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Folk–Rock Poet Activists and Their Influence on American Musical Theater.

A Thesis Presented

By

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To The Graduate School
In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements
For the Degree of
Master of Fine Arts
in
Theater Arts Dramaturgy
Stony Brook University

May 2013

Stony Brook University

The Graduate School

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My thesis and research focuses on the correlation between the music of the folk-rock singer songwriters of the late nineteen sixties and early nineteenth seventies and their relationship and influence on the current events of the time. The historical context is explored to show the influence of these artists on human emotions and social movements. The power of these songs added support to the changing political and social structures of the American culture. The civil rights movement, the women's liberation movement, the Kent State shootings, the Vietnam War, the gay movement, the gas shortages and much more were addressed through this art form. The songs that were created during this time supported the changes happening in the United States of America by these various movements resulting in social change. As we explore the current events and music of the folk-rock period the understanding of the historical past and its contribution and impact to American Musical Theater is presented. The singer songwriters influenced the culture by their commercial success. The lasting admiration of the songs created during this turbulent time provides the foundation for my work.

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1	The Pioneers, The Social Activists of the Late Nineteen Sixties
CHAPTER 2	The Civil Rights Movement and Joan Baez
CHAPTER 3	Coffeehouses And The Poets
CHAPTER 4	Laurel Canyon Collaborators
CHAPTER 5	West Coast Troubadours
CHAPTER 6	Feminism and the Folk–Rock Women Singers
CHAPTER 7	Folk Rock Influences on American Musical Theater
CHAPTER 8	The First Rock Musicals
CHAPTER 9	Personal Interview with Suki Elkind Weston
CHAPTER 10	Conclusion

WORKS CITED

Introduction

Folk music has a long history of uniting the masses for social change. These songs originate so far back they can be considered oral history. When storied songs are written and performed for and by the masses, they often appear when the working class needs it most.

“In the commune-like Almanac House on West Tenth Street in Greenwich Village, Seeger, sometimes the revered Woody Guthrie, and others wrote new songs that sounded like real Southern and rural working-folks’ complaints. Writing Appalachian hollow, road gangs, and steel mills. Bob Dylan spent many weeks at the New York Public Library to inspire his own writing.” (Weller 128)

The social pioneers set the stage for what was about to be an explosion of coffeehouses across the country. The intimate settings that the coffeehouses provided allowed for a unique platform of social and cultural protest to be created. They nurtured the individual artist and amplified their words in the most simplistic environments. “We Shall Overcome” sung by the American slaves in the south became a unifying force for the numerous protests of the 1960’s. The songs created are anthems to overcome some sort of struggle. The working class youth of the nineteen sixties and early seventies took this genre and created the movements that influenced and changed the political, social and cultural mindset of the entire nation. While everyone was not marching they were listening to music. The old and new songs about hardship and struggle are morphed into a hopeful battle cry with a lasting impact on American culture.

The emergence of the female singer–songwriter as a commercial force to be reckoned with allowed for the Women’s Liberation movement to have lasting influence on political and social change. In Susan Weller’s book, Girls Like Us, the women songwriters come from varied

backgrounds and ethnicities but all created social awareness and change through the power of their music.

Both men and women shared the spirit of mutual respect and collaboration as they continued to advance radical change throughout the nation. The idea that injustice could be addressed through song as a way of making social change was an effective tool in the way changes were made. In Neil Young's, Waging Heavy Peace: A Hippie Dream, he recounts years of social activism with numerous musicians.

The artistic impact of the folk rock poets on American Musical Theater is ever present today. When a song is created and performed it has a certain value. It also has imagery that can be created on stage. As a reflection of the voice of the people the folk-rock poets projected an image of both honesty and community. The young singer-songwriters influence on society had a firm and lasting effect that lead all the way to Broadway. The musicals of the late sixties and early seventies addressed the harsh realities facing the nation. Groundbreaking new work such as *Hair* and *Jesus Christ Superstar*, the first Rock Operas, would change the way traditional book musicals would be created forever. These new creations had strong roots in the small downtown coffeehouse that gave the support needed for theaters' new voice. Just as the folk-rock poets were able to create and present in these intimate settings, playwrights and directors like Sam Shepard and Tom O'Horgan used the some platform and environments of the coffeehouse to create new theatrical work that effected social change. In its wake and Off-Off Broadway was formed the New York theater scene was changed forever.

Chapter 1

THE PIONEERS, THE SOCIAL ACTIVIST OF THE LATE NINETEEN SIXTIES

The social unrest of the early nineteen sixties in America set the tone for a new group of young artists to emerge as pioneers of their generation. The radical changes began with the civil rights movement (Rossi). The introduction of mass media enabled the population as a whole to observe the injustices from their own homes. The fairly new medium allowed the viewer to take part in the drama from wherever they were in America. This was the catalyst for many new social revolutionary movements to begin. These early activists had to push the people forward to change laws and ways of thinking about basic human rights. The young people of the late sixties into the early seventies continued to pull those principles forward. The historical point of view of the early nineteen sixties was different from the late sixties to early seventies; this is the time in which real social change was created allowing the singer-songwriter to use music as a vehicle for social change. William John Thoms wrote "Folklore consists of legends, music, oral history, proverbs, jokes, popular beliefs, fairy tales and customs that are the traditions of that culture, subculture, or group. " (Dundes 9) While Thom's may have used the term for the first time the word "folk" is associated with the artists of the 1960's and early 1970's to capture the essence of the this young socially conscious generation. "Folk music was music made by and for the masses-songs to be sung at home, by yourself, and on the job. Topical music consisted of songs that related news, had a specific message, or supported a contemporary goal" (Rodnitzky 10). The evolution of the American protest song had resurgence during the turbulent years of the nineteen-sixties. Previously in America, musicians had long been thought of as glamorous entertainers that really had no impact or significance on social and cultural issues. When the movements started many popular entertainers were lending their names and talents to the new

social causes. “The so-called folk protesters or folkniks were generally not ideological, but they were willing to associate with radical movements, even at the risk of endangering their professional future” (13). The popularity of their commercial records allowed them to draw public attention to these causes. “There was a good deal of talk about alternative media and the phonograph records that disseminated it became the real alternative media, as opposed to vehicles like the underground press. If there was a counter culture, surely it lived between the microgrooves.” (15) The Newport Folk Festival founded in 1959 by George Wein helped create this new platform and allowed the vinyl to be heard live. The festival set the tone of American music until it ended in 1970 (Seeger). In 1969 the rock platform simply called Woodstock, was held for three days on the dairy farm of Max Yasgur in Bethel, NY. It is here that a pivotal change occurred in popular music. The Folk – Rock poets that shaped a nation were born from the sixties protest singers. They flourished until the late nineteen seventies.

The action of one woman in nineteen fifty-five sowed the seeds for the folk-rock generation to rally together. Rosa Parks’s refusal to move to the back of the bus in compliance with racial segregation laws was the true beginning of a new wave of social activism in America. They were met with great opposition and it took many years to consciously raise for social justice. “Her courageous act a pivotal moment in the American Struggle for racial equality led some to name her the “ Mother of the Civil Rights Movement” (Hussey) Parks’s action also supported a women’s voice and was a precursor to the Liberation movement of the nineteen-seventies. The partnering of activist with the combined force of the singer-songwriters forged a shift in American policy and laws. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Roe vs. Wade giving the right for women to govern their own body by overturning abortion laws, support the effectiveness of this approach. The music, which the early activists created, was the voice of change while the music

of the early seventies made peace with those the new changes. The Greek root of the word passion means to suffer. The folk singers of the early nineteen sixties used the passion and suffering to help align movements for change with various missions to effect those changes. The idea was nurtured that music could be used as a vehicle for social impact. This is the music that could be used as service to the nation. In the documentary *Joan Baez: How Sweet The Sound*, the power of the artist to lead and motivate people to march, vote and change the way they view the world is just as important to her story as her music (Baez). Her popularity was huge and at the age of 21 she was on the cover of *Time Magazine*. When this young dynamic performer teamed up with the young Martin Luther King the results were astounding. With her outspoken views of the Vietnam War draft she also rallied another social movement toward change. The efforts of Joan Baez to push social change in the early nineteen sixties paved the way for the artists of the early nineteen seventies to reflect and continue pulling those changes forward. Paul McCartney of the Beatles fame wrote the song "Blackbird" as a commentary on his personal reflection of the civil rights movement.

"I had been doing poetry readings. I had been doing some in the last year or so because I've got a poetry book out called Blackbird Singing, and when I would read "Blackbird", I would always try and think of some explanation to tell the people, 'cause there's not a lot you can do except just read the poem, you know, you read 10 poems that takes about 10 minutes, almost. It's like; you've got to, just, do a bit more than that. So, I was doing explanations, and I actually just remembered why I'd written "Blackbird", you know, that I'd been, I was in Scotland playing on my guitar, and I remembered this whole idea of "you were only waiting for this moment to arise" was about, you know, the black people's

struggle in the southern states, and I was using the symbolism of a blackbird. It's not really about a blackbird whose wings are broken, you know, it's a bit more symbolic.” (Doudidas)

In the iconic song “Woodstock” performed by Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young and written by Joni Mitchell the verse, and I dreamed I saw the bombers riding shotgun in the sky, they were turning into butterflies above our nation, clearly speaks as the collective voice of the people for ending the war in Vietnam. The Kent State shootings caused an internal rage that divided the nation and inspired Neil Young to write the song “Ohio”. After Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young recorded this song David Crosby recounted that he cried. “It’s still hard to believe I had to write this song. It’s ironic that I capitalized on the death of these American students. Probably the most important lesson ever learned at an American place of learning” (Young). The folk rock poets used their voice through song to rally the people to work together. The collective masses marched in the streets, attended caucuses and enjoyed concerts such as Woodstock. The voice of the young generation was impossible to ignore. Performers from both coasts were working together to create a new sound.

They worked in coffeehouses from numerous New York Greenwich Village favorites up the Hudson River to the oldest continuously run coffeehouse in America called Café Lena’s in Saratoga Springs. One of the California coasts contributions is the Troubadour on the iconic Sunset Strip in Los Angeles. The California coast was the ideal setting for the young artists of Laurel Canyon to collaborate in a way that had never been done before. Carole King and Joni Mitchell sang back up for James Taylor who fell in love with Carly Simon who was hanging out with Cat Stevens. Jim Croce saved “Time In A Bottle” while David Crosby invited Eric Clapton to hear Joni Mitchell tune and play her guitar as Joni and Stephen fell in love in “Our House.” A

music love festival. Stephen Stills describes the music scene there saying “ I can only liken it to Vienna at the turn of the century or Paris in the thirties. Laurel Canyon was similar in that there was a freedom in the air; there was a sense that we could do anything. We were scruffy kids that were in some small way changing the world, changing the way that people think about things. And there was a sharing of ideas and a true love for being in the right place at the right time” (Mitchell).

These young artists were blending the sounds of folk and rock music to create a unique new sound for a socially conscious generation. Using the power of their voice accompanied by a single guitar or piano they kept the message of the songs clear and concise. Pete Seeger’s comment that “the guitar could be mightier than the bomb” rang true to a disgruntled nation (Seeger). The essential parts and principles on which the singer-songwriters based their work reflected the voice and mindset of the young people across America. The simplicity of these songs added support to the changing political and social structures of our nation. The music that was created during this time was vital to support the changes that were happening. Those changes were created in the small coffeehouses and trickled into the experimental theaters that were scattered around the neighborhoods.

The Off- Off Broadway venue called Caffé Cino was said to be the first space in which a new plays were created under the philosophy of social change. Originally created by a retired dancer named Joe Cino as a coffeehouse where he could gather with his friends, listen to folk music and share poetry, Caffé Cino quickly became a theater venue where playwrights could express themselves in a safe environment. The new work was considered taboo and illegal at the time. Suki Elkind Weston, a lifelong resident of the New York’s Greenwich Village and personal friend with the artists, directors and playwrights, reflects that the work done at Caffé Cino and

later at La Mama set the foundation for the new work about to be created on Broadway. She recounts and shares her numerous first-hand experiences with the places and people who were the movers and the shakers of the village by painting her experiences with them on canvas. She worked with Joe Papp on *A Chorus Line*, and Tom O'Horgan, the original director of both *Hair* and *Jesus Christ Superstar*. The New York City Greenwich Village vibe was that of radical change and this new radicalism emerged as a force to be reckoned with. "The idea was to reject and destroy the old culture in order to liberate the individual. While some saw this as a negative, destructive act, many radicals insisted that it was a positive move, which forced critical evaluation of society" (Rodnitzky 31). By exploring the current events and music of the folk rock period the historical past is understood. The exploration of the cultural moment of the late nineteen sixties and seventies as presented through music, activism and multi-media was the foundation for massive changes in what was perceived as acceptable social behavior. The new normal was made possible by a change in the collective mindset.

Chapter 2

THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT AND JOAN BAEZ

As one of the earliest and youngest voices for social activism Joan Baez can be heard through her of songs as the voice of dissent and peaceful protest. Understanding the first amendments power of free speech she quickly became the voice that enabled many social injustices to be heard. (Rossi) In the documentary *Joan Baez: How Sweet The Sound* the first clip shows Joan categorizing herself as"one, a human being, two a pacifist and three a folksinger, in that order (Baez). She made a clear decision to be a role model for peaceful, non-violent change and a voice of reason in unreasonable circumstances. In the documentary David Crosby said "There

were a lot of very talented people trying to make a living as a folksinger in the little coffeehouse and clubs that were around then, me included, Joan was just one of the best at it. She was extremely talented and knocked people off their feet”(Baez). The recurring theme among the young artists throughout these years is the mutual admiration and support for their fellow folk rock poets. “Joanie was at the forefront in a new dynamic in American music. Bob Dylan shares, ”She had a record out circulating among the folk circles, called ah..I think it was just called Joan Baez and everybody was listening to it. Me included. I listened to it a lot”. (Baez) Previous to her attaching her image and name to actively protest, she sang songs that had socially conscious messages. “I Pity The Poor Immigrant”, “Man Smart, Women Smarter”, and “Oh Freedom” expressed her connection to the oppressed and the underdogs. When she discovered that her contract excluded blacks from attending her concerts her connection with the black community—and their struggle began. By making an effort to simply integrate her audience to be more racially balanced she became a vital part of the civil rights struggle. She was one of the first commercially successful female artists to align and place herself in the line of fire. “One has to appreciate that in nineteen sixty four, five and six we were living under state sponsored terrorism. It was illegal to for a person of color to use a hotel or motel. If whites and blacks were in the same car you could be arrested. In that setting which was hostile and dangerous there was Joan Baez”- Reverend Jesse Jackson (Baez). The media coverage of Joan walking young black children to school in Granada, Mississippi stopped people from throwing bricks and allowed for a national momentum to take place that resulted in monumental change. Jackson reflects, “Joan and Dr. King, I think it really was a mutual admiration. Most artists protecting their careers stood a bit away from the cutting edge of our struggle. Asking for their hot tea and their lemons and their fruit, and all of the stuff you get performing on some stage, she came as a member of that

family” (Baez). The powerful, guttural way she sang “I Ain’t Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around” was the backbone for the force of her non-violent peaceful warrior resolutions to the heated emotional fight that was taking place in the south.

Even though she chose to be a voice for social change, Bob Dylan, who sang with her on “I Pity The Poor Immigrant”, made a clear choice not to sing as an activist. “Protest singers of the 1960’s were essentially entertainers, not movement-oriented activists as Bob Dylan so clearly indicated in a 1964 interview with Nat Hentoff” (Rodnitzky Minstrils). “ I don’t believe in anything. No, why should I believe in anything? I don’t see anything to believe in”– Bob Dylan (Rodnitzky101). While Joan was working to push issues important to her into the limelight many artists were simply writing their poetry and songs in reflection of world events. In both instances the songs were an extension of the turbulence that was the early sixties. By the late sixties and seventies the confidence of this generation was clear. The results of Joan’s music and work with icons like Martin Luther King Jr. resulted in the historic Civil Rights Amendment. “Joan Baez had these special gifts of god. And she chose to devote them to the emancipation of a people and a transformation of a nation” Reverend Jesse Jackson (Baez). While activists were amazed by Joan’s commitment to their causes, the folk rock artists were amazed by her talent. Bob Dylan was a fan before he was a lover. “She had a very unusual way of playing the guitar. I never heard anybody do it like Joanie did. I tried to practice it but I couldn’t get that style down” (Baez). Joan’s personal belief in non-violent protest was embraced by the masses. Her work with the Civil Rights and Anti-Vietnam War movements allowed people of all races to unite for many great causes. It began and flourished in the numerous coffeehouses across the nation.

The historical role of the neighborhood coffeehouse has been to provide an outlet for people in a community to express themselves culturally, socially and politically. Retired professor, Jay Ruby from Temple University wrote,

“Supposedly the first was Kiva Han in 1475 in Constantinople (Istanbul), Turkey. Ibrahim Pecevi, provides us with one of the earliest account of its emergence: “They look’d upon them as very proper to make acquaintances in, as well as to refresh and entertain themselves...Young people near the end of their publick Studies: such as were ready to enter upon publick Posts: Cadhics [magistrates] out of place...the Muderis, or Professors of Law, and other Sciences; and, in fine, Persons of all Ranks flocked to them.” (Ruby)

The ideal spread rapidly to Europe- first Vienna in 1529, England by 1672, Italy in 1654, France in 1672 and, finally Germany in 1673” (Ruby). The traditional coffeehouse format sprang up all across America providing a platform for music and social activism.

In these small spaces huge momentous changes were happening for a variety of social causes. Civil Rights, Women’s equality, Gay issues, the Vietnam War all had platforms in which an activist could either sing, write, perform or simply speak about the causes that were important to the audience that was present. These are the people that lead the nation in understanding and support for all social causes.

Chapter 3

THE POETS AND COFFEEHOUSES

Joan Baez sang at Boston’s Club 47 instead of attending college, in spite of the fact that she was a registered student. She quickly became a folk icon, playing wherever she could. When

she started looking for new material she met Bob Dylan who was undiscovered at the time along with the other future stars of the folk-rock songwriters. The undiscovered youth crafted their sound while performing in various coffeehouses throughout the country.

“Coffee shops in the United States arose from the espresso- and pastry-centered Italian coffeehouses of the Italian-American immigrant communities in the major U.S. cities, notably New York's Little Italy and Greenwich Village, Boston's North End, and San Francisco's North Beach. From the late 1950s onward, coffeehouses also served as a venue for entertainment, most commonly folk performers during the American folk music revival. This was likely due to the ease at accommodating in a small space a lone performer accompanying himself or herself only with a guitar. Both Greenwich Village and North Beach became major haunts of the Beats, who were highly identified with these coffeehouses” (Ruby).

The craze spanned from Boston to San Francisco to Greenwich Village and up the Hudson River to Saratoga Springs, New York. Most of these iconic venues are closed but Saratoga's Café Lena still flourishes today. Founded in 1960 by Bill and Lena Spencer, a folk artist continues to have a home to sing the songs that matter. It continues to reign as America's oldest folk club.

These original classic coffeehouses such as Greenwich Villages' Gaslight, The Bitter End, Folk City, and The Troubadour provided a platform to perform new songs, experimental theater and poetry. These are the places where Bob Dylan, Joni Mitchell, David Crosby, James Taylor, Carol King, Carly Simon, Bonnie Raitt, Linda Ronstadt and so many young folk performers presented their new work. More importantly they were able to hear their peers perform as well. The environment of mutual respect and understanding encouraged lifelong collaborations. They also inspired playwrights, poets and other artist to do the same thing. These

small venues sprung up around the nation as a vehicle for social awareness and change. The roots took place to establish lasting changes in social policy as well. This work presented through song and performances changed the cultural landscape of the nation and resulted in major social and political changes.

It was in this free spirited environment that the folk singer songwriters would book themselves gigs all across the nation. These intimate performing spaces allowed and encouraged young artists to be influenced and supported by each other. Many of the traveling folk singers ended up on the west coast in the “Canyon of Dreams” which was immortalized by Kubernik book of the same title. It is here that true collaborations took place, Martin Luther King Jr. was marching with Joan Baez who was in love with Bob Dylan who was “Blowin’ in the Wind.” David Crosby was in love with Joni Mitchell who was in love with Stephen Stills and they were all floating high in the canyon. While on the strip Carol King sang back-up for James Taylor who fell in love with Carly Simon who was with Cat Stevens. In “Our House” and across the nation love was in the air (Weller 23-26).

Of all the collaborations one artist stands out as an iconic symbol of the west coast vibe during that time. In spite of the fact that she was from Canada she was the All- American face of the California girl. She was also the girl that was a respected poet and songwriter. Mitchell was the whole package. She had been writing music for years before the explosion of other artist descended upon the mountain and in Los Angeles. “When I first heard Joni’s music I was amazed. It was truly unique”– James Taylor (Browne). Mitchell booked her own singing dates and traveled across the nation until she settled into the hills of Laurel Canyon.

When Joni first started out in the coffeehouse she had mixed reviews. There were some club owners that were reluctant to give her a break. She worked hard to be a better musician. Joni

was developing a following, and she was determined to improve her musicianship. “Joni wanted to play better,” recalls Shawn Phillips, a featured performer at the Riel, “I distinctly remember telling her that anything she could do at the lower end of the guitar neck she could do higher up. I think she was intrigued by my use of nonstandard chords” (Weller 132). Her dedication, insight and hard work were about to pay off, as she became the singer songwriter that the folk rock musicians became intrigued with.

Chapter 4

Laurel Canyon Collaborators

Before she recorded her first album she had a backlog of songs that would have taken other artists an entire career to create (Mitchell). Joni Mitchell influenced the singer-songwriters of the late 1960’s and 1970’s because of the unique manor in the way in which she approached a song. “Joni Mitchell is a true poet. She could instill an experience or a feeling into song better than anyone. She is one of those ones where the sparks all connect. There’s some magic that took place there”–Crosby (Mitchell). She addressed taboo cultural topics with a sincerity that showed her inner most private thoughts and emotions. She had a child out of wedlock, lived with “the one she was with”, traveled across the country alone, and painted her images of songs as well as the written words. David Crosby first heard Joni sing in the coffeehouses and produced her first album. “He ‘discovered’ Joni Mitchell while she was playing in the gaslight clubs in Coconut Grove, Florida” (Walker 83). They traveled back to California where Crosby would bring other musicians like the highly skilled Eric Clapton to hear Joni play and listen to the strange new way in which she tuned her guitar. Fellow artist and musicians were amazed by the insight and depth of her writing. Having toured for years she set down some roots in a small cottage in the

mountains. It was here that she developed a reputation among the folk rock community as the being the queen of the canyon.

“In 1968 a British pop star and the refugees from two seminal Los Angeles bands gathered in a cottage on Lookout Mountain Avenue, the slightly seedy, camp-like neighborhood of serpentine one lane roads, precipitous hill, fragrant eucalyptus tree, and softly crumbling bungalows set down improbably in the middle of Los Angeles, and sang together for the first time. The occupant of the cottage, ...was a Canadian painter, poet, and folksinger named Joni Mitchell. The British pop-star... was Graham Nash” (Walker 1). A variety of bands and their members were in the canyon along with the individual songwriters. While they broke up, started new bands, went solo or just plain dropped out of the business they all ended up collaborating by the mere fact that they hung out together, smoked weed and played songs (Weston 108). Because of this exposure with the music community by the time Mitchells first album was released in 1968 she was well known and respected among her peers. When *Song to a Seagull* was released she already had a following from her coffeehouse tours and recognition by association with the pop stars of the canyon. It was the messages of her songs that made her an icon. The folk messages were of a different form. The protest song was replaced with songs of awareness and insight. The focus was on the individuals needs, especially from a female voice in the first person. Joni Mitchell crafted her unique guitar sounds by creating chords that expressed the emotions of her songs. Joni’s poetic lyrics addressed social, economic and political issues with a sense that she was writing these songs from a personal point of view. “Bob Dylan inspired me and it was the idea of the personal narrative, he would speak as if to one person in a song. *You’ve got a lot of nerve, to say you are my friend*. I mean nobody had ever written anything like that in song form. You know such a personal, strong statement and his influence was to personalize my

work. I feel this, for you or from you or because of you” (Mitchell). As Joni was struck by Bob Dylan’s work so was James Taylor when he first heard Joni Mitchell. “Joni invented everything about her music, including how to tune the guitar, from the beginning with the process of writing it she’s building the canvas as well as putting the paint on it”–Taylor (Mitchell). The chord renderings of Joni Mitchell songs attest to the power of the emotional attachment to her lyrics. “For years people would say; Joni’s weird chords, and I thought, how can they be weird chords? Chords are depictions of emotions. These chords that I was getting by twisting the knobs on the guitar until I could get these chords that I heard inside, that suited me, they feel like my feelings. You know, I called them not knowing... chords of inquiry. They have a question mark in them” (Mitchell).

Her music reflected the emotional turmoil the nation was feeling from the civil rights struggle, the women’s liberation movement, the gay rights issues and the conflict in Vietnam. “By the time we got to Woodstock, we were half a million strong, and everywhere there was song and celebration” (Mitchell). “ In mid-August, Joni and Crosby, Stills and Nash (now with Neil Young) flew to New York to appear at the Woodstock Music and Art Fair, and for Joni’s booking on the prestigious Dick Cavett Show the night after the festival” (Weller 288). Joni wanted to perform but her managers were afraid she would not be able to make it back to film the show so she had to watch it on television. In spite of the fact that she was not physically present at the festival the spirit in which she wrote the song “Woodstock” sang to the masses.

“And I dreamed I saw the bombers
Riding shotgun in the sky,
And they were turning into butterflies
Above our nation

We are stardust.
Billion year old carbon

We are golden
Caught in the devil's bargain
And we've got to get ourselves back to the garden.”

The hauntingly simplistic tone of Mitchells original version done with a single voice accompanied by the piano is still as powerful today as it was in 1970. “Joni wrote her song about a raucous weekend in counterintuitive minor mode” (Weller 291). The simplicity of her arrangement made the songs’ message all the more powerful. “ Years later, cultural critic Camille Paglia, in her book *Break, Blow, Burn*, would feistily place the lyric’s to “ Woodstock” along with the works by Robert Lowell, Sylvia Plath, Emily Dickenson—and Shakespeare—on her list of the forty three best poems produced in the English language” (Weller 291). The song was a huge hit by Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young and continued to support the movement for social and political awareness through song. “She contributed more to peoples understanding of that event than anybody that was there” – Crosby (Mitchell). This song allowed Joni to speak as the voice of people through her songs. Mitchell’s songwriting writing had a “confessionalism that intensely defined her next few albums *Blue, For The Roses and Court and Spark*” (Weller 419). These albums were all released during late sixties and early seventies in which activism was thriving. They allowed for people to continue to embrace and express their feelings through song and activism.

Chapter 5

West Coast Troubadours

Down in the valley, a short drive from the canyon, the troubadours on the Sunset Strip were having a ball. Doug Weston, the original proprietor of The Troubadour, was a driving force behind the blooming careers of many of the young singer-songwriters. Weston’s club gave them

a perfect start for their public platforms. “By the mid-70’s, the sheer surfeit served up by the record industry seemed as if it would never end. The hits just kept coming for the Laurel Canyon alumni. Carole King’s *Tapestry* kicked off the decade by rocketing to No.1 and forging the template for the enormous L.A. singer-songwriter albums to follow” (Walker 205). Like so many of the other coffeehouse across America, The Troubadour was one of the clubs that was a gathering place for the folk rock poets and their new fans. Lenny Bruce, the comedian, was arrested at the Troubadour following his stand-up routine. A few years later the hot new Off-Off Broadway director from La Mama named Tom O’Horgan would win a Tony award for his production of *Lenny* on Broadway. After a late night jam with the members of The Troubadours club band, Bob Dylan made a dramatic change from a folk artist to a folk-rock singer. Joni Mitchell performed in her Los Angeles debut in June in 1968 to coincide with the release of her first album. In 1969 Neil Young and James Taylor debuted their solo albums. It was here that James Taylor and Carol King first sang “You’ve Got a Friend” and where James was introduced to his future wife Carly Simon who was opening for Cat Stevens.

Neil Young established himself as a powerful songwriter and voice for the underdogs. He continues to work for many causes to this day. “The devastation from BP’s oil spill disaster, plus Hurricane Katrina’s aftermath, lingering for years, was an incredible load on those folks. I just wanted to go down there and help.....A lot of folks were greatly intimidated by the oil power that controls so much of the area. People were down, frightened, yet strong. They were not going anywhere” (Young 375-76). The oil crisis and gas shortages of the nineteen seventies was the first time in which Americans’ truly felt vulnerable to the oil companies that supplied so much of America’s daily needs. He also began his career and collaborations at the Troubadour in 1970. After his exposure at the Troubadour his work was nonstop. He collaborated with a variety of

performers such as Crosby, Stills and Nash. “Riots were happening on the Strip. Hippies against the war, cops against the hippies. Stephen wrote “For What It’s Worth” about the riots. It was a great message song of the times, with his signature vocal phrasing” (Young 390). The spirit of mutual admiration and collaboration is still alive today. “One day Bob Dylan called me, which is a surprise. He doesn’t typically call. It was after Hurricane Katrina destroyed New Orleans and I had done some TV with many other artists to help raise funds for the victims.....and he heard us do “Walking to New Orleans” and wanted to tell me what a good performance it was. That was really cool, and it meant a lot to me” (Young 225).

In 2007, for its 50th Anniversary celebration, The Troubadour welcomed back Carole King and James Taylor to reenact their original debut with their original band. “I stood outside a little dressing room up on the balcony,” Mr. Taylor said, referring to the Troubadour, the Los Angeles club that served as ground zero for the singer-songwriter movement in the early 1970s, “and I just had to find my guitar and figure out how that song went. I said: ‘She’s written it. That’s ‘The Star-Spangled Banner’ right there” (DeCurtis). “He was referring to “You’ve Got A Friend” and “he loved it so much that he said. ‘Damn! Why didn’t *I* write that?’ He would end up recording it; it would be his only #1 hit” (Weller 324).

While King was singing back up for Taylor she was writing one the most successful albums that would ever be written by a women. Tapestry was released in 1971 and continued the wave of female artists that were highly successful in the music business. “Carole King, Joni Mitchell and Carly Simon remain among the most enduring and important women in popular music. Each woman is distinct, in both her individual songwriting and vocal style and in her singular transformation of American music history... They collectively represent in their lives and in their songs, just about every girl who came of age in the late 1960’s” (Weller

Introduction). These women's music supported the new wave of feminism that was gaining momentum in America.

Chapter 6

Feminism and the Folk–Rock Women Singers

The influence of the female folk artist was well established by the early 1970's and allowed for the new female rock artists to be taken seriously as powerful singers, songwriter and interpreters of classic American music. This new sense of empowerment supported the momentum of the women who were working diligently for social and economic change. "Women's liberation had been the work of female civil rights and antiwar activists in collectives in Berkeley, Boston, New York and elsewhere...but now [in 1971] it was fully entrenched in the mainstream intelligentsia" (Weller 19). The battle cries of women could be heard through song lyrics such as; "I am Woman, hear me roar, in numbers too big to ignore, and I know too much to go back and pretend." Helen Reddy's hit became an anthem for the conscious raising wave of feminism in the early 1970's. The woman who has had the most influence on the changes that were happening then and now through politics and awareness continues to consciously raise for the rights of women everywhere. Gloria Steinem's *Ms. Magazine* was the first of its kind and continues to be a platform for feminist discussion and public awareness.

*"Without leaps of imagination, or dreaming,
We lose the excitement of possibilities.
Dreaming, after all, is a form of planning."*

Gloria Steinem

There were many women that contributed to the "second wave" of feminism in America during The Women's Liberation Movement of the early 1970's but none more iconic than Gloria Steinem. The journalist turned feminist has been an advocate for basic human equalities since she was asked to cover The Redstocking's feminist event in 1969. While reporting as a journalist

she listened to the stories of several women and their experiences with abortions. Steinem recalls that she felt as though a “ great blinding light bulb” had just been turned on. In that instant she knew she was a feminist. “ It wasn’t until I went to cover a local abortion hearing for the New York that the politics of my own life began to explain my interest.Suddenly, I was no longer learning intellectually what was wrong, I knew” (Rosen 209). The women’s movement was also supported by the new generation of folk rock women artists.

Bonnie Raitt was able to establish herself as one of the first women rock artist who could carry her career with her talent and a guitar. During an interview for the Dutch documentary called *Wonderland* filmed in Los Angeles during the 1970’s, Bonnie shares some of her feminist insight at a very young age. She discusses her views while sitting in the infamous lingerie store called Fredericks of Hollywood. “That whole va va voom effect is so outdated with the women’s movement... That’s why I wanted to do this interview and talk about women in the music business because this is such a ridiculous statement of where part of the culture is still behind ...imagine when everyone looks like David Bowie, this store won’t exist anymore. He probably shops here”–Raitt (*Wonderland*). Even though there were sweeping changes made for women during this time politically and socially with Roe vs. Wade and numerous other laws passed for basic equality, it was still very difficult to be a women in the rock world. Linda Ronstadt strolled along the beach in Malibu and shared her experiences traveling around the country for ten years without a real home of her own. “Women on the road.... I don’t know its strange, the rock and roll culture is so male dominated and it also seems to be dominated with a sort of hostility against women... that a sort of sexual identity that is sort of used as a weapon toward the women.... it’s sad to me–Ronstadt (*Wonderland*). These women shared their opinions and first hand views of the changing role for women from the boardroom to the bedroom. They also

addressed the difficulties women had when they wanted to live the life of an authentic artist. Both Raitt and Ronstadt remained true to their beliefs and their art. Raitt is still an activist and travels around the world extensively, pitching for her causes and her music. Her words from the *Wonderland* interview still ring true today. “It used to be that you had to be very attractive in a plastic way to make it big in show business and now I think more and more people are turning away from that Ann–Margaret, you know, Las Vegas, show girl, big hair. But I think in my own case, I like to put the context of my concerts in a political way. Giving some of the money back to the community that I took it out from. The idea of doing benefit concerts for whatever organization needs some help in the town”–Raitt (*Wonderland* 1977). She has always remained socially and politically active throughout her career. In 1993, on Earth Day, Bonnie Raitt along with Joan Baez climbed into a tree in the Redwood Forest to protest the cutting of the trees. These are the actions that defined the folk rock era and enabled artists to crossover into other avenues of artistic expression.

Linda Ronstadt’s career traveled all the way to Broadway with a successful run in Joe Papp’s *The Pirates of Penzance*.

“Yes, the New York Shakespeare’s Festival’s production of *The Pirates of Penzance* does sound crazy. One needn’t be an orthodox Savoyard to wonder what two American rock singers, Linda Ronstadt and Rex Smith, are doing smack in the middle of one of Gilbert and Sullivan’s most beguiling operettas. Or to wonder why they are surrounded by an eclectic crew of Broadway and West End actors. ... But if this *Pirates of Penzance* at first seems like a misbegotten ship of fools, I’ll be damned if it doesn’t sail” (Rich).

It was because of Joe Papp’s involvement with the legendary musical *Hair* that he was able to see past the classical Broadway book musical into the future. He played a monumental part in the

shift that occurred in the theater and continues to this day. His influence in the late sixties and early seventies contributed to the changing ways in which a musical was created and what was considered entertaining.

Chapter 7

Folk Rock Influences on American Musical Theater

The roots of American Musical Theater can be traced to a fire in 1866. The Academy of Music in downtown Manhattan was scheduled to host a ballet performance but burned down before the opening of the production. This is the original OFF-off Broadway production. The ballet included numerous scenic effects from the troupe, which had traveled from abroad to perform here in the states. William Wheatly heard of their misfortune and conceived of the idea to combine a play that he was working on called *The Black Crow* utilizing the ballet troupes dance movements and elaborate set designs. His play was a melodrama with music written by Charles M. Barra. Wheatly combined drama and spectacle with a number of minimally dressed ballet dancers and opened *The Black Crow* on September 12, 1866 at Niblo's Gardens. It was a huge hit that ran for sixteen months and grossed a whopping one million dollars. Riding on the success of *The Black Crow* other musical entertainment began to be created. In 1868 a show called *Humpty Dumpty* had achieved greater success by combining spectacle and pantomime. It had lavish set that included circus elements such as a roller-skating routine. As the years progressed more American themes were prevalent along with original musical scores that supported the book. In 1874 *Evangeline* became the first musical comedy featuring a burlesque show based on a poem by Longfellow (Sennett 48). As the roots of this new American art form became solid musicals reflected what was happening in popular culture. Collaborations with popular authors such as P.G. Woodhouse and Guy Bolton moved this blooming new genre into

popular music. One voice stood out among the early pioneers that led into the early 1900's. The influence of the popular songwriter on society can be traced to Jerome Kern who wrote songs that were incorporated into Broadway musicals. The confirmation of his success was reflected by his sheet music sales. In 1914 "The Girl From Utah" sold two million copies. The contribution of the folk songwriter to musical theater began with Kern who collaborated with the Broadway community on many more projects in the early 1900's. As the abundant, risky, playful decade of the 1920's progressed Kern continued to be an influential voice through his music. He worked with the Ziegfeld Follies and wrote the music for Sally. One popular song from this show called "Look For The Silver Lining" brought the Broadway show tunes into American homes throughout the country. Kern's popularity continued to gain momentum as he began to work with other songwriter's such as Oscar Hammerstein. Musical Theater's continued its popularity with other young composers such as George Gershwin, Cole Porter and Richard Rodgers. Audiences left the theater humming and singing these new popular tunes by these songwriters well into the nineteen thirties. These songs remain Broadway standards to this day. "Lady Be Good" and "Funny Face" in 1927, "Of Thee I Sing" in 1931 and the songs of *Porgy and Bess* continued to spread the folk song traditions with the people. "Someone to Watch Over Me" was hit again in the 1970's made popular by Linda Ronstadt. These composers were making hits on and off the stage. The popular music of the twenties was present on the stage. "Waltzes mingled with syncopated jazz tunes, and ballads with novelty songs"(12).

The stock market crash of 1929 followed by the great depression changed the musical theater landscape. People simple did not have the extra funds to go to the theater. "As theater audiences dwindled, producers of musical shows were convinced that the key to luring them back was to offer the same lighthearted diversion as the movies, the same way to escape from the

grim, beleaguered world for a few hours” (23). Unlike the social activist of the sixties and seventies the goal of the theater experience was to escape reality as opposed to facing it. There was social protest in theater but it was mainly left to playwrights such as Clifford Odets and members of the Group Theater to tackle (Hagen). The musical theater community decided that it was going to put a veil on reality. “What was needed for those difficult times was a large measure of wit and frivolity leavened with skepticism and a certain brashness” (23). Some of the most successful new works of this time had a fresh approach. Reaching back to musical theaters roots elaborate choreographed movement was reintroduced with great success. George Balanchine who founded the New York City Ballet premiered the first classical ballet created for a musical (Balanchine). *Babes In Arms* in 1937 was danced to Richard Rodgers jazz music and delighted audiences. The shows were fun and frivolous but did not reflect the disparity of the current social conditions and atmosphere that was prevalent in the nation at the time. As Broadway headed into the nineteen forties new problems plagued the theaters as a result of World War II. In spite of the war the dominant force of a new collaboration created new musical theater productions. Rodgers and Hammerstein combined a partnership and created numerous new classics. *South Pacific* in 1949 and the *King and I* 1951 have had many successful revivals. The songs remain timeless. “My Funny Valentine” and “You’ll Never Walk Alone” are both true testimonies to these songwriters lasting appeal. Traveling throughout the nineteen fifties other power players had success which appealed to the social norms of the time. The musical theater books were still catering to a traditional audience that wanted a happy experience at the theater. “These years brought to fruition the sort of traditional musical play that has always found favor with audiences and critics. A linear plot marks them, songs that grow logically out of characters and situations, and a production that gives the eye as much pleasure as the ears. Flaws disappear

or diminish in retrospect- in their way these shows are perfect and also perfectly wonderful” (Sennett). Irving Berlin hit it big with *Annie Get your Gun* and Frank Loesser enjoyed great triumph with *Guys and Dolls* and *The Most Happy Fella*. As Bob Fosse choreographed *Damn Yankees* in 1955 he began his career with a traditional format that was influenced by his burlesque background. He would become one of the most influential artist of the nineteen sixties and seventies because of these non-traditional roots. So would another retired dancer named Joe Cino. The changes that were about to come had a direct connection to the folk-poet, singer-songwriters that were reshaping the way American morality was interpreted. These changes started to brew and percolate in the small coffeehouse and venues across the nation. The theatrical coffeehouse most credited with the creation of the OFF-OFF Broadway movement in the early nineteen sixties was Joe Cino’s Caffé Cino.

At Caffé Cino located at 31 Cornelia Street in Greenwich Village the retired dancers original intent was to have a coffeehouse for friends to socialize and enjoy folk music, poetry readings, concerts and art exhibits. A friend suggested that he add theatrical performances to the mix and the rest is history. It quickly became the place for young playwrights to experiment with new theatrical works. It also created a safe haven for the gay community to present their plays involving gay rights and issues. Public laws did not allow any gay issues to be discussed or viewed publicly. Any performances that had gay topic or discussions in the script about intimate relationships were literally illegal at the time. “No one was paid but the police to leave the place alone” (Weston). It wasn’t long until other small venues appeared as safe places to present socially conscious theater. It was in these venues that activists could protest laws that they felt were unjust through their art. It was through these outside, underground theaters that social rebellion was possible. Caffé Cino’s space was so raw that the first productions did not have an

actual stage. When Cino did get around to making one it was from milk cartons and pieces of artifacts like old wood crates, carpet pieces and other scraps. Many playwrights that presented work at Caffé Cino went on to have long meaningful careers. Sam Shepard went on to write *True West*, William Hoffman wrote *As Is*, Lanford Wilson's highly praised *Burn This*, Tom Eyan of *Dreamgirls* fame, and Doric Wilson who founded TOSOS the first professional gay theater company. Harvey Milk who moved to San Francisco and became a political activist that was able to make real changes in social policy and equality. Robert Patrick was interviewed by the Village Voice in 2006 and discussed Caffé Cino's contributions to theater. "Theatre had been slow to enter the modern era; literature and painting had entered it a hundred years before. Artists had decided that they must paint or write as they wished, whether their work sold or not. But theatre lingered behind, because it takes a great many people to do theatre, and a space to do it in. At the Caffé Cino, no admission was charged, no one was paid, critics seldom came, and the cops were paid off. We were free to do plays as the Impressionists had painted: experimentally, individually, and responsibly" (Edroso). New works included commercial pieces as well as the new avant-garde work. The musical *Dames at Sea* ran for twelve weeks in 1966. The regulars were divided about the inclusion of the long running commercial pieces. Future celebrities like Al Pacino and Bernadette Peters appeared there along with Tom O'Horgan, the original Director of the musicals *Hair* and *Jesus Christ Superstar*. The play *The Bed* was written by Bob Heidi and premiered at Caffé Cino in 1965 for a benefit and again later in the year for 150 performances. Warhol shot a film version of the play in 1965 and again in 1966 without using Heidi's script. "Warhol came on several occasions to see his play *The Bed* at the Caffé Cino in 1965. *The Bed* featured two young men in an oversized bed and was filmed straight on by Andy Warhol with Danny Williams shooting specific close-ups, hand movements and zoom-ins at Richard

Bernstein's loft on the Bowery in the fall of 1965. It opened on April 26, 1966 at Jonas Mekas' Filmmakers Cinematheque on 41st Street. The script written by Robert Heide was a close adaptation of his one-act play *The Bed*, an Off-Broadway hit at the Caffé Cino. Projected onto two adjacent screens the film anticipated Warhol's famous double-screen film "The Chelsea Girls" (Comenas). After Caffé Cino burned down and Joe Cino took his own life in 1967 many of the regulars from Cino continued to do new work in a space called La Mama.

Ellen Stewart opened La Mama in 1961 and dedicated the space to the art of the playwright and all aspects of their work. This is the space in which Tom O'Horgan began his directing career with The La Mama Troupe. Playwrights established themselves as a driving new force in experimental theater. With the support of people like Stewart it made historic change possible. O'Horgan was a major part of her entourage. He was in the perfect place to experiment with his alternative directing techniques. His style of approaching a script with the actors was with free form movements. He took his work to Europe where he was well received. Joe Papp produced the first rock opera at The Public Theater and reflected on Tom's directing style. "I thought Tom O'Horgan was a very good director with a lot of imagination who was used to doing things that were unorthodox" (Turan 398). His reputation quickly grew and garnered the attention of the writers of a show called *Hair*. They had seen the experimental work being done at La Mama and knew right away that it would be perfect for the show they were writing. Since Tom was in Europe at the time he did not direct the original Off Broadway "Rock Opera" production that Joe Papp did at The Public Theater. When it went to Broadway, *Hair's* creators, James Rado and Gerome Ragnò got their wish and O'Horgan's first major success took place.

The Coffeehouses of the folk era set the stage for the change in American theater that reached Broadway by the end of the decade. Tom O'Horgan was there and made a few friends

and a lot of admiration along the way. Producers and writers sought him out for his work at Caffè Cino and later at Ellen Stewarts La Mama. The elements he infused into His Broadway version of *Hair* can be easily read in the stage directions. “*Time*: The present, *Place*: New York City; mostly the East Village. The sound will be rock music. It is very important that an excellent sound system be used that can regulate the balance of voice and musical instrumentation” (Richards 388-389). Tom O’Horgan was about to make Broadway history. A few years later he would make it again with the controversial *Jesus Christ Superstar*.

Chapter 8

The First Rock Musicals

Hair first debuted in 1967 at The Public Theater. Joe Papp took a chance with the downtown experimental work and he soon found himself with the show that would change the course of the Broadway Musical forever.

“A kind of free form, plotless “Oh, What a Happy Hippiedom, *Hair* ignites the key images and issues of the lost and found generation-youth vs. age, sex, love, the draft, race, drugs, Vietnam-into a vivid uproar that has more wit, feeling and musicality than anything since *West Side Story*...Twenty-one fresh faces and limber bodies have made (Newsweek).

The musical captured the energy and intensity of the downtown Greenwich Village artist and community. Joe Papp realized that the nation was in need of a show that was the new sign of the times. “One little scene he’d shown me, about a guy going off to war, had been intriguing. I always wanted to do something that comes out of the times we are living in, and all around us at the theater, in what was being called the East Village, were all hippies. It was no bullshit, you’d

go out the door and they were all there” (Turan 183). When he made the decision to do the *Hair* the first “tribal rock musical” was born (186).

The show’s writers finally got their way when the musical moved from the Public Theater to its Broadway debut. In 1968 Tom O’Horgan directed the Broadway production and made sweeping changes that put his own unique style of directing a show for his first uptown hit. In addition to a list of new songs O’Horgan incorporated his improvisational role-playing theories into the show that latter were written into the new script (Weston). The free form ideas and techniques used for *Hair* made O’Horgan a hot commodity. He also hired great singers that went on to have music careers after the show was over. While *Hair* was playing on Broadway another huge hit directed by O’Horgan was running across the street named *Lenny* about the controversial stand up comedian who used a lot of explicit profanity in his show.

O’Horgan was approached to do *Jesus Christ Superstar* and initially was not interested but the show’s producers made him an offer that he could not refuse (Weston). They bribed him with dinosaur bones, which were illegal to own privately. According to Suki Weston they were hanging in his loft until it was sold before his death. The Andrew Lloyd Webber *Jesus Christ Superstar* the musical also ran in 1971. By this point the rock musical had established solid roots and was a viable Broadway commodity. It re-introduced a future Broadway legend named Ben Vereen who played the part of Judas. He was also in O’Horgan’s Broadway production of *Hair*. The effect of these show on the future of the Broadway book musical is present today with the recent past and current hits like *Rent* and *Once*. “I see a show like ‘Spring Awakening,’ and I say, ‘Oh, that’s Tom O’Horgan,’ but no one stands up and says ‘Thank you.’ He changed so much about Broadway and they never bought him dinner” Vereen (Campbell).

The tight knit group of friends and colleagues from the small Off–Off Broadway venues of Caffe Cino and La Mama continued to remain friends through the years. One such friend and confidant was a girl from Long Island who has now lived in the Village since the early days of the experimental theater movement. She has lived the life of a true artist and activist. The contemporary original artwork of Suki Elkind Weston can be viewed and bought in Union Square and other downtown parks and venues. Her work spans from the early days of Caffe Cino until today and chronicles many of her own personal connections with these early pioneers. One of her most endearing relationships was that with Tom O’Horgan. Suki met Tom while she worked as Joe Papp’s assistant and the rest is history.

Chapter 9

Personal Interview with Suki Elkind Westson, Greenwich Village April 2013

Social activists must dedicate their lives to everything that they believe in every moment of everyday. Suki Weston is a social activist of the purist form. The following interview took place Greenwich Village on April 23, 2013.

Sweeney: Can you tell me a little about yourself?

Weston: I am an artist and I have a DVD that’s nineteen minutes long and starts at Caffe Cino and goes up to 2011. It’s called the LGBTQ (and straight) Creation of Off-Off Broadway and Performance Art: From 1960-Present. That’s my interest. I do performance art about Off–Off Broadway and Off Broadway. I was a life long friend of Tom O’Horgan. He was my family. We meet downtown when I was working with Joe Papp.

Sweeney: The folk songwriters of the late nineteen sixties were singing and protesting in the coffeehouses side by side with the theater community. Do you think any those new theater pieces started in the small coffeehouses?

Weston: They had to because most of the people who were the biggest creators were gay, why, because in your whole pool of human beings they were not allowed to go to Broadway. They were arrested. If two people gathered on a street corner before Stonewall they were arrested. So they went into the coffeehouses and they did theater. Bernadette Peters started for two weeks in the Cino, she started in *Dames At Sea* for two weeks and then she left. So you had all these gay people, all this talent, who were not allowed to perform where alcohol was served because gay bars were illegal. So people like Joe Cino started coffeehouse and they did little shows on little stages. They were sort of breaking the law but not really. And then when Joe commented suicide Ellen Stewart took over for him and she started the café at La Mama. She took in all those gay performers and gave them a platform. She got closed down a lot of times for having a gay café and she couldn't serve alcohol.

Sweeney: What were the dates that that happened?

Weston: I know exactly when the dates were. It's all on the DVD. You can view it on you-tube as well.

Sweeney: When was there a shift in policy?

Weston: It was Stonewall in 1970.

Sweeney: How was Tom O'Horgan involved with the downtown coffeehouse?

Weston: Tom had a troupe that was going to Europe in 1962. He did *Tom Paine*, he did *Rhinoceros*, and he did the famous one where everyone was rolling around in the mud. What was

that called? Oh. It was about a Pig and had naked women. I'll think of it latter. Tom took a troupe of Americans mostly to Denmark.

Sweeney: When did you meet Tom?

Weston: I met Tom when I was twenty-one. I was working for Joe Papp at the Public Theater. We were starting to do *A Chorus Line*. I was working in the office as one of his assistants. We were also working in the park. But that was one of the big arguments. Joe did not want to do *A Chorus Line* and Bernie Kirsten did and they fought everyday for like six months. Joe felt it wasn't experimental theater. And Bernie said its experimental enough and it will make us a fortune. So Joe finally gave in because Joe went to rehearsals and the kids were making up there own stories. That is by the way the first show where people actually got a part of the action. They got paid and got rich, because whatever they created for the show they got royalties. The first time it ever happened, because they were writing their own parts. The people who did *Hair* were really angry, all of my friends who were in the original cast of *Hair*, because they created a lot of the characters in that show.

Sweeney: Is that because of the improve work that Tom did during rehearsals for Hair?

Weston: Yes. The producers (of *Hair*) were not going to let it happen for them. *A Chorus Line* was so much more of an organized show. The hippie days were kind of kind of coming to an end.

Sweeney: Was Tom involved with *A Chorus Line* at all?

Weston: No. He got busy with La Mama. Jerry and Jim wanted to do *Hair* at La Mama with John Vacaro because they liked the Ridiculous Theater Company's approach for the show. But that director was off the wall, and he's not a musical director. So Jerry and Jim called in Tom. Tom quickly realized that even as much as he loved Ellen and helped her build her theater and how he

got her a Tony Awards.. that her theater was not big enough. That Joe Papp could afford a bigger venue and that he could raise more money.

Sweeney: Did that cause a rift between Tom and Ellen?

Weston: Yes, for a long time it did and then it mended. And then at the end of their lives there was a rift.

Sweeney: Then what happen with the production?

Weston: So Tom took the show to Papp and John Vacaro was fired as the director. John Vacaro was a drug addict who knew nothing about music and here you had Tom O'Horgan who had gone to the University of Chicago and was conductor and a composer and a singer.

Sweeney: Did he play instruments as well?

Weston: He played all those instruments and anything he could pick up.

Sweeney: Did he incorporate music into his experimental theater group?

Weston: Yes, the money that he made from *Superstar* and from *Hair* he put back into his own shows, unfortunately, because he wanted them to be perfect. So we would have literally a full orchestra in the loft with my cousin John being the engineer. We would record music for all of his shows. And one of the reasons he kept doing shows with so much music like the *The Architect and the Emperor of Assyria* which was a huge international hit, was because the union rules. If it's a musical and there is signing through the whole show like *Hair* it's a different union so you are not dealing with the musicians union.

Sweeney: Are you dealing with Actors Equity Association or a different union?

Weston: No, you are dealing with the opera union. That's why they called them musical opera's.

Sweeney: Was that how the Rock-Opera term was coined?

Weston: Yes. That's right. They were dealing with the opera union, which had no rules. You could have a stage manager that wasn't union, you could have performers that were non-union.

Sweeney: So they got around the union rules for a while and then what happened?

Weston: They got around it Off Broadway and Off-Off Broadway still but I don't know about Broadway.

Sweeney: Did you know each other while he was at Second City in Chicago?

Weston: No, but I knew all the people and everything about because in all the years that I knew him I was at his loft everyday.

Sweeney: How do you feel Tom's time in Chicago influenced his work here in New York?

Weston: He started out as a comedian. He toured and played the harp and told jokes. And he had a car and Woody Allen taught him to drive if you can believe it.

Sweeney: Do you think that the folk-rock artist had any influence on American musical theater?

Weston: I think that it ruined it in terms of who would work on Broadway anymore. If they could go out on tour and make albums and write music for popular artists why would they work on Broadway? A lot of my friends are incredible wealthy because they wrote for rock musicians and pop singers.

Sweeney: So do you think that the influence of the folk rock singer on American Musical theater shifted they was American Musical were created on Broadway.

Weston. I think the 1980's were lousy. Pop music destroyed Broadway. Everyone from Broadway came to Carole King and they wanted her to do Broadway after her Tapestry album. There was no reason for her to do Broadway.

Sweeney: What was your personal experience with Broadway?

Weston: You do a Broadway show and you go into the theater and you sit there okay and you are with the director on one side, I was an assistant director to Tom. You've got the writer on this side of you, you've got Joe Papp, you've got Tom O'Horgan, you've got the other people putting the money in, You've got Jules Fisher, you've got um the clothing designer, anyway what happens is it's a mess. Where Carole King can go into the studio and make an album like "Tapestry" and sell a zillion records and not have to deal with all that.

Sweeney: How do you feel the folk rock artist influenced American Musical Theater on Broadway.

Weston. Life goes on you know. I mean how long can you do things like "I'm Gonna Wash That Man Right Out Of My Hair"? It wasn't enough for people once T.V. became popular and once people were buying records and record players became stereos and stereos had good speakers. It became more expensive to do theater. Out of town Broadway tryouts got more expensive. It got very complicated.

Sweeney: What some of your memories of the original production of *Hair*?

Weston: I thought there was some funny things in it. I love the scene where the three black girls come out and their dresses are all attached. That was Tom's idea.

Sweeney: I now know that you were like family with Tom. What were your personal experiences with working with him?

Weston: My experience with Tom is that he came to the Public Theater and he was doing a show called *The Conjuror* in 1973 while *Jesus Christ Superstar* was on Broadway. That's when we started to work together.

Sweeney: Did you see any of Tom's other Broadway shows?

Weston: Yes I saw *Lenny* in 1971, which I loved. I thought it was brilliant. One of the best things I'd ever seen.

Sweeney: *Hair* opened on Broadway in 1968. After that in 1971 he directed *Lenny*, which won the Tony Award that year for best actor. At the time it had some controversy due to the graphic verbal script. How did Tom deal with this response?

Weston: He expected it. He was friends with Lenny and was hurt when they did not use him for the film version. But at the time he had a reputation for going over budget. Tom didn't care about money. That's why he was poor at the end of his life even though he had made millions with *Hair* and *Jesus Christ Superstar*.

Sweeney: How did he approach the casting of *Hair*?

Weston: Tom took all the people who were the village hippie people out of the show and put in the people with the most incredible voices. He discovered everyone who became famous out of that show and there were about twelve different people. There was Ben Vereen, Melba Moore, Diane Keaton to name a few. He discovered a lot of black singers. He was completely color blind when it came to casting for Broadway.

Sweeney: How did Tom get involved with *Sgt. Peppers Lonely Hearts Club Band*, the show at the Beacon Theater?

Weston: He met The Beatles. He met everybody. 840 Broadway became a very famous loft, just like Andy Warhol's The Factory. You hung at The Factory or you hung out at 840.

Sweeney: You spent so much time personally with Tom. Working with him for so many years how do you feel you were you treated by Tom professionally?

Weston: The difference was, I always felt, that Tom never quite treated the women in his life with the same equality that he treated men. Meaning that you could go to him if you were a boy

and borrow all kinds of money but if you were a girl you really had to work. And I think he really liked me because I was the only girl who ever lasted working with him for a long period of time because I was quiet. I didn't ask for things. I waitressed, I was a message therapist. I was careful and I worked really hard. We had one fight where I told him that someone was going to die if he didn't help him and he fired me. He didn't talk to me for a year and the person did die. He killed himself. He jumped out of Tom's window. But as long as I kept my mouth closed and I was hard working he loved me.

Sweeney: Would you say that he surrounded himself with people he knew or new faces to work on his productions?

Weston: People he loved. Like Harvey Milk who was his best friend. People don't know that. He told Harvey to go to San Francisco. We should watch my DVD. It has so many of Tom's friends like Harvey Feinstein who always thanks Tom for his career.

Sweeney: How many more shows did you work with Tom on after his successful runs with *Hair*, *Lenny* and *Jesus Christ Superstar*?

Weston: He never had that kind of success again as he did with the first Rock Musicals. Everything else he tried to do failed. He was the first director to have four Broadway plays on Broadway at the same time.

Sweeney: Tell me about all of this artwork on your walls.

Weston: I painted 96 paintings of all the people involved with early years. You can see my work on YouTube as well. After Ellen had died they were doing a memorial at La Mama so I had to get all of these paintings together. You look it up on my website.. Robert Patrick helped me upload my work.

Sweeney: It was said that Tom hated Broadway. How was Tom persuaded to do *Jesus Christ Superstar*?

Weston: Since he wasn't into money dinosaur bones persuaded him. Real dinosaur bones.

Sweeney: What? Why?

Weston: Tom wanted dinosaur bones which the producers got for him. Which you are not supposed to own. So he had this big thing in his house with bones on it.

Sweeney: What do you feel was Tom's contribution as a director?

Weston: Tom didn't understand relationships between a man and a woman so it was hard for him to direct shows that weren't about gay people. So Tom was into tableaux, creating tableaux, like all of a sudden you'd be watching him direct and go 'oh my God, that's the Matisse painting'. That's why he was so good with like the leave people we did on Broadway with lots a people in every scene.

Sweeney: So he did a lot a movement that was improvisational.

Weston: Yes, at first it wasn't set then he would have to set it when he did that kind of work for *Hair* and *Superstar*.

Sweeney: Any other examples of your personal experience in the rehearsal process.

Weston: There's one play called *The Architect and the Emperor of Assyria* by Fernando Arrabal. It's a two person surrealist play that toured all over Europe. And in that play with two men, there was never a woman in it. Why the emperor or architect was never a woman I don't know, but they lived on an island and they changed places and its' all about who's more important. The architect or the emperor, the creator or the ruler. And that was the only play I ever worked on where there was actual interpersonal communication. It was touching and it worked.

Sweeney: How was Tom's work received in Europe?

Weston: They loved him in Europe. Europeans came to La Mama as a result of Tom's work there.

Sweeney: How did Tom end up in Florida at the end of his life?

Weston: He had Alzheimer's disease and someone sold the loft and moved Tom to Florida. He died soon after.

Chapter 10

Conclusion

Weston spent the last years of O'Horgan's life being one of many caretakers. During his life he took care of the people he loved and they were with him during his final bow. He was a driving force in the experimental theater movement and helped form the beginning of a new era for the American Broadway musical. Along with his friends and other visionaries that gathered in the small coffeehouse, he was an inspiration for his fans and friends across the nation. With his encouragement his friend Harvey Milk was able to make a real contribution to the world of politics and gay rights in San Francisco until his tragic shooting death. Both *Hair* and *Jesus Christ Superstar* have been re-created for film and have both had several revivals over the years and many extended runs regionally. These were the shows that traveled across the nation with bus and truck productions for the masses to see live productions or the filmed version. The role that mass media played in the success of the singer-songwriters, playwrights, activist and poets still is as powerful today as it was in its infancy.

Todd London, the artistic director of the New Dramatists, has reviewed the works of many of the playwrights that created the mystique of Joe Cino's Caffe Cino. In his forward for the book Cino Nights: Plays From Rising Phoenix Rep, he reflects; "I'm nostalgic for the

urgency of impulse, a driving drive to make theater for some pressing, if still indiscernible, reason, the reason you have to discover by doing. I'm nostalgic for the art that tastes like freedom. I'm nostalgic for theater that smells like fun" (Talbot 2). This empowering energy coupled with the aspect of the sheer joy of creation, trickled down from the young folk-poets and singer-songwriters into the small theater spaces and allowed for social change to take place.

Earlier musicals ignored the major problems of the nation such as the Great Depression while these new theatrical pieces addressed social and political issues head on. Changes in American Musical Theater came quickly during the turbulent years of the late 1960's and early 1970's because it reflected a nation in upheaval. By the nineteen seventies the face of theater would be altered forever. These early works continue to support the way Broadway musicals are created today. *Rent*, *Spring Awakening* and *Once* all have the Folk-Rock musical influences that make them popular and successful while addressing social issues that are important to the masses. The folk-rock singer-songwriters paved the way for the activists to push social and political change forward. The effects of their songs on the masses allowed for the collective mindset to pull the issues into the spotlight with the power of song and theater. The civil rights movement, the women's liberation movement, the Kent State shootings, the Vietnam War, the gay movement, all experienced social changes during this exciting time that had lasting effects on American culture and politics. The new mindset of popular music and theater was then transformed into television, film and theater where the change could continue to be collectively viewed and shared throughout the nation. The imagery of honesty and community that was created by the folk rock singer-songwriters of the late nineteen sixties and early nineteen seventies continues to promote social equality and freedom. Freedom to create through poetry, song and playwriting has changed the collective views of morality with justice for all. The

pioneers of the folk–rock era established a solid foundation for social and political movements of all types to flourish. Their contribution to the cultural landscape of the nation has had a peaceful lasting effect, which allowed people to understand that differences can also unite us. Uniting people of the human race and not just that of a nation. The folk rock singer–songwriters paved the way for numerous pioneers of social activism to work and change the collective mindset. Historic changes in laws and policies took place as a direct result of the folk rock poets’ ability to rally and unify the nation. Their presence in the coffeehouses across the nation trickled down into small theaters where the work continued to speak as the voice of the people. They incorporated the first amendments, right to free speech into their musical art form that transformed the nation.

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