significant rift in the band. Klein's business practices were deceptive from the beginning of his relationship with the group. Dividing the band further, McCartney never signed the contract with Klein because of his infamous and deceitful reputation as the Rolling Stones' manager.⁷⁰ Eventually, McCartney sued Klein for taking more royalties than contracted and fired him from his position

⁶⁷ Jon Landau, "James Taylor," *Rolling Stone*, 19 April 1969, accessed 28 November 2014, <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/albumreviews/james-taylor-19690419>.

⁶⁸ Pete Johnson, "James Taylor: Fine Folk Feeling," *Los Angeles Times*, 16 March 1969, V36.

⁶⁹ Dave Laing, "Obituary: Allen Klein," *The Guardian*, 5 July 2009, accessed 5 December 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/music/2009/jul/06/obituary-allen-klein>; also see Steve Hamelman, "The Beatles in 1969 and 1970," *Cambridge Companion to the Beatles*, 128.

⁷⁰ Hamelman, "The Beatles in 1969 and 1970," 129. Klein was still hired based on a majority vote from Lennon, Harrison, and Starr; the Rolling Stones sued Klein for "intent to 'deceive and defraud' the group" when they discovered that Klein had gained rights to all of their songs published before 1971. See "The Rolling Stones Sue Allen Klein," 14 October 1971, accessed 13 December 2014, <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/the-rolling-stones-sue-allen-klein-19711014>.

as head of Apple Records in 1970, but the damage done to Apple's reputation and the band's dynamic was irreparable.⁷¹

Although the dissolution of Apple posed a problem for Taylor's early career, the tension ultimately prompted his move to Los Angeles. When the Beatles signed with Klein, Asher resigned from his position at Apple and persuaded Taylor to leave the label, explaining:

I knew of Allen in some detail from friends in New York and didn't think he was the right man for the job or think he was a reputable guy at all, which was correct. So once I knew he was coming in, I left and wrote a letter of resignation and recommended to James Taylor that we just leave the label.⁷²

Asher moved to Los Angeles and secured a new contract for Taylor on Warner Bros. Records. In an interview with *Playboy*, Klein spouted empty intimidation about his intention to sue Asher and Taylor for breach of contract, but never followed through with his threat.⁷³ Taylor moved to California months later, and Asher began promoting Taylor heavily through performances in the Los Angeles area. It was this live space that would inspire changes to his recorded sound.

For the Beatles, reliance on studio techniques and record production intentionally prohibited the band from performing live. Likewise, Taylor could not reproduce the sound produced in studio for "Carolina In My Mind" during a live performance without hiring an orchestra to back him. Instead, Taylor performed mellow, acoustic versions of his songs during live performances. For example, at his Troubadour debut in 1969, Hilburn noted that Taylor's live arrangement brought his "distinctive and relaxed" voice to the foreground, whereas the

⁷¹ Dave Laing reports that Klein was taking 20% of the Beatles' earnings without a proper contract signed by all four members of the band in his obituary, "Allen Klein," 5 July 2009.

⁷² Peter Asher, phone interview with author, 5 January 2015; David Browne also discusses Asher's departure from Apple in *Fire and Rain: The Beatles, Simon & Garfunkel, James Taylor, CSNY, and the Lost Story of 1970* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2011), 59, 83.

⁷³ Peter Asher, phone interview with author, 5 January 2015. The Klein interview appeared in November 1971 issue of *Playboy*.

Apple recording had rendered Taylor's voice "undistinguished."⁷⁴ Like the writers at *Sing Out!*, Hilburn preferred an arrangement where the voice and lyrics could stand out.

Following this reception, Taylor and Asher agreed to a simpler approach on the next album. Asher, explained:

I started to think that I overdid that process ever so slightly, and realized that I just needed to pay even more attention to James and his writing, and his singing, and his playing, and be a bit less of an avid producer. Sometimes wanting to make your mark as a producer, wanting to make the record neat, can detract from the songs.⁷⁵

The belief that Taylor's songs would be untainted by studio production demonstrates an anti-technological discourse in singer-songwriter narratives. In fact, the sound developed on Taylor's subsequent recordings were as much products of studio processes as *James Taylor*.

Taylor's second album, *Sweet Baby James*, utilized a more subtle studio approach that recreated the sound and feel of Taylor's solo-acoustic arrangements. Asher enlisted Los Angeles native, Chris Darrow, to recommend a studio and backing band. Darrow recommended Sunset Sound specifically for its "warm vibe" and studio engineer, Bill Lazerus.⁷⁶ Darrow also recruited Russ Kunkel, the drummer for John Stewart's band, who joined Taylor's childhood friend and guitarist, Danny Kortchmar. Asher enrolled Carole King to play piano, filling out the small backing band utilized on *Sweet Baby James*.

Lazerus crafted a studio mix that kept Taylor's voice front and center. The levels keep the accompanying arrangement in the background of the track, maintaining the prominence of Taylor's voice and guitar. The full effect comes through on "Fire and Rain," which epitomizes the way a studio mix, combined with confessional songwriting, enhanced the idea of an artist's

⁷⁴ Robert Hilburn, "Taylor in West Coast Debut at the Troubadour," *Los Angeles Times*, 10 July 1969, C25.

⁷⁵ Peter Asher, phone interview with author, 5 January 2015.

⁷⁶ Chris Darrow, interview with author, 5 May 2014.

vulnerability. Taylor composed the song in response to the loss of a friend he had met while in rehab for his heroin addiction (Figure 2.5). His friend died of an overdose after a drug relapse, and the song reflects on loss (verse 1) and his own struggle with addiction (verses 2 and 3). The way that Taylor spoke about addiction rather than glorification of drug culture contributed to the sense of vulnerability in Taylor’s song. The subject took on an even more current meaning after the deaths of Jimi Hendrix and Janis Joplin in 1970, when audiences started to question if drug culture was a problem for the rock industry.⁷⁷ The lyrics bring out other elements of personal songwriting, speaking in the first person and addressing “you” as if he was actually conversing with a friend. Taylor also calls his friend by name in the lyrics (“Suzanne, the plans they made put an end to you”), bringing a level of specificity to the song that indicated autobiographic authenticity to listeners (line 2).

“Fire and Rain”—James Taylor

Verse 1

1 Just yesterday morning they let me know you were gone
 [Suzanne] the plans they made put an end to you ← Calls friend by name
 I walked out this morning, and I wrote down this song
 I just can’t remember who to send it to

Chorus

5 I’ve seen fire, and I’ve seen rain
 I’ve seen sunny days that I thought would never end
 I’ve seen lonely times when I could not find a friend
 But I always thought that I’d see [you] again ← Conversational feel

The arrangement the band adapted for “Fire and Rain” trimmed the orchestration critics had condemned on *James Taylor*, creating a simple, straightforward sound. On piano, King played only chords that support Taylor’s guitar, making the folk-based fingerpicking style the most prominent musical aspect of the arrangement. Instead of complicated horn fills, Taylor’s

⁷⁷ Hilburn “Death Poses Drug Culture Question,” *Los Angeles Times*, 19 September 1970, B6; Hilburn “Janis Joplin’s Lifetime ‘A Rush,’” *Los Angeles Times*, 7 Oct 1970, E1.

guitar ornamentation punctuates each line of the lyrics. Drummer Russ Kunkel provided a unique approach to the drums on this particular track, switching out his sticks for brushes on the recording. According to Kunkel, this decision emerged from rehearsals in Asher's home:

One of the things that happened in the rehearsals was that, because Peter lived in this residential area down by Larchmont...I really couldn't play with sticks. There was no amplification, no monitors, so I did the four rehearsals with brushes, playing them like sticks. "Fire And Rain" was one of the songs that we rehearsed before we went into the studio...I fully intended to try to use sticks on some of the songs, which I did, but when it came to "Fire and Rain"—it might have been Peter, it might have been James, I'm not sure—but they said, "You know what? Maybe... what did you play at the rehearsal?" I said, "I was playing on brushes." And they said, "Try that." And that's why I used [brushes]. That's why it sounds the way it does.⁷⁸

The end result brought the track the richness of a studio arrangement while maintaining the delicacy of a solo acoustic performance.

Robert Hilburn's assessment of *Sweet Baby James* demonstrates that the new studio aesthetic achieved the appropriate effect for Taylor's songs. According to Hilburn, "He [Taylor] has gone through many of the same problems and tensions as members of his audience, several of his songs suggest, and he shares his feelings. His music is soft, rather than loud, personal rather than collective, therapeutic rather than disturbing."⁷⁹ This review emphasizes the importance of a feeling of connection between artist and audience within the singer-songwriter movement, and through the dichotomous comparisons of Taylor's music with other contemporary rock sounds, exemplifies how the construction of recorded sound acted as a conduit fostering this sense of connection.

⁷⁸ Russ Kunkel, in interview with Joe Bosso for musicradar.com, "Session legend/producer on 13 career-defining records" 2 April 2014, accessed 14 November 2014, <http://www.musicradar.com/news/drums/session-legend-producer-russ-kunkel-on-13-career-defining-records-597399/3>.

⁷⁹ Robert Hilburn, "Soothing Sounds in Taylor Album," *Los Angeles Times*, 25 April 1971, T40.

Carole King's Tapestry (1971)

In 1960, 18-year old Carole King wrote her first pop single, “Will You Love Me Tomorrow,” with her husband and lyricist, Gerry Goffin. The Shirelles recorded the song with an up-tempo beat, syrupy strings, and saccharine “sha-la-la’s”—essential building blocks for a hit that resonated with the teen masses. The track climbed the charts to reach number one on *Billboard's Hot 100* in 1961, and over the next five years, thirteen other versions were released in English. The royalties from this song alone built King’s financial foundation and proved her reputation as an accomplished songwriter. But ten years after the initial single, King released her own recording with a different interpretation of the lyrics on her 1971 album *Tapestry*. Crooned with only her accompanying piano, King’s version reframed the lyrics from a vulnerable perspective. This version constructed King’s persona as a “natural woman,” another one of her previous pop hits that received an acoustic makeover on the album, appropriating the discourses of the singer-songwriter movement. The effect, once again, resonated with the masses, and *Tapestry* sold 500,000 copies within six months of its release.⁸⁰ When asked how she achieved such success on *Tapestry*, Carole King told interviewer Paul Zollo, “Right time and right place.”⁸¹

Like Taylor and Mitchell, Carole King’s musical metamorphosis took place when she moved from New York City to Laurel Canyon. Carole King’s background as a commercial songwriter necessitated a new acoustic aesthetic and careful publicity treatment to establish her singer-songwriter credibility as a sincere artist untainted by commercial ambition. King’s story reveals how this Los Angeles sound created an anti-commercial discourse crucial to perceptions

⁸⁰RIAA’s Gold and Platinum Database, accessed 20 September 2015, http://riaa.com/goldandplatinumdata.php?content_selector=gold-platinum-searchable-database

⁸¹ Paul Zollo, *Songwriters on Songwriting* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2003), 146.

of singer-songwriter authenticity, such that King has earned a place as a legitimized singer-songwriter in spite of her continued commercial gain.

King began her career in 1959 when she was seventeen years old as a staff songwriter for Aldon Music, part of the commercial music conglomeration of publishing houses in New York City known as the Brill Building.⁸² As a staff songwriter, King was trained to write songs tailored to other artists with maximum commercial appeal, similar to the Tin Pan Alley model from the early twentieth century. In addition to “Will You Love Me Tomorrow” (1960), Goffin and King’s string of singles throughout the 1960s—“Take Good Care of My Baby” (1961), “The Locomotion” (1962), and “Pleasant Valley Sunday”(1967)—continued to define the pop aesthetic of the decade, even inspiring young John Lennon and Paul McCartney to be “as good as Goffin and King.”⁸³

The changing landscape of the music industry throughout the 1960s motivated King’s transition to a performing career. Observing the growth of the entertainment industry in California, Goffin and King relocated to Los Angeles in 1963 but divorced soon after the move.⁸⁴ King continued to write for Aldon Music in California but claims that the industry’s demands for songwriters were decreasing, a phenomenon which King attributes to the increase in bands such as the Beatles writing their own material.⁸⁵ King believed that to continue to have a career as a songwriter, she would have to record her songs herself, and this realization pushed

⁸² See Ken Emerson’s chapter on Goffin and King’s partnership at Aldon Music, “The Young Lovers” in *Always Magic in the Air: The Bomp and Brilliance of the Brill Building*, (New York: Viking, 2005), 84–91; King, “Cubicles,” *A Natural Woman*, 89-92

⁸³ James Perone, *The Words and Music of Carole King* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2006), 11; McCartney listed Goffin and King as his favorite songwriters in an interview with *New Musical Express* in 1963; Roy Carr and Tony Tyler include the interview in *The Beatles: An Illustrated Record* (New York: Harmony Books, 1975).

⁸⁴ King, *A Natural Woman*, 148, 151.

⁸⁵ Jon Landau, “Tapestry,” *Rolling Stone*, 29 April 1971; Carole King, *A Natural Woman*, 121.

her toward her performing career. Whether or not this story accurately portrays the ability for songwriters to earn a living at the end of the 1960s, King's story steers skeptics away from her connection to the commercial industry that would invalidate her legitimacy as a singer-songwriter. By assuring audiences that she never wanted the limelight but was truly dedicated to the continuation of her songwriting craft, the language in her promotional materials and biography persuaded audiences of her pure intentions and dedication to music, not fame.

Further discourse about King's unadulterated dedication to her music comes from the stories surrounding her demo recordings. As a staff songwriter, King recorded demo versions of her songs, and these tapes were used to pitch the song to a potential recording artist. Industry insiders were amazed by King's ability to hint at a full arrangement through the demo recording with only her voice and piano. The reputation of King's flawless demos caused producers and songwriters to hoard copies of the tapes, and the recordings became a lively part of bootleg culture in Los Angeles. Peter Asher had a collection of King demos even before he began producing James Taylor, and Adler gave a stack of King's tapes to Randy Newman when he started out as a songwriter.⁸⁶ Adler was so impressed by the demo recordings she used to pitch songs to other artists that he encouraged King to record a solo album.⁸⁷ The mythology surrounding the stripped-down versions of King's pop demos plays into the perception that music remains unadulterated prior to the industry's influence.

Although King's demos had earned her ubiquitous popularity among industry insiders, her first album, *Writer* (1970), failed to gain critical attention or reach broader audiences.⁸⁸ The

⁸⁶ David Browne, liner notes to *The Legendary Demos* (Hear Music HRM-33681-02), 2012.

⁸⁷ King released fifteen of these recordings from 1961 to 1974 on *The Legendary Demos*.

⁸⁸ Perone, *The Words and Music of Carole King*, 27; Jon Landau wrote a retrospective review of *Writer* in 1971 alongside its review of *Tapestry* in *Rolling Stone*.

album, although recorded in L.A., suffered the same effects of overproduction as Taylor's inaugural record. This is likely because the album was John Fischbach's first attempt as a producer. Furthermore, even though Adler had convinced King to record in studio, she still feared live performance. In my analysis, the lack of accompanying concerts to promote *Writer* further prohibited its commercial success.

One year later, King's career took off with her second solo album, *Tapestry*. In addition to bringing on Lou Adler as the producer for the project, King mellowed the rock-leaning style of *Writer* to fit the Laurel Canyon singer-songwriter sound. For the track list, King paired a few of her former Goffin and King hits ("Natural Woman" and "Will You Love Me Tomorrow") with new tunes co-written with lyricist Toni Stern ("It's Too Late" and "Where You Lead") and songs she wrote completely herself ("You've Got a Friend" and "So Far Away"). This combination drew on her fame as a songwriter, but the former pop songs transformed into soft rock ballads through King's new acoustic arrangements. To achieve this sound, King utilized much of the same backing band as Taylor's *Sweet Baby James*, bringing in Kortchmar and Taylor on guitar. King also brought in her second husband, Charlie Larkey, to play bass, and asked Joni Mitchell and James Taylor to sing backup vocals. According to *Tapestry* recording engineer Hank Cicalo, Mitchell was recording *Blue* at A&M Studios at the same time, and Taylor jumped between sessions contributing guitar tracks to both albums.⁸⁹ The similarities in personnel on *Sweet Baby James*, *Tapestry*, and *Blue* show how the close-knit ties in the Los Angeles scene created a unified sound across albums produced on three different labels.

⁸⁹ Hank Cicalo, interview with author, Santa Monica, CA, 15 April 2014; Dave Thompson, "Shaky Town," in *Hearts of Darkness: James Taylor, Jackson Browne, Cat Stevens, and the Unlikely Rise of the Singer-Songwriter* (Milwaukee: Backbeat Books, 2012), 189–204; King, *A Natural Woman*, 209–211.

The recording and arrangement of “Will You Love Me Tomorrow” demonstrates how the studio mix on *Tapestry* focused listener attention on King’s vocal and altered the perceived meaning of the song. On this particular track, the minimal arrangement signaled to audiences that they were encountering King’s unmediated version of the song. The song itself is composed in AABA form typical of songs from King’s Brill Building era, signaling pop formula from the outset. King slowly lilts the melody in a manner that corresponded with the tender, emotionally honest lyrics, accompanied by piano, acoustic guitar, and light drums. Joni Mitchell and James Taylor add background vocals to the refrain “Will you still love me tomorrow?” in each A section. Mitchell and Taylor join King again through the entire bridge section, adding harmonies that build tension until the A section returns, the only musical contrast in the entire arrangement. Again, the similarities in personnel and studio location help give the recordings from this era a consistent sound. Moreover, the stripped down version of a song that gives audiences a window into the interpretation of its author bespeaks the same perception of immediacy that garnered Mitchell attention for her version of “Both Sides Now.”

Carole King’s metamorphosis of “Will You Love Me Tomorrow” exhibits how the presentation of her popular songs, packaged in acoustic settings and publicized in a new way, gained different meanings within the singer-songwriter movement. Robert Hilburn understood Carole King’s recording as emotionally honest, saying that the “bubble gum” quality of her pop songs “is gone...It has been replaced by a warm, personal commentary about human relationships.”⁹⁰ Jon Landau called *Tapestry* “an album of surpassing personal-intimacy,” and noted a sense of generosity in the album, saying, “She reaches out toward us and gives us

⁹⁰ Robert Hilburn, “Carole King’s New Role as a Singer,” *Los Angeles Times*, 22 May 1971, A6.

everything she has.”⁹¹ The description highlights the prevailing sense of vulnerability surrounding the singer-songwriter identity cultivated by the sound and feel of acoustic arrangements.

King eventually grew to accept performing as a crucial aspect of promoting her music, but carefully crafted an anti-commercial narrative to retain credibility as a singer-songwriter. King’s insistence about her aversion to performance undermined attacks of commercialism and heightened her reputation as “pure” artist. For example, in her memoir, King recalls her first performance at the Troubadour—opening for James Taylor—with comments about her stage fright and nervous tension.⁹²

Months later, King took the Troubadour stage as the headliner. Based on her prominence as a songwriter, tickets for King’s debut performance at the Troubadour sold out two weeks in advance, with audiences eager to hear pop hits they loved. After King took the Troubadour stage in May of 1971, Robert Hilburn declared the arrival of a vibrant era for singer-songwriters, writing, “The marvellous reception being paid this week to Carole King at the Troubadour...underscores the fact that singer-songwriters in all probability, have never had it so good in pop music.”⁹³

Like Hilburn prophesied, *Tapestry* brought King unmatched commercial success, indicating that King’s new singer-songwriter identity resonated with the masses. In its first year, *Tapestry* remained at number one on *Billboard*’s Top LP’s Chart for 15 consecutive weeks—a record for female recording artists that was only recently surpassed by Adele’s album *21*

⁹¹ Jon Landau, “Tapestry,” *Rolling Stone*, 29 April 1971.

⁹² King, *Natural Woman*, 225, 228–229.

⁹³ Robert Hilburn, “Carole King’s New Role as a Singer,” *Los Angeles Times*, 22 May 1971, A6.

(2011)—and swept the 1972 Grammy Awards, winning in four categories.⁹⁴ With continued sales today, *Tapestry* is certified diamond by the Recording Industry Association of America, a designation given to albums that surpass ten million sales.⁹⁵

In spite of her commercial ascendancy, King's dedication to her genuine persona came through clearly when she took the stage at the much larger venue, the Greek Theatre, in August of 1971, just three months after her Troubadour show. The rapid expansion to a major venue—holding an audience of almost 6,000 patrons—demonstrates King's explosion on a national level, broad audience base, and mainstream appeal. Reporting on the performance, Hilburn observed that King was no longer just “the favorite of the younger, folk-rock oriented crowd that saw her at the Troubadour...but has become ‘the’ fashionable favorite of the chic Hollywood crowd.”⁹⁶ But, in his typically biased and enthusiastic praise for Carole King, Hilburn assured his readership that she had not let the success get to her head, writing, “I love Carole King. I really do. Not just for her music—though that is certainly reason enough—but for the uncompromising way she refused to assume any false airs or to surround herself with any show business pretentiousness Wednesday night at her Greek Theater opening.”⁹⁷ The review continued to remark at length on King's commitment to her values in the face of commercial attention:

The danger in all this attention is that one's values begin to shift. There is the temptation of trying to “polish” or alter one's act so that it fits some type of general show business pattern so that, the rationalization goes, it can reach “everyone” with the artist's music. In the process, however, the artists begin valuing polish more than artistry, “entertainment” more than creativity. The list of contemporary pop music figures who have stumbled in this dangerous role is a

⁹⁴ “Top LP's,” *Billboard*, 19 June 1971, 54; “Top LP's,” *Billboard*, 25 September 1971, 50.

⁹⁵ “Diamond Awards,” by the Recording Industry Association of America at [riaa.com](http://riaa.com/goldandplatinum.php?content_selector=top-diamond-awards), accessed 5 December 2014, http://riaa.com/goldandplatinum.php?content_selector=top-diamond-awards.

⁹⁶ Robert Hilburn, “Carole King in Greek Theater,” *Los Angeles Times*, 20 August 1971, F1.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

long one. But this enormous attention did not cause the slightest change in Miss King's values. There were no fireworks, fancy gowns, multitude of dancers, show business trimmings, special dialog, trace of smugness or anything else to mar her opening.

She was the same warm, gentle Carole King (singer-songwriter-pianist) who made her debut last year at the Troubadour with James Taylor and she gave what, musically, was the most significant concert I've seen this summer at the Greek because it reflected most accurately the current mood of contemporary pop music.⁹⁸

Hilburn interpreted King's warm, heartfelt performance as proof that she had retained her values, which were, in Hilburn's interpretation, central to her music's meaning. This analysis shows how the meaning of King's music resided in the performance and presentation of the music as sincere, allowing her to craft her identity as an authenticated singer-songwriter based on a genuine persona and the perceived commitment to these values over commercial ambition.

To this day, King constructs her anti-commercial rhetoric based on notions of honesty, vulnerability, and sincerity during a performance. In her 2012 memoir, King claims that during her headline performance at the Troubadour, she learned how to overcome crippling stage fright, writing,

The more I communicated my joy to the audience, the more joy they communicated back to me. All I needed to do was sing with conviction, speak my truth from the heart, honestly and straightforwardly, and offer my words, ideas, and music to the audience as if it were one collective friend that I'd known for a very long time.⁹⁹

King accentuates the importance of the connection between artist and audience, facilitated by the size and atmosphere of the venue. "I had found the key to success in performing. It was to be authentically myself."¹⁰⁰ Claiming that the Troubadour was the place that allowed her to access

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ King, *A Natural Woman* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2012), 225.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

this part of her artistry, King perpetuates the venue's legacy and situates herself within the club's agenda of authentication. King's narrative ties together the ways in which venues, artists, and recording studios constructed the singer-songwriter identity that crystallized in the Los Angeles scene.

* * * * *

These stories of individuals in a particular place and time establish the convergence of artists, journalists, and producers within Los Angeles venues and recording studios that created a coherent singer-songwriter identity in the early 1970s. This narrative reveals the impact of geography, space, and place on the creation of musical styles. For example, the aesthetics of the club environment at the Troubadour and studio mix created in Los Angeles recording studios each helped solidify the meaning of the singer-songwriter identity for its varied audiences. Specifically, the sounds created in these spaces fused the idea of singer-songwriter performance with notions of intimacy, immediacy, and vulnerability. In addition, accounts of how Taylor and King each entered the Los Angeles scene during this time reveal the importance of the networks in that city and the ways that artists adopted new modes of performing, presenting themselves, and crafting their narratives to fit within the L.A. scene.

This account has further demonstrated the constructed nature of the singer-songwriter identity. Created to appear natural and unmediated, the singer-songwriter was, in fact, a finely curated performance of sincerity. Such an understanding counteracts the romanticized notions about how the singer-songwriter scene claims authenticity as an unmediated value. However, the notions of authenticity set up by the singer-songwriter scene powerfully affected Los Angeles audiences' interpretation of the music. Considering how listeners engaged this constructed identity provides a way to understand the relationship between the singer-songwriter movement

and the political shifts of the 1970s, wherein the presentation of sincerity and the audiences' perceptions of authenticity, however manipulated, counteracted the broader effects of citizens' mistrust of their nation and the stability of their society.

CHAPTER THREE: “YOU PROBABLY THINK THIS SONG IS ABOUT YOU”: CONFESSIONAL SONGWRITING AS CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING IN THE UNITED STATES WOMEN’S MOVEMENT

When Carole King took home four Grammys at the 1972 awards, she became the first woman to win for “Song of the Year.” Although King’s success represented a remarkable achievement for women in the music industry, when King decided to skip the award ceremony to stay home with her newborn baby, confusion from the press undermined her achievement. “We are at a curious point in cultural history,” wrote rock critic Noel Coppage, commenting on King’s absence in *Stereo Review*. “Our society is paying the greatest tribute ever paid to women for their accomplishments in music. At the same time, our society is being buffeted by the forces of Women’s Liberation—and there seems to be little or no cause-effect connection between the two developments.”¹ To Coppage, a truly liberated woman would prioritize her career over family responsibilities, even though this idea has little basis in the reality of family life for women maintaining careers, especially in the weeks after giving birth. His remarks, however, echo the perception that the singer-songwriter movement had failed to connect with contemporary politics, a position held by certain traditionalists in the folk revival community, as demonstrated in Chapter 1. Coppage continued with an observation about the growing number of “troubadettes” in the singer-songwriter movement, following King’s path:

The troubadette, the female singer who writes her own material, has arrived with a gradual suddenness. She has done it with only minimal help from the [women’s] “movement,” and she has helped the movement only incidentally, with the artist’s

¹ Noel Coppage, “Troubadettes, Troubadoras, Troubadines...Or, What’s a Nice Girl Like You Doing in a Business Like This?,” *Stereo Review*, September 1972, 58.

classic ambivalence: politics may be used in the making of art, but art may not be used in the making of politics.²

Here, Coppage uses a diminutive term to designate the gender of female troubadours, and also draws on the notion of separation between art and politics used by defenders of “great art.”

Coppage’s question about the relationship between the singer-songwriter movement and feminist politics persists.³ These critics found that without lyrics that overtly confronted the patriarchy, the singer-songwriter movement fell short of musically addressing feminist issues.

The songs that emerged from the singer-songwriter movement presented intensely personal narratives that addressed such private concerns as relationships, family, and a search for meaning and fulfillment in life. These narratives that focused on the self were viewed as at odds with the discourses of political protest songs, indulging in autobiography rather than writing lyrics that look outward at the problems facing society. Yet, as this chapter will explore, the singer-songwriter’s personal narrative perspective was, in fact, a mirror for the political strategies of the women’s movement. During this time, the women’s movement adopted new organizing strategies that migrated political work to private spaces, opting for the personal setting of consciousness-raising meetings instead of staging large, public protests. Furthermore, the women’s movement raised issues considered “private,” such as women’s health, birth control, abortion, division of labor, and childcare, as public concerns. The intersection between a musical movement that drew on personal experience and a social movement that politicized

² Ibid.

³ Shayna Maskell, “I Predict a Riot: Riot Grrrls and the Contradictions of Feminism,” in *Routledge History of Social Protest in Popular Music*, ed. Jonathan C. Friedman (New York: Routledge, 2013); Mavis Bayton, “Feminist Musical Practice: Problems and Contradictions,” in *Rock and Popular Music: Politics, Policies, Institutions*, eds. Bennet, Frith, Grossberg, Graeme, and Turner (New York: Routledge, 1993), 177–192; Jerome Rodnitzky, “Songs of Sisterhood: The Music of Women’s Liberation,” *Popular Music and Society* 4, no. 2 (1975): 77–85; Jerome Rodnitzky, *Feminist Phoenix: The Rise and Fall of a Feminist Counterculture* (Westport: Praeger, 1999), 55–82; Ronald D. Lankford, *Women Singer-Songwriters in Rock: A Populist Rebellion in the 1990s* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2010), xii.

these narratives suggests that the music was a way for women to negotiate their desire for social change.

This chapter theorizes the confessional style of the singer-songwriter as a form of feminist political expression. By comparing the works of female singer-songwriters and the consciousness-raising practices of second-wave feminisms, I demonstrate how the singer-songwriter movement set up a new type of political song that was personal and subjective. Described by bell hooks as sites where women “uncovered and openly revealed the depths of their intimate wounds,” consciousness-raising meetings challenged the divisions between public politics and private life.⁴ Likewise, I analyze work by female singer-songwriters as examples of women voicing private concerns in the public arenas of performances and recordings. Viewed through a feminist theoretical lens, this music emerges as a new medium for highly politicized communication within the ethos of the women’s movement.

This chapter begins with an analysis of consciousness-raising as the primary organizing strategy employed by the 1970s women’s movement. The second section presents the ways female singer-songwriters have been impacted by constructions of gender in the music industry, exploring how artists were able to find a sense of agency even within this patriarchal space. Finally, analyses of individual compositions by Joni Mitchell, Carole King, Valerie Simpson, Cris Williamson, and Margie Adam show how specific songs brought heightened awareness to critical feminist issues.

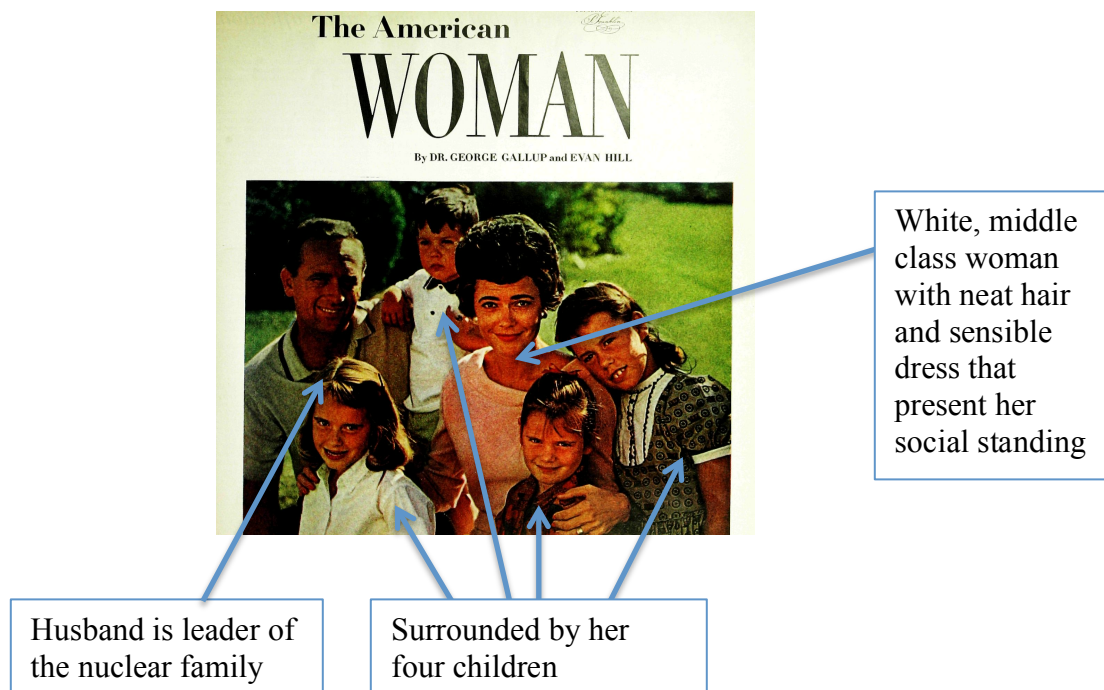
Beginnings of 1970s Women’s Movement

The women’s movement, which became a national cause in the 1970s, stemmed from groundwork laid by female activists in the years following World War II through the civil rights

⁴ bell hooks, *Feminism Is for Everybody: Passionate Politics* (Cambridge: South End Press, 2000), 8.

movement and the New Left. Broadly characterized by economic prosperity, corresponding materialism, and Cold War McCarthyism, the post-war years brought a period of conservative values in American culture. This conservatism fostered a culture adhering more strictly to traditional gender roles and to the societal glorification of motherhood as the core of an American woman's meaningful life. These attitudes come to the forefront of Dr. George Gallup's assessment of white, middle class women in the U.S., based on a survey of 1,800 "average" women published in *The Saturday Evening Post* in 1962. The cover image of Mrs. Charles Johnson, a wife and mother of four from Phoenix Arizona, depicts the image of the happy, suburban housewife: a woman who is dedicated to her husband and family, and ultimately draws her satisfaction from her role within the home (Figure 3.1). This image shows white, middle-class femininity with Mrs. Charles Johnson perfectly coiffed in a respectable frock:

Figure 3.1: Illustration of suburban housewife imagery in the *Saturday Evening Post* (1962)



Cover image from "The American Woman" in *The Saturday Evening Post*, 22 December 1962, 15.

In Gallup's assessment, such women were content precisely because, unlike men, who needed to search for meaning in life through careers, women knew their place was in the home.⁵

"Practically every one" of the women interviewed in his study, Gallup explained, "said that the chief purpose of her life was to be either a good mother or a good wife."⁶

But unrest about the value of women's work beyond the home, and a desire to build an equal society, simmered beneath the façade of this Cold War conservative image. For one thing, Gallup's survey intentionally excluded "the divorcée, the childless wife, the working mother, the old maid, [and] the widow," claiming that "they are not typical. They concern the sociologist because they are unusual in a society that is not geared for them. This survey was not a sociological examination of the extremes among the American women. It was an attempt to look at American women, *in toto*."⁷ Not only did Gallup exclude single and employed women, but his unmarked racial category in his totalizing picture of the "American woman" also meant that this study excluded all non-white women. Indeed, as Joanne Meyerowitz makes clear in her edited collection, *Not June Cleaver* (1994), the circumstances for working-class white women and women of color in the post-war culture were far from the realities described in "The American Woman."⁸ These wage-earning women suffered from discrimination based on race and gender and began to protest the inequality that prevailed during America's "prosperous" post-war years.

Many of these women found voices working as community organizers in the civil rights movement, and the women's movement in the 1970s borrowed heavily from their activist

⁵ George Gallup and Evan Hill, "The American Woman," *The Saturday Evening Post*, 22 December 1962, 28.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁸ Joanne Meyerowitz, ed., *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 1–16.

strategies. Beginning in the 1940s, this female-driven community organizing became an instrumental force mobilizing the cause of civil rights. The Women's Political Council (WPC) in Montgomery, Alabama established a network of black professional women who worked to help register black voters in the face of "literacy tests" used to deny constitutional rights throughout the Jim Crow South. After Rosa Parks refused to comply with segregation rules in December of 1955, this extensive network of women in Montgomery facilitated the quick distribution of information creating the large-scale boycott of the bus system.⁹ While men were more likely to hold official titles and mediate with public officials within civil rights organizations, this mediation would have been ineffective without women mobilizing communities to take part in the movement's causes.¹⁰ This type of grass-roots organizing and the emphasis on political work done outside of the public eye would become a crucial contribution of women in the civil rights movement to the rhetoric and structure of the women's movement.

Another challenge to the 1950s status quo came from leftist activist and journalist Betty Friedan, who published *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963. This book is credited with awakening a new generation of white, middle-class women to issues of gendered oppression.¹¹ Friedan critiqued the image of the perfectly coiffed and contented housewife disseminated by the media, saying, "Over and over women heard in voices of tradition and of Freudian sophistication that

⁹ Belinda Robnett, *How Long? How Long? African-American Women in the Struggle for Civil Rights* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 57–70.

¹⁰ See *Women and the Civil Rights Movement, 1954–1965*, ed. Davis W. Huock and David E. Dixon (University of Mississippi Press, 2009) for a collection of speeches and public addresses made by women community leaders in the civil rights movement; bell hooks, *Ain't I a Woman?: Black Women and Feminism* (Boston: South End Press, 1981), 177; *Sisters in the Struggle: African-American Women in the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements*, Bettye Collier-Thomas and V.P. Franklin, eds. (New York: New York University Press, 2001) contains biographical accounts of women leaders in the civil rights and Black Power eras.

¹¹ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010); Stephanie Coontz, *A Strange Stirring: The Feminine Mystique and American Women at the dawn of the 1960s* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 81–99; Daniel Horowitz, *Betty Friedan and the Making of The Feminine Mystique: The American Left, the Cold War, and Modern Feminism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998).

they could desire no greater destiny than to glory in their own femininity.”¹² Friedan argued that these images sent the message that a woman should draw her greatest sense of value and self-worth from her husband, her family, and her well kept home.¹³ Friedan herself was a radical politician and maintained work as a freelance journalist when she became a mother. But Friedan muted these aspects of her biography and amplified her domestic life, and using the personal nature of her revelation helped women feel connected to a larger cause.¹⁴ Stephanie Coontz, collecting oral histories of the book’s impact from its first generation of readers explained, “Readers experienced a shock of recognition and an overwhelming sense of relief to learn that they were not alone in their feelings.”¹⁵ By linking Friedan’s personal story (selectively truthful as parts were) to the unveiling of a larger societal problem, *The Feminine Mystique* was instrumental in raising awareness of women’s subordination.

In the first half of the 1960s, many black and white women were involved in the civil rights movement in spite of a prevailing sexist culture overall. But in the years after Friedan’s *Feminine Mystique* awakened many white middle-class women to the “problem with no name,” several white women working in the civil rights movement shifted their political focus to feminist causes.¹⁶ Casey Hayden and Mary King, two white women working within the civil rights movement, explicitly called attention to the sexism present in those activist circles. Hayden and King, both members of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), anonymously circulated a paper titled “Women in the Movement” that made connections

¹² Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 57–58.

¹³ *Ibid*, 87.

¹⁴ Daniel Horowitz, *Betty Friedan and the Making of The Feminine Mystique*, 202–205.

¹⁵ Coontz, *A Strange Stirring*, 20.

¹⁶ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 55.

between black oppression and women's oppression, helping to mobilize women activists to fight against sex discrimination alongside racial discrimination.¹⁷ Following passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, many women activists were hopeful that the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) would advocate against sex discrimination, in addition to racial discrimination, in the workplace.¹⁸ When the EEOC failed to take sex discrimination seriously, many white women who had previously worked in civil rights causes joined a new movement to seek explicit legal protections for women.¹⁹ Even though the women's movement borrowed from the civil rights movement, the women's movement's majority white, straight, middle-class leadership failed to take the concerns of black women seriously, and this tension based in privilege and institutional racism has complicated the relationship and historical reception of the two social movements.²⁰ As the women's movement unfolded, it became clear that its leaders—white, college-educated, middle- and upper-class women—pursued goals for legal and social change that served their own interests.²¹

In 1966, Friedan founded the National Organization for Women (NOW), an organization that espoused liberal feminist principles seeking to bring equality through existing legal

¹⁷ Sara Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), 233–235.

¹⁸ Susan Wright, *The Civil Rights Act of 1964: Landmark Antidiscrimination Legislation* (New York: Rosen Publishing Group, 2006), 34. Wright notes that in its first year, there were 8,852 charges filed with the EEOC and one-third of those claims were under the basis of sex discrimination.

¹⁹ Lois W. Banner and Tiffany K. Wayne, eds., *Women's Rights in the United States* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2015), 314; Danelle Moon, *Daily Life of Women in the Civil Rights Movement* (Santa Barbara: Greenwood, 2011), 166.

²⁰ Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley: Crossings Press, 2007), 110–113, originally presented at "The Personal and the Political Panel," Second Sex Conference, New York University, 29 September 1979; Astrid Henry, *Not My Mother's Sister: Generational Conflict and Third-Wave Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), 33, 169.

²¹ bell hooks, *Ain't I a Woman?*, 147–148. In this book, hooks lays out the relationship between racism and sexism, as well as the history of tensions between white and black women's rights activists.

processes.²² Friedan was elected the organization's first president, and the organization's first challenge was to draft a "Bill of Rights" outlining NOW's political agenda.²³ This document called for Congress to pass the Equal Rights Amendment, which would explicitly prohibit federal and state governments from abridging laws based on sex.²⁴ NOW also asked that the EEOC enforce prohibitions against sex discrimination based on Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.²⁵ The "Bill of Rights" further sought revisions to tax code that would benefit working mothers, advocated for reproductive rights, maternity leave, and publicly funded childcare facilities, and called for federal legislation eliminating sex discrimination in education.²⁶ Similar organizations, including the Women's Equity Action League, the Young Women's Christian Association, the National Council for Negro Women, and the Coalition of Labor Union Women also advocated for equal protection for women under the law. Establishing these official platforms, the women's movement gained momentum such that by the end of the 1960s, women's rights had become a national cause just as women's suffrage had been in earlier parts of the twentieth century.

²² Valerie Bryson, *Feminist Political Theory: An Introduction* (MacMillan: New York, 2003), 142–143. NOW began in Washington, D.C. at a meeting of 28 people on the Presidential Commission on the Status of Women (an annual conference initiated through executive action by President Kennedy in 1961).

²³ National Organization for Women Records, 1959–2002; "NOW: The First Five Years," MC 496, Box 1 Folder 1, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.

²⁴ National Organization for Women Records, 1959–2002; "NOW Bill of Rights," MC 496, Box 1 Folder 2, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass. This was the same legislation that suffragist Alice Paul submitted to congress in 1923. For a full history of the Equal Rights Amendment, including its failure to pass in Congress in 1979 and discussion of the continuing need for protection against sex discrimination in the United States Constitution, see Jessica Neuwirth, *Equal Means Equal: Why the Time for an Equal Rights Amendment is Now* (New York: The New Press, 2015).

²⁵ National Organization for Women Records, 1959–2002; "NOW Bill of Rights," MC 496, Box 1 Folder 2, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

As evidenced in almost every aspect of NOW's Bill of Rights, one of liberal feminisms fundamental aims focused on women in the workplace.²⁷ Feminist organizations held that institutional discrimination both limited a woman's career options and prohibited her from advancing within that career. For liberal feminists, a woman's financial security independent of traditional marriage was a key to women's societal liberation.

In addition to seeking equality in the workplace, the women's movement also increased women's health initiatives and challenged long-standing oppression of women's reproductive rights. Government regulations against birth control and abortion in addition to the United States' forced sterilization practices became important issues for women's rights activists, arguing that women should control their own bodies and that government regulations obstructed women's autonomy.²⁸ Free clinics and education initiatives advocated for revision of health care to address issues specific to women's bodies. One group, the Boston Women's Health Collective, organized meetings where women could share personal stories about health concerns and their experiences interacting with male doctors who had little consideration for woman-specific health issues.²⁹ Stemming from these meetings, the collective decided to publish a book to educate women about their own anatomy and physiology in *Our Bodies, Our Selves*, the title emphasizing that women take "full ownership of their bodies."³⁰ The success of this initiative, transforming ideas generated in a small meeting into large-scale overhauls in women's

²⁷ Bryson, *Feminist Political Theory*, 142–143.

²⁸ National Organization for Women Records, 1959–2002; "Action Resolutions (passed by members of the National Organization for Women at the Fourth Annual Conference, 1970), MC 496, Box 1 Folder 7, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.

²⁹ "History" at OurBodiesOurSelves.org, available at <http://www.ourbodiesourselves.org/history/>, accessed 4 March 2015.

³⁰ Boston Women's Health Collective, *Our Bodies, Our Selves* (Boston: New England Free Press, 1971). Originally published in 1969 under the title *Women and Their Bodies*. Simon & Schuster published the first commercial edition in 1973; see <http://www.ourbodiesourselves.org/history/>, accessed 4 March 2015.

healthcare and sex education, demonstrates the power of personal stories in creating measurable changes in women's lives. This initiative culminated in the 1973 Supreme Court ruling, *Roe vs. Wade*, that legalized abortion in the United States and provided federal protection to women's autonomy of their own bodies.

Consciousness-Raising

The strategy employed by the Boston Women's Health Collective showcases the way the women's movement deployed personal testimony to reveal larger societal issues. This technique cohered in what the women's movement called consciousness-raising meetings.³¹ Meetings were organized in private homes where women could share personal stories. In sharing her own experience and listening to the stories of others, a woman could better understand the effect of women's subordination on her own life and the world around her.³²

This technique emerged from the practice of "speaking bitterness" in the Chinese revolution and community organizing in the civil rights movement, particularly the practice of "telling it like it is" espoused by Fannie Lou Hamer.³³ Hamer demonstrated the importance of connecting personal narrative to political practice throughout her involvement with black freedom causes. In her political organizing, Hamer divulged her story as the daughter of a sharecropper to connect with rural black Southerners during voter registration rallies.³⁴ Even

³¹ Evans, *Personal Politics*, 213–215.

³² *Ibid*, 215.

³³ Bryson, *Feminist Political Theory*, 164.

³⁴ Maegan Parker Brooks, *Voice That Could Stir an Army: Fannie Lou Hamer and the Rhetoric of the Black Freedom Movement* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2014), 45.

more, Hamer used her story to explain Mississippi Delta life to those outside of the region.³⁵ In her 1969 address “To Tell It Like It Is” delivered at the Holmes County Courthouse in Lexington, Mississippi, Hamer mobilized her stance as an outsider to mainstream black politics and instead claimed that her experience came from her childhood, allowing her to speak out more adequately and effectively against systems of racist oppression in the U.S.³⁶ Making her personal story the crux of her political platform, Hamer elevated her own personhood, thereby raising the consciousness of black voters.

Consciousness-raising grew into the hallmark of the women’s movement through the way that the practice mirrored the movement’s political agenda. By migrating political work to private spaces and similarly raising private issues as public concerns, feminists blurred the distinction between personal life and public life that had formerly kept women’s issues from entering the political stage. As women’s activist Charlotte Bunch explained, “There is no private domain of a person’s life that is not political and there is no political issue that is not ultimately personal.”³⁷ The catchphrase of the women’s movement, “the personal is political,” summarized the way the movement obscured these boundaries.

Consciousness-raising meetings created a feminine-positive space apart from the prevailing sexism in all other areas of society. Describing the development of consciousness-raising, feminist activist and women’s studies scholar Sara Evans drew attention to the amount of trust women placed in each other in order to share vulnerable details of their lives. The resulting camaraderie created an environment accepting of women, building an alternative to the

³⁵ Ibid, 48.

³⁶ Ibid, 167.

³⁷ Charlotte Bunch, “A Broom of One’s Own: Notes on Women’s Liberation Program since the motive Magazine Issue” in Evans *Personal Politics*, 212.

discrimination and isolation women felt in society at large. In a paper titled “Defining Reality,” Lynn O’Connor similarly described the sense of collective power built through confessional details shared in these meetings:

In fairly amorphous and unstructured weekly meetings, group members begin to discuss what they *see* as personal problems. Telling their stories or making their “confessions” is difficult because it demands a public admission in a society where unhappiness is viewed as a symptom of emotional illness and where the details of family and other interpersonal relationships are considered private material...

Thus the small group functions as an arena of reality testing—a place where the members see their experiences mirrored in each other, where they are able to check and reaffirm their perceptions. One woman alone who complains of her oppression can be told she is distorting reality. When it happens enough she learns to doubt her own observations and assumes that they are really somewhat distorted. But when a group of women perceive again and again the same patterns of oppression derived from concrete stories of their day-to-day lives, it is impossible to sweep away their words as distortions. The first stage ends with a collective recognition that their tales of failures and feelings of inferiority are not functions of inferior people, but of some unnamable force that has acted upon them all to make them feel inadequate.³⁸

Through consciousness-raising meetings, personal issues were mobilized as societal problems, taking away an individual woman’s shame and fear that her problem was only her own. Male skeptics criticized the potential of consciousness-raising meetings by negatively characterizing them as “therapy sessions,” a discursive tool that pathologized women’s political activities.³⁹ Accounts by Evans and O’Connor, however, show how individual testimony was not an indulgent practice of therapeutic catharsis, but rather built collective awareness and mobilized women to address instances of discrimination in their own lives.

Another benefit of consciousness-raising meetings was the ability to disseminate the

³⁸ Lynn O’Connor, “Defining Reality,” pamphlet distributed by the Redstockings, accessed through the Redstockings archive, available at Redstockings.org.

³⁹ Michel Foucault, *History of Madness* trans. Jonathan Murphy and Jean Khalifa (New York: Routledge, 2006), 277–296.

cause quickly with minimal infrastructure. This grass-roots aspect of consciousness-raising initiatives also acted to subvert a top-down regime that resembled the patriarchal structures against which women fought. Feminist organizations adopted the rhetoric of consciousness-raising in their official platforms and published materials. The manifesto outlined by the Redstockings showed the organization's belief that personal stories could break down sexist ideologies:

We regard our personal experience, and our feelings about that experience, as the basis for an analysis of our common situation. We cannot rely on existing ideologies as they are all products of male supremacist culture. We question every generalization and accept none that are not confirmed by our experience.

Our chief task at present is to develop female class-consciousness through sharing experience and publicly exposing the sexist foundation of all our institutions. Consciousness-raising is not "therapy," which implies the existence of individual solutions and falsely assumes that the male-female relationship is purely personal, but the only method by which we can ensure that our program for liberation is based on the concrete realities of our lives.

The first requirement for raising class-consciousness is honesty, in private and in public, with our selves and with other women.⁴⁰

Publishing this manifesto and other pamphlets instructing women in how to start a consciousness-raising group, feminist organizations could disseminate information in a cheap and effective manner.

As the women's movement advanced, one of the benefits of consciousness-raising was how the practice maintained the uniqueness of each woman's individual experience while simultaneously building a sense of group coherence. The importance of this strategy became clear in the aftermath of a series of demonstrations in 1969, which became a turning point for the women's movement to seek sisterhood instead of criticizing women who appeared to capitulate

⁴⁰ Pamphlet distributed by the Redstockings, accessed through the Redstockings archive, available at Redstockings.org.

to patriarchal pressures. In a series of protests at the Miss America pageant in Atlantic City, New Jersey, jointly organized by NOW, New York Radical Women, and the Redstockings, the women's movement made its debut on the national stage, contesting the glorified objectification of women at beauty pageants. After the demonstration, organizer Carol Hanisch was disappointed by the protest's failure to achieve movement goals, writing: "At this point in our struggle, our actions should be aimed primarily at doing two inter-related things: 1) awakening the latent consciousness of women about their own oppression, and 2) building sisterhood."⁴¹ While protests remained a part of the women's movement, activists relied on consciousness-raising as the primary method to transform attitudes and realities in the face of gender discrimination. Hanisch explained that the protest organizers decided to demonstrate at the Miss America pageant to show that all women were hurt by the beauty pageant; reflecting after the demonstration, however, Hanisch's perspective shifted and she declared the demonstration "anti-woman":

Posters which read, "Up Against the Wall, Miss America," "Miss America Sells It," and "Miss America Is a Big Falsie" hardly raised any woman's consciousness and really harmed the cause of sisterhood. Miss America and all beautiful women came off as our enemy instead of as our sisters who suffer with us.⁴²

Throughout her position paper, Hanisch struggled with how to reconcile individual actions with group opinion. Consciousness-raising, explicitly balancing group opinions with individual uniqueness, became a promising solution for the movement's problem following the Miss America demonstrations.

⁴¹ Carol Hanisch, "What Can Be Learned: A Critique of the Miss America Protest," Robin Morgan Papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

⁴² Ibid.

Women's rights activists continued their study of consciousness-raising throughout the 1970s. A specific consciousness-raising task force in the Los Angeles chapter of NOW in 1974 made recommendations to the entire organization about the benefits of the organizing strategy, recommending that the meetings be used to bring women out of the isolating effects of a patriarchal society. In a pamphlet titled "Consciousness-Raising: How It Turns the Personal into the Political," task force organizers Harriett Perl and Gay Abarbanell explained:

Thus, CR emphasizes the political by bringing women together to understand that their problems stem from the common source of society's determination to objectify and use them for its own ends instead of treating them as individuals. Out of this, women are relieved of their sense of isolation and unwarranted personal failure. Self-respect and respect for other women are developed. CR, secondly, helps women understand, not only that they share common problems, but also that they have the power to help each other solve those problems. Women cease to feel powerless and this produces what we believe is the underlying energy of CR: "The refusal to acquiesce in one's own oppression."...The group becomes the centralized force for creating politics out of concrete personal experience. Women think about their lives, their society, and their potential for being creative individuals.⁴³

The singer-songwriter's confessional songwriting style similarly migrated political songs into the private sphere. Feminist songwriters in the 1970s did not pen incisive critiques of the patriarchy in the form of a topical song, like protest singers had done during the 1960s folk revival. Rather, songwriters drew on personal narratives to explain the impact of broader societal issues. According to singer-songwriter Carol Hall:

People did not announce themselves as feminists and then say "I'm gonna write a feminist anthem!" You know? You just knew that certain women were giving a voice to feelings that could have been very private, very hidden for years, like wanting more freedom. A lot of the songs that I wrote at that time were about not marrying, having my own house, moving free, travelling.⁴⁴

⁴³ Records of the National Organization for Women, "Consciousness-Raising: How It Turns the Personal into the Political (A Recommendation)" by L.A. NOW's CR Committee, Box 169 Folder 37, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.

⁴⁴ Carol Hall, phone interview with author, 23 February 2014.

These autobiographical topics echoed the stories shared in consciousness-raising meetings, and women singer-songwriters were able to similarly blur the distinctions between their private lives and the public sphere by sharing their stories in performances and recordings.

“What’s a Nice Girl Like You Doing in a Business Like This?”

“Dear Ellen Peck,” inquired Cathy from New Orleans in a question for Ms. Peck’s nationally-syndicated teen advice column in 1972: “You write a lot about women’s lib. Could you please comment about whether you think the lyrics of today’s rock songs are ‘liberated’—or do they still put women down?” Cathy’s question gets to the crux of whether women, as artists and listeners, were able to find this “liberated” voice in contemporary music. Peck’s response specifically positioned singer-songwriters a major step forward for popular music, building an almost evolutionary history in which women adapted from being mentioned as mere objects into artists who articulated a strong sense of independence and self. According to Peck’s history, “Probably the height of putting women down musically occurred in the musicals of the Forties and Fifties, such as *South Pacific*, *How to Succeed in Business*, etc., where women were merely secretaries, ‘dames,’ or ‘dolls.’”⁴⁵ She also saw the “June-moon little girl lyrics” in songs by the Beach Boys as symbolic of the continued objectification of girl culture.⁴⁶ But she noted an innovation when women wrote their own lyrics, including the following lines from popular songs by female artists:

1) Laura Nyro, “The Confession”: “Little girl of all the daughters, you were born a woman not a slave...”

⁴⁵ Ellen Peck, “Ellen Peck: Liberated Lyrics?,” *Chicago Tribune*, 5 September 1972, B4.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

- 2) Rosalie Sorrels, "Travelin' Lady": "Sooner or later, she's gonna discover she can do without you..."
- 3) Joni Mitchell, "Blue": "I want to be strong, I want to laugh along, I want to belong to the living..."
- 4) Helen Reddy, "I Am Woman": "I am strong, I am invincible, I am a woman..."⁴⁷

Peck's response echoes a common sentiment among scholars of women in popular music: a woman gained greater control of her representation in the music industry by writing her own songs.⁴⁸ To be sure, maintaining agency in one's own lyrics was a monumental advantage that made the role of a singer-songwriter an attractive one to women seeking their own voice. Artists reiterate the importance of writing music and lyrics that fit a sense of who they believe they are.

However, here, I paint a more nuanced picture of both the liberations and limitations for women within the singer-songwriter movement, offering an expanded history of the narrative of agency ruling women's musical liberation. Contrasting the experiences of two singer-songwriters—Joni Mitchell and Lori Lieberman—demonstrates how women made remarkable strides to gain greater power in the music industry, but faced great adversity and discrimination in order to get there. Motivated by difficulties in gaining performance opportunities and recording contracts, followed by subsequent bad deals with record labels, many women sought greater autonomy in their musical careers. Beyond lyrical contributions, women in the singer-songwriter movement took on more substantial roles as producers and sound engineers, gained greater control of their time in the recording studio, and even directed their own management. These developments are analogous with liberal feminist advances for women in the workplace,

⁴⁷ Ibid; Peck cites the incorrect song title for the Joni Mitchell lyrics, which come from "All I Want" off the album *Blue* (1971).

⁴⁸ Sheila Whiteley, *Women and Popular Music: Sexuality, Identity, Subjectivity* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 78; Charlotte Grieg, "The Woman Songwriter," in *Sexing the Groove*, ed. Sheila Whiteley (New York: Routledge, 1997), 168–177; Kendra Leonard, "Song of Myself: Autobiography in Pop Music," *The Avid Listener*, 22 December 2014, accessed 5 November 2015, available at <http://www.theavidlistener.com/2014/12/singing-about-yourself-autobiography-in-pop-music.html>.

showing how female singer-songwriters espoused contemporary feminist values and projected an image of women's empowerment.

Joni Mitchell's contract with Asylum Records, which she signed in 1972, exemplifies how some women were able to navigate the music industry and gain greater control of their careers. Early in her career, gendered stereotypes prohibited Mitchell from obtaining work. In one story told to interviewer Malka Marom, she explains that after a few successful performances at a hoot night in Toronto, she approached the club owner, Bernie Fielder, for a chance to book a show:

J: Well obviously, from a business point of view, I was not a draw. So he'd say, "Darling, don't bother me, I don't like to associate with failures." That was one of the things he said. "Yes, I'll call you when I need a good dishwasher." It was all like his sense of humour, but there was a certain amount of seriousness to it. He wasn't interested. I wasn't going to make him any money.

M: How did it affect you? Did it affect you personally when you were rejected professionally?

J: I was very angry with Bernie, those two times. I could remember really burning over those things. I was insulted. [laughs] I really was.⁴⁹

Instead of merely turning Mitchell down, Fielder humiliated her for asking. Humiliating tactics intimidated women from asking for future performance opportunities and subsequently inhibited their chances at gaining experience, recognition, and eventually a contract with a label.

Mitchell eventually left her contract with Reprise and re-signed with Asylum Records, a new label that Elliot Roberts started with partner David Geffen. Geffen and Roberts opened the company to offer an outlet for artists that they already managed but who could not get deals with other labels. Asylum further built their reputation as a label friendly to artists wanting greater control of their musical products, with the label's name implying that the company was a place

⁴⁹ Marom, *Joni Mitchell In Her Own Words*, 34.

of refuge for artists tired of the “insanity” of the music industry.⁵⁰ An article in *Billboard* magazine in 1972 profiled how the new company, lead by “young bloods” Geffen and Roberts, created this safe haven in a competitive industry. Beginning with then unknown Jackson Browne and another Laurel Canyon singer-songwriter Judee Sill, Asylum funded production costs and distribution through a deal with Atlantic Records and would give the artists a ten percent cut of retail sales.⁵¹ By offsetting the costs of distribution, Asylum was able to offer artists competitive percentages of record deals. In addition to producing albums, Geffen and Roberts acted as managers for Asylum artists, instituting another lucrative platform for their clients. The managers would not take any commission for performances unless the artist earned more than \$3,000 in a night, only taking fifteen percent cut for performances that met this income.⁵² Finally, according to this article, Asylum did not have written contracts between the company and its artists. Instead, the company hoped that good treatment and a feeling of freedom would entice artists to stay with the label.⁵³ While I was unable to corroborate this claim from the 1972 article, it is imaginable that such contractual freedom would prove to be an attractive offer for recording artists.⁵⁴ Asylum became a haven in particular for a number of prominent women in Los Angeles’ music scene, including Joni Mitchell, Emmylou Harris, and Linda Ronstadt.

Mitchell took advantage of Asylum’s loose policies for artists. She acted as her own producer and cut records on her own timeline instead of being pushed by the label to create each new album. According to Roberts, at Asylum “each record doesn’t have to be a million dollar

⁵⁰ Stephen Singular, *The Rise and Rise of David Geffen* (Secaucus: Carol Publishing Group, 1997), 39.

⁵¹ “Young Bloods Lend Zest to Management, Agency Fields,” *Billboard*, 22 July 1972, 56.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁵⁴ I was unable to reach the artists who could corroborate this claim; no one has refuted it, however.

seller... They [artists] record for us at whatever pace they need. There are no suspensions.”⁵⁵

Mitchell decided to take time off from touring in 1972, and Roberts was sympathetic to her decision to take time away from performing.⁵⁶ A demanding touring schedule was one of the greatest deterrents to women performers, particularly for women with children who did not want to take long periods of time away from family. This aspect of the industry life ultimately drove singer-songwriter Carol Hall to become a Broadway songwriter, finding that the demands of a strict songwriting gig without the performance element were easier to manage with her family life.⁵⁷ Journalist Barney Hoskyns has also pointed out that Asylum kept the company’s promises to many of their prominent artists, as they did for Mitchell, but other less well-known artists felt neglected by Geffen and Roberts as mentors and financiers.⁵⁸

Not all labels offered women this sense of autonomy, as illustrated by singer-songwriter Lori Lieberman’s deal with Capitol Records. Unlike Mitchell, Lieberman had little control over her career until the 1990s, when she opened her own home studio. Lieberman moved to Los Angeles in 1970 and began to perform in the area, where two songwriters, Norman Gimbel and Charlie Fox, “discovered” her and signed her to a deal with Capitol Records:

They [Gimbel and Fox] signed me to a production deal, a managing deal, a publishing deal—they had me all wrapped up. They were looking for a singer they could write for. Shortly after that we recorded four songs and showed them to Capitol. They signed me to a four-year deal with them [Gimbel and Fox] as my producers. It was a very all-encompassing, I would say controlling, contract.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Ibid, 56.

⁵⁶ Michelle Mercer, *Will You Take Me As I Am?: Joni Mitchell’s Blue Period* (New York: Free Press, 2010), 129.

⁵⁷ Carol Hall, phone interview with author, 23 February 2014.

⁵⁸ Barney Hoskyns, *Hotel California*, 141–142; Hoskyns mentions female singer-songwriter Essra Mohawk, specifically; Essra Mohawk, *Primordial Lovers*, Reprise RS 6377, 1970.

⁵⁹ Lori Lieberman, interview with author, Calabassas, CA, 13 March 2014.

Capitol structured Lieberman's contract like a typical business arrangement for a "girl singer" in the music industry, meaning that Lieberman was paid as a performer who sang songs composed by Capitol's team of professional songwriters. Lieberman said that she did not know how to navigate the label system or advocate for herself in negotiations. "I was so sheltered," she commented, explaining that she grew up in Switzerland and moved to the states to go to college, abandoning her studies for a music career. Lieberman sensed that Capitol was caught between wanting a hit song and attempting to stay on trend with current styles. Even though Capitol would not let Lieberman perform her own songs, the company marketed Lieberman as "a blonde guitar player...a singer-songwriter," sticking to their old business model that made stricter distinctions between songwriters and artists and capitalizing on Lieberman's identity as a singer-songwriter without giving her the financial benefits or artistic license of writing for herself.⁶⁰

The implications for Lieberman's limited contract become clear in the context of a controversy surrounding her 1971 song, "Killing Me Softly." From her perspective, "I wrote the poem. I communicated it to my producer-boyfriend [Gimbel]. We then met with Charlie Fox, who made some changes to the music to compliment my voice." In spite of the song's origins, Lieberman's producers did not credit her as a contributing songwriter, as per the conditions of her contract. "We released it as my single, and it was starting to climb up the charts when Roberta Flack heard it on an airplane. Her recording knocked mine off the charts."⁶¹ Had Lieberman been listed as a songwriter on the track, she would have received royalties for Flack's 1973 recording of the song and the Fugees cover in 1996, both number-one singles on *Billboard's* Hot 100 chart. Songwriting did more than just give a woman control of her

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

representation; it gave her income and capital, the keys to gaining power in the music industry and broader constructs of a capitalist system. As evidenced by the level of wealth accrued by songwriters like King, Mitchell, and Carly Simon, songwriters' royalties from hit songs could guarantee a woman financial security.

Lieberman viewed her time at Capitol as motivation for developing her sense of individual identity, choosing not to recall this past experience with bitterness and regret. "To me, what it speaks to is young women in the music business or not, who just do not have a voice or don't feel they have a voice. You can't look for protection outside. *You* have to have it, and I certainly did not have it before...I don't want my story to be, 'Oh, poor Lori.' This song has given me an amazing experience, and you can't put a dollar amount on it."⁶² This perspective reveals the way that negative industry interactions spurred women to take greater control of their careers and develop enduring strength in the face of discriminatory practices. Lieberman set up a home recording studio, where she still actively records and produces her own albums. She has cultivated a significant following among Dutch audiences, and tours regularly in the Netherlands, a unique niche audience who appreciates her past and remains interested in new compositions.

Lieberman's story begins to help unpack the complications of women's liberation in a music industry that viewed female artists, even the progressive ones, as commodities. Rock journalist Lynn van Matre was similarly skeptical about the extent of women's empowerment in the singer-songwriter movement. Writing for the *Chicago Tribune*, van Matre heralded 1971 as the "year of the female singer-songwriter...with more female composers and singers being heard now than ever."⁶³ Demonstrating that Carole King had outsold Paul McCartney and that Carly

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Lynn Van Matre, "Singing-Songwriters: 1971 Is Woman's World," *Chicago Tribune*, 4 July 1971, E4.

Simon was rising on both album and single charts, van Matre observed an industry trend marking women's success and speculated that "equally strong interest in Women's Lib...seems an obvious connection."⁶⁴ However, van Matre was suspicious that the recording industry only began supporting female songwriters because companies sought to capitalize on women's liberation as a trend: "The recording industry makes it its business to keep up with trends that can make the cash register sing as the records spin 'round."⁶⁵ In this way, van Matre viewed the female singer-songwriter trend as granting women musicians a false sense of empowerment without fundamentally changing the social environment in which they worked.

In spite of her cynicism toward the industry's apparently growing support for women, van Matre did admit that if women were given opportunities such as those that King and Simon enjoyed, and if they succeeded in bringing in a lot of money for record companies, the recording industry would eventually have to let go of their credo that "girls don't sell." Van Matre was hopeful that the trend would give enough women opportunities that "the move toward women in the spotlight will give way to a situation where women's equal prominence is accepted as a natural thing, not a fad or 'trend.' To borrow a line from Carly Simon, 'that's the way I'd always heard it should be.'"⁶⁶

Even female singer-songwriters who successfully advocated for greater control of their work continued to struggle with feelings of inferiority and comparisons to male contemporaries. Joni Mitchell explained that she viewed her own work as silly and naïve in comparison to the serious artistry of Leonard Cohen, being such a great admirer of his song, "Suzanne":

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

I thought he was much more sophisticated. It made me feel like, “Oh Jesus, my songs are kind of naïve. Stupid.” My “Both Sides Now” took such ridicule from Chuck [Mitchell’s first husband], I came out of the marriage with a chip.⁶⁷

Mitchell explains that part of her insecurity stemmed from the way her first husband treated her. His dismissal of her intelligence negatively affected her self-esteem. Mitchell then attempted to couch her artistry in intellectual terms—historically a more masculine trope—using high art and eastern thought to appear less naïve. Mitchell recalls asking Leonard Cohen for a reading list because she wanted to become as well read as the songwriter she so deeply admired.⁶⁸ Cohen included the *I Ching* and works by French author Albert Camus, and Mitchell often cited her inspiration from these books, attempting to legitimize herself within the aesthetic biases of patriarchy. This comes through both in her compositions and her discourse about her music, which frequently take on universalizing masculine discourses associated with high art to help her appear as a serious musician.⁶⁹

This discourse becomes complicated in the hands of many male critics—at once artful and gendered with societal conceptions of such “ideal” feminine traits as grace and delicacy. Consider this quote from Pete Johnson’s review of Joni Mitchell’s debut performance at the Troubadour in 1969: “Apart from her delicate word plays, her songs have the strength of good stories—sometimes even compressed novels—and delicately described scenes rendered as

⁶⁷ Marom, *Joni Mitchell In Her Own Words*, 36.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ These universalizing discourses are particularly prevalent in the composition of art music and the history of the male genius composer in Western classical music. Susan McClary sees the emphasis on universality and transcendence as masculine values that respond to claims that musicians are effeminate in *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 17, 102-103. Also see Matthew Bannister, “Powerless Power: Masculine Intellectualism and Aesthetics,” in *White Boys, White Noise* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2006), 28–33. For more on the masculine institutionalization of knowledge, see Nelly Richard, *Masculine/Feminine: Practices of Difference* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 14.

graceful poems within pretty music.”⁷⁰ Similarly, in Don Heckman’s review of Mitchell’s 1972 performance at Carnegie Hall, he assessed that “I suspect that in her own way Joni Mitchell may be one of the most genuinely gifted composers North America has yet developed. That she chooses to express her art in small forms and personal sentiments in no way reduces either its impact or its importance.”⁷¹

Living Room Music

Women in the singer-songwriter movement put forward a specific image of femininity that combined traditional domestic settings with the alterity of the counter-culture through their promotional photos, album covers, and publicity materials. The idea that these empowered singer-songwriters based their public image in home-settings may seem oxymoronic following the way that Friedan’s critique of gender roles concentrated on the image of the housewife perpetuated by the media, encouraging women to find meaning outside the home.⁷² This domestic imagery can be seen as a limiting gesture, suggesting that a woman’s rightful place remains in the home. However, the glorification of the home throughout the singer-songwriter scene marks the movement as a female-positive space.⁷³ By transferring the focus to private spaces, both in imagery and lyrical content, the singer-songwriter movement created a sphere in which behaviors traditionally coded feminine were of greatest value. This space, furthermore,

⁷⁰ Pete Johnson, “Canadian Singer in U.S. Debut,” *Los Angeles Times*, 7 June 1968, G18.

⁷¹ Don Heckman, “Concert Is Given by Joni Mitchell: Excels in Song Program-Unorthodox on Guitar,” *New York Times* 25 February 1972, 27.

⁷² Erin Arizzi, “Modeling Professional Femininity through U.S. Media Culture, 1963–2015,” Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2015, 97–115.

⁷³ Jane Rendell, *Gender, Space, Architecture: An Interdisciplinary Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 2–4, 101–111.

modeled the private setting of consciousness-raising meetings, where a woman could open up about her most vulnerable experiences, thus allowing her to feel empowered through self-definition. The image put forward by female singer-songwriters further pushed against conservative values through the ways the artists presented their image as an alternative to mainstream popular culture. Women in the singer-songwriter movement curated a new image of privileged white domesticity in line with New Age and hippie culture, fashioning a “natural” version of femininity that deviated from the materialism of the housewife image.

Journalistic representations of singer-songwriters “at home” contributed to the perception of the movement as parlor music.⁷⁴ Long-form newspaper articles published in newspapers across the country concluded that female singer-songwriters were sincere artists, as evidenced by the humble décor of their homes, the prevalence of “natural” elements and an organic healthy lifestyle, in addition to traditional feminine hospitality. The ability to maintain this down-to-earth lifestyle amid the fame helped secure the perception of the artist’s authenticity for audiences. Each of these descriptions contain conspicuous amounts of “superfluous detail,” a journalistic strategy Lisa Rhodes identifies in *Electric Ladyland* as a way that rock critics sexualized and objectified a woman musician instead of discussing her musical merits, as was the practice when reviewing male rock artists.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Judith Tick, “Passed Away Is the Piano Girl: Changes in American Musical Life, 1970–1900,” in *Women Making Music: The Western Art Tradition, 1150–1950*, Jane M. Bowers and Judith Tick, eds. (University of Illinois Press: 1985), 325–348; Richard D. Leppert, *The Sight of Sound: Music, Representation, and the History of the Body* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 91–118; Petra Meyer-Frazier, “Music, Novels and Women: Nineteenth-Century Prescriptions for an Ideal Life,” *Women & Music* 10 (2006): 45–59; Petra Meyer-Frazier “American Women’s Roles in Domestic Music Making as Revealed in Parlor Song Collections: 1820–1870,” PhD diss., University of Colorado at Boulder, 2000; M.E. Barnes-Ostrander, “Domestic Music Making in Early New York State: Music in the Lives of Three Amateurs,” *Musical Quarterly* 68, Issue 3 (1982): 353–372; Regula Hohl Trillini, *Gaze of the Listener: English Representations of Domestic Music-Making* (New York: Rodopi, 2008), 2–7.

⁷⁵ Lisa Rhodes, *Electric Ladyland: Women and Rock Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press), 66–68.

Yet even while the discourses of rock criticism objectified female artists and marginalized their identities as musicians, the emphasis that the media placed on their physical selves, fashion, and environs granted these singer-songwriters a powerful form of agency.⁷⁶ Such a reading is clear from feminist activist and rock journalist Susan Gordon Lydon's interview with Joni Mitchell published in the *New York Times*, which counters mainstream constructions of appropriate feminine behavior by characterizing Mitchell as a Bohemian and pointing to Mitchell's non-traditional live-in-relationship. The article's title, "In Her House, Love," projects Mitchell's homebody persona from the outset. The opening paragraph of the article paints a detailed picture of Mitchell's miscellaneous home decor:

Joni Mitchell lives in Laurel Canyon, in a small, pine-paneled house lovingly cluttered with two cats, a stuffed elk's head, stained glass windows, a grandfather clock given her by Leonard Cohen, a king's head with a jeweled crown sticking out from the brick fireplace, votive candles, blooming azaleas, a turkey made of pine cones, dried flowers, old dolls, Victorian shadow boxes, colored glass, an ornamental plate from Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, where she grew up, an art nouveau lamp in the shape of a frog holding a lily pad, a collection of cloisonné boxes, bowls, and ash trays, patchwork quilts, Maxfield Parrish pictures, various musical instruments, and Joni Mitchell and Graham Nash.⁷⁷

This description validates Mitchell's Bohemian style as eclectic décor distinct from the proper household put forward in *Ladies Home Journal* or *Good Housekeeping*. This gesture already brings the reader another step further into her personal life, but also begins to chip away at the image of conventional femininity. By advertising her live-in relationship with Nash without citing intention to marry, Lydon characterizes Mitchell as a liberated woman who lives outside the definitions of traditional marriage relationships.

⁷⁶ Tim Edwards, *Fashion in Focus: Concepts, Practices, and Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 67–86; Elisabeth Wilson, *Bohemians: The Glamorous Outcasts* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2000); Pamela Church Gibson, *Fashion and Celebrity Culture* (New York: Berg, 2002), 153–166; Joanne Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body: Fashion, Dress, and Social Theory* (Malden: Polity Press, 2015); Janice Miller, *Fashion and Music* (New York: Berg, 2011).

⁷⁷ Susan Gordon Lydon, "In Her House, Love," *New York Times*, 20 April 1969, D19.

An article on Carly Simon in *Stereo Review* also positioned her living situation as a dimension of her non-traditional femininity. Journalist Robert Windeler interviewed the east coast based singer-songwriter at her home in New York City in 1972, just before the release of her third studio album, *No Secrets*. Windeler described Simon's opulent apartment with a level of detail one would expect to find in a decorating magazine, not a music-industry trade magazine:

She occupies a cheerful, sunny, five-room apartment in the Murray Hill section of New York City. Brightly colored sofas, rugs, and draperies contrast with the white walls and woodwork. Her first guitar hangs on the living room wall in semi-retirement. Wearing electric green cotton slacks and a white blouse, she drapes her long, yet somehow elfin body onto a rust-colored velvet sofa, her brown hair tumbling over her blue eyes, and talks about her new success as a performer.⁷⁸

Despite her bicoastal romance with James Taylor in Los Angeles, Windeler reported, "Carly is indulging herself in living alone," a statement that emphasizes her independent personality and her ability to define herself outside of a traditional marital relationship. In the interview, Simon divulged that she had ended her two previous live-in relationships to prioritize her career. She claimed that both former boyfriends were threatened by her success, saying "There can't be any security on his part if I'm in a field that might take me away from him."⁷⁹ By ending those relationships to focus on recording and performing, Simon implied that she found greater security by establishing her career than she did by cultivating a traditional relationship.

For Carole King, coverage of her home life focused on her maternal character and emphasized her house as a reflection of the simple values that resonated with her musical persona. In his 1972 piece naming Carole King "[Los Angeles] Times Woman of the Year," Robert Hilburn included details about King's canyon abode neighboring Mitchell's. Always

⁷⁸ Robert Windeler, "Carly Simon," *Stereo Review*, September 1972, 63.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

impressed by King's ability to remain humble in the midst of her explosive ascent into rock stardom, Hilburn wrote, "Except for the piano, visitors to her modest, Mediterranean-style home in the Hollywood Hills probably wouldn't be able to tell she is in the music business, much less one of the most popular singer-songwriters in the world. Her home isn't part of the rock 'n roll scene."⁸⁰ Hilburn is quick to point out that King's lifestyle distinguishes her from her more indulgent Laurel Canyon neighbors, including the rock stars Frank Zappa and Jim Morrison. Hilburn also included an interview with photographer Jim McCrary, who shot the cover image for *Tapestry*. In the vignette, McCrary commented on how King welcomed her daughters home from school, impressed by her warm sense of hospitality and maternal side:

But the thing that impressed me most about her was the day we spent at her house shooting the *Tapestry* cover. We had been working about an hour when her two girls came home from school. She had been concentrating on the session, but when they entered the room she turned all her attention to them. She was so warm to them. She didn't just say hello or make them wait until we were through to talk to them. She instantly became a mother.

McCrary shows that King is anti-materialistic and maintains the simple values and lifestyle that her songs project. To flaunt her wealth, as rockers did, would discredit the aura of authenticity audiences granted to singer-songwriters who displayed a genuine persona. However, McCrary's characterization of King's maternal behavior also reinforces female stereotypes and standards of appropriate white feminine decorum. Describing King as demure, humble, hospitable, and motherly shows that she has not obtained the masculine bravado of the rock scene, as if it is more palatable to accept her success as a pop artist if audiences understand she is a proper woman.

Home imagery even pervaded the singer-songwriter movement's live performances. Recalling Chapter 2, the descriptions of the intimate atmosphere created in venues such as

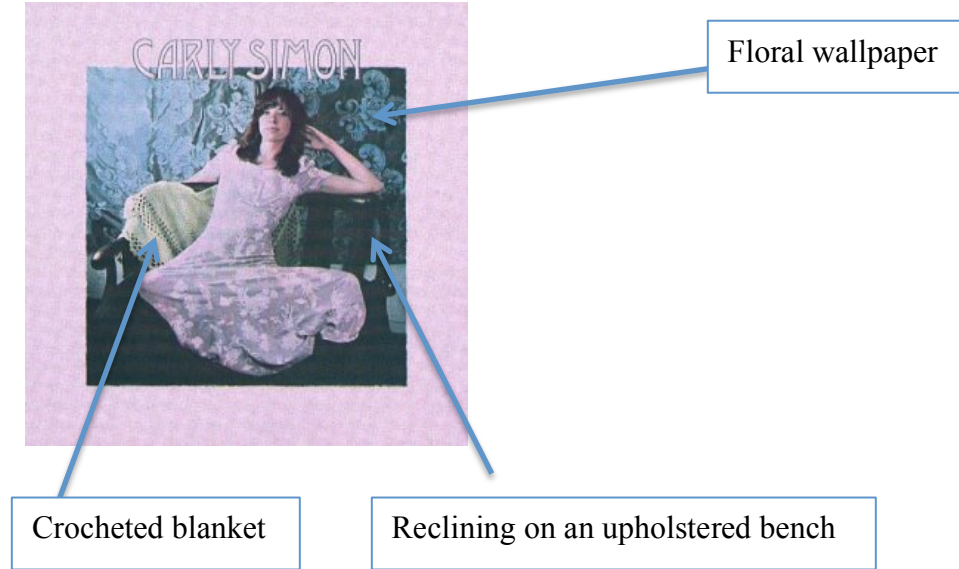
⁸⁰ Robert Hilburn, "Carole King: Return to Simple Values," *Los Angeles Times*, 13 December 1971, G1.

McCabe's, the Troubadour, and the Ash Grove emphasized the incorporation of home-touches, including candlelight, tablecloths, and wood paneling, to increase the comfort and appeal of their listening rooms. Even when performing in large spaces, the feeling of the performance was compared to a living room. For example, Robert Hilburn's review of Joni Mitchell's 1972 concert at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion in Los Angeles was titled "Joni Performing in a Giant Living Room," discursively transforming the grand concert hall into a domestic space.⁸¹ The reception of the singer-songwriter movement, saturated with these notions of the home, created an environment friendly to expressions of a range of femininities. Creating this safe environment was a crucial aspect that enabled singer-songwriters to open up about the intimate details of their personal lives in their musical works.

Album covers and publicity photos similarly sealed the connection between singer-songwriters and domestic settings. Outside of live performances, audiences listened to recordings by singer-songwriters on record players in their own living rooms, bedrooms, or dorm rooms. As listeners held the physical albums, pictures of singer-songwriters in nature or parlor settings, framed the listening experience within the same private space. Album covers featuring this living room imagery include: the covers for King's *Tapestry* (1971) and *Music* (1971); Carly Simon's self-titled first album (1971), depicted in Figure 3.2, and *Hotcakes* (1974); Valerie Simpson's *Exposed* (1971); and Joan Baez' *Diamonds and Rust* (1975).

⁸¹ Robert Hilburn, "Joni Performing in a Giant Living Room," *Los Angeles Times*, 15 March 1972, I19. Carole King employed the same strategy for her 2005 Living Room Tour, setting up large arenas with a couch, area rugs, and a lamp.

Figure 3.2: Illustration of living room imagery in singer-songwriter album covers



Simon's self-titled debut album featured the artist reclining in a parlor. The artist's casual pose, vintage clothing, and the variety of soft textiles and floral patterns combine to convey a level of comfort and relaxation reserved for private home-settings. Carly Simon, *Carly Simon*, Elektra EKS 74082, 1972; Photograph by Peter Simon.

Importantly, album-cover images constructed the singer-songwriter movement as an alternative to mainstream culture. Singer-songwriters, although at home, were fashioned as “natural,” as opposed to the perfected image of the housewife pervading the media. Photographs featured natural light, living room or outdoor settings, and maintained a candid aesthetic. The appearance of these photographs as candid expressions, even though they actually emerged from posed photo shoots, worked to convince the viewer that the photograph captured the subject in some sort of natural activity. This aesthetic reflected the ways that a singer-songwriter's music was thought to flow from the authentic stories of daily life.

Photographer Henry Diltz perfected this photographic aesthetic as one of the most notable cameramen in Laurel Canyon. As Diltz explained to me, he began capturing candid photos for pure enjoyment, only entering into the world of photography by chance. Diltz was a banjo player in the Modern Folk Quartet, and he bought a second-hand camera while touring with the band in 1964. He recalled that after purchasing the camera, he took a roll of pictures,

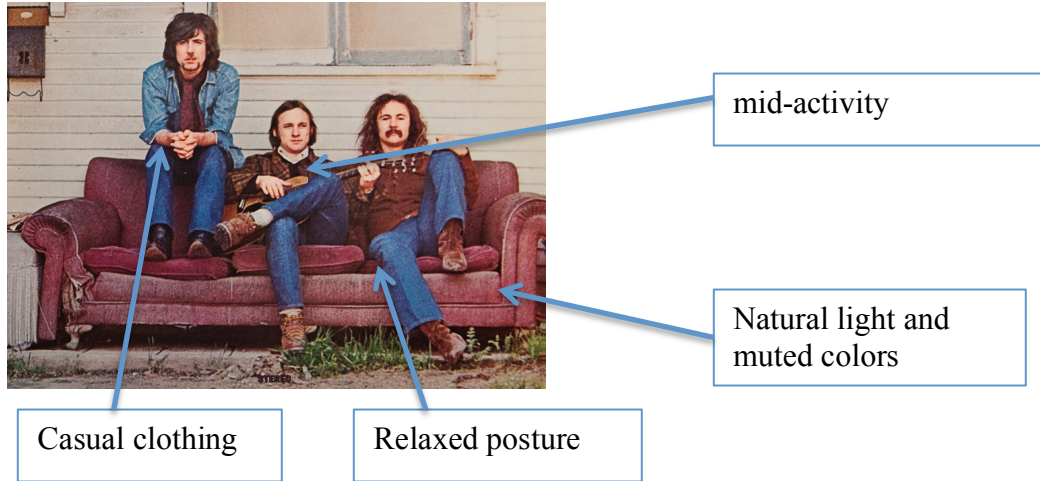
and upon developing the photos was surprised to discover that the camera had been loaded with slide-film, rather than standard 35 mm film. Diltz turned his chance-encounter into a hobby, snapping candid photos of his musician friends in Laurel Canyon and revealing the chance results at “projector parties,” where his guests would be thrilled to see these surprise snapshots blown up to larger-than-life slides projected onto a full wall.⁸²

Eventually, Diltz’s hobby turned into a full career as one of the most-sought-after photographers in the Laurel Canyon, creating album covers for Crosby, Stills and Nash; James Taylor; Jackson Browne; the Doors; and the Eagles (see Figure 3.3).⁸³ Diltz’s predilection for candid shots greatly influenced the photographic aesthetic in Laurel Canyon. This aesthetic frames the perceptions of intimacy and vulnerability and helps foreground the sense of immediacy between the audience and the artist’s persona by creating a constructed environment that appears unconstructed.

⁸² Henry Diltz, interview with author, North Hollywood, CA, 7 June 2014.

⁸³ Diltz worked with art director Gary Burden; *Under the Covers* dir. Burden and Diltz, 2002.

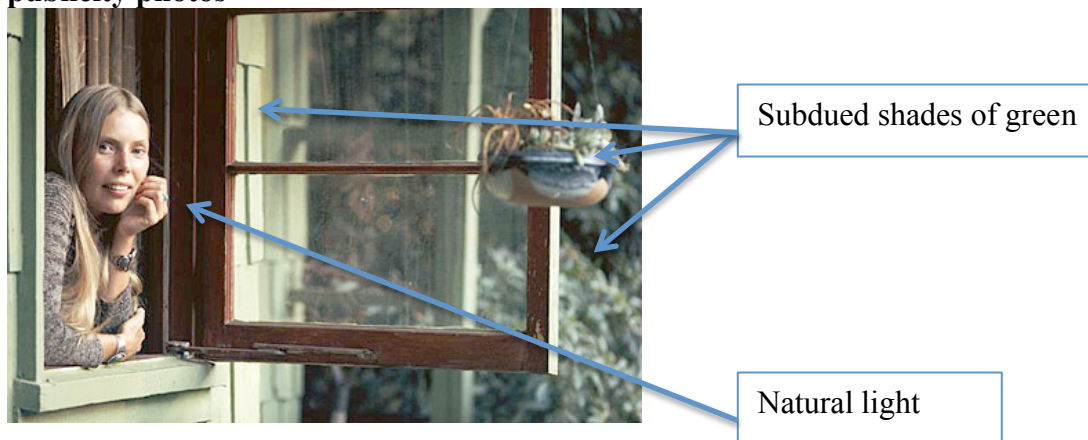
Figure 3.3: Illustration of photographic aesthetic on Laurel Canyon album covers



Photograph from the cover of the debut album by Crosby, Stills, and Nash taken by Henry Diltz. The artists strike casual poses mid-activity appearing as if caught by the photographer. The artists wear casual clothing that makes the photograph seem like it comes from ordinary everyday activities. The tattered couch as a prop outside an old house reflects the artist's nonchalant postures. Natural light softens the colors and creates a muted palette that contrasts the vibrant colors featured on psychedelic rock album covers. Crosby Stills & Nash, *Crosby Stills & Nash*, Atlantic SD 8229, 1969.

Diltz's aesthetic can be seen in the publicity photos he shot for Joni Mitchell in 1970 at her Laurel Canyon cabin. In one of the most iconic images from this shoot, Mitchell leans out of an open window, cracks a smile, and rests her chin against her hand, appearing as if she casually noticed the camera when she turned to face the sun outside (Figure 3.4).

Figure 3.4: Illustration of natural light and domestic setting in female singer-songwriter publicity photos



Publicity photo for Joni Mitchell taken by Henry Diltz in 1970. Mitchell leans out the window from her wood-paneled cabin in Laurel Canyon. Her face is lit by the sun and the surrounding subdued shades of green from her painted house, potted succulents, and backyard set the tone for Mitchell's earthy persona that matches the perception that her music flows organically from her daily life.

Carole King presents the same casual appearance on the iconic cover for *Tapestry*. Motown songwriter Valerie Simpson's solo debut, *Exposed*, shows Simpson seated on vintage parlor furniture, and the album title further frames the perception of autobiographic vulnerability demonstrated in her songs. Carly Simon's album covers suggests an even more private space, evoking boudoir images. On the cover of her 1971 self-titled release, Simon sits legs crossed atop a velour settee in a nearly sheer, pale pink lace dress, partially covered by a crocheted throw blanket (Figure 3.2). Simon's subsequent album covers are less ambiguous, culminating in the photo for *Playing Possum* (1975), when Simon switches out the nearly sheer fabric for actual lingerie. The idea of exposure, as expressed in Valerie Simpson's album title or Simon's bare body, signals a degree of familiarity normally reserved for private spaces. The stripped-down images connect with discourses surrounding the singer-songwriter movement's bare musical aesthetic and performance practices in which artists were lauded for their ability to "bare it all" emotionally on stage. Yet, these album covers still lock the female singer-songwriter into the patterns of objectification in the music industry, wherein women's bodies are as much the commodity as the music itself.

This aesthetic can be understood clearly as an alternative to mainstream culture when placed alongside pictures of these artists from the previous decade, shown in Figure 3.5. A 1965 album cover for the family folk-duo the Simon Sisters, featuring a young Carly Simon, presented the sisters in matching frocks and neatly curled shoulder-length hair. Joni Mitchell dressed similarly during her time in the folk scene, with tailored dresses and clean-cut bangs. Photographs of King during her time at the Brill Building may be the most jarring, where her styled bee-hive hairdo seem worlds away from her "back to the earth" Laurel Canyon look.

Figure 3.5: Illustration of 1960s fashion trends in Carly Simon, Joni Mitchell, and Carole King



Carly Simon in matching knee-length dresses with full skirts and neatly styled hair

Carly and Lucy Simon perform as the Simon Sisters in 1965; *The Simon Sisters*, Kapp Records KL-1359, 1965.



Joni Mitchell in 1965 in short, fitted dress and shoulder-length hair

Joni Mitchell performs "Me and My Uncle" in 1965; Still from *Let's Sing Out!*.



Carole King in 1962 with bee-hive hairdo, collared blouse, and false eyelashes

Carole King in 1962; Publicity photo from RCA Victor.

While in one sense, this shows that these women were on trend with changes in the ever-fleeting fashion market, it also demonstrates deliberate distancing from traditional or conservative feminine fashions worn by women in the 1960s.

“Joni’s Inward Journeys”

According to popular legend, when Joni Mitchell played a demo recording of *Blue* (1971) for country artist Kris Kristofferson, he gasped, “Jesus, Joni! Save something for yourself!”⁸⁴ Kristofferson’s response to Mitchell’s album illustrates the widespread perception that her music expressed an unprecedented display of vulnerability. The reception of Mitchell’s music reveals that audiences viewed her deeply personal songs as a mirror for evaluating their own experiences. I analyze three songs, “I Had a King,” “All I Want,” and “Little Green,” as examples of a woman voicing private concerns relating to relationships, divorce, and children in public arenas, blurring the distinction between these two spheres and subverting notions of traditional femininity. Furthermore, the reception of Mitchell’s music shows that within the space of the singer-songwriter movement, her display of vulnerability was recast as strength. Usually viewed as a weakness or victimization, Mitchell’s ability to convey her own story with a sense of honesty led audiences to see her as achieving the elusive mark of singer-songwriter authenticity. Audiences thought that by staying “true to herself,” Mitchell demonstrated a courageous amount of individual character. Thus, for women in the singer-songwriter movement, vulnerability, traditionally viewed as a negative characteristic of femininity, was recast as empowered womanhood.

Beginning in the late 1960s, Mitchell began to incorporate more autobiographic material in her lyrics. She still wrote some songs from the perspective of fictional characters, such as “Marcie” (1968), “Michael from the Mountains” (1968) and “Ladies of the Canyon” (1970), wherein Mitchell as the performer was clearly not identifying herself as the protagonist of the song. More often, however, Mitchell’s songs showed some degree of self-revelation, as seen in

⁸⁴ Bego, *Joni Mitchell* (Lanham: Taylor Trade Publishing, 2005), 95.

“Both Sides Now” (1967), “Urge for Going” (1968), and “Chelsea Morning” (1967). Mitchell’s song “I Had a King,” recorded in 1968 but written earlier, opened up Mitchell’s songwriting to a new realm of confession, and shifted listeners’ understandings of her songs from poetry or character tableaux to autobiography. The new, confessional tone in her lyrics combined with the materiality of her voice to convey her lived experience and subjectivity. In effect, the vocal quality of Mitchell’s performance (to evoke both Cavarero and Cusick) allowed listeners to access the interior as a space ensouling the feminine of her song lyrics, thus turning the quality of the voice and songs into a link between Mitchell’s private life and the listener’s own experiences.

In “I Had a King,” Mitchell told the story her divorce from her first husband, musician Chuck Mitchell. Met with a great degree of stigma in the 1960s, divorce signaled failure to those who valued traditional marriage.⁸⁵ Her lyrics ring with associations of traditional balladry, referring to the couple through a courtly story between a king and queen evocative of medieval literature and filled with imagery of castles and carriages (imagery displayed in bold letters) as well as domestic life (underlined).⁸⁶

⁸⁵ California’s “Uniform Marriage and Divorce Act,” signed by Governor Ronald Reagan in 1970, was the first no-fault divorce law in the United States. See Stéphane Mechoulan, “Economic Theory’s Stance on No-Fault Divorce,” *Review of Economics of the Household* 3.3 (September 2005): 337–359 for a summary of the socio-cultural and economic impact of no-fault divorce laws implemented in the 1970s and 1980s.

⁸⁶ Lloyd Whitesell, *The Music of Joni Mitchell* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 17; also see Dai Griffiths’ analysis of Cat Stevens’ lyrics in “Internal Rhyme in ‘The Boy With the Moon and the Stars on his Head, 1972,’” *Popular Music* 31, no. 3 (2012), 383–400.

“I Had a King”—Joni Mitchell

Verse 1

1 I had a **king** in a tenement **castle**
Lately he’s taken to painting the pastel walls brown
He’s taken the curtains down
He’s swept with the broom of contempt
5 And the rooms have an empty ring
He’s cleaned with the tears
Of an actor who fears for the laughter’s sting

Strips away the
fantasy of fulfilling
domestic life

Chorus

I can’t go back there anymore
You know my keys won’t fit the door
10 You know my thoughts don’t fit the man
They never can they never can

Resolves to
not change to
fit the man

Mitchell’s seemingly archaic images did not obscure listeners from clearly understanding the song as not only commentary on modern divorcees, but Mitchell’s own story. In the first verse, Mitchell casts off the fantasy of finding fulfillment through married life, resolving in the chorus to never change her self to “fit the man” (line 10). Critic Ellen Sander explained, “The songs about herself are songs for today’s independent young woman and the peculiar problems she faces. ‘I Had a King’ is a sad, backward glance at the artist’s broken marriage, without bitterness or self-reproach. ‘Cactus Tree’ speaks of today’s young divorcee on the rebound, ‘so busy being free.’”⁸⁷ Mitchell’s resolute attitude conveyed her agency in the divorce, subverting the stigma surrounding divorced women as helpless.

Folksinger Malka Marom, who released a collection of interviews with Mitchell in 2014, remembered Mitchell’s music as a catalyst for understanding to her own marital unhappiness, describing “I Had a King” as a mirror for her experiences. In 1966, Marom (of the Canadian folk-duo Malka & Joso), described that she was “Trying to juggle a big career and a household

⁸⁷ Ellen Sander, “Three Who Sing Their Own Songs,” *New York Times*, 29 December 1968, D24.

with two little children and a bad marriage,” but felt as though she “could never catch up.”⁸⁸ Attempting to escape these pressures, Marom wandered into the Riverboat coffeehouse in Toronto’s Yorkville neighborhood, stumbling upon the then virtually unknown Joni Mitchell. While listening to Mitchell’s songs about her own search for self, Marom took comfort knowing she was not alone in her experiences, particularly connecting with Mitchell’s description of her emotional state that led to her divorce in “I Had a King.” Marom described the performance as “a kaleidoscope that splintered my perception, turned it round and round, then refocused to illuminate a reality I had not dared to see.”⁸⁹ During this performance, Marom felt that “Her [Mitchell’s] voice became my own,” as Mitchell’s songs articulated what she had been unable to admit out loud: “My marriage was a bust.”⁹⁰ Like the description of consciousness-raising put forward by feminist organizers, Marom saw her experience mirrored in Mitchell’s story, and the experience reaffirmed her perspective.⁹¹ Through this “shock of recognition,” Marom was made aware of a greater societal issue and felt less isolated.⁹² Being brought into this consciousness through Mitchell’s vocality, Marom claimed that this experience empowered her to follow through with her own divorce rather than accepting her circumstances as unalterable.

Reviewing subsequent albums, critics made statements similar to Marom’s, discussing the transfer of personal knowledge into “universal” emotions, or stories that illuminated the experiences of others. Writing about Mitchell’s 1972 performance at Carnegie Hall, *New York*

⁸⁸ Marom, *Joni Mitchell In Her Own Words*, ix.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, x.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, xii.

⁹¹ Lynn O’Connor, “Defining Reality” pamphlet distributed by the Redstockings, accessed through the Redstockings archive, available at Redstockings.org.

⁹² Stephanie Coontz, *Strange Stirring*, 20; for oral histories of suburban women who began to view their personal unhappiness as a product of societal failures, see the chapter “I Thought I Was Crazy,” 81–100.

Times critic Don Heckman claimed, “Starting from a base that is rooted deeply in her own psyche, she builds metaphoric excursions through life-trips that are common to us all.”⁹³ Lynn van Matre, of the *Chicago Tribune*, admitted that even though she was not a “card-carrying, dues-paying, member of the Joni Mitchell cult,” the Chicago audience found the “fragility of expression in her music” appealing. She couched her distaste of the music as an unpopular view amid Mitchell fans, saying, “If Joni Mitchell leaves the canyons of my mind empty with her travels into her own, it was still good to see so many people following her on her inward journeys and, perhaps, ending up somewhere they wanted to be.”⁹⁴ Robert Hilburn, whose journalism frequently betrayed his status as a fan, called Mitchell’s 1972 *For the Roses* a “work of exploratory honesty”:

One of the reasons Miss Mitchell is able to produce works of merit so consistently is her willingness to explore and then honestly reveal—rather than soften, filter, or glamorize—her emotions and experiences, both the joys and, more importantly, the sorrows. She is able to face her disappointments in love and deal with them in an instructive way in song...Several of the 12 songs on the *For the Roses* album...deal with moments of defeat or insecurity in an open, honest way that few other major writers could duplicate.⁹⁵

For these critics, Mitchell presented a sense of fragility, but this trait was valued as strength in her music. Critics read the honest revelation of her insecurities as a marker of self-awareness and courage. Nowhere is this sense of vulnerability recast as strength more apparent than on Mitchell’s 1971 album, *Blue*.

⁹³ Don Heckman, “Concert Is Given by Joni Mitchell: Excels in Song Program-Unorthodox on Guitar,” *New York Times*, 25 February 1972, 27.

⁹⁴ Lynn Van Matre, “Joni’s Inward Journeys,” *Chicago Tribune*, 22 February 1972, A3.

⁹⁵ Robert Hilburn, “Joni Mitchell’s New ‘For the Roses’” *Los Angeles Times*, 21 November 1972, D12.

“If you hold sand too tightly in your hand, it will run through your fingers, Love, Joan.”⁹⁶

When Graham Nash received this telegram in 1969, he knew that his idyllic romance with Mitchell had ended. Fearing that their relationship would push her into a stay-at-home role and inhibit her career, Mitchell left Nash and flew to the Greek islands, where she vacationed in Matala, a hippie commune in Crete.⁹⁷ When she returned to California, Mitchell recorded *Blue* at A&M studios in Hollywood, an album viewed by many as the archetypal standard of confessional songwriting.⁹⁸

The perception that the record emerged from Mitchell’s journey to Europe informs the general view that the songs represent a transformative experience, and listeners use the album as a meditation for their own self-discovery. Mitchell’s reminiscences cultivate listeners’ perceptions of *Blue* as an honest account of her emotional state during this time. She claims that the songs on *Blue* emerged from a period of emotional instability, with characteristics similar to descriptions of depression, admitting, “I dreamed I was a plastic bag...with all my organs exposed, sobbing on an auditorium chair at that time. That’s how I felt. Like my guts were on the outside. I wrote *Blue* in that condition.”⁹⁹

Mitchell’s sense of self-discovery through vulnerability comes through on the album’s first track, “All I Want.” The song preaches a message of indecision as Mitchell celebrates her freedom to travel, even if the road is “lonely.” The introduction of the song establishes an up-tempo groove through Mitchell’s constant strumming on the drone string of her Appalachian dulcimer combined with James Taylor’s percussive use of the guitar body like a drum. The rich

⁹⁶ Graham Nash, *Wild Tales: A Rock & Roll Life* (New York: Crown Archetype, 2013), 185.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 185–187; Mercer, *Will You Take Me As I Am?*, 20–23.

⁹⁸ Mercer, *Will You Take Me As I Am?*, 3.

⁹⁹ Marom, *Joni Mitchell In Her Own Words*, 57.

rhythmic texture inflects the lyrics with a sense of confidence despite Mitchell’s admission of loneliness (line 1) and hurt. During the chorus, the lyrics’ stream-of-consciousness character (lines 6–10) reveals Mitchell’s sense of aimlessness, and her apparent acceptance of this state.

“All I Want”—Joni Mitchell

	<i>Verse 1</i>	
1	I am on a lonely road and I am traveling] Travel with no destination
	Traveling, traveling, traveling	
	Looking for something, what can it be	
	Oh I hate you some, I hate you some, I love you some	
5	Oh I love you when I forget about me	
	 <i>Chorus 1</i>	
	I want to be strong I want to laugh along] stream of conscious- ness
	I want to belong to the living	
	Alive, alive, I want to get up and jive	
	I want to wreck my stockings in some jukebox dive	
10	Do you want, do you want, do you want to dance with me baby	
	Do you want to take a chance	
	On maybe finding some sweet romance with me baby	
	Well, come on	

This sense of indecision (lines 4–5) subverts normative societal values that dictate a “right” path for a woman.¹⁰⁰ As both the song’s narrator and protagonist, Mitchell shows that she is interested in defining herself in more than one way, and this complex sense of self-definition further subverts societal expectations of traditional femininity. In the second chorus, her emphasis on the word “feel” draws the listener’s attention to her own emotional state, even though Mitchell as narrator is talking to a lover. To “feel free” is the cathartic moment in the song, as Mitchell ad-libs and repeats those lyrics twice before bringing the song into the outro, the same material as the introduction. In a time where women were learning to break free of society’s expectations for traditional feminine behavior, Mitchell brings the listener into her moment of self-revelation and, in doing so, allows her to experience this freedom.

¹⁰⁰ Lloyd Whitesell, conversely, reads this song as Mitchell’s “ingénue” persona in *The Music of Joni Mitchell*, 66.

A second track on *Blue*, “Little Green,” was confessional beyond the way it expressed a sense of individuality. Mitchell composed the song for her daughter, a child she put up for adoption in 1964 because she could not support her child financially as a single twenty-year old.¹⁰¹ Mitchell composed the song in 1966 and performed it in folk clubs, but never recorded a version until *Blue*.¹⁰² The title refers to her daughter’s birth name, Kelly Dale, and Mitchell codes the daughter in the lyrics as a shade of Kelly green.¹⁰³ The early performed version of the song contained variations of the melody canonized on the 1971 recording. As seen in Figure 3.6, a version of “Little Green” performed in Philadelphia in 1966, the melodic phrasing on the stressed syllable “green” follows downward scalar motion and creates a minor tonic chord on the emphasized downbeat. This setting shades the naming of her child in a more melancholic tone. However, the recorded melody on *Blue* shifts this line upwards to the fifth scale degree and avoids the minor tonicization, imbuing the melody with a sense of resolution in the face of her difficult decision.

Figure 3.6: Two versions of “Little Green”—Joni Mitchell
 “Little Green” on *Live at the Second Fret* (1966)



¹⁰¹ Bego, *Joni Mitchell*, 32.

¹⁰² *Joni Mitchell: Live at the Second Fret in 1966*, All Access Entertainment AACD0120, 2014.

¹⁰³ Brian D. Johnson, “Joni’s Secret: Mother and Child Reunion,” *MacLean’s*, 21 April 1997. The adoptive parents renamed Mitchell’s daughter Kilauren.

“Little Green” on *Blue* (1971)

Call her green and the winters can not fade her call her

4

green for the chil - dren who've made her Lit - tle Green

The final verse of the song, maintained in both versions, echoes the tone in the second version of the melody while continuing to allow for a multiple emotions to co-exist without neat resolution.

“Little Green”—Joni Mitchell

Verse 3

- 1 Child with the child *pretending*
Weary of *lies* you are sending home
So you sign all the papers in the family name
You're sad and you're sorry, but you're not ashamed
- 5 Little Green, have a happy ending.

In this verse, Mitchell confesses to feeling like she was pretending, or ill equipped, to responsibly care for her child (lines 1–2). But alongside the confusion and sadness, refuses to feel ashamed of her decision (line 4). The last line of this verse embodies both the heartbreaking notion of not knowing what will happen to her daughter and the hope that she has offered her daughter a better life (line 5). The complex range of emotions conveyed in her poetry came across not just as vulnerability, but as decisive markers of Mitchell's empowered self-awareness.

Read through a feminist lens, Mitchell's songs showed how societal pressures based in gendered expectations, such as getting married, remaining married, and drawing fulfillment from children, affected her private life. By narrating her experience in her own words, Mitchell became the agent in her story, even when she admitted the most vulnerable aspects of her life.

Her vulnerabilities became a way for Mitchell to find an empowered voice, seeking to discover and define herself in spite of society's inequalities.

Carole King as Working Mother

Carole King's long standing career as a songwriter granted her notable authority among her colleagues in the music industry, and this clout allowed her to have a substantial voice in both her musical production and tour management. Her music articulated the concerns of working mothers, with songs addressing the relationship between her career and family life becoming more frequent in her output after the criticism of her absence from the Grammy awards. Moreover, King also defied easy definitions of her femininity, subverting societal standards of propriety for motherly behavior.

Although King was not credited as a producer on her albums, she took charge in the studio and shaped the direction of her sessions. Sound engineer Hank Cicalo explained to Robert Hilburn, "She's very professional in the studio. She knows just what she wants on the record. Best of all, she makes everyone feel at home. There's no tension when she's around."¹⁰⁴ In an interview, Cicalo explained that he and producer Lou Adler actively stepped back to allow King to take this greater role in studio.¹⁰⁵ Cicalo also described helping King with child-care, letting her daughters play in the sound booth so that King could work with the musicians in the studio.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Robert Hilburn, "Carole King: Return to Simple Values," *Los Angeles Times*, 13 December 1971.

¹⁰⁵ Hank Cicalo, interview with author, Santa Monica, CA, 10 April 2014.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

Another way that King took control of her career was by denying media access. King desired privacy as an artist, and, as discussed in Chapter 2, curated a public image that her popularity was based in her dedication to songwriting, not the limelight. Aside from the article profiling her as the “Woman of the Year” published in the *Los Angeles Times* in 1971, King routinely declined television appearances and interviews with the press. *LIFE* magazine even offered her a cover story to incentivize the interview, but King still refused.¹⁰⁷ Robert Hilburn used this fact to assure fans that King was not changed by stardom.¹⁰⁸ But more than this, King’s reluctance to speak to the media showed the way she took control of her life as a woman in the music industry.

Beyond interviews, King minimized the time she spent touring on the road. Limiting her concert engagements ensured that she did not have to spend long amounts of time away from her family and also restricted her contact with the press. Touring, however, was a crucial aspect of record promotion, and her tour for *Tapestry* made a distinct difference in sales compared to her previous album. When King released her 1973 album, *Fantasy*, she did tour, but on a smaller scale, playing only 12 performance dates total in May of that year. King still routinely turned down interviews with journalists. King’s manager and producer Lou Adler, who viewed King as a partner rather than client, facilitated King’s desire to avoid the press, defended her, explaining, “She just feels it’s a lot easier if her life isn’t reviewed every time she performs...She has her private life and she wants to keep it that way.”¹⁰⁹ King wanted the private life she sang about to stand on its own and did not feel the need to defend herself to the media. Adler’s advocacy, like

¹⁰⁷ Robert Hilburn, “Carole King: Out from Shadow of ‘Tapestry,’” *Los Angeles Times*, 19 June 1973; Tom Zito, “The Silent Side of Carole King,” *Washington Post, Times Herald*, 24 May 1973, C1.

¹⁰⁸ Robert Hilburn, “Carole King: Out from Shadow of ‘Tapestry,’” *Los Angeles Times*, 19 June 1973.

¹⁰⁹ Tom Zito, “The Silent Side of Carole King,” *Washington Post, Times Herald*, 24 May 1973, C1.

Geffen and Robert's partnership with Joni Mitchell, demonstrates how individual men in the industry acted as allies for women seeking greater autonomy.

Based on King's domestic public image and refusal to speak to the press, critics frequently misconstrued King as a housewife rather than working professional. This interpretation began with the criticism of her absence from the Grammy's in 1972 following the birth of her third child. In 1973, Robert Hilburn described King as "stay-at-home," adding that she "stays at home" and "emerges only—on a professional level—to record her new songs"¹¹⁰ King's publicist, Pat Luce, divulged to *Washington Post* journalist, "Believe me, there's nothing I'd like better than to get her to talk with someone. But her No. 1 concern is being a housewife."¹¹¹ These commentators failed to view her output as a songwriter as work. Furthermore, many neglected to see the ways that King fought to make her work compatible with her home life—a feat that ultimately drove many women away from careers in the music industry.

Much of King's music responded to this dissonance, positioning herself as both working woman and mother. Despite King's rare tour appearances, many of her songs dealt with her experience on tour away from her children.¹¹² For example, King wrote her 1971 song "So Far Away" while touring with James Taylor. In the final lines of the chorus she sings, "Holding you again could only do me good, how I wish I could but you're so far away," longing to be with her daughters while on the road.

¹¹⁰ Robert Hilburn, "Carole King: Out from Shadow of 'Tapestry,'" *Los Angeles Times*, 19 June 1973.

¹¹¹ Tom Zito, "The Silent Side of Carole King," *Washington Post, Times Herald*, 24 May 1973, C1.

¹¹² Robert Hilburn, "Carole King: Return to Simple Values," *Los Angeles Times*, 13 December 1971.

Following the press response to her Grammy ceremony absence, King continued to channel this concern into songs on her next two albums in the classic, confessional way. King included the songs “Goodbye Don’t Mean I’m Gone” on the 1972 album *Rhymes and Reasons*, and “Weekdays,” on *Fantasy*. “Goodbye Don’t Mean I’m Gone” discusses the strain her career placed on her family. In verse 2, King sings of her life style on the road performing, describing her desire to remain close to her children (line 4). In verse 3, King describes the ways she tried to remedy this struggle by integrating her songwriting, or work life, into her home life (lines 9–10):

“Goodbye Don’t Mean I’m Gone”—Carole King

Verse 2

5	I know how alone you are When it’s so hard to be so far From the ones who mean the most to you <u>When you would so much rather have them close to you</u> I hope you know you haven’t been forsaken Goodbye don’t mean I’m gone	} description of tour life
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Verse 3

10	Missing you the way I do You know I’d like to see more of you <u>But it’s all I can do to be a mother</u> <u>My baby’s in one hand, I’ve a pen in the other</u> You know my love is always there for the taking And goodbye don’t mean I’m gone	} description of songwriter life
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As she was recording *Rhymes and Reasons*, King remembers bringing her infant daughter into the sessions in a bassinet, unconcerned about possible cries disrupting a take.¹¹³ These songs voiced the reality of King’s life as a mother in the music industry, difficulties that other working mothers faced, too, and they illuminated the broader societal issue that prohibited many women from entering the workforce at this time. Furthermore King posited her songs as the source of her story, refusing to answer to media inquisition. By turning the performance of her songs in

¹¹³ King, *A Natural Woman*, 248.

concerts and recordings into an alternative to the written word, King drew on the subversive potential of vocality as a powerful feminist strategy of expression.¹¹⁴

Valerie Simpson as Career Woman

Valerie Simpson, a Motown staff songwriter who embarked on a solo career in 1971, spoke to the concerns facing black women in the United States who continued in the struggle for both racial and gender equality in the 1970s. As previously discussed, by privileging the concerns of white, straight, middle-class women, the women's movement excluded women of color.¹¹⁵ Therefore, many black women continued to advocate through black freedom circles, but their fight focused on the subordination of black women in society based on race, gender, and class. In these black feminist traditions, the politics of self-definition played a prominent role in deconstructing the controlling images of a racist and patriarchal society.¹¹⁶ According to Patricia Hill Collins, this act of self-definition explores the “inside,” or the “ideas that allow Black women to cope with, and in many cases, transcend the confines of intersecting oppressions of race, class, gender, and sexuality.”¹¹⁷ Although among relatively few black female musicians who manifested their activism in singer-songwriter circles during this time, Valerie Simpson advocated for equality by utilizing the language of consciousness-raising and self-definition in

¹¹⁴ Adriana Cavarero, *For More Than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2005).

¹¹⁵ bell hooks, *Ain't I A Woman*, 1–2, 4–9.

¹¹⁶ Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 102, 112 (capitalization in original). Collins also mentions two influential autobiographies by black women—Shirley Chisholm's *Unbought and Unbossed* (1970) and Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969)—literary examples of self-definition contemporary to Simpson's musical expression.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 98. Collins traces this history of self-definition in music through twentieth-century blues women Bessie Smith and Ma Rainey through to Nina Simone's song “Four Women.” Reiland Rabaka also discusses the act of self-definition in his study of blues women and hip hop women in *Hip Hop's Amnesia: From Blues and the Black Women's Club Music to Rap and the Hip Hop Movement* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012), 79.

her music. This confessional mode was viewed as an effective means of rallying communal sentiments that mobilized black political causes in addition to containing an underlying black feminist critique through its personal language. For Valerie Simpson, the act of defining herself came through the way she attained greater control of her musical products and the ability to realize her songs through her own voice.

Simpson sang from the perspective of an independent woman, an idea that women could lead successful careers without relying on their husband as a breadwinner, which gained traction in the U.S. in the 1970s. As Patricia Hill Collins writes, the long history of exploitation of black women's labor in the U.S.—beginning with slavery and extending into twentieth century through service industries and domestic work—has created a culture in which black women have few opportunities to do meaningful work, traditionally defined.¹¹⁸ Collins further discusses the trope of self-reliant women throughout black feminist thought, demonstrating how women have valued this construction of independent womanhood for the way it challenges dominant notions of femininity.¹¹⁹ The 1970s image of an American “career woman” was marketed toward white, middle-class women through such publications as self-help literature and *Ms.* magazine. Precisely because of this exclusion, activists similarly inspired black women to pursue careers as a method of subverting the history of labor exploitation and a way to benefit black communities.¹²⁰ Editors at *Ebony* magazine began to feature stories on black women who had pursued, and succeeded in, career paths not historically available to them, including law,

¹¹⁸ Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 4.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 116–117.

¹²⁰ Toni C. King, “‘Who’s That Lady?’: *Ebony* Magazine and Black Professional Women,” in *Disco Divas: Women and Popular Culture in the 1970s*, ed. Sherrie A. Inness (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 87.

engineering, business, and broadcast journalism.¹²¹ These stories showed how women could succeed at “man’s work,” such as the sciences or entrepreneurship, and benefit the black community writ large through the economic impact of salaried careers over of hourly wages. Simpson’s narrative aligns with these stories of independence and career advancement as both a means for economic uplift and empowerment through self-definition.

Simpson began her musical career in a New York gospel choir, where she met her husband, Nick Ashford. The pair began writing songs together, with Ashford penning the gospel lyrics and Simpson setting them to music. According to Simpson:

The manager of our gospel group asked if we’d like to try writing some rock songs. We said, “no, never!” But there were no other jobs in view and we thought, “are we going to have to get out of the music field altogether?” So we wrote five songs and sold them all for \$75—which was a lot of money to us then. Those were really fun days...we enjoyed writing those songs, and the \$75 inspired us to write more.¹²²

Ashford and Simpson joined the songwriting staff at Motown in 1966.¹²³ The duo became some of Motown’s most prominent writers, particularly through their hits with Marvin Gaye and Tammi Terrell, which included “Ain’t No Mountain High” (1966), “Ain’t Nothing Like the Real Thing” (1968), and “You’re All I Need to Get By” (1968).¹²⁴ During this time, Simpson advocated for greater recognition for all uncredited personnel on Motown recordings, a change she realized on her own solo albums. According to Motown session guitarist Dennis Coffey, “Valerie Simpson was the first writer who insisted that we get credits on an album we recorded

¹²¹ “New Careers for New Woman,” *Ebony*, July 1971, 31–42; “Upsurge in News Girls,” *Ebony*, June 1971, 168–176; “Monsanto’s Designer ‘Extraordinaire,’” October 1973, 135–140.

¹²² “Valerie Simpson moves into limelight as singer,” *Afro-American*, 12 August 1972, 10.

¹²³ Gerald Posner, *Motown: Music, Money, Sex & Power* (New York: Random House, 2002), 154.

¹²⁴ Posner, 154; “Ain’t No Mountain High” also became a single on Diana Ross’s 1970 solo album.

for her as a Motown artist.”¹²⁵ Simpson appeared as a vocalist on Quincy Jones’ 1970 album *Gula Matari*, singing on Jones’ arrangement of Simon & Garfunkel’s “Bridge Over Troubled Water,” and continued working on Jones’ projects throughout the 1970s. Despite these contributions, both Ashford and Simpson remain relatively unmentioned in the many histories of Motown Records, which focus more on interactions between producer Berry Gordy and his star performers Diana Ross and Marvin Gaye.

As staff songwriters at Motown, Ashford and Simpson customarily wrote songs that could work for a variety of acts at Motown and “tweaked” the song to fit an artist once a performer was assigned.¹²⁶ However, by 1970, Simpson had taken on a greater role as a producer at Motown, which led her to experiment as a performer of her own songs. When Motown execs stopped picking up Simpson’s songs for their roster of artists, Simpson decided that she would bring her own interpretation to realize the songs properly: “It [performing] had to do with being a producer, and the songs didn’t sound right to anybody.”¹²⁷ Simpson explained that she thought these songs required her specific voice and persona to convey the meaning. Likening the experience to “couture clothing,” Simpson explained that even though the songs “didn’t sound right to anybody,” in her voice, “they fit.”¹²⁸ Co-producing an album with Ashford, Simpson was able to realize her artistic vision in every aspect of the recording: “Was the voice up loud enough? Should we go in for another take? We were the ones answering the questions.”¹²⁹

¹²⁵ Dennis Coffey, *Guitars, Bars, & Motown Superstars* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), 67.

¹²⁶ Valerie Simpson, phone interview with author, 20 August 2013.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

Baltimore-based newspaper, the *Afro-American*, heralded Simpson's "enviable" position as a producer, claiming that she was the "only successful woman producer in rock 'n roll."¹³⁰ Simpson felt thrilled finally to be able to perform the songs she wrote, claiming "Now the time is right—so I'm doing my thing also," assuring people that she was still making time for the songwriting-producing partnership she had built with Ashford.¹³¹

Simpson recorded and released *Exposed*, her first solo album, in 1971 on Motown's Tamla label. The marketing for *Exposed* mimicked the promotion of Carole King as a favorite American pop songwriter. An advertisement in *Billboard* proclaimed, "Diana Ross sang Valerie Simpson, Marvin Gaye and Tammi Terrell sang Valerie Simpson, the Supremes sang Valerie Simpson, Smokey Robinson and the Miracles sang Valerie Simpson, Aretha Franklin sang Valerie Simpson...Now Valerie Simpson sings Valerie Simpson."¹³² A writer for the *Afro-American* echoed this sentiment, likening Simpson to other artists in the singer-songwriter movement with backgrounds as commercial songwriters: "With the advent of Neil Diamond, Carole King, Bill Withers and others, songwriters are no longer a mystique behind a superstar. The cloak and dagger shield has been removed."¹³³ This explanation resonates with the title of Simpson's album, *Exposed*, which in addition to alluding to the vulnerable nature of the songwriting, unveiled the songwriter behind the Motown hits. A *Billboard* ad promoting Simpson's self-titled second album among Motown's 1972 releases read "The award-winning songs of Nick Ashford and Valerie Simpson, sung as only Valerie can sing them."¹³⁴ The

¹³⁰ "Valerie Simpson is Up Front and Making it Big," *Philadelphia Tribune*, 26 August 1972, 13.

¹³¹ "Valerie Simpson moves into limelight as singer," *Afro-American*, 12 August 1972, 10.

¹³² Advertisement for "Exposed," *Billboard*, 21 August 1972, 45.

¹³³ "Valerie Simpson moves into limelight as singer," *Afro-American*, 12 August 1972, 10.

¹³⁴ Advertisement, "Motown presents the winners: The best from the best," *Billboard*, 2 December 1972, 9.

wording reinforces the value of hearing classic songs as the composer intended them, similar to the hype surrounding *Tapestry*.

The opening track on *Exposed*, titled “I Don’t Need Nobody’s Help,” is an example of the stripped-down aesthetic critics lauded, and similarly articulates the message of women’s independence through a gospel-inspired declaration of love. More than a love song, however, Simpson viewed the opening track of *Exposed* as “a way of me saying, ‘I am equipped to do this.’”¹³⁵ In the song’s introduction, Simpson made a bold statement of independence, stating that she wanted to speak for herself (lines 1–4), emphasizing her self and thoughts through repetitive use of the personal pronoun “I” and stressing the word “feeling” (lines 1 and 3). The *a cappella* texture mimics the sentiment, as do the lyrics that reject accompanying instruments (lines 5–8):

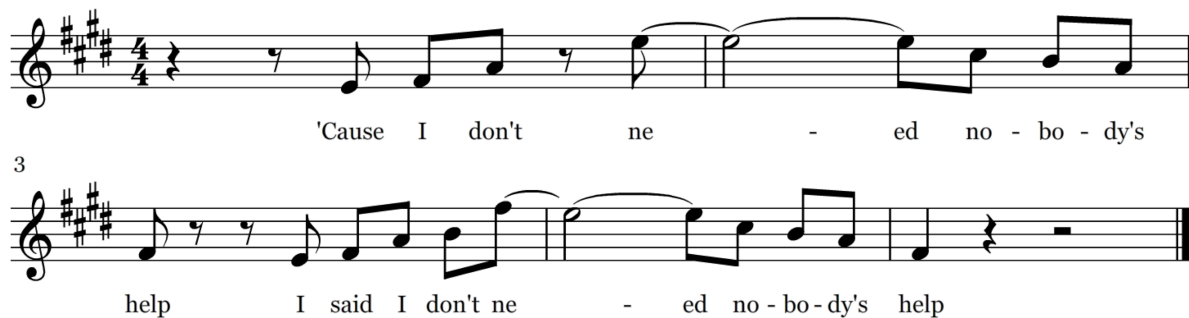
“I Don’t Need Nobody’s Help”—Valerie Simpson

1	Every now and then I get the feeling That I got something to say Every now and then I get the feeling That I want to say it my way	}	introductory announcement of independence
5	And I don’t want no horns blowing I don’t want the strings to play a melody I don’t want to hear the guitar strummin’ Don’t wanna hear no voices in back of me I’m not gonna use words that rhyme	}	describes acoustic style
10	I don’t want the drummer to help me keep time	}	
	’Cause I don’t need nobody’s help Said I don’t need nobody’s help	}	return to independence
15	To say I love you I wanna tell you right now baby That I love you From the bottom of my heart	}	Transition to love song

¹³⁵ Valerie Simpson, phone interview with author, 20 August 2013.

Simpson’s return to singing about independence (lines 11 and 12) forms the height of the introduction, reaching into her highest register with a crescendo (Figure 3.7).

Figure 3.7: “I Don’t Need Nobody’s Help”—Valerie Simpson



Following this grand gesture, the lyrics make a stark shift to speak explicitly about a romantic relationship, halting the narrative of independence. Veiled in the sentiments of a love song, Simpson expressed her desire for an autonomous voice in ways relevant to many black women seeking promotions in new career paths and this sense of self-definition.

Ebony journalist Phyl Garland viewed the track as a sign of Simpson’s career achievements, invoking Nina Simone’s song “To Be Young, Gifted, and Black” (1970) to explain the importance of Simpson’s dual roles as performer and songwriter:

Until a few months ago, she was highly respected within the trade, but otherwise was known only to a few super-hip folks who read the small print on record jackets....But now she has stepped out of the shadows to seek recognition on her own behalf. It’s about time she did so, for she is young, gifted, black, beautiful, and has all the makings of a major talent.¹³⁶

The mention of Simone’s song—considered by many the new civil rights anthem—in this review of *Exposed* demonstrates how *Ebony* viewed Simpson as an inspirational and aspirational figure for black readers.¹³⁷ Garland specifically mentioned “I Don’t Need Nobody’s Help” as a case-in-

¹³⁶ Phyl Garland, “Sounds,” *Ebony*, November 1971, 32.

¹³⁷ Shana L. Redmond, *Anthem: Social Movements and the Sound of Solidarity in the African Diaspora* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 179–221.

point, saying, “Only an exceptional artist could hold the attention as she does here on a piece pared down to its essentials.”¹³⁸

Simpson performed at a number of black political events, where she sang the confessional songs on her album, rather than traditional protest songs. Simpson took part in Chicago’s Black Expo in 1971, a meeting for black business professionals that fit with her own biography for career advancement. She also performed at the NAACP Image Awards in 1972, and sang at events hosted by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC).¹³⁹ She explained her position on the political imperative of popular music to a reporter for the *Afro-American*, saying, “Today’s generation look to writers for a philosophy on life, for ways to think about things, for reports on what’s going on here and in the rest of the world. In other words, they’re paying more attention to what we’re saying,” adding, “We have a responsibility.”¹⁴⁰ For Simpson, the aspect of life-philosophy was as important as songs that covered current events, and this explains why she viewed her confessional compositions as necessary songs to perform on the political stage, even without advocating for explicit feminist causes. This feminist reading of Simpson’s work reveals how, as a black woman excluded from the women’s movement, Simpson was still able to mobilize the discourse of consciousness-raising as a powerful political tool in her work towards racial and gender equality.

¹³⁸ Phyl Garland, “Sounds,” *Ebony*, November 1971, 32.

¹³⁹ “Black Expo ‘71 attracts top U.S. celebrities,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, 25 September 1971; *Billboard*, 11 November 1972, 46–47;

¹⁴⁰ Valerie Simpson moves into limelight as singer,” *Afro-American*, 12 August 1972, 10.

Women's Music

The politics and presence of female singer-songwriters extended through the rest of the 1970s most prominently in the realm of women's music, an outgrowth of radical feminist political spheres that rejected male participation in the production of its music, thereby creating music "of, by, and for" women.¹⁴¹ Women's music began as a mostly white movement in the early 1970s, but became more diversified by the end of the decade.¹⁴² Participants in the movement eventually broadened their view of diversity and fashioned their circles as welcoming spaces for lesbian women, women with disabilities, and women of color, to include black, Latina and Asian American artists, as well as international acts.¹⁴³ Judy Dlugacz opened Olivia Records, the first recording company established exclusively "by and for" women, in Washington, D.C. in 1973.¹⁴⁴ The label espoused a separatist stance, necessitating the creation of completely women-run recording studios, performance venues, and distribution channels in order to work outside of music industry patriarchy. Olivia recorded its first two albums, Meg Christian's *I Know You Know* in 1974 and Cris Williamson's *The Changer and the Changed* in 1975, both distributed by

¹⁴¹ *Radical Harmonies*, dir. Boden Sandstrom, 2002; Boden Sandstrom, "Performance, Ritual, and Negotiation of Identity in the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival," PhD diss., University of Maryland, 2002; Eileen Hayes, *Songs in Black and Lavender: Race, Sexual Politics, and Women's Music* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010); Stacy Holman Jones, *Kaleidoscope Notes: Writing Women's Music and Organizational Culture* (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 1998); Sarah Dougher, "Sex and Laughter in Women's Music, 1970–1977," *Current Musicology* 90 (2010): 35–56; Erika Engstrom, "Alternative Feminist Media on the Airwaves: Radio and Women's Music," *Journal of Radio & Audio Media* 17, Issue 1 (2010): 18–32; Bonnie J. Morris, *Eden Built by Eves: The Culture of Women's Music Festivals* (Los Angeles: Alyson Books, 1999).

¹⁴² Hayes, *Songs in Black and Lavender*, 65.

¹⁴³ Despite their inclusive attitude towards the populations mentioned, the women's music community, particularly the Michigan Womyn's festival, came under harsh scrutiny from the broader LGBTQ community in the 2000s for their exclusion of transgender women from their concerts, enforcing a controversial "womyn born womyn" policy. For an account about how this controversy eventually led to the close of the Michigan Womyn's Festival, see Dawn Ennis, "Michfest Womyn and Trans Women Ask Why?," *The Advocate*, 23 April 2015, accessed 9 April 2016, <http://www.advocate.com/arts-entertainment/music/2015/04/23/michfest-womyn-and-trans-women-ask-why>.

¹⁴⁴ Meg Christian, *I Know You Know*, Olivia Records LF 902, 1974; Cris Williamson, *The Changer and the Changed*, Olivia Records LF 804, 1975.

mail order to avoid industry channels.¹⁴⁵ The company moved to Los Angeles in 1974 to position itself as a competitive alternative to other commercial labels.

Performers from the women's music scene played an active role in NOW events and rallies in Los Angeles, which often featured performances by singer-songwriters at organized gatherings. NOW conferences included workshops on women's music led by prominent artists to teach women how to write, record, and produce their own songs.¹⁴⁶ Like Simpson, the songs that these women performed at feminist events aligned musically with the aesthetics of the commercial singer-songwriter movement. Instead of penning topical songs with calls to action typical for music at the site of protest, artists in the women's movement composed personal songs to make their political statements. Singer-songwriter Margie Adam specifically cited women singer-songwriters in Los Angeles as inspiration, and credited artists who modeled empowerment within the commercial system, saying:

I have great respect for the musical form and energy of women like Joni Mitchell and Laura Nyro who work within the present framework of the record industry...I also think Carole King's real important, both for the sheer endurance of what she has done and the quality of her writing within the genre of popular music. It doesn't matter at this point whether she identifies with women's music or the women's movement, any of that stuff. I see her as a strong woman model. But there are so few. The fact that I can name them all shows the obvious problem. Walk into a record store and see the many images of men and men's groups in the photos on the wall and see how few women images there are. To me, that shows how much work has to be done.¹⁴⁷

Hilburn thought that the personal messages made the point effectively and avoided sounding too preachy, writing, "Adam's songs—the emphasis of an evening—certainly need no explanation.

¹⁴⁵ Sandstrom, "Performance, Ritual, and Negotiation of Identity in the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival," 91–96.

¹⁴⁶ Records of the National Organization for Women, Program for NOW National Conference 1971, Box 23 Folder 13, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.

¹⁴⁷ Robert Hilburn, "The Women's Movement With a Pop Beat: 'A Woman, a Feminist, an Artist,'" *Los Angeles Times*, 8 March 1977, F1.

They are lively, compact works that carry a message without the dangerous edge of sermonization.”¹⁴⁸ Adam explained to Hilburn that her songs come from her sense of “who she was” as a person, saying,

I am a woman, I’m a feminist, I’m an artist...There’s no way what I write isn’t influenced by what I am as a person. So that’s going on all the time...But the song that I opened the show with, “Sweet Control,” doesn’t have anything in it that’s overly political. It’s a caring love song. You couldn’t take it out of context and say, “Aha, a feminist song.”¹⁴⁹

Adam’s explanation touches on a sense that songwriting comes from knowing one’s self and drawing on the integrity of one’s character to write a meaningful song. Adam even went so far as to say that she found traditional political songs uninteresting: “I have tried to sit down and write the ponderous, intellectual, political song and I find that boring. BORING...Propaganda in the key of C.”¹⁵⁰

Cris Williamson’s music on *The Changer and the Changed* presents a clear example of the connections between mainstream confessional songwriting and women’s music. The first track on the album, “Waterfall” acts as an expression palliative relief for lesbian women coming out about their sexual identity. In the first verse, Williamson seeks “peace of mind” (lines 6 and 7) and assures her listener that everything will be “alright” (line 3):

“Waterfall”—Cris Williamson

1 Sometimes it takes a rainy day
 Just to let you know
 Everything’s gonna be alright
 ...

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

5 Wake me from this dream
 That I have dreamed so many times
 I need a little peace of mind
 Oh, I need a little peace of mind

Williamson's verses are less specific about the story behind her troubled emotions than King's or Mitchell's lyrics. She still finds her solution, however, through self-discovery in the chorus, in which she claims to "open her life to the living." Williamson's freedom to openly express her sexuality allowed her, and others, to finally feel true to her self.

Reporting on Cris Williamson's appearance at McCabe's, *Los Angeles Times* critic Richard Cromelin focused on the accessibility of Williamson's music, highlighting the similarities between her style and commercial singer-songwriters. According to Cromelin, "Her music is not overtly political, nor does it address itself exclusively to the female condition. Rather, Williamson speaks to anyone who looks to music for keys to self-discovery, for resonant metaphors of life's internal and external struggles."¹⁵¹ This analysis of the music's meaning residing in its self-reflective function places it squarely in line with the values of consciousness-raising. Elevating personal narratives as ways to understand the effects of patriarchy, Williamson and other singer-songwriters in the women's music scene reconfigured confessional songs as musical protest.

* * * * *

The songs by female singer-songwriters presented in this chapter articulated a highly politicized form of feminist communication, centering on personal experiences and creating empowered female subjects. This discourse resonated with activists in the women's movement, who focused on women's personal stories as a vehicle for understanding the societal

¹⁵¹ Richard Cromelin, "Beyond Feminism: Cris Williamson at McCabe's," *Los Angeles Times*, 10 April 1978, OC_C11.

subordination of women through consciousness-raising meetings. Singer-songwriters, like feminist activists in these meetings, channeled individual experiences toward collective understanding of how societal expectations shaped women's lives. Whether singing about motherhood, career advancement, marriage, or travel, female singer-songwriters were able to use music to define themselves, creating empowered voices in spite of the effects of gender discrimination.

In addition to the historical context of these songs, from a feminist theoretical perspective, the singer-songwriter movement provided a way to access the private sphere through music. Within the prominent singer-songwriter venues, the gendering of space created a female-positive environment, drawing on notions of domesticity and the types of intimate conversations women are safe to have in these private settings. Furthermore, the personal language of singer-songwriters' lyrics combined with their sung vocal expression to form a channel to the interior, private sphere of the artists' subjectivity. For listeners, then, these songs formed critical sites (both literal and metaphoric) where women counteracted the isolating effects of a patriarchal society. For activists, entering this consciousness and understanding the widespread effects of patriarchal politics on women's personal lives was a critical first step in their work. These sung self-narrations played a crucial role in building this awareness among the general public before those activists undertook, through legal means, challenges to those patriarchal policies.

CHAPTER FOUR: FOR EVERYMAN: NATIONALISM, CITIZENSHIP, AND THE “SENSITIVE” MALE DURING THE VIETNAM WAR

In 1975, eight years after the introduction of the singer-songwriter movement’s personal messages to the folk market, critic Robert Hilburn proposed a radical idea to help the Democratic party win the upcoming presidential elections, writing, “If Sen. Edward Kennedy remains firm in his decision not to run and Ronald Reagan begins winning some key primaries, the Democrats—desperate for someone with enormous popular appeal and high visibility—may have only one alternative next summer: nominate John Denver for President.”¹ Hilburn cites Denver’s optimism and popularity: “Denver has become the singer-songwriter who most consistently speaks of America in the way millions would like to think of it—especially in a period when the nation is about to celebrate its 200th birthday.”² With Nixon’s resignation post-Watergate, rising inflation, and a deflated economy carrying the country into its bicentenary, many Americans felt hopelessly disappointed by their nation. In the face of these crises, citizens created ways to celebrate their nation by locating American culture in a distant, idyllic folk past and, similarly, by elevating the idea of individual autonomy, allowing for American national pride separate from the government’s decisions. Denver’s music, which romanticized America’s roots in its majestic landscape, provided such a nostalgic alternative.

Not all critics viewed Denver as having this political and national importance. Robert Christgau, for example, compared Denver’s image to “the guy who tried to sell you Earth Shoes

¹ Robert Hilburn, “A Troubadour of and for the People,” *Los Angeles Times*, 30 November 1975, U1.

² Ibid.

last week,” in the *Village Voice*, suggesting that his music lacked substance, like the claims of the back-to-the-earth footwear company.³ Hilburn even described Denver’s music as “too sugar-coated for some,” admitting that many of his songs contained a naïve quality.

The caricature accompanying Hilburn’s article, however, uses iconography of the anti-war movement, illustrating Denver’s subversive power. Dressed as Uncle Sam, Denver stands barefoot, atop the Rocky Mountains, wearing his signature round-frame glasses. But unlike Uncle Sam, the propagandistic figure that calls young American men to fight for their country, Denver wields a guitar and a peace sign. As popular as Denver was, this picture was not the face of Nixon’s conservative supporters, known as the “silent majority.” This conservative base endorsed the imperialist foreign policies that prompted the United States’ involvement in the Vietnam War and chauvinistically celebrated their nation’s dominance, attitudes that loomed large in American politics even after Nixon resigned from office.⁴ Denver as a presidential candidate, then, symbolized a United States free of the politics and politicians that motivated the military conflict in Vietnam.

Hilburn’s description of Denver, combining electoral politics, American nationalism, and opposition to military conflicts, paints an image of the role of the singer-songwriter in American social life that is distinctly different from the scholarly accounts previously discussed in this dissertation, which framed the singer-songwriter movement as an apolitical diversion from the

³ Robert Christgau, “Stevie Wonder Is a Fool,” *Village Voice*, 16 December 1974, accessed 19 September 2014, <http://www.robertchristgau.com/xg/rock/wonder-74.php>. Earth Shoes were designed by Danish yoga instructor Anne Kalsø, who introduced the product in the United States coinciding with the first Earth Day in April 1970; today the company claims to have started the “casual revolution” among young people in the U.S. and links their product to wellness philosophies, saying today that the Earth Shoe comes from “a belief that wellness could be part of everyone’s daily existence”; see “Our Story” at <http://www.earthbrands.com/our-story>, accessed 9 February 2016.

⁴ Speech by Richard Nixon, 3 November 1969, published in *Richard Nixon: Speeches, Writings, and Documents*, ed. Rick Perlstein (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 189: “And so tonight—to you, the great silent majority of my fellow Americans—I ask for your support.”

socially-engaged music of the 1960s. In this light, Denver's portrayal as a presidential candidate, as an anti-Uncle Sam, and as the face of optimism and nationalistic nostalgia approaching the American bicentenary, raise questions about the political message of the singer-songwriter movement. Was the singer-songwriter's emphasis on individuality an outgrowth of 1970s narcissism, or a way to speak out against conservative and imperialist political agendas?

This chapter demonstrates how the singer-songwriter movement constructed alternatives to nationalist patriotism through appeals to democratic principles of autonomy. This staunch commitment to individuality—a marker of American identity—consequently constructed a new sense of connection to their nationality and notions of “American” music, conjuring nostalgic references to an idyllic and idealized American folk past. The first section considers wartime politics, demonstrating how attitudes of protestors and draft resisters framed individuality as a subversive position. I consider this narrative from a musical perspective through the wartime songs of Randy Newman, John Prine, and John Denver, followed by an analysis of Jesse Winchester, a U.S. singer-songwriter and draft resister who composed nostalgic personal ballads while in exile in Canada. The second section discusses the corrosion of trust in the U.S. military through an examination of expanding notions of masculinity in the 1970s. Case studies explore the music and critical reception of Neil Young, Jackson Browne, and Bill Withers as examples of “sensitive” male songwriters, demonstrating how their displays of vulnerability and emotion fractured the solidity of masculine dominance and control. Together these analyses illustrate how singer-songwriters created individual expressions that encapsulated the mistrust of the United States government and subverted status quo ideologies about the United States' policies abroad and at home.

The Vietnam War

American involvement in Vietnam began in the 1959, when Cold War anxieties motivated the United States to intervene in Vietnam's civil war: a struggle between communist North Vietnam, or Viet Cong led by President Ho Chi Minh, and democratic South Vietnam.⁵ The conflict in Vietnam stretches even farther back to the Indochina War—when communist forces fought for independence from France—which began after World War II and, in 1954, resulted in the formation of these separate Vietnamese states and in Cambodian and Laotian independence. Beginning with Truman's presidency and extending into Eisenhower's, the general population in the U.S. feared that South Vietnam's fall to northern communist rule would lead to successive rebellions and the spread of communism across the world.⁶ Still, citizens were hesitant about entering another war. Fear of the conflict escalated so significantly during the 1950s that John F. Kennedy ran for president on a platform ensuring that U.S. soldiers would stay out of Vietnam. Following Kennedy's assassination in 1963, Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson promised to maintain Kennedy's strategy in Vietnam.⁷ In 1965, however, Johnson sent 200,000 American soldiers to fight in Vietnam, with the intent to protect towns in South Vietnam from falling to Viet Cong invasion.⁸

Johnson's escalation led to the most violent period in the conflict, and the rise in casualties increased suspicion on the home front towards continued American involvement. The

⁵ The nations of North and South Vietnam were formed through the Geneva Convention in 1954, see Marilyn Young, *The Vietnam Wars, 1945–1990* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991), 38–42 and Lawrence, *The Vietnam War*, 48–53.

⁶ Young, *The Vietnam Wars*, 24–25; Mark Atwood Lawrence, *The Vietnam War: A Concise International History*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 37, 40–41.

⁷ Lyndon B. Johnson, "Peace Without Conquest," *Landmark Speeches on the Vietnam War*, ed. Gregory Allen Olson, (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2010), 44–52.

⁸ Lawrence, *The Vietnam War*, 87–88.

Tet Offensive in 1968, a series of surprise attacks on South Vietnam that resulted in high casualties among U.S. soldiers, raised concerns for United States civilians who were becoming increasingly horrified by the violence of combat and death tolls.⁹ General Westmoreland's response to these attacks was the systematic destruction of villages in South Vietnam suspected of aiding the Viet Cong through aerial napalm strikes and invasion by ground troops.¹⁰ American media coverage of the My Lai and My Khe massacres in 1969 revealed unsavory details about U.S. soldiers who raped and killed Vietnamese civilians.¹¹ This revelation repulsed those who opposed intervention in foreign countries, and further persuaded Americans who previously supported the war to doubt its efficacy.¹²

The rising death toll and news of the American atrocities committed in Vietnam coincided with Nixon's ascent to the Oval Office. His military strategy over the next seven years, which changed the emphasis of the war from ground combat to air strikes, was an attempt to appease disgruntled citizens while remaining involved in the war. Nixon ran for office in 1968 promising that he would remove U.S. troops from Vietnam.¹³ While Nixon did remove ground troops, he escalated the air war, resulting in the subsequent invasions of Cambodia and Laos in 1970 and 1971, respectively.¹⁴ The war continued throughout this expanded territory until the

⁹ Young, *The Vietnam Wars*, 217; Lawrence, *The Vietnam War*, 121–123, 125

¹⁰ Young, *The Vietnam Wars*, 222.

¹¹ “The My Lai Massacre,” *Time*, 28 November 1969; “The Massacre at My Lai,” *Life*, 5 December 1969, 36–45; Young, *The Vietnam Wars*, 243–244.

¹² Young, *The Vietnam Wars*, 225–226; Robert O. Self, *All In the Family: The Realignment of American Democracy Since the 1960s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012), 51. Young cites a Gallup poll conducted in November 1967 and after the Tet Offensive in 1968, showing that the number of Americans who believed the U.S. was making progress in Vietnam dropped from 50 percent to 33 percent.

¹³ Jeffrey Kimball, *Nixon's Vietnam War* (Lawrence: University of Kansas, 1998), 40.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 131–133.

U.S., North Vietnam, and South Vietnam signed the Paris Peace Accords in January of 1973, which resolved that the U.S. would end its direct military involvement by the end of that year. The capital city of Saigon fell to North Vietnam in April of 1975, officially ending the twenty-year civil conflict in Southeast Asia.¹⁵

Protest Music and the Vietnam War

Beginning in the early 1960s, the Vietnam War was a frequent subject for protest songs by topical songwriters in the folk revival and in psychedelic rock bands alike. These songs indexed the conflict through overt references to war and explicitly called listeners to object to the United States' military actions. Such songs also fostered communal identity, typical of the ethos of both the folk revival and the psychedelic counterculture, through group singing and festival environments. Musicologist Mark Clague and American studies scholar Michael J. Kramer both read this communal identity as a way for participants in rock culture to express a new form of citizenship, meaning the relationship between individuals and society.¹⁶ American youth who were part of this culture proclaimed their allegiance to a different society, alternative to the mainstream government that was fueling the United States military intervention in Vietnam. These protest songs articulated the values of this countercultural society that they chose to form.¹⁷

¹⁵ In *The Vietnam Wars*, Marilyn Young provides a full explanation of the conflict in addition to colonial history and the fifteen years after the war's aftermath. The collected edition *Making Sense of the Vietnam Wars: Local, National, and Transnational Perspectives*, ed. Marilyn Young (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008) sheds new light on the Paris Peace Accords.

¹⁶ Michael J. Kramer, *The Republic of Rock: Music and Citizenship in the Sixties Counterculture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 44–54; Mark Clague, "'This is America': Jimi Hendrix's Star Spangled Banner Journey as Psychedelic Citizenship," *Journal of the Society for American Music* 8, no. 4 (2014): 435–478.

¹⁷ Clague, "'This is America,'" 469–470.

Anti-war songs during the 1960s served two functions: to soothe mourning citizens with pacifist messages and also to incite outrage with U.S. involvement in Vietnam. In the folk revival, Pete Seeger's "Where Have All the Flowers Gone," a memorial he composed in 1955 to fallen soldiers during the Korean War, maintained its significance as American troops were sent into battle in 1965.¹⁸ The song had a palliative quality that simultaneously questioned the price of lives lost to combat while fighting with North Korea and later, Vietnam. Other songs took this pacifist stance, including Phil Ochs' "I Ain't Marching Anymore" (1965) and Joni Mitchell's "Fiddle and the Drum" (1969).¹⁹ Alternatively, some songwriters served as agitators, criticizing President Johnson's escalation of the war through vitriolic lyrics about the increase of U.S. troops in Vietnam. Tom Paxton's "Lyndon Johnson Told the Nation" (1965) condemned Johnson for going back on his promise to keep American lives out of Vietnam.²⁰ As news about the atrocities committed by U.S. soldiers against Vietnamese civilians broke in 1969, Paxton continued to express his disdain. His song "Jimmy Newman" (1969), written from the perspective of an injured soldier in a hospital who tried to wake the soldier in the neighboring hospital bed, only to find that his fellow soldier had died before getting to go home.²¹

Still other artists took issue with the United States' national draft policy, which continued through 1972. The draft policy cemented the cultural stance that American men were obligated to serve in the military, and the draft further illustrated racial and class-based inequities in

¹⁸ David King Dunaway, *How Can I Keep from Singing: The Ballad of Pete Seeger* (New York: Villard, 2008), 229–230. Dunaway traces the popularity of the song to the Kingston Trio's 1962 recording and subsequent performances on college campuses, where the song became a staple for college folk clubs.

¹⁹ Phil Ochs, *I Ain't Marching Anymore*, Elektra EKS-7287; "I Ain't Marching Anymore" was published in *Sing Out!* 16, no. 1, 3 and *Broadside* #54; Joni Mitchell, *Clouds*, Reprise RS6341; "Fiddle and Drum" was published in *Sing Out!* 19, no. 3, 1.

²⁰ Tom Paxton, *Ain't That News*, Elektra EKS-7298, 1965; "Lyndon Johnson Told the Nation" was published in *Sing Out!* 15, no. 6, 20 and *Broadside* #62.

²¹ Paxton recorded "Jimmy Newman" as a 7" single, Elektra EKS-45674, 1970.

American society, disproportionately affecting black, Latino, and working class citizens.²²

Psychedelic band Country Joe and the Fish, led by songwriter and guitarist Joe McDonald, wrote the “Feel Like I’m Fixin’ to Die Rag.”²³ The song took a sardonically gleeful melody and paired it with morbid lyrics about mortality in combat. In their landmark performance of the song at Woodstock Music and Arts Festival in 1969, McDonald opened the tune with a profane call and response cheer (known as “the Fish Cheer”), and this rally cry captured the communal and rebellious spirit of the counterculture. Many anti-war protests, particularly those led by students on college campuses, erupted in police violence at the end of the 1960s, the most shocking and memorable of which was the shooting of nine students at Kent State University in Ohio in 1969.²⁴ Rock super group Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young wrote the song “Ohio” to memorialize those lost while also ultimately condemning police brutality.²⁵

Psychedelic artists utilized sonic distortion to critique conservative values, diverting from the topical song tradition. Marvin Gaye’s song “What’s Going On?” (1971) critiqued police brutality and the draft, layering in noise to echo the songs message of confusion and despair

²² Robert O. Self, *All in the Family*, 51, 72. Self explains that, while volunteers made up 60% of the military, Johnson’s increase in draft calls in 1965 to three times the men drafted in the previous year made the subject a heated debate throughout the war; starting in 1965, Johnson set draft calls at 35,000 per month. Still, of the 30,000,000 draft age men in the United States, only 10 percent of them served in the Vietnam War. African American and Latino men were drafted in rates double the proportion in society, and furthermore, people of color were disproportionately represented on draft boards. Both the Black Panthers and the Chicano movement staged mass protests of the military draft, including the Chicano moratorium on 29 August 1970, in which 30,000 protestors marched in East Los Angeles in solidarity against the draft; see Lorena Oropeza, *¡Raza, Sí! ¡Guerra No!: Chicano Protest and Patriotism during the Vietnam War Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 145–182.

²³ Country Joe and the Fish, *I-Feel-Like-I’m-Fixin’-To-Die*, Vanguard VDS-79226; the song was published in *Sing Out!* 16, no. 3, 20.

²⁴ John Kifner, “Students Killed by Troops,” *Special Issue to the New York Times*, 5 May 1970, 1; “Kent State Riot; Four Killed,” *Chicago Tribune*, 5 May 1970, 1; “Four Students Slain,” *Los Angeles Times*, 5 May 1970, 1; also see Tom Wells, *The War Within: America’s Battle Over Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994). Four students, of the nine shot, were fatally wounded.

²⁵ David Browne, *Fire and Rain: The Beatles, James Taylor, Simon & Garfunkel, CSNY, and the Lost Story of 1970* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2011), 183-186.

expressed by civil rights activists.²⁶ Jimi Hendrix's performance of "The Star Spangled Banner" at the Woodstock Music and Arts Festival in 1969 questioned American values and expressed shock and dismay over lives lost through the war through a masterful manipulation of guitar timbres.²⁷ Popularly understood as a "powerful symbol of rock's potential for protest," musicologist Mark Clague analyzed Hendrix's interpretation of the national anthem—imbued with distortion, improvisation, quotation, and the aesthetic of a psychedelic jam session—as a way for Hendrix to create a collective identity for the counter-culture as a community separate from the United States, and with its own anthem.²⁸

The war continued for the next four years, but little research has been done on continuing musical responses to Vietnam during the rest of Nixon's presidency. During this time, the singer-songwriter movement developed an individualist musical aesthetic, distinct from the communal, nation-building project of the counterculture. The elevated sense of individuality, apparent in their proclamations of self, continued to articulate new attitudes towards their nation and to depict an intense skepticism that underlined their critiques of the American government.²⁹

Anti-War Protests in the 1970s

Nixon's program of "Vietnamization"—a plan to make the South Vietnamese armies more self-sufficient—subsequently extended the war into neighboring countries and expanded the reach of the conflict in Southeast Asia. In April 1970, the war crossed over the border of

²⁶ Mark Anthony Neal, "Trouble Man: The Art and Politics of Marvin Gaye," *Western Journal of Black Studies* 22, Issue 4 (1998): 252–259.

²⁷ *Woodstock: 3 Days of Peace and Music*, dir. Michael Wadleigh, Warner Bros. Pictures, 2009.

²⁸ Mark Clague, "This Is America," 469.

²⁹ Alexander Petit, "The Skepticism of Joni Mitchell's 'Woodstock,'" *Canadian Literature* 220 (Spring 2014): 188.

Vietnam with increased conflict in Cambodia, Laos, and Thailand. Protestors rejected the invasion of more nations and the secretive escalation of violence administered through Nixon's air-war strategy. In response, throughout this period of the Nixon administration, anti-war protests adopted the individualist rhetoric of the 1970s in five distinct ways: 1) criticizing the "impersonal" technology that escalated the air war 2) offering individual testimony of war crimes committed by the U.S. before Congress 3) using the democratic principle of the vote to empower individual voters to take a stand against the U.S. government 4) opposing the war as a symbol of American imperialism and 5) refusing to offer their lives in military service. The singer-songwriter movement reflected this rhetoric through its autobiographical story telling, anti-technological discourses surrounding its acoustic style, and the elevation of the individual in songwriting and performance practices.

As much as Nixon's strategy seemed to allow Vietnam a chance to become self-sufficient, one particularly controversial aspect of Nixon's doctrine remained his glorification of U.S. intervention in global conflicts. An exclusive interview with journalist C.L. Sulzberger in the *New York Times* brought Nixon's foreign policies to light in 1970. Nixon viewed U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia as a moral imperative based on the nation's role as a global superpower. From Nixon's perspective, America would be compelled to intervene in global conflicts as long as the country remained in such a position, stating, "The fact of the matter is that for the next 25 years the United States is destined to play this superpower role as both an economic and a nuclear giant. We just have to do this. We cannot dodge our responsibilities."³⁰ Nixon even took the liberty of saying that other countries should be grateful for U.S. involvement, explaining, "If I lived in another country that wanted to be sure and retain its right

³⁰ C.L. Sulzberger, "Excerpt from Interview Granted by President Nixon on Foreign Affairs," *New York Times*, 10 March 1970, 14.

to self-determination, I would say: ‘Thank God that the United States exists at this moment of history.’³¹ Three weeks following this interview, Nixon authorized the military to invade Cambodia, and the following year commanded the invasion of Laos. Nixon’s ability to convince the American people that the war was ending in the midst of his militaristic escalation of the war relied on his air-war strategy, which minimized American casualties and therefore obscured the dramatic increase of civilian deaths in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia.

The invasion of more countries incited protestors to fight against U.S. foreign intervention writ large, viewing the Vietnam War as a symbol for the broader forces of American imperialism. Protestors insisted that these imperialist policies denied the sovereignty of other nations, impeding Vietnam’s ability to self-govern. Pacifist Claire E. Gorfinkel, a member of the American Friends Services Committee, explained that opposition to the Vietnam War warranted objecting to the U.S. entire foreign policy:

The focus of our Peace Education program is militarism: the relationships between weapons developments, the economy, and militaristic thinking, and our domestic and foreign policy. While the war in Southeast Asia is clearly not winding down, we feel the need to keep people alerted and actively working towards the end of American military intervention abroad.³²

By criticizing the methods used in the Vietnam War, activists were able to make broader assessments of U.S. foreign policy and fight against “American military intervention abroad.”

The argument for foreign nation’s sovereignty resonates with the desire for individual autonomy that was, at the time, echoing throughout U.S. cultural life.

³¹ Ibid. This quote was also reprinted in protest pamphlets, including “The Era of the Blue Machine: Laos 1969- ”, Folder 1, Vietnam War protest ephemera, MS-M034, Special Collections and Archives, The UC Irvine Libraries, Irvine, California, 23 June 2014.

³² Letter dated 24 November 1971 in “War Making by Machine,” Folder 1, Vietnam War protest ephemera, MS-M034, Special Collections and Archives, The UC Irvine Libraries, Irvine, California, 23 June 2014 (emphasis in original).

Anti-war organizations also attempted to bring the effects of Nixon's air war strategy into the public eye. Specific protests of Nixon's increased air warfare ballooned in California in 1971 as activists sought to expose the continuing violence against civilians, claiming, "The air war must be identified and made public property. The government can say the war is over and be believed because the people are too far away to know otherwise."³³ Activists throughout California distributed pamphlets that exposed the secrecy of aerial escalation, masked by Nixon's claims that Vietnamization reduced U.S. casualties in the war:

By a policy of silence, of deception, and of manipulation of news media, Richard Nixon has lulled the American people into believing that U.S. involvement in the war in Indochina is coming to an end. The truth is that behind the well-publicized withdrawal of American ground troops, the government is waging a vast air war against the people and land of Indochina. U.S. warplanes are dropping about 70,000 tons of bombs per month on targets in North and South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia.³⁴

Activists first needed to bring the air war out of secrecy, and then call individuals to dissent.

The rhetoric of those opposed to the air war highlighted individuality and personhood to draw others to their cause. For example, those opposed to air war foregrounded the impersonal technology that greatly increased civilian casualties. "The air war relies heavily on an impersonal, deadly technology, indiscriminate in its targets," claimed opponents of air war.³⁵ Authors further warned of the destructive consequences of dropping bombs at such great distance:

Foot soldiers are being replaced with machines that fly at thirty thousand feet. The machines are hard to hit and can each levy more simple destruction than a division of marines. Most of the functions of the machines are automated and

³³ "Air War Vote is Happening," Folder 1, Vietnam War protest ephemera, MS-M034, Special Collections and Archives, The UC Irvine Libraries, Irvine, California, 23 June 2014.

³⁴ Loc cit.

³⁵ Loc cit.

some have eliminated the use of humans altogether...This allows Americans to stay a good distance from the danger and step further into the war.³⁶

Through the automated technology and “impersonal” nature of air war, soldiers and military leaders downplayed the increase in civilians killed through bombings. The personal narratives of singer-songwriters, as well as the anti-technological discourses surrounding their acoustic musical style, presented a powerful antidote to the increasing fear of the impersonal technology used in the war.

Finally, protestors against the air war were determined to let American citizens express their individual dissent through a vote to end the war. Activists in California formed a coalition against the air war in 1971, collecting signatures via petition to place the issue on the state ballot, which would allow citizens of the state to vote against California’s tax dollars contributing to the Vietnam War. The language of the petition emphasized voicing individual opinions in the face of the public reputation of the war, saying, “The air war vote gives the voters of California their first chance to voice their own opinions about the air war in Southeast Asia.”³⁷ This statement positioned the democratic process as a way to be individual, subverting the spirit of patriotic and militaristic conformity. Such an elevation of individuality is celebrated throughout the singer-songwriter movement, exemplifying how the rhetoric of protest in the 1970s reflected the rise in this musical style.

Military members could attest to the horrors of war through their lived experience, and in the 1970s, veterans of the war convincingly spoke out against the war’s atrocities by offering personal stories and showing the impact of the war on their own bodies. The Vietnam Veterans

³⁶ “Air War Vote,” Folder 1, Vietnam War protest ephemera, MS-M034, Special Collections and Archives, The UC Irvine Libraries, Irvine, California, 23 June 2014.

³⁷ “Air War Vote Petition” (1972) Folder 1, Vietnam War protest ephemera, MS-M034, Special Collections and Archives, The UC Irvine Libraries, Irvine, California, 23 June 2014.

Against the War (VVAW) became the activist organization most prominent in the anti-war movement in the years following the Tet Offensive. According to historian Andrew Hunt, VVAW grew out of the Spring Mobilization to End War in Vietnam, a rally held in Central Park in New York City in 1967.³⁸ The organization rapidly expanded to include chapters in every state, where veterans could find a community of soldiers who, after their experiences in Southeast Asia, objected to the war. Most members of the organization, according to Hunt, came from working-class families and only espoused a radical stance against the war as a result of their military service.³⁹ Such statistics on the organization's demographics speak to the way that personal knowledge of the war could powerfully refashion a person's position.

VVAW activists took advantage of this power and drew on the individual testimonies of 150 honorably discharged soldiers to explain their opposition to the war.⁴⁰ Naval officer John Kerry even appeared before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee during trials about U.S. war crimes in 1971. Kerry was a highly decorated soldier, receiving both the Silver Star and Purple Heart, and also had been wounded three times during his service. His upper-class status and Yale education, however, posed less of a threat to conservative voices who viewed members of the anti-war movement as licentious members of the counterculture.⁴¹ In his testimony, Kerry cited

³⁸ Andrew Hunt, *The Turning: A History of Vietnam Veterans Against the War* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 6; Hunt notes that the name of the organization came from veterans at the rally who coincidentally organized around one person who brought a banner reading "Vietnam Veterans Against the War!," 10.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 2.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 109.

⁴¹ Frank Mankiewicz and Tom Braden, "Vets to Reveal U.S. Wrongs," *Washington Post*, 13 April 1971; Robert O. Self, *All in the Family*, 67–68; Fred Halstead, *Out Now!: A Participant's Account of the American Movement Against the Vietnam War* (New York: Monad Press, 1978), 2; George C. Wilson, "Viet Veteran Turns Protestor," *Washington Post*, 18 April 1971, A8. Wilson states that "The leader of the newest Vietnam War protest group can hardly be called a 'pusillanimous pussyfooter,' 'nattering nabob' or 'misfit.'" In *The War Within* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 495; Wells notes that fellow veterans derided Kerry, sensing that he was only using the protests to bolster his political career. A study of the VVAW dissenters conducted by Hamid Mowlana and Paul H. Geffert in June 1971 revealed that the demographics of the protestors comprised of 48% working class men

the crimes committed by the U.S. against civilians in Vietnam, the increased civilian death toll through aerial combat, and the lack of resources for injured veterans as reasons for the U.S. to end the war, and further criticized the Nixon administration for extending the conflict. Joining Kerry's testimony, Senator Mark Hatfield read the testimony of the 150 other dissenting veterans into the Congressional Record.⁴² The individual witness of these veterans stood as a profound act of protest against the United States military system. Like the testimonies of the VVAW, the singer-songwriter movements value of personal story telling encouraged citizens to focus on the self as a way to subvert the nationalist rhetoric of wartime patriotism.

Anti-War Rhetoric in Singer-Songwriter Compositions

The combination of these anti-war efforts transformed the image of the soldier in American cultural life from a symbol of patriotic protector into one of neo-imperialism.⁴³ Singer-songwriters drew on this new perspective of nationalism in songs that express ambivalent attitudes towards their country and critiqued the Nixon administration's imperialist foreign policies. Songs by Randy Newman, John Prine, and John Denver express this mode of dissent against the Vietnam War and its supporters, thereby crafting a complicated narrative position with regard to their native home. Their songs utilize humor, caricature, and sarcasm to make poignant critiques of U.S. intervention abroad.

Released on his 1971 self-titled debut album, John Prine's "Your Flag Decal Won't Get You Into Heaven Anymore" questions American exceptionalism in the face of Nixon's

and that 65% of the dissenting soldiers had enlisted; see John Kerry and Vietnam Veterans Against the War, *The New Soldier* (New York: MacMillan, 1971), 172–174.

⁴² John Kerry and Vietnam Veterans Against the War, *The New Soldier*, 10; this book contains Kerry's entire speech, excerpts from the testimonies read by Senator Hatfield, and pictures from the protest on the Washington Mall.

⁴³ Robert O. Self, *All in the Family*, 69.

comments glorifying U.S. foreign policy. The song's protagonist displays his patriotism through a hyperbolic abundance of American flag stickers on his automobile, which eventually cover his windshield causing him to drive his car into a tree. In the final chorus, St. Peter at the gates of heaven turns the protagonist away, singing the chorus of the song:

“Your Flag Decal Won’t Get You Into Heaven Anymore”—by John Prine

Chorus

But your flag decal won’t get you into heaven any more.
They’re already overcrowded from your dirty little war.
Now Jesus don’t like killin’ no matter what the reason’s for,
And your flag decal won’t get you into heaven any more.

With this concluding twist in the song, wherein the protagonist is turned away from heaven due to overcrowding from the violence that his flag stickers endorsed, Prine criticizes conservative notions that connected Christianity, or the moral impulse fueling military intervention, and the United States’ foreign policy. As a country artist and singer-songwriter, Prine uses stylistic traits of the country genre to critique the ideologies of its audience. Prine set the chorus to a cheerful melody, accompanied by a typical country boom-chuck guitar. The juxtaposition of critical lyrics and the sincerity of his country delivery create a sense of irony between Prine’s anti-imperialist political position and the beliefs of the song’s protagonist, in line with those of the typical country music listener.⁴⁴

Randy Newman’s “Political Science,” released on *Sail Away* in 1973, lampoons Nixon’s administration, criticizing the Americanization of other nations and the use of nuclear weapons, a pervasive fear during the Cold War era. Newman’s songwriting style emulates the first-person narratives apparent throughout the singer-songwriter movement, but each of Newman’s songs

⁴⁴ This ambivalent relationship with the values of country music is consistent with Travis Stimeling’s analysis of the progressive country scene in Austin, Texas during the 1970s in *Cosmic Cowboys and New Hicks: The Countercultural Sounds of Austin’s Progressive Country Music Scene* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 4.

takes on the persona of a new character, a trait that would later secure Newman's easy transition into film scoring later in his career. In "Political Science," Newman comically takes on a hawkish conservative persona with Kissinger-like views on foreign policy.⁴⁵ The caricature proposes to solve international negative attitudes towards the United States by "dropping the big one" to wipe out any dissenters (lines 1–4). In the second verse, Newman echoes Nixon's attitudes towards the moral imperative of foreign intervention, and wonders why other nations are not more grateful for the United States' help (lines 5–8). Newman also exposes American intolerance of difference (lines 9–11), as the protagonist decides to spare Australia from nuclear destruction, deeming the continent similar enough to American tastes (lines 15–16) and not wanting to harm their unique wildlife (line 14). Newman's caricature concludes, "They all hate us anyhow, so let's drop the big one now."

⁴⁵ Kevin Courier discusses the continuing resonance of "Political Science" during the Iraq War in *Randy Newman's American Dreams* (ECW Press), 135.

“Political Science”—Randy Newman

1	<i>Verse 1</i> No one likes us, I don't know why We may not be perfect but heaven knows we try But all around, even our old friends put us down Let's drop the big one and see what happens	Sarcastic proposal to end anti-American attitudes
5	<i>Verse 2</i> We give them money, but are they grateful? No, they're spiteful, and they're hateful They don't respect us, so let's surprise them We'll drop the big one and pulverize 'em	Echoes Nixon's imperialist politics
10	<i>Verse 3</i> Asia's crowded, and Europe's too old Africa is far too hot, and Canada's too cold And South America stole our name Let's drop the big one; There'll be no one left to blame us	Intolerance of difference
15	<i>Bridge</i> We'll save Australia Don't wanna hurt no kangaroo We'll build an all-American amusement park there They got surfen', too	Spares Australia for its American tastes

The sarcastic function, and eerie quality, of this song comes from the way Newman pairs conservative neo-imperialist statements with music that sounds like an early twentieth-century Tin Pan Alley song.⁴⁶ The jovial cadence that accompanies the words “pulverize ‘em” in line 8, for example, creates distance between Newman as author of the song and the character he is conveying. This alienating strategy, which has spurred comparisons to German agitprop playwright Bertolt Brecht, allows Newman to create an Americana style that critiques American

⁴⁶ Peter Winkler, “Randy Newman’s Americana,” in *Popular Music: Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies*, ed. Simon Frith (New York: Routledge, 2004), 371–372.

nationalism.⁴⁷ This distance further critiques combat strategies in war by enacting the alienation of aerial combat. By distancing himself from the American government, Newman celebrates his rights as an American individual.

John Denver, an artist known for exactly the type of saccharine Americana Newman was working against, in fact, had a dissenting side as well. Alongside his hit songs like “Leaving on a Jet Plane” and “Rocky Mountain High,” Denver covered several topical songs by Tom Paxton, including “Whose Garden Was This?,” a song about pollution as the title track of his 1970 album, and “Jimmy Newman,” Paxton’s song about a soldier injured in Vietnam on *Take Me to Tomorrow* (1970).⁴⁸ Denver included a third Paxton cover, “The Ballad of Spiro Agnew” on *Rhymes and Reasons*, his debut album in 1969. Agnew, Nixon’s Vice-President, was well known for publicly criticizing anti-war protesters as “pusillanimous pussyfooters,” gendered language that criticized protestors for lacking the masculine courage required of soldiers.⁴⁹ The short ballad contains a single line: “I’ll sing you a song of Spiro Agnew and all the things that he’s done...” On Denver’s recording, the line is followed by five seconds of silence. Three tracks later on the album, Denver includes a contrafact of Paxton’s ballad titled “The Ballad of Richard Nixon.” This track removes the introductory line, and only contains seven seconds of silence. In combination, the tracks state that when it comes to the policies of Nixon’s administration, there is nothing to say. Denver’s literal silence is not the evasion of political topics, but the exasperated expression of his cultural milieu.

⁴⁷ William Farina, *The German Cabaret Legacy in American Popular Music* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2013), 173–175.

⁴⁸ John Denver’s “Leaving on a Jet Plane” was made famous by Peter, Paul, and Mary, *Album 1700*, Warner Bros. W 1700, 1967.

⁴⁹ Douglas Schoen, *The Nixon Effect: How His Presidency has Changed American Politics* (New York: Encounter Books, 2016), 102.

Draft Resisters: Jesse Winchester in Exile

The final aspect of individuality in anti-war rhetoric during the 1970s was found in draft resisters' refusal to fight in a war they considered immoral despite their civic obligation. In 1967, the first page of the March/April edition of *Sing Out!* magazine published two thoughts that demonstrate this juxtaposition of a draft resister's individuality with the American military machine. The first quote was from Muhammad Ali, the American heavyweight-boxing champion who brought the draft into public debate when he refused to report to the draft board and was subsequently denied his boxing license in every state.⁵⁰ *Sing Out!* quoted Ali stating, "I don't have to be what you want me to be. I'm free to be what I want to be."⁵¹ Following this quote, *Sing Out!* printed a vignette of President Lyndon B. Johnson from the *New York Post*, reading:

At the conclusion of a ceremony during President Johnson's recent tour of military bases, the President walked off to a group of waiting helicopters and was about to board one when a Marine Colonel caught his attention. "Mr. President," the colonel said, "this is not your helicopter. Yours is over there." "Son," the President replied, "they're ALL my helicopters."⁵²

Johnson's sense of ownership gives an eerie glimpse into his sense of power, a revelation that America's resources, including civilians, were all subject to his will. Ali's unrelenting assertion of self was positioned as a revolt against such a thought. For men drafted to fight in a war, maintaining one's independent beliefs required this unrelenting assertion of self.

Between 1964 and 1973, an estimated 50,000 Americans who objected the Vietnam War fled north to Canada, creating what was considered the largest exodus of Americans in the

⁵⁰ Benjamin T. Harrison, "The Muhammad Ali Draft Case and Public Debate on the Vietnam War," *Peace Research* 33, no. 2 (2001): 69–86.

⁵¹ "Children," *Sing Out!* 18, no. 1, March/April 1968, 1.

⁵² *Ibid*; second quote attributed to the *New York Post*, 20 November 1967.

country's history.⁵³ Popularly known as “draft dodgers,” a derogatory assertion of the person's neglect of military responsibility, members of anti-war organizations derided weakness displayed by a “dodger's” evasive strategy. Joan Baez, for example, implored resisters to come back to the U.S. and face the problem head on.⁵⁴ In fact, historians Jessica Squires and John Hagan, interpret this migration as an act of activism, emphasizing the ways that draft resisters refused to offer their bodies to fight as a protest of the war.⁵⁵

The connection between the singer-songwriter movement's emphasis on individuality and the politics of draft resistance can be seen through the artistry of Jesse Winchester. Winchester received his draft notice in 1967 at the age of 23 and moved to Canada to avoid military service.⁵⁶ Ending up in Montreal, Winchester worked in French Canadian bands before embarking on a career as a solo musician, an experience that helped him learn a new language and adjust to life in the majority French-speaking region.⁵⁷ By early 1968, Winchester began performing solo in coffee shops and gained critical attention for his sensitive songwriting craft. After his performance at Montreal's Yellow Door coffeehouse in 1968, critic Dick MacDonald explained that watching Winchester's strong sense of self compelled him to find his own confidence, writing, “You find yourself searching for that elusive inner strength, discovering that

⁵³ John Hagan, *Northern Passage: American Vietnam War Resisters in Canada* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 3.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 111.

⁵⁵ Jessica Squires, *Building Sanctuary: The Movement to Support Vietnam War Resisters in Canada, 1965–1973* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2013), 8; John Hagan, *Northern Passage*, 99. Émigrés to Canada included men drafted to the war, spouses of draft resisters, and other women who left in solidarity for draft resisters opposition to the war; see Squires, 10.

⁵⁶ Juan Rodriguez, “Jesse Winchester's Trip to Canada,” *Rolling Stone*, 19 March 1970, accessed 10 June 2015, <http://www.jessewinchester.com/OtherPages/Interviews.htm>.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

the lamps he lights with his intensity to mean something to you, the individual.”⁵⁸ By exuding personal emotion, critics interpreted Winchester’s music as an indication of his individual resolve to stand up for what he believed in.

Robbie Robertson, a Canadian musician who toured with Bob Dylan’s backing band and the folk rock group known as the Band, discovered Winchester through a mutual friend.⁵⁹ Inspired by Winchester’s talent and understanding that he could not return to the U.S., Robertson connected Winchester to manager Albert Grossman and agreed to produce his first record.⁶⁰ Robertson made arrangements to have the album recorded in Canada, and Grossman released the album on his own Bearsville label with distribution in both the U.S. and Canada.⁶¹

Winchester’s status as a conscientious objector shaded the typical imagery of American rural life found in the songs on his debut album, *Jesse Winchester* (1970), with notions of exile, loss, and nostalgia. Winchester incorporated confessional lyrics with American folk themes. The musical texture sealed Winchester’s alliance with the Band. In fact, Robertson played guitar on the album and brought on fellow band mate Levon Helm to assist on drums and mandolin. *Chicago Tribune* critic Lynn Van Matre identified the similarities in the Americana imagery on Winchester’s album and The Band’s *Music from Big Pink* (1968). However, van Matre specified

⁵⁸ Dick MacDonald, “An Accurate Picture from Inside His Head,” *Montreal Star*, 1 June 1968, 10.

⁵⁹ Jon Pareles, “Jesse Winchester, Writer and Singer of Thoughtful Songs, Dies at 69,” *New York Times*, 11 April 2014, accessed on 2 July 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/12/arts/music/jesse-winchester-singer-songwriter-dies-at-69.html?_r=0.

⁶⁰ David Browne, “Jesse Winchester Dead at 69, Singer Became Anti-War Icon,” *rollingstone.com*, 11 April 2014, accessed 2 July 2015, <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/jesse-winchester-dead-at-69-singer-songwriter-became-anti-war-icon-20140411>. Grossman was also the manager for the Band, Bob Dylan, and Peter, Paul, and Mary.

⁶¹ Jesse Winchester, *Jesse Winchester*, Ampex, A-10104, 1970; distributed in the United States by Bearsville Records, BR 2045, 1970.

that because Winchester sings alone, “The effect seems more personal and heartfelt.”⁶²

Winchester’s personal stories of loss had an emotional effect on the listener. Dick MacDonald, writing for the *Montreal Star*, wrote, “Winchester is a sensitive person and his writing, as a result, breathes of sensitivity, stirring sensitive chords in the listener... There is this feel of honest depth, of understatement, understanding, communication. And unashamedly comes a tightness in the throat, a blurry eye,” conveying the sympathy that Winchester’s narratives evoked in his listeners.⁶³

One of Winchester’s standout songs from his first album, “Brand New Tennessee Waltz,” illustrates his signature blend of personal narrative and generalized folk expression. Through the verses, Winchester discloses his lost relationship after leaving Tennessee (presumably for Canada) and his subsequent disillusioned view of love (lines 3 and 6). Compared to the emotion and personal narrative found in the verses, the chorus is surprisingly light-hearted, with the line “literally waltzing on air” (line 12) and becomes more generic by removing the personal pronouns present in the verses.

⁶² Lynn Van Matre, “Jesse Winchester Captures Fresh Bread Mystique,” *Chicago Tribune*, 26 April 1970, F3.

⁶³ Dick MacDonald, “An Accurate Picture from Inside His Head,” *Montreal Star*, 1 June 1968, 10.

“The Brand New Tennessee Waltz”—by Jesse Winchester

Verse 1
1 Oh my, but you have a pretty face
You favor a girl that *I* knew
I imagine that she’s still in Tennessee
And by God, *I* should be there too
5 *I’ve* a sadness that’s too sad to be true

Verse 2
But *I* left Tennessee, in a hurry, dear
The same way that *I’m* leaving you
Because love is mainly just memories
And everyone’s got him a few
10 So when *I’m* gone, *I’ll* be glad to love you

Chorus
At the brand new Tennessee Waltz
You were literally waltzing on air
At the brand new, oh, Tennessee Waltz
It’s just no telling who will be there

←
←
←
←

Point to the specificity of relationship and Winchester’s personal experience

General lyrics with little connection to Winchester’s story; dropped first-person pronouns

Winchester’s combination of confessional lyrics and Americana created a unique sense of American identity. Through his personal quality, he asserted an individual moral stance. Placed alongside topics of folk identity, Winchester insisted that his autonomy was a way to express the American ideal of freedom even in the face of the draft, a government system that denied men free choice during the Vietnam War.

The song becomes an even stronger marker of Winchester’s political stance when considered as a reconceptualization of the country standard “Tennessee Waltz.” Winchester’s lyrics and arrangement establish the song as an alternative to the sound of mainstream country music, exemplified by “Tennessee Waltz.” This song had occupied the borders between country and pop since its inception. First recorded by its songwriter and Nashville-based Western swing leader Pee Wee King 1946, “Tennessee Waltz” became a hit country song. When pop singer Patti Page recorded the tune in 1950, the song soared on pop charts and also earned Page

recognition in country spheres. In 1963, Patsy Cline recorded “Tennessee Waltz” in the style of the famous “Nashville Sound,” which included such sonic signifiers as lavish orchestral strings and smooth backup vocals, all pop-elements that had become the signature sound of the commercial country industry in the 1960s.⁶⁴ Tennessee adopted the tune as their new state song in 1969, shortly after Winchester fled the U.S., a decision that reveals how the state used country music to model its identity. The intertextual references to a song that had become the emblem for his home state show Winchester dealing with the loss of his homeland even more than his lost relationship. This reading is also apparent in the song’s musical arrangement described in Table 4.1, a country rock alternative to the commercial sounds emerging in Nashville. Instead of the smooth orchestrations of Nashville’s studio system, like the one’s found in Patsy Cline’s “Tennessee Waltz,” “The Brand New Tennessee Waltz” features guitar, mandolin, and fiddle, retaining the emphasis on Winchester’s voice typical of singer-songwriter arrangements. Winchester rejects the ideology of his home state and Red State conservatism by aligning his music with these styles.

Table 4.1: “Brand New Tennessee Waltz” (1970) by Jesse Winchester, arr. Robertson

<i>Time</i>	<i>Form</i>	<i>Lyrics</i>	<i>Arrangement</i>
0:00	Intro		Guitar, mandolin, and bass
0:11	Verse 1	“Oh my but you have a pretty face...”	Voice enters
0:34	Verse 2	“But I left Tennessee in a hurry...”	Fiddle enters
0:57	Chorus	“At the brand new...”	Back-up vocals join full texture
1:16	Verse 3	“When I leave...”	Guitar, mandolin, bass, and voice
1:40	Chorus	“At the brand new...”	Add backup vocals and fiddle
1:58	Verse 4	“So have all of your passionate violins...”	Guitar, mandolin, bass, voice, and fiddle
2:21	Chorus	“At the brand new...”	Add backup vocals
2:41	Instrumental verse—outro		Guitar, mandolin, bass, fiddle

⁶⁴ Jocelyn Neal, *Country Music: A Cultural and Stylistic History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 195; Diane Pecknold, *The Selling Sound: The Rise of the Country Music Industry* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

Even though Winchester's songs focused heavily on American topics, Canada represented a nation that supported his moral stance, and he opted to become a Canadian citizen in 1973.⁶⁵ One year after receiving his citizenship, when given the opportunity to return to the U.S. under Ford's conditional amnesty policy, Winchester decided to remain in Montreal. The terms of Ford's conditional amnesty required military deserters and draft dodgers to work in public service for two years to gain "earned reentry" to the U.S.⁶⁶ Many émigrés found the policy demeaning, according to Neil and Joanna Gilbride's article in *Los Angeles Times*, "They don't want to put aside the careers they've painstakingly built in half a dozen years of exile to work in low-paying alternative service jobs."⁶⁷ When asked about Ford's policy, Winchester explained that he would not return to the U.S. if it meant that he had to admit a mistake, saying, "He [Ford] described it as though we had made some kind of mistake and were going to have to pay for it by working in civil service for a few years. I don't feel as though I made a mistake in the first place."⁶⁸ Winchester even went so far as to say that going back to the U.S., even after the withdrawal of American troops from South Vietnam, would weaken his stance towards the war. In an interview with Geraldo Rivera on *Good Night America* in 1974, Winchester explained, "I just can't do that. I read in some magazine the other day that 23,000 Vietnam veterans were

⁶⁵ David Browne, "Jesse Winchester Dead at 69, Singer Became Anti-War Icon," *Rolling Stone*, rollingstone.com, 11 April 2014, accessed 2 July 2015, <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/jesse-winchester-dead-at-69-singer-songwriter-became-anti-war-icon-20140411>.

⁶⁶ Neil and Joanna Gilbride, "Home Is Where the Market Is, Émigrés Find," *Los Angeles Times*, 29 September 1974, O20.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ James Litke, "Jesse Winchester: Still Third Down," *Rolling Stone*, September 1974, accessed 10 June 2015, available at <http://www.jessewinchester.com/OtherPages/Interviews.htm>.

permanently disabled, you know?...For people to find me a pitiable case is really kind of ridiculous in view of facts like that.”⁶⁹

Winchester also explained that his stance toward the war allowed him to view his new life in Canada as an accepting new homeland instead of longing for his old American life. In Juan Rodriguez’ piece on the English Pop scene in Montreal for *Billboard*, Rodriguez blatantly stated, “Winchester considers himself a Montrealer.”⁷⁰ Clearly disheartened by the continued questions about his history resisting the draft, Winchester continued, “Sometimes I wish people would forget I ever came from the States. Obviously you can’t escape your past, but it never crosses my mind that I came from America. I don’t spend my time thinking about it. You can’t live in a place like Montreal for six years and not grow to love it and be affected by it.”

Winchester forfeited career success by choosing to stay in Canada based on his continued moral opposition to the Vietnam War. Winchester was luckier than most exiled musicians during this time because his albums had distribution in the U.S.—a key market for musicians looking to make money off of album sales.⁷¹ However, without the ability to tour freely in the U.S. and promote his records, Winchester’s albums never reached the expected sales.⁷² In a grim article in the *Los Angeles Times* titled “Home Is Where the Market Is, Émigrés Find,” journalists Neil and Joanna Gilbride found that American artists, writers, and musicians who moved to Canada to evade the draft were faced with great difficulty navigating the complex U.S. entertainment industry while abroad. “For musicians, Canada is the boondocks; the only hope of making the

⁶⁹ Jesse Winchester, interview with Geraldo Rivera on “Good Night America,” accessed 10 June 2015, <http://www.jessewinchester.com/OtherPages/Interviews.htm>.

⁷⁰ Juan Rodriguez, “Montreal’s English Pop Community Starts to Make Some Sparks,” *Billboard*, 29 September 1973, C-18.

⁷¹ Neil and Joanna Gilbride, “Home Is Where the Market Is, Émigrés Find,” *Los Angeles Times*, 29 September 1974.

⁷² *Ibid.*

big time is to go to the United States,” explained Bill King, a resister who played organ for Janis Joplin until he moved to Canada in 1969.⁷³ King was unable to get his album distributed in the States. When President Ford announced his conditional amnesty plan, exiled artists were faced with a difficult decision: remain in Canada and pursue their art with the limited market restraints, or give up their artistic pursuits altogether to work low-paying public service jobs in the U.S. to earn their re-entry without serving their military duty. Winchester’s decision to stay in Canada represented a pragmatic view, finding the promise of low-paying jobs in the U.S. undesirable and unfulfilling, in addition to representing his strong moral stance against the war and dedication to his artistic craft.

The “Sensitive” Male

The changing attitudes towards the United States’ foreign and domestic policies, magnified by the conflict in Southeast Asia, further manifested in new representations of masculinity, and these changing notions of what it meant to “be a man” during the Vietnam War can be seen in the performance practices and confessional songwriting of the singer-songwriter movement. For instance, Warren Farrell’s *The Liberated Man* (1974) identified the “Ten Commandments of Masculinity.” The commandments explained that the culture of masculinity in the United States prohibited crying, demonstrations of emotion or vulnerability, and feelings of empathy, as evidenced in Spiro Agnew’s derision of anti-war protestors mentioned in the previous section.⁷⁴ But chief among these sins, in Farrell’s opinion, was to “commit any form of introspection.” By this regard, the introspective, vulnerable musings of male singer-songwriters

⁷³ Ibid

⁷⁴ Warren Farrell, *The Liberated Man* (New York: Random House, 1974).

presented a clear crisis of masculine behavior and direct transgression of the codes laid out for men by American society.

The reception of three artists, Neil Young, Jackson Browne, and Bill Withers, serve as case studies for how singer-songwriters influenced expanding conceptions of masculinity during the 1970s wherein depictions of emotional and vulnerable men replaced the idea of the stoic, dominant leader.⁷⁵ These performers embody the persona of the new “sensitive male”—a heteronormative figuration for a straight, usually white, man who is comfortable enough to embrace his feminine side.⁷⁶ This construction plays out in very different ways across these three case studies, demonstrating that the “sensitive” male singer-songwriter was a much broader category than their liberated female contemporaries. The label could be applied across racial and class boundaries. Yet in each case, artists mitigated the potentially damning critiques of effeminate behavior by retaining working-class signifiers alongside their emotionally emancipated ballads, revealing that the limits of men emoting in public could only be expanded so far for men in popular music.

Cultural attitudes towards masculinity in the United States shifted greatly during the Vietnam War and throughout the 1970s. As Bruce Schulman found surveying the decade, “Seventies men possessed the traits that earlier sociological surveys had labeled stereotypically female: interest in their own appearance, aware of the feelings of others, gentle, talkative.”⁷⁷

⁷⁵ See Mary Chapman and Glenn Hendler, *Sentimental Men: Masculinity and the Politics of Affect in American Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999). Chapman and Hendler describe the eighteenth-century perception of the sensitive male in the United States as a “male body feminized by affect” and during the nineteenth century, sentimentality was completely ensconced in notions of maternity carrying feminine associations throughout the early twentieth century.

⁷⁶ Judy Kutulas, “You Probably Think This Song is About You: Women’s Music in the 1970s,” in *Disco Divas: Women and Popular Culture in the 1970s*, ed. Sherrie A. Inness (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 178.

⁷⁷ Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture* (New York: The Free Press, 2001), 181.

These changes were results of the emotionally rich language and culture of the New Age and self-discovery trends pervading popular culture. The women's movement further loosened the restrictions on traditional gender performance. While women found the expectations of housework unbearable, men became similarly disgruntled by the pressures to perform professionally and physically, and with strong, silent, and stoic stature.⁷⁸ Many found feminist thought helpful for casting off the repressive effects of masculinity, such as Marc Fasteau in his book *The Male Machine*, although few acknowledged the gendered privilege experienced by even sensitive men in a patriarchal culture.⁷⁹ Finally, the gay liberation movement, introduced on the national stage through media coverage of the Stonewall riot in 1969, helped redefine heterosexual norms in the U.S. These new attitudes towards the stoic and strong masculine ideal were particularly prevalent among straight men in their twenties. According to Schulman, *Esquire* magazine deemed these men "the Postponing Generation," saying that this new demographic demanded time away from work for "personal growth," and viewed "being loving" as the most important personal quality, while ambition and effective leadership fell to the bottom of their priorities.⁸⁰

Alongside the politics of the military draft, this version of American masculinity asserted a new belief: that one did not need to fight to "be a man." The gendered construction of civic activity as a male space, as discussed in Chapter 3, warrants that rejecting civic participation subsequently eschews standards of masculine behavior. With the civic duty of military obligation at the forefront of political debates during the 1970s, objections to civic participation further

⁷⁸ Sally Robinson, "Men's Liberation, Men's Wounds: Emotion, Sexuality, and the Reconstruction of Masculinity in the 1970s," *Boy's Don't Cry*, 205.

⁷⁹ Marc Fasteau, *The Male Machine* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974).

⁸⁰ Schulman, *The Seventies*, 182; Gail Sheehy, "The Postponing Generation," *Esquire* (October 1979), 26–39.

questioned the stability of the traditional construction of masculinity in American culture.⁸¹ By embodying the traits of a “sensitive” man, male singer-songwriters helped to disrupt the public perception of masculine power.

The sensitive male musician has a long history predating the singer-songwriter movement, emerging throughout the medieval troubadour tradition, as composers of lieder, and in popular music, as crooners and ballad singers throughout the early twentieth century.⁸² Richard Smith’s history of gay men in popular music found that women were drawn to “unmanly men” like singer Johnnie Ray, whose performances broke societal norms for masculine behavior through his highly stylized and emotive vocal style on his song “Cry.”⁸³ Yet in the 1970s, progressive rock and psychedelia created a performance style that represented masculinity as strong, virile, and dominant. Simon Frith and Angela McRobbie coined this style as “cock rock,” embodied by such artists as Mick Jagger, Robert Plant, and Jimi Hendrix, whose performance practices “constantly seek to remind the audience of their prowess [and] their control.”⁸⁴ A significant aspect of Frith and McRobbie’s analysis relies on the physical stance and space occupied by male rock performers, which place the male body on display through “plunging shirts and tight trousers, [and] a visual emphasis on chest hair and genitals” all accompanied by music that is “loud, rhythmically insistent, built around techniques of arousal and climax, and the

⁸¹ Robert O. Self, *All in the Family*, 47.

⁸² Susan McClary, “Constructions of Subjectivity in Schubert’s Music,” *Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology*, ed. Philip Brett, Elizabeth Wood, and Gary C. Thomas (New York: Routledge, 1994), 205–233; Laura Tunbridge, *The Song Cycle* (New York: Cambridge University Press), 50.

⁸³ Richard Smith, “Housewives’ Choice: Female Fans and Unmanly Men,” in *The Popular Music Studies Reader*, Andy Bennet, Barry Shank, and Jason Toynbee, eds. (New York: Routledge, 2006), 378; also see Mitchell Morris’ analysis of Barry Manilow in *The Persistence of Sentiment: Popular Music in the 1970s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 88–117.

⁸⁴ Simon Frith and Angela McRobbie, *Taking Popular Music Seriously: Selected Essays* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2007), 43.

lyrics are assertive and arrogant.”⁸⁵ The men in the Los Angeles singer-songwriter movement created a masculine alternative to this dominant male persona.

Male singer-songwriters constructed this sensitive quality in four ways: through their lyrics, with a mellow acoustic style, by adopting a feminine physical stance, and with fashion that subverted conservative ideals. Compositions by male singer-songwriters took on the same themes as their female colleagues, focusing on themes of loneliness, the experience of solitude, confession of past mistakes, and romantic loss. The general topic of searching for one’s self creates an indecisive and questioning tone in the lyrics and vocal performance, which demonstrate that the male artist has lost control. Highlighting indecision disrupted the solidity of typical masculine strength built through control, casting artists as less dominant, docile even, in comparison to the hypermasculine presence of most rock artists. This is further emphasized in the musical style of singer-songwriter compositions, which bring out lyricism and melodic phrasing, rather than the rhythmic insistence Frith and McRobbie describe in progressive rock.

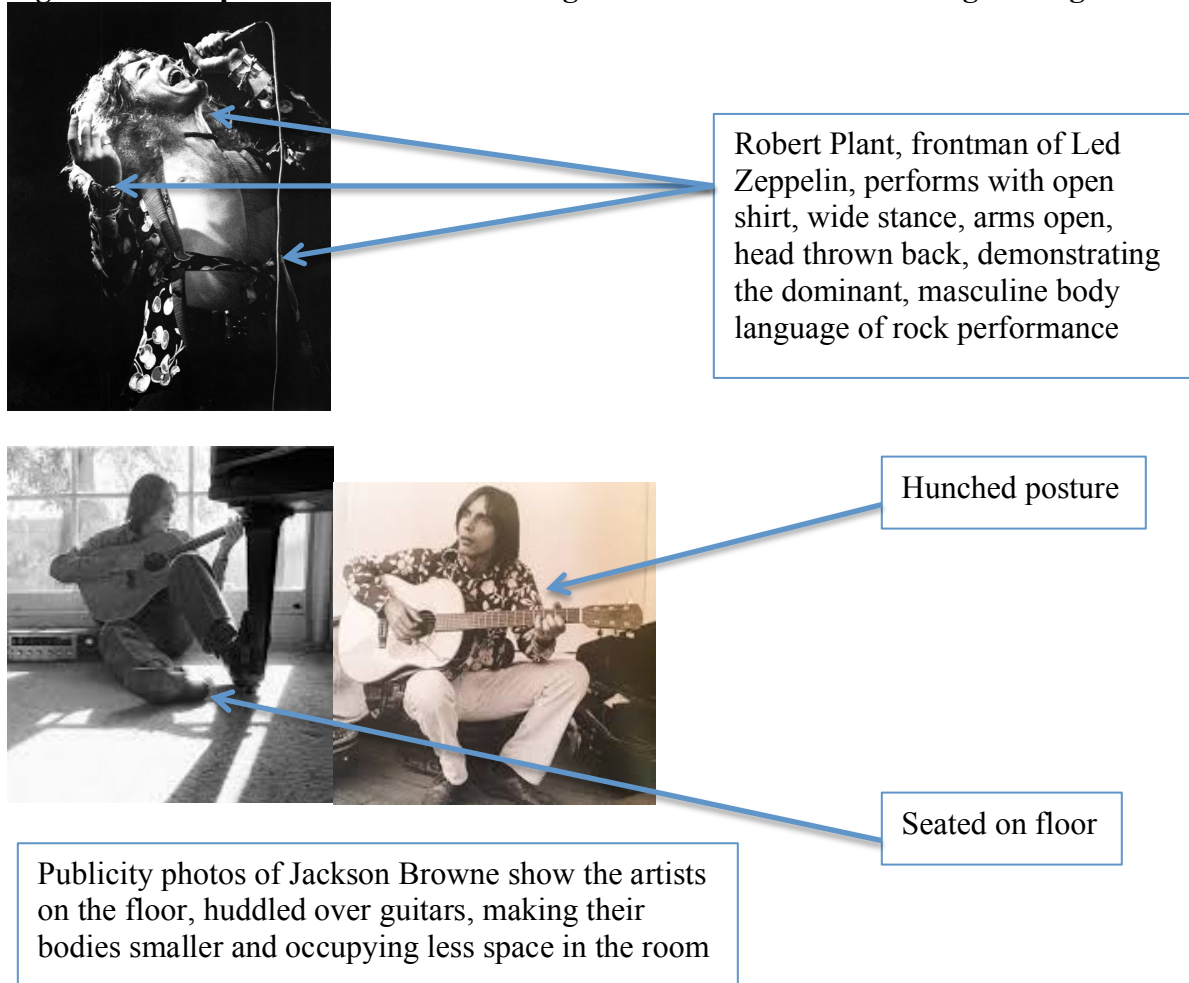
Male performers altered their physicality to conform to normative expectations of singer-songwriter performance. A singer-songwriter’s posture is typically huddled, an easy posture to assume when accompanying yourself on the guitar (Figure 4.1). By shrouding the body in this way, however, male artists made their bodies occupy less physical space on stage and in the venue, taking on an epicene position. Sociologist Mavis Bayton discusses this issue in her work on female rock performers, explaining that this posture is usually seen in female performers, resulting from the way women are socialized.⁸⁶ Male singer-songwriters also demonstrated the emotional content of their songs on stage, usually with closed eyes and intent facial expressions.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 43–44.

⁸⁶ Mavis Bayton, *Frock Rock: Women Performing Popular Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

These artists relinquished aspects of masculine power by adopting the values of the singer-songwriter movement: altering their posture, adopting a feminized stance, and emoting publicly.

Figure 4.1 Comparison of Posture in Progressive Rock Artists and Singer-Songwriters



Visually, white male singer-songwriters' fashion created an alternative expression of social values to the conservative mainstream look. These artists grew their hair long in a gesture that further signaled changing cultural attitudes toward masculinity. Artists including James Taylor, Jackson Browne, Neil Young, and John Denver each sported long manes, with a spectrum ranging from Young's grungy lack of grooming to Browne's well-maintained locks.⁸⁷

⁸⁷ Publicity photos of all three artists taken by Henry Diltz available at Morrisonhotelgallery.com; accessed 15 May 2015, <https://www.morrisonhotelgallery.com/photographer/default.aspx?photographerID=9>,

Hair that framed the face and fell past the shoulders contributed to the feminine quality in male singer-songwriters, particularly alongside the vulnerable lyrics, soft vocal production, and feminine stance. Read through the lens of musical genre, the long hairstyles sported by progressive rock artists when paired with other displays of mastery and dominance did not have the same effect on the gendered reception of their music. The idea of the “sensitive male” also had anti-war connotations during this time, and this hairstyle directly protested the close-trimmed hairstyles of military members, signaling a man’s rejection of conservative values (Figure 4.2).⁸⁸ Black male singer-songwriter Bill Withers also made a bold statement against mainstream white standards of beauty by wearing his hair natural. To wear one’s hair “natural” signaled a rejection of oppressive standards of beauty upheld by white America.⁸⁹ The other name for the “natural,” an “Afro,” indicated connection to African cultural heritage that emulated the black nationalist politics gaining traction in the Black Power movement.⁹⁰ Politician Jesse Jackson identified his Afro as a direct statement of his opposition to racial oppression, saying “I feel that the way I wore my hair was an expression of the rebellion of the time. It was our [the black community’s] first statement which was not easy to imitate.”⁹¹

<https://www.morrisonhotelgallery.com/photographer/default.aspx?photographerID=9&photographID=7721>, and <https://www.morrisonhotelgallery.com/photographer/default.aspx?photographerID=9&photographID=314>.

⁸⁸ Timothy Miller, *The Hippies and American Values* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2011), 116. Miller describes the countercultures aesthetic as “hair, profanity, and dirt.”

⁸⁹ Ayana Byrd and Lori Tharps, *Hair Story: Untagging the Roots of Black Hair in America* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2001); Ingrid Banks, *Hair Matters: Beauty, Power, and Black Women’s Consciousness* (New York: New York University Press, 2000).

⁹⁰ Ayana Byrd, *Hair Story*, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2001), 52.

⁹¹ *Ibid*, 53.

Figure 4.2: Illustration of Hairstyles of Military Members and Anti-War Protestors



Hard rock criticism during this time reveals the deep anxiety towards the emasculated sensitive songwriter. Legendary rock critic Lester Bangs' vicious review of James Taylor's *Sweet Baby James* (1970), titled "James Taylor Marked for Death," exposed the gendered biases of the hypermasculine rocker culture pervasive in the early 1970s.⁹² Bangs criticized the act of self-discovery when he bemoaned the themes in Taylor's lyrics, writing:

"If I hear one more Jesus-walking-the-boys-and-girls-down-a-Carolina-path-while-the-dilemma-of-existence-crashes-like-a-clab-of-hod-on-J.T.'s-shoulders song, I will drop everything...and hop the first Greyhound to Carolina for the single satisfaction of breaking off a bottle of Ripple...and twisting it into James Taylor's guts until he expires in a spasm of adenoidal poesy."⁹³

The violence towards Taylor in Bangs' poignant language makes explicit how his readership should feel when an artist violates the codes of rock masculinity.

Many in the rock scene considered male singer-songwriters too sensitive and effeminate to be labeled rock artists, reducing them to the style "soft rock."⁹⁴ Bangs' review further

⁹² Bang's review, originally published in *Who Put the Bomp?* in 1971, can be found in *Psychotic Reactions and Carburetor Dung: An Anthology*, ed. Greil Marcus (New York: Knopf, 1987), 53–81.

⁹³ Lester Bangs, "James Taylor Marked For Death," 71–72.

⁹⁴ Eric Weisbard, *Top 40 Democracy: The Rival Mainstreams of American Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 128. Weisbard describes soft rock as a part of the shift to Adult Contemporary radio formats that were marketed to a majority female, suburban, white audience.

demonstrates the gendered construction of sound, juxtaposing Taylor's quietly picked guitar with the combination of power chords and sexual lyrics demonstrated by the Troggs, the British rock group who popularly covered "Wild Thing" (1966).⁹⁵ Bangs wonders if any rock band will ever be able to compete with what he considers most valuable in the Troggs' music—the "raw, high-energy, electro-fertility stomps"—a description ripe with connections to technology, domination, and virile masculinity.⁹⁶ Yet other critics, as the following case studies reveal, demonstrate how the "sensitive" male persona communicated effectively within the 1970s culture of self-examination.

Neil Young's "Rock With a Gentle Touch"

Neil Young's bifurcated identity as both a hard rocker and singer-songwriter provides a case study in the way music articulated the gender politics of the era. One half of Young's music contains slashing electric guitar licks and incisive, overt social critiques, and the other half consists of sensitive ballads. While it is easy to see the social protest in Young's "Southern Man," a penetrating critique of racial inequality in the American south, his confessional songs packed an equally subversive tone. The clearest understanding of Neil Young as a sensitive male comes through in the reception of Young as a singer-songwriter rather than hard rocker. These analyses focus on his static lyrics, his boyish vocal register, and his acoustic performances, but also demonstrate how such qualities gave voice to a generation deeply skeptical of the American establishment.⁹⁷ Like the analyses presented in the previous chapter, the concept of vocality

⁹⁵ The Troggs, *Wild Thing*, Fontana Records MGF-27556, 1966.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 56.

⁹⁷ Regarding "Southern Man" see Bart Bull, "Review: Neil Young, *Life*," *Spin*, August 1987, 28 and Dominic Pulera, *Sharing the Dream: White Males in Multicultural America* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 249; Kevin Chong, *Neil Young Nation* (Berkeley: Greystone Books, 2005), 248–249 and William Echard, *Neil Young and the*

helps to explain how Young's voice articulated his interior perspective. The gendered understanding of vocal expression influenced the critical reception of his work in these feminized, but still political, ways.

Neil Young's persona as an introverted loner, a characteristic Young perfected through his introspective singer-songwriter ballads, helped him ascend to prominence as a spokesperson for a disillusioned generation in the 1970s. Musicologist William Echard notes that this persona emerged when Young was a member of the folk-rock band Buffalo Springfield and informed his decision to break off from the band and pursue a solo career.⁹⁸ Like the artists discussed in Chapter 2 including James Taylor and Carole King, Young's first solo venture after leaving Buffalo Springfield failed to sell. The album was critically diagnosed as over-orchestrated by music journalists Greg Kot and Robert Hilburn.⁹⁹ Young hit his stride as a solo performer on his next two albums, *Everybody Knows This is Nowhere* (1969) and *After the Goldrush* (1970). While Young's simultaneous involvement in the rock super-group Crosby Stills Nash & Young sealed his connection to rock culture at this time, on both of Young's solo albums, critical attention focused on his acoustic ballads. Critics characterized his work using feminized adjectives. For example, Robert Hilburn's review of *After the Goldrush* read, "Words like lovely,

Poetics of Energy (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 40 agree that songs with overtly political lyrics make up the minority of Young's output. It seems that the reception of Young as a political musician is based most concretely in the reception of Lynrd Skynrd's *Sweet Home Alabama*, which mentions Young's "Southern Man" in the second verse.

⁹⁸ William Echard, *Neil Young and the Poetics of Energy*, 9, 12–13.

⁹⁹ Greg Kot, "Review: Everybody Knows This is Nowhere," *Rolling Stone*, accessed 11 February 2016, <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/albumreviews/everybody-knows-this-is-nowhere-19990819>; Robert Hilburn, "Rock 'n' Roll With a Gentle Touch," *Los Angeles Times*, 29 September 1970, F13; Lynn van Matre, "Neil Young's Strange Vocal Gymnastics," *Chicago Tribune*, 18 October 1970, F4.

beautiful and romantic cannot often be applied to rock albums, but there haven't been many rock albums like Neil Young's *After the Goldrush*. It is a delicate, fragile jewel."¹⁰⁰

Yet the emotional ballads and fragile performance style on *After the Goldrush* form the crux of the political impact of Young's music in the context of 1970s culture. The album's title track, for example, a strophic ballad about moments in solitude, is a tribute to Young's sense of individual self. Full of imagery and metaphor, Young's lyrics hint at current issues without stating them outright, like a topical song typically would, thus requiring or inviting a more attentive interpretation from the listener. The song's first verse addresses pollution ("Look at Mother Nature on the run..."); the second verse comments on drug culture ("I was lyin' in a burned out basement..."); and the third verse conjures images of aerial combat in Vietnam ("I dreamed I saw the silver spaceships flyin' in the yellow haze of the sun..."). Even though Young indexes these political topics in his lyrics, his tone conveys a sense of inaction or stasis. His perspective voiced the generational disappointment with the failures of politics, and further admitted his own inability to effect those changes. In this sense, Young's lyrics are not apathetic, but make his own fallibility transparent.

Young's atypically high vocal register, also exemplified in "After the Goldrush," was a point of contestation for many listeners.¹⁰¹ Reviews that comment on Young's voice demonstrate how, as Cusick argues, the voice acts as a badge for the gender and sex of the singing body.¹⁰² Pete Johnson's found that "his (Young's) voice conveys his shy charm and adds to the emotional

¹⁰⁰ Robert Hilburn, "Rock 'n' Roll With a Gentle Touch," *Los Angeles Times*, 29 September 1970, F13.

¹⁰¹ Richard Williams, "Imperfect, Irresistible Neil Young," *Melody Maker*, 24 October 1970; Alan Lewis, "Personal Opinion," *Melody Maker*, 17 January 1970, 7; Langdon Winner, "Album Review: After the Goldrush," *Rolling Stone* (1970).

¹⁰² Suzanne Cusick, "On the Musical Performances of Gender and Sex," in *Audible Traces: Gender, Identity, and Music*, Elaine Barkin and Lydia Hamessley, eds. (Los Angeles: Carcciofoli, 1999), 29–31.

impact of the lyrics,” in his review of Young’s performance at the Troubadour in 1970.¹⁰³

Johnson characterized Young’s voice in feminine terms, claiming that he possessed a demure quality, which heightened his ability to emote. Lynn Van Matre, on the other hand, found the high tessitura on the songs on *After the Goldrush* a negative factor, writing, “*After the Gold Rush* really wasn’t worth the wait. On too many of the songs, Young sounds as if he’s trying to push his voice higher than normal, and the result sounds uncomfortably like a 10-year-old choir boy.”¹⁰⁴ Considering Young to sound pre-pubescent, critics undermined his masculinity.

However, his lyrics articulate the pensive quality of a fully-formed subject. By setting his compositions in keys where the melodies sat in this boyish register, Young subverted normative expectations of masculine vocality, showing that one can be fully man without a “manly” voice.

Robert Hilburn found Young’s voice to be an antidote to hypermasculine rock culture. In his review for the *Los Angeles Times* titled “Rock With a Gentle Touch,” Hilburn poses Young’s “soft, disarming voice” as “therapeutically gentle in this time of assault rock.”¹⁰⁵ Hilburn focused on Young’s themes of searching, longing, and reassurance found in songs like “Tell Me Why,” “Only Love Can Break Your Heart,” and “Don’t Let It Bring You Down.” When Hilburn addressed “Southern Man,” he noted the tune as an outlier on the album for its historical specificity. Hilburn managed still to connect the song with the larger themes of the album by highlighting Young’s sense of compassion, writing that the tone of the lyrics “seems more in sympathy for the oppressed than in hatred for the oppressor.”

¹⁰³ Pete Johnson, “Neil Young Featured in Show at Troubadour,” *Los Angeles Times*, 13 March 1969, F14.

¹⁰⁴ Lynn van Matre, “Neil Young’s Strange Vocal Gymnastics,” *Chicago Tribune* 18 October 1970, F4.

¹⁰⁵ Robert Hilburn, “Rock With a Gentle Touch,” *Los Angeles Times*, 29 September 1970, F13.

Many critics described the jarring split between Young's bifurcated musical identity as both singer-songwriter and hard rocker in live performances. Young divided his solo appearances into two halves, first playing an acoustic guitar, then switching to the electric.¹⁰⁶ In a particularly evocative review of one of Young's Los Angeles appearances in 1970 at the Santa Monica Civic Auditorium, *Los Angeles Times* critic John Mendelsohn describes the two halves of the concert in dichotomous gendered terms. In the first half of the concert, Mendelsohn noted Young's trembling voice as he sang his acoustic ballads, writing:

Nearly all of these are characterized by the gentle undercurrents of futility, desperations, and hopeless longing that pervade almost all of his work. His shy and quietly trembling half-voice (which more surrounds than actually hits a given note) renders each of them almost indescribably moving—in the presence of that awkward but perfect voice one can't help but realize that Young is singer of real, rather than vicarious, pain.¹⁰⁷

Mendelsohn deemed Young's singer-songwriter set as authentic precisely because of the way Young performed weakness, perceiving this display to express "real" pain. In the electric half of the show, Mendelsohn uses metaphors for straight masculine sexual behavior to describe Young's treatment of the electric guitar:

Usually, the amplified songs are perceptibly more overtly sexual and terrifying/terrified than their acoustic predecessors...[He ends songs by] conducting endless vibrato-laden guitar rampages while Crazy Horse [Young's backing band] keeps pounding away on one chord. Thus, what he plays during these solos becomes of secondary interest to how long he plays it while he and the band set up the listener for their total knockout punch.¹⁰⁸

Young's masculinity manifests in his sexually evocative gestures with his guitar, theorized by musicologist Steve Waksman as a "technophallus" that understands the guitar as an extension of

¹⁰⁶ John Mendelsohn, "Neil Young Appears Singly," *Los Angeles Times*, 2 April 1970, D11.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. This description hearkens Robert Walser's investigation of heavy metal performers in *Running With the Devil: Power, Gender, and Madness in Heavy Metal Music* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1993), 108–109.

the musician's body and as a display of masculine power. Furthermore, the structure of the music itself contained persistent pounding on a single chord, force of volume, and lyrics described as "terrifying."¹⁰⁹ Robert Walser's analysis of masculinity in his study of heavy metal asserts that metal performers construct hypermasculine, controlling, and powerful personae in response to what they view as the "threat" of women in society.¹¹⁰ That Young splits these musical styles in two reveals an anxiety about the expression of feminine characteristics that needed to be repressed or put back in place by his masculine outbursts as a hard-rocker. Nonetheless, his confessional mode remained the style most impactful during the 1970s specifically because it articulated the themes of searching and longing, topics newly available for men to publicly admit.

Jackson Browne: Late for the Sky

Browne's music deals largely with nostalgia for the idealism of the 1960s, a theme that heightened the sense of loss and vulnerability in his songs and performances. The reception of Jackson Browne's music demonstrates a second response to a singer-songwriter's openly emotional masculinity, through which critics interpreted male artists as dark, mysterious, and deeply thoughtful, which in turn made critics more open to understanding Browne's confessional work as socially-engaged. This trope wraps the singer-songwriter identity with age-old narratives of male genius. Such a reading characterizes Dave Thompson's analysis in his popular history, *Hearts of Darkness: James Taylor, Jackson, Browne, Cat Stevens and the Unlikely Rise of the*

¹⁰⁹ Steve Waksman, "Black Sound, Black Body: Jimi Hendrix, the Electric Guitar, and the Meanings of Blackness," *Popular Music and Society* 23/1 (Spring 1999): 75–113; Walser finds a similar connection between music and gesture in the heavy metal scene in *Running With the Devil*, 115.

¹¹⁰ Walser, *Running With the Devil*, 110, 117.

Singer-Songwriter (2012), in which the songwriters' study of pain contributes to the mark of a suffering artistry rather than Bangs' derogatory feminization forty years earlier.¹¹¹ By casting male singer-songwriters as a part of the intellectualization of rock, historians have conceived of a way to forgive male singer-songwriters' transgressive gendered expressions.

The youngest of the singer-songwriters in this study—and the only California native—Jackson Browne enjoyed an early career that was informed by the developments of the Southern California folk scene. He began composing tunes in high school after he was cut from the football team, and by his senior year, had composed “These Days” and “Shadow Dream Song,” two hits that would carry him throughout his career.¹¹² Growing up in Orange County, Browne frequented open mics at Beat coffee houses and folk clubs, where he gained performance experience and a local reputation as a songwriter.¹¹³ Browne briefly joined the nascent Nitty Gritty Dirt Band in 1966, but shortly thereafter moved to New York City, where he got a gig backing German singer-songwriter Nico on electric guitar.¹¹⁴ During his time on the east coast, Browne secured a publishing deal with Nina Music, a subsidiary of Elektra, and through this deal, Elektra artists Tom Rush and Nico recorded his songs.¹¹⁵ Browne also had his songs recorded by his former band mates in the Dirt Band, further spreading his influence in Southern California.

¹¹¹ Dave Thompson, *Hearts of Darkness: James Taylor, Jackson Browne, Cat Stevens, and the Unlikely Rise of the Singer-Songwriter* (Milwaukee: Backbeat Books, 2012); also see Donald Brackett, *Dark Mirror: The Pathology of the Singer-Songwriter* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2008).

¹¹² Cameron Crowe, “Jackson Browne Earns His Letter in Music,” *Los Angeles Times*, 3 March 1974, N46; Bego, *Jackson Browne: His Life and Music* (New York: Citadel Press, 2005), 24; Severin Browne, interview with author, Eagle Rock, CA, 25 February 2014.

¹¹³ Crowe, “Jackson Browne Earns His Letter in Music,” N46; Van Dyke Parks, interview with author, Pasadena, CA, 18 August 2013.

¹¹⁴ Bego, *Jackson Browne*, 28.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 32–33.

Browne's return to Los Angeles brought him critical acclaim as a performer of his own songs. He began playing in Hollywood clubs, where, as mentioned in Chapter 2, the owner of the roots-oriented folk club the Ash Grove re-directed Browne to perform at the more commercially-oriented Troubadour. Dickie Davis, who ran the lights at the Troubadour, recalled that the first time he heard the young ballad writer, he thought his lyrics sounded Shakespearean, and was even more surprised to find out that Browne was only eighteen years old.¹¹⁶ David Crosby listed Browne as "one of the ten best songwriters around" in an interview with *Rolling Stone* in 1970, saying "he's got songs that'll make your hair stand on end."¹¹⁷

Despite his local reputation, returning to the music community in Los Angeles challenged Browne as a songwriter. Browne sought to write, what he viewed, as "real" songs, and attempted to bring his personal story into his writing. As he explained in the rock zine *Cheetah*, "I've written a few good songs...nothing really heavy yet. Though...I think I'm headed that way...I'm not trying to be different; I'm just trying to be real. Trying to write what's around me, inside of me."¹¹⁸ In an interview in June 2014, Browne explained that he began writing confessional songs because they expressed what he found most valuable in the music he listened to. Even before the singer-songwriter tradition crystallized in L.A., Browne described his attraction folk music through these personal—rather than communal—attributes, describing, "I think the songs have always been very personal to me. At the same, that's what was happening in the music I listened to, I think. It seemed to me that that's what people were always [doing]."¹¹⁹ Browne specifically

¹¹⁶ Dickie Davis, interview with author, Los Angeles, CA, 7 August 2013.

¹¹⁷ Cameron Crowe, "A Child's Garden of Jackson Browne," *Rolling Stone* 23 May 1974, accessed 3 January 2016, available at <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/features/a-childs-garden-of-jackson-browne-19740523>.

¹¹⁸ Ibid; Bego, *Jackson Browne*, 36.

¹¹⁹ Jackson Browne, interview with author, Santa Monica, CA, 6 June 2014.

cited Bob Dylan's "Ramona" as the type of songwriting he hoped to emulate, explaining that he was drawn to songs with a level of personal specificity,

If you listen to Bob Dylan's "Ramona," this is an incredibly beautiful song to somebody that is so specific, you know, [quotes] 'Your cracked country lips to kiss,' and the whole discussion of her attitudes of what she was finding in the city. And I always pictured someone from the civil rights movement because it was right in that era, and I thought this was a discussion about idealism, but one that was specific to a particular person. And I thought *that* was really valuable.¹²⁰

Importantly, Browne's interpretation of "Ramona" connects the personal narrative in the song to the idealism of the civil rights era, a trope that his own songs replicate through the ethos of the 1970s.

Furthermore, Browne imbued his songwriting at this time with a political imperative. In his mind, this came from the spirit of skepticism toward the dominant institutions of American society. As he recalled:

The thing that we [singer-songwriters] all shared was this widespread distrust of the American establishment...That was just the ground...a basic fact. So the one thing that we all had in common was the recognition that things were changing. And we had a deep sense of being on the right side—being on the side of change, on the side of upheaval and disruption against an unjust status quo. That was in my music before I could address any specific political questions. But it was always there.¹²¹

Here, Browne describes that his political impulse did not manifest as overt critiques in his lyrics, but rather as an underlying reaction to the cultural changes in his life.

This ability to explain larger societal problems through a personal lens attracted producer David Geffen to Browne's music. Even with his acclaim in the local scene, Geffen had difficulty obtaining Browne a recording contract. This failure ultimately motivated Geffen to open his own

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Jackson Browne, interview with author, Santa Monica, CA, 6 June 2014.

label, Asylum, where he produced Browne as his first artist.¹²² Throughout 1972, Geffen added Joni Mitchell, John David Souther, and Glenn Frey to Asylum's roster. Geffen explained that the thread uniting his artists was the interest in artists "generating their own material...with a voice," which, in his mind, added a layer of authenticity to Asylum's products.¹²³ Asylum released Browne's self-titled debut in January of 1972.¹²⁴ The album featured the session players from the Section and backing vocals from a cadre of Laurel Canyon friends, including David Crosby and drummer Russ Kunkel's wife Leah.¹²⁵

Hilburn's review of *Late for the Sky* advanced Browne's album as a musical analogue to societal changes. Hilburn cited Browne's ability "to tell us about ourselves and our times in song."¹²⁶ The critic explained that this came through Browne's ability to communicate personal emotions and connect them to broader problems—the same argument he used to laud Joni Mitchell's *Blue* and *For the Roses* just years earlier. For Hilburn, Browne's second album, *For Everyman* remained a disappointment because it lacked the "consistent personal statements" that he viewed as the quality exhibited by the best songwriters, listing Bob Dylan, Joni Mitchell, Neil Young, Randy Newman, Kris Kristofferson, and John Prine—Browne's Troubadour contemporaries—as the artists deploying this unified musical sense of self.¹²⁷ On Browne's third album, however, Hilburn discovered the coherent articulation of self he felt Browne had been missing:

¹²² Bego, *Jackson Browne*, 56; Cameron Crowe, "Jackson Browne Earns His Letter in Music," N46.

¹²³ David Geffen, interview in *Inventing David Geffen*, dir. Susan Lacy, 2012.

¹²⁴ Jackson Browne, *Jackson Browne*, Asylum SD5051, 1972.

¹²⁵ Leah Kunkel was also "Mama" Cass Elliot's younger sister.

¹²⁶ Robert Hilburn, "Jackson Browne Fulfills Promise in Latest Album," *Los Angeles Times*, 20 October 1974, Q64.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

In *Late for the Sky*, Browne deals chiefly with the loss of innocence—the realizing [that] life isn't always the idyllic journey we were led to believe as children—and, more specifically, the complexities of romance—the false expectations that are sometimes set up, the difficulty in accurately assessing the strengths of a particular relationship and the need to be able to accept the often traumatic disappointments.¹²⁸

Hilburn intuited the songs on *Late for the Sky* as coming from a deeply personal place, remarking that the songs “are so personal at times that they seem pulled from a diary, yet containing the perspective and universality that an artist puts into his work.” Rather than remaining at the level of frivolous journaling, Hilburn elevates Browne’s work to the level of artistry, revealing age-old conceptions about narratives of the male genius. Hilburn further justified Browne’s introspection by making appeals to universality, claiming that Browne focused on life lessons rather than wallowing in self-pity: “Browne has reached into his own emotions and experience to put into perspective some of the lessons of that experience.” This analysis similarly connects the personal and the universal as discussed in the previous chapter on the women’s movement.

Stephen Holden also found socially-conscious themes in Browne’s personal vision on *Late for the Sky* in his *Rolling Stone* review. Holden explained, “I can’t think of another writer who merges with such natural grace and fluidity his private and public personas in a voice that is morally compelling yet non-coercive.”¹²⁹ This analysis of Browne’s work, once again, echoes the rhetoric of the women’s movement by blurring the lines between private and public spheres. That Holden valued Browne’s non-coercive authorial voice demonstrates the singer-songwriter’s ability to communicate effectively to an audience that found the direct commands of topical

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Stephen Holden, “Late for the Sky,” *Rolling Stone*, November 7, 1974, accessed 20 October 2015, <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/albumreviews/late-for-the-sky-19741107>.

songs cliché. This value placed on male communication that is non-coercive signals a significant change in the acceptance of alternative expressions of masculinity during this time.

The final track on *Late for the Sky* demonstrates Browne's balance between personal confession and the social critique. Titled "Before the Deluge," Browne ponders the loss of idealism, particularly through the lens of the fading counterculture. Browne refers to innocent dreamers (lines 1 and 4) who lived for the moment (line 13), describing the naïve quality with which people had come to view the counterculture in the new decade. The deluge, presumably, signals the catastrophic events onset in 1968, after which the dreamers emerged tired and tattered (lines 15–16).

"Before the Deluge"—by Jackson Browne

Verse 1

1 **Some of them were dreamers**
And some of them were fools
Who were making plans and thinking of the future
With the energy of the innocent
5 They were gathering the tools
They would need to make their journey back to nature
While the sand slipped through the opening
And their hands reached for the golden ring
With their hearts they turned to each other's hearts for refuge
10 In the troubled years that came *before the deluge*

Verse 2

Some of them knew pleasure
And some of them knew pain
And for some of them **it was only the moment that mattered**
And on the brave and crazy wings of youth
15 **They went flying around in the rain**
And their feathers, once so fine, grew torn and tattered
And in the end they traded their tired wings
For the resignation that living brings
And exchanged love's bright and fragile glow
20 For the glitter and the rouge
And in a moment they were swept *before the deluge*

The gendered understandings of vocality remained an important factor in the reception of Browne's confessional work, as it had for Neil Young. But in Browne's case, his baritone voice added to his masculine persona. For *Rolling Stone* reviewer Bud Scoppa, Browne's deep voice redeemed him from sounding "self-conscious or precious" despite the romantic themes in his lyrics. Characterizing the edge in his tone as a "straight-faced, country-boy sound," Scoppa uses markers of working class masculinity to absolve Browne of the sins committed by his contemporaries, Young and Taylor.¹³⁰ Browne's baritone voice, opposed to the falsetto and tenor ranges on Young and Taylor's recordings, respectively, further colors Browne's voice and expression as traditionally masculine. Thus, men were allowed to have a sensitive side so long as other traits secured their masculinity.

Bill Withers: Soul Troubadour

When asked about his relationship to the contemporary soul scene in 1971, Bill Withers told journalist Leonard Feather, "I wanted to make some quiet music."¹³¹ A third example of the sensitive male artist in the singer-songwriter movement comes through Withers's 1970s "soul folk" ballads.¹³² Withers's biography as a working-class black man in the military made his vulnerable expression all the more surprising. Still, audiences interpreted Withers's music as a sign of his strength, self-assurance, and genuine persona, indicative of changing attitudes towards expressions of black male subjectivity that allowed for a new instantiation of that masculine strength.

¹³⁰ Bud Scoppa, "Review: 'Jackson Browne'" *Rolling Stone*, 2 March 1972, accessed 2 January 2016, <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/albumreviews/jackson-browne-19720302>.

¹³¹ Leonard Feather "Withers Strikes Gold With First Record" *Los Angeles Times*, 10 October 1971, T46.

¹³² "Soul-folk" was the word used by Mike Jahn in his review of Withers's performance at the Bitter End in New York City; see "Bill Withers Plays in Soul-Folk Style," *New York Times*, 30 July 1971.

Bill Withers was born in Slab Fork, West Virginia, and grew up in a working-class family. Interviewed in 2011 for a documentary, Withers explained this aspect of his biography, saying, “I’m the first man in my family not to work in the coal mines, my mother scrubbed floors on her knees for a living.”¹³³ The path to his songwriting career grew out of a connection he made while working in the manufacturing industry for ten years before he made it to Hollywood. Withers served in the Navy for nine years after high school, primarily as an aircraft mechanic stationed in Guam and Oakland, California. Following his service, Withers worked as a mechanic variously for the Ford Motor Company, Douglas Aircraft, and Weber Aircraft.¹³⁴ A work colleague, Mort Gorson, helped Withers move from San Jose to Los Angeles, where he eventually recorded a demo album while continuing to work at Weber Aircraft.¹³⁵ The demo helped Withers get a meeting with Clarence Avant of Sussex Records, a Motown subsidiary, who offered Withers a record deal.¹³⁶

Withers released his first album, *Just As I Am*, in 1971, and the marketing for this record repeats much of Motown’s agenda throughout the 1960s: packaging black music for white audiences. Withers recorded at Sunset Sound and Wally Heider studios in Los Angeles, recruiting Booker T. Jones—frontman of Stax Records’ integrated house band Booker T. and the M.G.’s—to produce the album and Stephen Stills—guitar player from Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young—to perform as well. The combination of these influences, drawing on iconic Southern soul and California folk rock, shows how Withers couched himself between black musical styles and the white, Los Angeles singer-songwriter scene. The songs on *Just As I Am* dealt with the

¹³³ *Still Bill*, dir. Damani Baker and Alex Vlack, 2010.

¹³⁴ “Singer’s Life Style Expressed in Songs,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, 11 September 1971, 16.

¹³⁵ Leonard Feather “Withers Strikes Gold With First Record,” *Los Angeles Times*, 10 October 1971, T46.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

topics of family, life in the ghetto, and suicide alongside songs about unsuccessful romance. Withers also covered Harry Nilsson's pop hit, "Everybody's Talkin'" and a gospel rendition of the Beatles' "Let It Be." Indeed, the title of the album references the Christian hymn by the same name and Withers's gospel influences as much as it signals the album's autobiographical content. In the press, Withers deployed his working class background to explain why the songs were "so real," explaining "I was working around real people, man," to *New York Times* journalist Clayton Riley.¹³⁷ Critics intuited that "his message seems to be that life's ups and downs must be simply confronted."¹³⁸ In Withers own estimation, this reception came from the fact that on his albums "I was feeling what I said."¹³⁹

Two songs on *Just As I Am* demonstrate Withers's vulnerable expression. Withers wrote his hit single "Ain't No Sunshine" about the issues men face when dealing with loss. "Men have problems admitting to losing things," he said. "I think women are much better at that. . . . So, once in my life, I wanted to forgo my own male ego and admit to losing something."¹⁴⁰ "Ain't No Sunshine" contains wistful lyrics accompanied by a soulful groove that sets in during the second verse. Withers admits this loss in every line of the verse, and this repetition further emphasizes the loss of ego and control normally expressed by male performers.

¹³⁷ Clayton Riley, "Bill Withers: 'Just As I Am,'" *New York Times*, 24 September 1972, HF1.

¹³⁸ James P. Murray "Bill Withers Accepts a Musical Life," *New York Times*, 20 July 1974, D12.

¹³⁹ Sasha Frere Jones, "As Is," *The New Yorker*, 8 March 2010, accessed 10 June 2015, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2010/03/08/as-is-2>.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

“Ain’t No Sunshine”—Bill Withers

Verse 1

Ain’t no sunshine when *she’s gone*
It’s not warm when *she’s away*
Ain’t no sunshine when *she’s gone*
And she’s always gone too long anytime *she goes away*

Withers’s rich baritone voice strains slightly with the ascending line of each eight-bar phrase. The lyrics combined Withers’s performative vocal expression construct his character as emotionally responsive. A second song, “Hope She’ll Be Happier,” similarly displays Withers’s powerlessness. The lyrics center on solitude, as Withers admit his loneliness (line 2) and powerlessness (line 3), and admits fallibility in the song’s refrain (line 4). The simplicity of the lyrics, with short statements and long pauses between each line, creates a meditation on a compact range of sounds and ideas. Withers extends the end of each phrase by sustaining the final syllable. Sometimes the final word of a line contains an open vowel, but lines two and four of the verses end in consonants that allow him to resonate with a full-bodied hum (on words “am” and “him”), which he carries for 6–8 beats at the end of these lines. In both of these songs, Withers’s vocal performance on these hums and open vowels elevates the plaintive quality of romantic loss.

“Hope She’ll Be Happier”—Bill Withers

Verse 2

1 Maybe the darkness of the hour
Makes me seem **lonelier** than I am
But over the darkness I have **no power**
Hope she’ll be happier with him (*Refrain*)

The reception of Withers work centers on his down-to-earth persona. A feature in the *New Pittsburgh Courier* explained the similarities between Withers’s simple musical aesthetic and his lifestyle, saying:

If one was to listen to Bill Withers sing his simple, uncomplicated, but very meaningful songs dealing with everyday life, one might think that his life style must be similar. That would be a correct assumption, for Bill's tunes are direct extensions of his just being alive. If you saw him on the street, his mannerisms would make him blend into the crowd, for he is part of that crowd, part of the people.¹⁴¹

Clayton Riley wrote in the *New York Times* that Withers was “a man who is just a man, a human being thoroughly in touch with himself, his weaknesses and his strengths, who knows as much about where he comes from as he knows about where he wants to go.”¹⁴² While Withers stood as the everyman, he was also a man who was “in touch with himself,” the new, sensing and feeling everyman.

Withers also connected his statements of self-discovery to current events, explaining “I'm very much concerned with stability, peace, and answers for the multitude of things that are important to me.”¹⁴³ The only songwriter in this study with a history of military service, spending nine years in the Navy as an aircraft mechanic, Withers composed the song from the perspective of an injured soldier after an interaction with a disabled veteran. His 1973 song “I Can't Write Left Handed” protested the war by evoking the concerns of injured veterans, utilizing first-person narrative to make his point. Although he never recorded the song in studio, Withers performed the song in his concert recorded at Carnegie Hall in 1973, where he explained the circumstances inspiring the piece in an extended introduction:

We recorded this song on October 6, and since then the war has been declared over.¹⁴⁴ If you're like me, you'll remember it like anyone remembers any war: one big drag. A lot of people write songs about wars and the government—very

¹⁴¹ “Singer's Life Style Expressed in Songs,” *New Pittsburgh Courier*, 11 September 1971, 16.

¹⁴² Clayton Riley, “Bill Withers: ‘Just As I Am,’” *New York Times*, 24 September 1972, HF1.

¹⁴³ James P. Murray, “Bill Withers accepts a musical life,” *New York Times*, 20 July 1974, D12.

¹⁴⁴ The Paris Peace Treaty was signed in 1973, though it would be another two full years before Saigon officially fell to the Viet Cong and all U.S. troops evacuated from Saigon on 30 April 1975.

social things—but I think about young guys who were like I was when I was young. I had no more idea about any of it: government, or political things or any thing. And I think about those kind of young guys now, who all of a sudden, somebody comes up—and they’re very law abiding...so if somebody says “Go,” they don’t ask any questions, they just go. And I can remember not too long ago seeing a young guy...with his right arm gone. He just got back. And I asked him how he was doin’. He said he was doin’ alright now but he had thought he was gonna die. He said gettin’ shot at didn’t bother him...it was gettin’ shot that shook him up.¹⁴⁵

After describing the interaction, Withers explained his attempt to sympathize with the veteran, saying, “And I tried to put myself in his position. Maybe he cried. Maybe he said: ‘I can’t write left handed.’”¹⁴⁶ Inspiring the title of the song, Withers attempt to put himself in the place of an injured veteran allowed him to use the first person, confessional mode of the singer-songwriter but still come from the place of a soldier.

This image of Withers’s hard-working ethic continues to inform Withers’s legacy as an “All-American.”¹⁴⁷ A 1985 article in the *New Pittsburgh Courier* claimed as much, citing Withers’s “soulful warmth” and “folksy genuine feel” along with his biography as a factory worker. Amir Questlove Gomez, drummer for the Roots, explained, “He’s the last African-American Everyman. Jordan’s vertical jump has to be higher than everyone. Michael Jackson has to defy gravity. On the other side of the coin, we’re often viewed as primitive animals. We rarely land in the middle. Bill Withers is the closest thing black people have to a Bruce Springsteen.”¹⁴⁸ Withers’s music, based in personal confession, allowed this human representation of blackness in a society that continues to treat black people as less than human.

¹⁴⁵ Bill Withers, *Bill Withers Live at Carnegie Hall*, Sussex SXBS 7025-2, 1973.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ “Bill Withers: A Genuine, All-American Guy,” *New Pittsburgh Courier*, 23 November 1985, 2.

¹⁴⁸ Andy Greene, “Bill Withers: The Soul Man Who Walked Away,” *Rolling Stone*, 14 April 2015, accessed 4 January 2016, <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/features/bill-withers-the-soul-man-who-walked-away-20150414>.

* * * * *

This chapter has laid out how the singer-songwriter embodied a version of individual protest that simultaneously questioned dominant institutions of the United States government and reinforced notions of American individualism. The impact of the Vietnam War on the United States created a divisive climate of protesters questioning their nation's role in the conflict and supporters who venerated U.S. intervention abroad. Within this context, anti-war protestors adapted new, individualistic strategies to counter the majority position supporting Nixon's domestic and foreign policies. Draft resisters celebrated their autonomy by refusing to conform to their civic obligation of military service, protesters disparaged the impersonal aerial warfare that increased civilian casualties in Vietnam, and veteran soldiers launched their individual testimony of war crimes as witnesses against the U.S. military. Likewise, the singer-songwriter movement celebrated the individual as a way to stand up against society. The autobiographical songwriting and performance practices that focused on the subjective experiences of the listener created a personal antidote to the increasingly alienating effects of the war.

Furthermore, the idea of the individual confronting conservative ideologies manifested in displays of male subjectivity, prevalent in many aspects of U.S. culture, but epitomized by the introspective and vulnerable expressions of male singer-songwriters. These artists broadened constructions of masculinity in the United States through their sung expressions of personal thoughts and displays of sensitivity. Their songs of loss, through this lens, can be interpreted as subversive individual expressions that questioned status quo notions of male strength exhibited through the dominance of American military might. The singer-songwriter movement created a space in which individuals could challenge these institutions through a personal lens that resonated with the broader anti-war movement.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION:
THE LEGACY OF THE SINGER-SONGWRITER MOVEMENT, 1975–2016

In 2014, Jackson Browne released his 14th studio album, *Standing in the Breach*, a collection of new songs including a tune that had remained unfinished since 1967. In many ways this album captured the spirit that has carried Browne throughout his career: the ability to illustrate social problems through personal songs. An iTunes review posted on Twitter lauded Browne for the way his album “merges the personal and political.”¹ Other critics noticed how Browne subtly interwove political issues into his lyrics, which lent the material an “un-preachy” quality that made the songs compelling rather than overbearing. Reviewing his performance in London on November 26, 2014, for *The Guardian*, Betty Clarke explained, “In his time, Jackson Browne has charted personal battles, political conflict, and environmental catastrophes with compassion and legendary mellowness.”² Continuing, Clarke saw his new songs on *Standing in the Breach* as uninterrupted continuations of this style, writing, “There’s never a sense that Browne is lecturing, and issue-addressing odes such as ‘Which Side,’ ‘Standing in the Breach,’ and ‘If I Could Be Anywhere’ are peerless examples of his un-preachy style.”³ The reception of Browne’s latest album exemplifies how the personal political messages of the singer-songwriter movement, which emerged out of a particular time and place, continue to resonate in the present day.

¹ Posted on Twitter by @iTunes on 11 October 2014.

² Betty Clarke, “Jackson Browne Review: Mellow Politics from a Reticent Hero,” *The Guardian*, 26 November 2014, accessed 1 February 2016, <http://www.theguardian.com/music/2014/nov/26/jackson-browne-royal-albert-hall-uk-tour-review>.

³ Ibid.

This dissertation has presented the singer-songwriter movement within the cultural context of the 1970s, arguing that the music and message developed in the Los Angeles scene articulated the political shifts occurring in the United States through its expression of social problems through a new, personal lens. Chapter 1 established the singer-songwriter movement as an outgrowth of the United States folk revival, comparing the two scenes' stylistic preferences for acoustic music and contrasting the songwriting strategies of topical songwriters in the folk revival with the confessional practices of the singer-songwriter. While topical songwriters composed songs with lyrics about current events, singer-songwriters channeled personal experiences into their music. Singer-songwriters adopted this personal message as an effective way to communicate with their disillusioned audience base in the wake of the political events of 1968 and throughout the following decade. Chapter 2 investigated the music scene in Los Angeles, where these confessional songwriters took on new roles as performers of their music. The environment built at the Troubadour, the most prominent venue in this scene, tied the music to performance practices that imbued the singer-songwriter's identity with perceptions of intimacy, vulnerability, and personal storytelling. Constructed as such, the music became a way for both artists and audiences to mitigate the widespread mistrust of American institutions, as evidenced in the reception of James Taylor and Carole King. The second half of this chapter connected the music of the singer-songwriter movement with the rhetoric of concurrent social movements, most especially the women's movement and anti-war protests. Chapter 3 argued that music by female singer-songwriters acted as a form of feminist consciousness-raising specifically espoused by the women's movement. Their songs offered personal experiences of marriage, divorce, family, and careers, and illuminated truths about the patriarchal expectations placed on women through these first-person accounts. Chapter 4 drew parallels between singer-

songwriter compositions and anti-war protests, demonstrating how the music's personal quality echoed the rhetoric of protestors' individual testimonies and served as an antidote to the perceived impersonal nature of modern warfare brought about by new technologies, manifest, for instance, in the increase in aerial combat. Furthermore, the singer-songwriter movement helped broaden the construction of American masculinity beyond the role of the soldier, embracing emotional lyrics and performance practices that disrupted the solidity of masculine control, a way to protest the militaristic dominance of the United States' foreign policies.

This chapter broadly traces the developments in the singer-songwriter tradition from 1975 to today. Through this analysis, I establish the continuous legacy of the 1970s movement over the past 40 years. This history surveys national trends, then returns to present-day Los Angeles to illustrate the long-standing influence of 1970s Laurel Canyon songwriters—Joni Mitchell, Carole King, and Jackson Browne—on the contemporary scene. These artists dispense their power as figureheads of the scene through connections to new artists, granting approval and transmitting authority through performances with younger singer-songwriters. Finally, this chapter concludes with an investigation of how Carole King and James Taylor navigate the contemporary political climate. New developments show that while singer-songwriters have taken on more public roles in politics, drawing on their fame to give voice to political causes, the artists continue to rely on personal messages to communicate their point. In each case, these new roles demonstrate how singer-songwriters have become musical icons in American politics.

The Singer-Songwriter Tradition, 1980 to 2015

The singer-songwriter movement of the 1970s has provided an interpretive framework and label for the personal, acoustic music that has come after it. In the years immediately

following the widespread presence of singer-songwriters in U.S. popular music, new styles began to take over the charts throughout the late 1970s and 1980s, including disco, punk, new wave, nascent hip hop, and such mainstream synth-pop performers as Michael Jackson. During this time, however, certain artists harnessed the acoustic style and intimate performance practices of singer-songwriters from the previous decade, creating a surprising twist from their regular musical output for their fans and recreating the discourses of authenticity that surrounded this style. Bruce Springsteen, for example, was well known for the boisterous rock sound of his full band throughout the 1970s. In 1982, he recorded an acoustic album titled *Nebraska*, and the stripped-down aesthetic emphasized many of the personal narratives that had been present in his lyrics even in his earlier songwriting. Robert Hilburn, who had been instrumental in discerning the tastes of the singer-songwriter movement during the 1970s, declared:

The secret to the impact of *Nebraska* is its intimacy. Rather than try to capture the delicate psychological nuances of these songs in a state-of-the-art recording studio with a band, Springsteen recorded the tunes at home on a four-track cassette. The result is an album that speaks with unflinching immediacy and compassion.⁴

Hilburn's comments emphasize both the home and anti-technology sentiments as aspects of Springsteen's intimate, singer-songwriter persona on *Nebraska*.

Other artists from the punk and new-wave movements emerging in New York and London, such as Patti Smith and Elvis Costello, were heralded as artists with individualistic poetic voices in spite of the fuller, punk rock accompaniment. Critics admired female New York punk rocker Patti Smith for her ability to keep the words at the forefront of her rock aesthetic, referring to her as a poet more than a musician. A *Rolling Stone* review of her 1976 album *Horses* praised Smith's poetry for its emotional quality, writing "Like all real poets, Smith offers visions that embrace a multiplicity of meanings, all of them valid if they touch an emotional

⁴ Robert Hilburn, "Springsteen: Brooding Over the American Dream," *Los Angeles Times*, 19 September 1982, O61.

chord.”⁵ The connection between poetry and personal emotions strongly links Smith to Laurel Canyon songwriters even if her sound provides a stark contrast. For the British new-wave artist Elvis Costello, singer-songwriter associations began when the artist attempted to “soften” his “angry-man” image by adopting “a softer, more melodic tone” on his *Imperial Bedroom* (1982) album.⁶ Hilburn described Costello’s ability as a songwriter to “weave absorbing tales about desire and betrayal in human relationships—songs so filled with emotional shading that they literally take him from a whisper to a scream.”⁷ Costello’s vocal timbre and scream are still located within the genre of new-wave rock, yet the comments surrounding his “softening” replay the discourse of sensitivity in work by male singer-songwriters.

Later in the 1980s and into the 1990s, female singer-songwriters made a huge resurgence in popular culture. In the late 1980s, Tracy Chapman, Suzanne Vega, and Shawn Colvin all succeeded commercially, restoring the presence of acoustic music in mainstream popular music. This presence continued with the alternative music trend in the 1990s that coincided with the rise of third-wave feminism. Like their predecessors in the 1970s, these women used personal narratives to express feminist concerns. For example in the song “Me and Gun” (1991), Tori Amos sings about being raped and makes a strong statement condemning sexual violence by telling her own story. Ani DiFranco sings about her desire to be valued for her intellect, not objectified for her body, in “Talk to Me Now” (1990). Unlike women in the 1970s, female singer-songwriters in the 1990s were not afraid to associate openly with the feminist movement. Some singer-songwriters in the 1990s—Alanis Morissette, PJ Harvey, Liz Phair—adopted a rock

⁵ John Rockwell, “Review: Patti Smith, *Horses*,” *Rolling Stone*, 12 February 1976, accessed 10 February 2015, <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/albumreviews/horses-19760212>.

⁶ Robert Hilburn, “Elvis Costello: Shedding the Image of an Angry Young Man,” *Los Angeles Times*, 18 July 1982, K1.

⁷ Robert Hilburn, “Tensing in the Dark: An Evening with Costello,” *Los Angeles Times*, 31 December 1981, F5.

aesthetic, which has been interpreted as a way for women to break free of gendered performance practices and considered to retain sonically the “political bite” of their lyrics.⁸ Others continued to present their music through a more conventional acoustic style, such as Sarah McLachlan, who created the Lillith Fair music festival to support women in the music industry. The 1997 event featured many of her singer-songwriter contemporaries and demonstrated the power women possessed in the industry, both as artists and fans.

In the 2000s, singer-songwriters have returned to the acoustic roots of the movement, both in Americana and mainstream pop, providing an alternative to the large-scale productions and performances found in contemporary pop. Elliott Smith, Gillian Welch, Ryan Adams, and Brandi Carlile each perform confessional songs with a stripped-down aesthetic in folk and alt-country. Others, including Ingrid Michaelson, Greg Laswell, and Regina Spektor, perform acoustic pop songs to more mainstream markets. The focus on immediacy between artist and listener has become the trope uniting these performers and linking their music to the singer-songwriter history. A review of Ryan Adams *Gold* (2000) in *Rolling Stone*, for instance, praised the sound and style of the music, describing how “With the barest narrative and a silver drizzle of guitars, Adams spills apologies and belated promises...with the concentrated immediacy of a guy singing to the door that just slammed in his face.”⁹ Michaelson links this sense of immediacy to her autobiographical material and her stage persona that projects honesty. Calling her songs “snapshots of my life,” Michaelson offered as a contrast: “Beyoncé sings songs that aren’t true or

⁸ Ronald D. Lankford, *Women Singer-Songwriters in Rock: A Populist Rebellion in the 1990s* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2010), *xii*.

⁹ David Fricke, “Review: Gold,” *Rolling Stone*, 25 October 2001, accessed 1 February 2016, <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/albumreviews/gold-20011025>

real. She employed an alter ego on *Sasha Fierce*...I'm just me on stage.”¹⁰ The criticism that Michaelson is directing at Beyoncé is, in large part, a criticism of the pop music industry as an entity. Entertainers in popular music are expected to create larger-than-life productions full of spectacle, such as the stage presence of pop divas, whose characters in performance have little to do with their life behind-the-scenes. It is also common for pop stars to perform through an alter ego, such as those employed by David Bowie (Ziggy Stardust), Garth Brooks (Chris Gaines), and Lady Gaga, among others. Michaelson’s comment about Beyoncé makes reference to such an alter ego, one which Beyoncé’s fans would understand as a stage persona. Like these other entertainers, Michaelson presents a specific character on stage, albeit, one that she has convinced her audiences is consistent with her life—on and off the stage—and her songs. Michaelson’s comments resonate with the performance of a genuine persona, and by making reference to a pop star as a foil, she reinforces the idea for her fans that her on-stage character is different, connecting with the values of intimacy and interior self that are the hallmarks of the singer-songwriter movement. Indeed, the performance practices employed at the Troubadour over 40 years ago, which emphasized displays of vulnerability and presented sincerity, have remained entrenched, iconic markers of the singer-songwriter identity.

Current Los Angeles Scenes

Los Angeles remains a “hotbed for musical activity,” as Joni Mitchell described it, and in particular, the resonance of the 1970s Laurel Canyon scene continues to support a vibrant culture of singer-songwriter performance. Since the early 2000s, new venues have joined the older institutions discussed in Chapter 2, revitalizing the singer-songwriter movement in Los Angeles

¹⁰ Henry Freedland, “In the Studio With...Ingrid Michaelson,” *Paste Magazine*, 13 May 2009, accessed 10 February 2016, <http://www.pastemagazine.com/articles/2009/05/in-the-studio-with-ingrid-michaelson.html>.

(Figure 5.1). The Troubadour has become hallowed ground for those seeking a place in the singer-songwriter tradition, but the venue’s prominence in Hollywood means that only the most promising songwriters in U.S. and U.K. markets get the chance to perform there. A broader swath of up-and-coming singer-songwriters can be found at the Hotel Café, which preserves the culture of networking that characterized the social aspect of the Troubadour in the 1970s within the current scene. The performances at the Largo, the original location of the Troubadour before it relocated to its current space on Santa Monica Boulevard in 1958, showcase how the singer-songwriter tradition has been subsumed within the Americana scene in L.A. Finally, McCabe’s and two newer venues, Kulak’s Woodshed and the Coffee Gallery, serve as spaces for the older generation of songwriters, some of whom were present at the movement’s inception, to continue to produce their craft.

Table 5.1: Venues for Singer-Songwriter Performance in Los Angeles since 2000

<i>Venue</i>	<i>Date Opened</i>	<i>Neighborhood and Address</i>
Troubadour	1953 (current location since 1958)	West Hollywood (9081 Santa Monica Boulevard)
McCabe’s Guitar Shop	1958	Santa Monica (3101 Pico Boulevard)
Largo at the Coronet Theatre	1989 (current location since 2008)	West Hollywood (366 N. La Cienega Boulevard)
Coffee Gallery	1998	Altadena (2029 N. Lake Avenue)
Kulak’s Woodshed	1999	North Hollywood (5230 Laurel Canyon Boulevard)
Hotel Café	2000	Hollywood (1623 1/2 N. Cahuenga Boulevard)

The Troubadour remains in its Santa Monica Boulevard location, but the surrounding neighborhood has changed significantly. The venue has made several changes to keep up with the changing trends in musical style, and presents a wide variety of electronic, rock, Americana, and even heavy metal music, expanding their venue far beyond the singer-songwriter and country rock sounds it featured in the 1970s. Yet the venue stands as an anomaly among the clubs in West Hollywood today. West Hollywood, incorporated as a city in 1984 by activists in

the LGBTQ community, has become an important gay neighborhood in Los Angeles.¹¹ Although the Troubadour stands out from the vibrant dance-club life in West Hollywood, it has updated its space to keep up with other aspects of present-day Hollywood culture. For example, the Troubadour incorporated a VIP lounge on the second floor for special guests, and the club maintains its connections to the music industry through special events and showcases.

The Troubadour has remained an important part of authentication narratives for singer-songwriters, but today the space is solely privileged for new artists featured in promotional showcases backed by the music industry. The venue no longer hosts open-mic performances where lesser known musicians can try to break into the scene. This aspect of the singer-songwriter scene has migrated to a new venue at the Hotel Café in Hollywood. The Troubadour regularly hosts showcases by trade organizations, record labels, and other influential industry organizations. For example, in February 2016 the Americana Music Association hosted their annual pre-Grammy event for industry professionals at the Troubadour (See Figure 5.1).¹² The following month, satellite radio company Sirius XM presented their newest “Spectrum certified” artists, the Icelandic band Kaleo, at the Troubadour to promote a band receiving play on one of their stations.¹³ These events demonstrate the long-standing relationship between the venue and the recording industry in Los Angeles. Finally, the cast of regular characters from the 1970s

¹¹ “30 Years of Cityhood,” www.weho.org, accessed 6 February 2016, <http://www.weho.org/city-hall/30-years-of-cityhood>. Activists from the LGBTQ community proposed cityhood in 1984, and West Hollywood was incorporated as a city in the same year. The history of West Hollywood available on its municipal website boasts its progressive public policy agenda, including its status as the first city in the U.S. to have a majority openly gay governing body, its work to support people with HIV and AIDS, and its resolutions supporting marriage equality in 2001, long before federal law was passed by the Supreme Court in 2015.

¹² “Americana’s Pre-Grammy Salute and Tribute to Glenn Frey,” [Troubadour.com](http://www.troubadour.com), accessed 10 February 2016, <http://www.troubadour.com/event/1085015-americanas-pre-grammy-salute-los-angeles/>.

¹³ “Sirius XM The Spectrum Certified,” [Troubadour.com](http://www.troubadour.com), accessed 10 February 2016, <http://www.troubadour.com/event/1008469-sirius-xm-spectrum-certified-los-angeles/>.

scene still perform at the Troubadour, usually drawing an older crowd to the hip corner in West Hollywood (Figure 5.2). Today, however, these guests are spotted in the second floor VIP space rather than mingling with the patrons in the downstairs bar.

Figure 5.1: The Americana Music Association Presents Pre-Grammy Showcase at the Troubadour, 2014



Marquis at the Troubadour announcing the Americana Music Association Pre-Grammy Salute to the Everly Brothers, February 2014. The event featured performers Bonnie Raitt, Joe Henry, Peter Asher, Rhiannon Giddens, Jamestown Revival, Della Mae, and the Haden Triplets. Photo by Author.

Figure 5.2: 1970s Troubadour Regulars Perform Today



Bonnie Raitt and Joe Henry perform “You Can’t Fail Me Now” at the Troubadour during the Americana Music Association’s Pre-Grammy event. February 2014. Photo by Author.



David Crosby, former member of the Byrds and Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young, returns to the Troubadour during his tour for his 2014 album release *Croz*. 14 April 2014. Photo by Author.

The singer-songwriters with the chance to perform at the Troubadour continue to deploy their sets at this institution as a way to prove their place in the tradition. For example, James Blake, an electronic artist from England, chose the Troubadour as the site for his U.S. debut in 2011. The stories that emerged after Blake's performance echo the themes of Troubadour premieres forty years earlier, emphasizing the importance of the venue's atmosphere and audience's spellbound silence. A review in *LA Weekly* by journalist Lainna Fader proclaimed, "He used space and silence to great advantage in his short but mesmerizing set, playing nearly an hour without more than a couple words. The soul in his music wrapped around every member of the silent crowd, who kept quiet all night...enraptured by his minimal, deconstructed beats and fractured, soulful vocals," in language that even evokes the tone of Hilburn's effusive reviews from forty years earlier.¹⁴ At the performance, Blake paid homage to the Troubadour's legacy by ending his set with a cover of Joni Mitchell's "A Case of You" (1971). The choice demonstrated his knowledge and proficiency within the canon of works by singer-songwriters that turned the venue into the institution it is today.

The account of the event by *Los Angeles Times* critic August Brown further divulged that Mitchell herself was present for Blake's set, writing:

Just before his encore at the sold-out Troubadour on Monday night, UK singer-producer James Blake had someone to thank. Introducing his last song, a lonely and lilting solo piano cover, he first lauded its songwriter. "She's been such an influence on my writing for the last year or so, and that she might be here to hear this is such a massive honor." Then he played Joni Mitchell's "A Case of You," and at that the audience gasped a bit and searched around the room. Sure enough, in the upper VIP balcony, there was the Lady of the Canyon, watching over the proceedings.¹⁵

¹⁴ Lainna Fader "Live Review: James Blake at the Troubadour," *LA Weekly*, 24 May 2011, accessed 2 June 2014, <http://www.laweekly.com/westcoastsound/2011/05/24/live-review-james-blake-at-the-troubadour>.

¹⁵ August Brown, "Live Review: James Blake at the Troubadour," *Pop & Hiss, The L.A. Times Music Blog*, 24 May 2011, accessed 1 June 2014, http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/music_blog/2011/05/live-review-james-blake-at-the-troubadour.html.

The bio that Blake provides to the venues where he is scheduled to perform reiterates the importance of this event, reading, “It all started, says Blake, with Joni Mitchell. His favorite singer and songwriter came to see him at the Troubadour in Los Angeles two years ago and hung around afterwards to talk. ‘She’s an oracle...I learned a lot just from meeting her.’”¹⁶ Mitchell’s presence at his performance acted as validation of Blake, inducting him into the metaphoric Troubadour hall of fame.

Today, the singer-songwriter scene in Los Angeles that most resembles the Troubadour in the 1970s revolves around the Hotel Café, the venue where up-and-coming artists perform and network. Located on Cahuenga Boulevard in Hollywood, just blocks away from Capitol Records, the club opened as a coffee shop in 2000 where singer-songwriters could perform to small audiences. In 2004, the Hotel Café acquired more space in the building next door, allowing it to cater to Hollywood nightlife.

The set-up at the Hotel Café mimics the Troubadour’s important division of social space and performance space. In the entrance of the venue, patrons can access a full bar and kitchen. Through the bar, a stage in the left-hand corner can fit a small ensemble (Figure 5.3). Lucky audience members can sit at tables and chairs up front, with plenty more listeners occupying standing room in the back. With a total capacity of 165 people, the Hotel Café keeps the intimate quality of acoustic performers playing to small audiences. The club hosts multiple performers every night, scheduling one-hour sets between 7 pm and 1 am, a schedule that allows up to six artists to perform in a single night. Patrons can come into the venue for the 7 o’clock show and stay to hear music for the next six hours. Others might stop in for a specific set and spend another hour socializing with friends in the bar. With this set up, the Hotel Café presents more

¹⁶ James Blake “Biography,” Cat’s Cradle Events, 13 May 2013, accessed 1 June 2014, <http://www.catscradle.com/event/261575-james-blake-carrboro/>.

singer-songwriters in Los Angeles than any other venue, showcasing sets by 125 different performers in the month of February 2016 alone, a testament to the vitality of the Los Angeles singer-songwriter scene today.

Figure 5.3: Stage Setup at the Hotel Café



Norwegian singer-songwriter Thomas Dybdahl performs at the Hotel Café. 28 May 2014. Photo by Author.

The Hotel Café has the ability to launch unknown artists into successful careers, most notably the singer-songwriter Sara Bareilles, whose performance at the 2014 Grammy Awards with Carole King demonstrates how she channeled the historical poser of the Troubadour singer-songwriter into a present day song equally personal and political. Bareilles graduated from UCLA in 2002 and spent the next three years performing original songs in Hollywood clubs. Her memoir, *Sounds Like Me*, credits the community at the Hotel Café for connecting her to the industry, allowing her to record *Little Voice* in 2007 on Epic Records. Bareilles's story at the Hotel Café parallels that of 1970s singer-songwriters at the Troubadour, and these connections between the current scene and its historical predecessors became clear when Bareilles and Carole King performed a duet at the 2014 Grammy awards. 2014 Grammy Awards King and Bareilles

both sat at pianos, facing each other on the stage, and sang a medley of King's "Beautiful" (1971) and Bareilles's "Brave" (2013).¹⁷ "Beautiful" spoke out against standards of beauty during the women's movement and urged listeners to "show the world all the love in your heart," rather than focusing on the mirror. "Brave" honors a friend of Bareilles, who had come out, and encouraged others to do the same. The song became quickly recognized as an anthem for gay rights.¹⁸ Together the songs contained an empowering message about self-image and identity, and each song reinforced the other as the performers transitioned fluidly between them. The duet performance was a literal coming together of the 1970s singer-songwriter and the present-day incarnation of that persona, thereby illustrating how the political power of personal songwriting remains resonant to present-day issues.

On LaCienega Boulevard, the original home of the Troubadour, the Largo at the Coronet Theatre hosts the Watkins Family Hour every month, a show that represents the ties between the singer-songwriter tradition and contemporary Americana music. The associations between the singer-songwriter movement and the folk revival, as discussed in Chapter 1, have turned the music of 1970s Laurel Canyon songwriters into both a pool of repertory and a tradition on which to build new songs. Today these artists perform in Americana circles, which encompass an eclectic variety of folk traditionalists, country-influenced alternative or "indie" artists, and singer-songwriters.

The Watkins Family Hour is a monthly performance hosted by fiddler Sara Watkins and guitarist Sean Watkins. The Southern California-based siblings began performing in the trio Nickel Creek with mandolin player Chris Thile in 1993, and the band received critical success in

¹⁷ Bareilles co-wrote "Brave" with guitarist Jack Antonoff.

¹⁸ Jason Peebles, "Sara Bareilles Wants to See You Be Brave," *advocate.com*, 24 April 2013, accessed 10 February 2016, <http://www.advocate.com/arts-entertainment/music/2013/04/24/sara-bareilles-wants-see-you-be-brave>.

the early 2000s, winning a Grammy for their 2004 album *This Side*. The Largo's owner, Mark Flanagan, suggested that the Watkinses begin a monthly residency at his club in 2003, intended as a more informal, impromptu event compared to their regular touring schedule with Nickel Creek (Figure 5.4).¹⁹ During the one-week a month while the artists were in Los Angeles home from tour, they would schedule a show and invite friends to perform. The monthly series grew tremendously, and now features a house band comprised of L.A. session players: bass player Sebastian Steinberg, drummer Don Heffington, pedal steel player Greg Leisz, and pianist Benmont Tench, a former member of Tom Petty's Heartbreakers.

The show has become a venue for the Watkins, who now both have solo careers as songwriters, to try out new material in front of an audience. Sara has recorded two solo albums, *Sara Watkins* (2008) and *Sun Midnight Sun* (2012), both of which contain mostly original songs written in a confessional style alongside a few Americana-style arrangements of tunes by Jimmie Rodgers and John Hartford.²⁰ Sean has released five solo albums featuring entirely original material since the dissolution of Nickel Creek.²¹

¹⁹ "About Watkins Family Hour," Watkinsfamilyhour.com, accessed 10 February 2016, Watkinsfamilyhour.com/#biography.

²⁰ Sara Watkins, *Sara Watkins*, Nonesuch 516987-1, 2009; Sara Watkins, *Sun Midnight Sun*, Nonesuch 520684-2, 2012.

²¹ Sean Watkins, *Let It Fall*, Sugar Hill, SUG CD 3928, 2001; *26 Miles*, Sugar Hill, SUG CD 3955, 2003; *Blinders On*, Sugar Hill, SUG CD 3988, 2006; *All I Do Is Lie*, Fontana/Rolling Girl Records, 2015; *What To Fear*, Single Lock Records, 2016.

Figure 5.4: The Watkins Family Hour at the Largo at the Coronet Theatre



Sara Watkins and Sean Watkins perform as a duo during the Watkins Family Hour at the Largo at the Coronet Theatre, September 2015. Photo by Roman Cho (Romancho.com). Used with permission.

The majority of guest artists at the Watkins' shows are singer-songwriters, who perform original songs as both solo acoustic sets and with the backing of the Sara, Sean, and the house band. Past guests have included singer-songwriters Fiona Apple, Taylor Goldsmith, Tom Brousseau, Blake Mills, Jenny Lewis, Jonathan Rice, Ben Lee, Jenny Mancan, Garrison Starr, Sam Amidon, and Beth Orton. Regularly sitting in with the Watkins is Jackson Browne, whose status as an institution of Los Angeles songwriting helps validate the Watkins as the center of the current folk scene (Figure 5.5). Yet Browne sees his involvement with the Watkins Family Hour as mutually beneficial, describing the scene at the Largo as a new source of creativity as he continues writing.²² This new scene shows how Laurel Canyon songwriters have become a part of the folk institution in L.A. and also how these artists are still vital contributors to the contemporary scene.

²²Peter Balckstock, "The Sound of Jackson Browne's Personal and Political Equilibrium," *Indy Week*, 18 July 2012, accessed 10 February 2016, <http://www.indyweek.com/indyweek/the-sound-of-jackson-brownes-personal-and-political-equilibrium/Content?oid=3106053>.

Figure 5.5: Jackson Browne Sits-In at the Watkins Family Hour



Jackson Browne sitting in with the Watkins Family Hour house band in November 2015. Photo by Roman Cho (Romancho.com). Used with permission.

Although the major stars from the 1970s are clearly still influential within both the political and artistic scenes some forty years later, those performers who earned less notoriety as performers have been instrumental in sustaining the relevance and activity level of the scene in Los Angeles that persists to the present. The vibrant culture for these members of an older generation of songwriters centers around three venues: McCabe's Guitar Shop in Santa Monica, Kulak's Woodshed in North Hollywood, and the Coffee Gallery in Altadena.

The owners of these venues have ties to the era of 1970s songwriters in various ways. McCabe's owner, Bob Riskin, has run the shop since the 1960s. McCabe's presents concerts in their back room every weekend curated by current concert manager Lincoln Myerson. Bob Stane, who today owns the Coffee Gallery in Altadena, California, a café with open mics, poetry readings, local art, and an impressive line-up of international touring acts that play their

“backstage.”²³ Stane’s strong reputation in the Los Angeles acoustic music scene stems from his work presenting folk music and comedy acts at the Ice House in Pasadena during the 1970s.²⁴ In an interview Stane expressed that his life has been dedicated to presenting “good thoughts performed well.”²⁵ Stane explained his “Acid Test” for finding a good song resided in whether the audience “could sing, whistle, or recite the song” after the performance, an aesthetic determination that values listening in the same ways that were central to the 1970s scene.²⁶ Today, the Coffee Gallery draws performers through Stane’s influence and long ties to the industry dating back to the Ice House. His large network of contemporary folk, Americana, and roots musicians appreciate his support for artists old and new. Finally, Paul Kulak opened a new venue called Kulak’s Woodshed in North Hollywood, aiming to recreate the atmosphere of the 1970s singer-songwriter music he loves and provide a space for the abundance of local talent to perform.²⁷ The space only seats 50 listeners, and while the venue struggles to survive with this limited amount of potential ticket-buyers, Kulak’s has been kept in business through donations from enthusiasts in the community.

These venues support songwriters who still actively compose, perform, and serve as tradition bearers for the local confessional songwriting practice. Severin Browne, Jackson Browne’s younger brother, plays a monthly show at Kulak’s Woodshed where he performs new

²³ Bob Stane, interview with author, Altadena, CA, 15 March 2014.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Interview with Paul Kulak, KCET PBS TV, 7 July 2011, accessed 9 February 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2JgjCGKQPMU>.

songs penned with his writing group (Figure 5.6).²⁸ His songs are often confessional, such as his 2012 tune “To the Light,” which processes moral lessons about the community and the environment through personal perspective.

Figure 5.6: Severin Browne Performs at Kulak’s Woodshed



Severin Browne performs at Kulak’s Woodshed in North Hollywood. 7 February 2014. Photo by Author.

Tracy Newman is another member of the 1970s Los Angeles scene who continues to perform in the area, frequently playing at McCabe’s, the Coffee Gallery, and Kulak’s. Newman began as a folk singer during the early 1960s as a member of the Los Angeles based New Christy Minstrels. After a career switch to become a TV-screenwriter, writing for *All About Jim* and receiving an Emmy for her work on the “coming out” episode of *Ellen* in 1997, Newman returned to writing songs.²⁹ Like Carole King, Newman’s songs address issues of motherhood and marriage. Her

²⁸ Browne, interview with author, Eagle Rock, CA, 25 February 2014.

²⁹ “The Puppy Episode” (Season 4 Episode 22) of *Ellen*, starring comedian Ellen DeGeneres, was the first time DeGeneres, and her character on the show, came out as a lesbian. The episode aired on ABC 30 April 1997.

song “Carpool,” for instance, explains how parents often feel underappreciated for caring for their children through first-person narrative and her sitcom writer’s sense of humor (Figure 5.7).

Figure 5.7: Tracy Newman Performs at Genghis Cohen



Tracy Newman explains a song during a performance at Genghis Cohen with her band, the Reinforcements. 22 February 2014. Photo by Author.

1970s Singer-Songwriters and Twenty-first Century Politics

The personal rhetoric of the singer-songwriter movement was rooted in the cultural climate of the 1970s, emerging from a specific time and place to resonate with the attitudes of citizens disillusioned with American politics and seeking answers to societal questions through self-examination. Since the 1970s, prominent artists from this decade have taken on more public roles as advocates for political causes. Two case studies of the present-day activist work by Carole King and James Taylor’s demonstrate how artists use their fame as a platform for political activity, drawing on their celebrity to raise awareness for their cause of choice. Carole King currently advocates for environmental causes, and James Taylor campaigned for President Barack Obama, continuing to fundraise for the Democratic Party well-into Obama’s second

presidential term. These case studies also show how the personal politics musically expressed by singer-songwriters exist in tension with more public platforms of political activity, and are sometimes misunderstood outside of the time-period in which this confessional style is rooted.

Carole King and the Northern Rockies Ecosystem Protection Act

Following her time in California, King took on a role as an environmental activist while maintaining her presence as a performer. After ten years living in Laurel Canyon, Carole King relocated to Sun Valley, Idaho, in 1977. King released ten studio albums after moving to Idaho, and once her kids were older, began to perform regularly until her final tour in 2013.

Since 1993, King's time spent outside of music has been as an environmental advocate. King became involved with the Alliance for the Wild Rockies, a non-profit organization founded in 1988 committed to preserving ecosystems in the Northern Rockies, specifically through the Northern Rockies Ecosystem Protection Act (NREPA). The act seeks to protect one of the largest remaining ecosystems in the U.S. that has not yet been destroyed by development and industry.³⁰ The NREPA expands existing wilderness areas in Washington, Oregon, Montana, Wyoming, and Idaho, protecting 24 million acres of land and 1,800 miles of river.³¹ The results will help endangered species, including the bull trout and grizzly bear, and preserving forests will help counteract the effects of climate change.

The NREPA has gone before Congress seven times since 1994, most recently in 2015. King has appeared before Congress advocating for the act five of the seven times, and works

³⁰ Carole King, "Environment," [caroleking.com](http://www.caroleking.com), accessed 10 February 2016, <http://www.caroleking.com/ideas/environment>.

³¹ "NREPA," Alliance for the Wild Rockies, accessed 10 February 2016, <https://allianceforthewildrockies.org/nrepa/>.

closely with Representative Carolyn Maloney, the current Congressional leader for the act.³²

Through her appeals to state politicians, King uses her status as a public figure to voice environmentalist concerns.³³ Capital interests from the oil, logging, and mining industries have prevented the passage of the NREPA thus far.

When King promotes this cause to the broader public, she connects her music from the 1970s to her activism. In an interview with NPR's Diane Rehm, King equated the simple values of her music with the simplicity of the cause, arguing that working to end climate change is a "no-brainer." King made an even more explicit connection to her music, citing her 1971 song "So Far Away," which focuses on the importance of family, to remind her audience about environmental stewardship and implore fans to take steps that ensure a better world for future generations.³⁴ By making these connections, King continues to advocate for political change through personal music.

James Taylor and the Obama Administration

James Taylor's recent involvement with the Obama administration illustrates how singer-songwriters have become symbols for American politics and how perceptions of the singer-songwriter as politically soft persist today. Both of Obama's presidential campaigns were backed by a cadre of musicians, most famously endorsed by the celebrity couple Beyoncé Knowles and Jay-Z. James Taylor also campaigned with Barack Obama in both 2008 and 2012. Taylor

³² Dylan Brown, "Energy and Environment Daily: Carole King Sings Praises of Northern Rockies Plan," Carolyn B. Maloney Maloney.house.gov, 11 February 2015, accessed 10 February 2016, <https://maloney.house.gov/media-center/in-the-news/energy-and-environment-daily-carole-king-sings-praises-of-northern-rockies>

³³ Jeremy Goldmeier, "Carole King Lobbies to Protect the Rocky Mountains," *Paste Magazine*, 8 October 2007, accessed 10 February 2016, <http://www.pastemagazine.com/articles/2007/10/carole-king-lobbies-to-protect-the-rocky-mountains.html>; Rebecca Roberts, "Rocky Mountain Activist Carole King," NPR.org, 12 December 2012, accessed 10 February 2016, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=120059429>.

³⁴ "Singer-songwriter, Author, and Activist Carole King," Interview with Diane Rehm, *Dianerehmshow.org*, 4 April 2013, accessed 10 February 2016, <http://thedianerehmshow.org/shows/2013-03-04/singersongwriter-author-and-activist-carole-king>.

supported donations to the campaign by volunteering to meet with donors as a prize to incentivize giving. Taylor also performed at the 2012 Democratic National Convention in Charlotte, North Carolina.³⁵ He celebrated his ties to the convention's location, singing "Carolina in my Mind" and helped to build a sense of unity among Democratic supporters with "You've Got a Friend."

Following re-election, Taylor's role as a musical figurehead attached to the Obama administration became clear after the shootings at the offices of French magazine *Charlie Hebdo* in Paris on January 7, 2015, which killed 12 people and injured 11 more. During Obama's second term, politician John Kerry—the veteran who testified before Congress about U.S. war crimes in Vietnam in 1971—assumed the office of Secretary of State. Following the tragedy in Paris, Kerry travelled to France to visit with victims and family members of the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks. Taylor accompanied Kerry on the trip and performed "You've Got a Friend" as a message of solidarity between France and the U.S.³⁶ Kerry described his visit as a way to "share a big hug for Paris and express the affection of the American people for France and for our friends there who have been through a terrible time."

Kerry was widely criticized for his decision to include Taylor in the diplomatic visit, and the reactions to Taylor's presence extend the decades-long critiques of the singer-songwriter identity as a weaker form of politics. First, commentators viewed the performance as overly apologetic after both Kerry and Obama were absent from a unity walk in Paris to honor victims due to prior engagements. Moreover, BBC correspondent Hugh Schofield scoffed, "I can't think

³⁵ For an analysis of the music used at both the Republican and Democratic Conventions during the 2012 elections see James Deaville, "The Sound of Media Spectacle: Music at the Party Conventions," *Music & Politics* IX, Issue 2 (2015), <http://dx.doi.org/10.3998/mp.9460447.0009.205>.

³⁶ Megan Griswold, "Watch James Taylor Sing 'You've Got a Friend' Beside John Kerry in Paris," *Time*, 16 January 2015, accessed 10 February 2016, <http://time.com/3671375/james-taylor-john-kerry-paris/>.

of a better definition of ‘soft power’ than James Taylor blasting out across the universe to seduce us with his dulcet tones.”³⁷ The commentary resonates with the derision of the sensitive male discussed in Chapter 4 that equates “soft” with effeminacy and accuses both Taylor and Kerry of lacking the effective masculine command political leaders should embody. Despite the criticisms of this particular political moment, Taylor’s diplomatic role in France places him in a long line of musicians used for cultural diplomacy in the United States, including composer Aaron Copland and jazz artists Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington.³⁸ Such connections demonstrate how singer-songwriters are today considered a part of an American musical heritage.

Conclusion

Singer-songwriters from the 1970s continue to command authority in the Los Angeles scene and on the national political stage. These artists are vital figures transmitting the legacy of the singer-songwriter tradition to contemporary artists, both in performance—as demonstrated through Carole King and Jackson Browne’s duets with younger performers—and through mere presence—as seen when Joni Mitchell attended James Blake’s performance at the Troubadour. On the national political stage, their fame from this era provides a platform to promote new causes, such as Carole King’s environmental activism and James Taylor’s work for the Obama administration. These case studies reveal how 1970s singer-songwriters stand as figureheads for political causes in the 21st century, but retain the personal narratives of their signature songs.

³⁷ Alex Griswold, “BBC Mocks John Kerry for James Taylor Soft Power Diplomacy,” *Daily Caller*, 16 January 2015, accessed 10 February 2016, <http://dailycaller.com/2015/01/16/bbc-mocks-john-kerry-for-james-taylor-soft-power-diplomacy-video/>.

³⁸ Penny M. von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006); Emily Abrams Ansari, “‘Masters of the President’s Music’: Cold War Composers and the United States Government,” PhD diss., Harvard University, 2010; Lisa E. Davenport, *Jazz Diplomacy: Promoting America in the Cold War Era* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2009).

This dissertation has unveiled the ways that singer-songwriters in Los Angeles influenced the 1970s culture of self-examination as a way to disempower the dominant institutions in society and mobilize individuals to address the difficult questions facing United States' society. Studying this time period challenges scholars of popular music to understand protest music in more complex ways, moving away from a definition that relies on overtly political lyrics as markers of an artist's political engagement. The songs examined in this dissertation have demonstrated that the personal narratives of singer-songwriters take on powerful political meanings when placed in cultural context. The reception history presented here also reveals how critics and audiences used the music as a way to understand the changes happening in the world around them, providing a further way to examine the political impact of personal songs. Rather than viewing personal songs as an indication that individuals had retreated from political engagement, these analyses illustrate the ways that personal narratives created a connection between individual artists and communities of listeners, removing singer-songwriters from critiques of pathologized narcissism and, instead, establishing the movement as an important medium of conversation among citizens disillusioned with their nation.

The music of the singer-songwriter movement also significantly shaped the changing identity politics of the 1970s. Social movements advocating for new rights for women, continued battles for racial equality, and changing conceptions of masculinity each influenced the ways the singer-songwriters viewed themselves as newly empowered subjects. The reception of singer-songwriter compositions demonstrates how audience members refracted their own personal experiences through the artist's narratives and how the music provided a site where listeners could liberate themselves along the boundaries of identity politics.

Tracing the influence of this music to present day, the singer-songwriter has become a symbol for new political engagement that is intimate and personal rather than blatant and public. The influence of these artists resonates as an integral part of the Los Angeles sound, a legacy evident in the ways present-day artists channel the performing rites established during the 1970s. Furthermore, by singing personal narratives as a way to illuminate the influence of society on individual experiences, singer-songwriters continue to give voice to political concerns, whether in Carole King's environmental activism, or in James Taylor's campaign for a presidential candidate. My analysis has demonstrated how musical protest works in the private sphere, and in doing so, this work challenges the ways in which divisions between public and private life have influenced what music scholars consider politically active. The 1970s singer-songwriter movement stands as a powerful example of how music has merged personal and political messages in the United States during the past 40 years.

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