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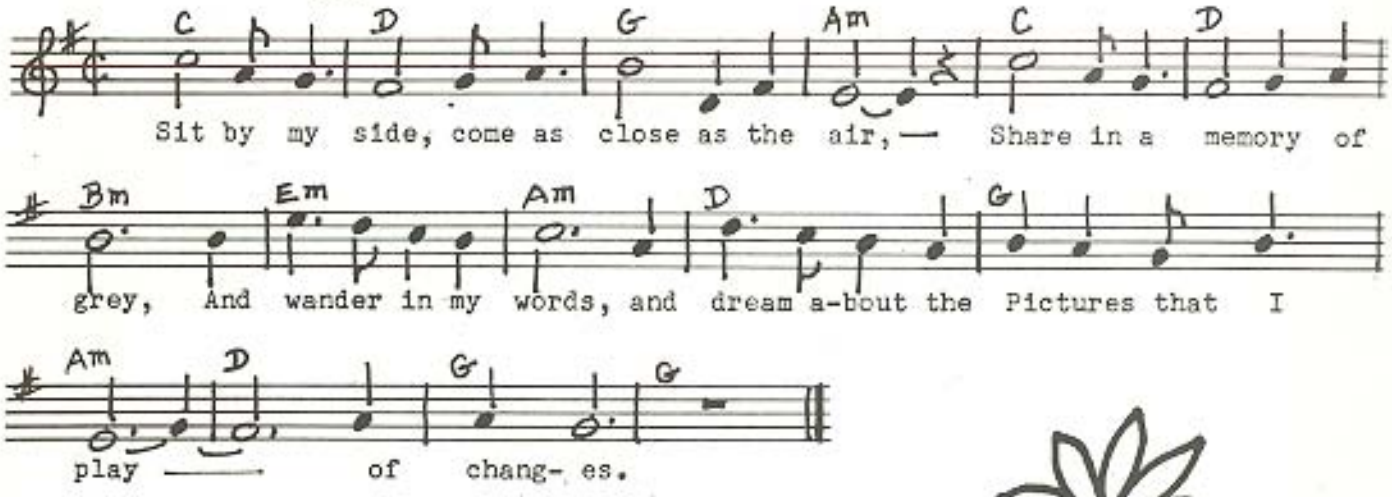


in this issue

PHIL OCHS talks about protest songs,

BOB DYLAN, PHIL OCHS

Changes

Words & Music by PHIL OCHS



2. GREEN LEAVES OF SUMMER TURN RED IN THE FALL,
TO BROWN AND TO YELLOW THEY FADE
AND THEN THEY HAVE TO DIE, TRAPPED WITHIN THE
CIRCLE TIME PARADE OF CHANGES.

3. SCENES OF MY YOUNG YEARS WERE WARM IN MY MIND.
VISIONS OF SHADOWS THAT SHINE.
TILL ONE DAY I RETURNED, AND FOUND THEY WERE THE
VICTIMS OF THE VINES OF CHANGES.

4. THE WORLD'S SPINNING MADLY, IT DRIFTS IN THE DARK,
SWINGS THROUGH A HOLLOW OF HAZE.
A RACE AROUND THE STARS, A JOURNEY THROUGH THE
UNIVERSE ABLAZE WITH CHANGES.

5. MOMENTS OF MAGIC WILL GLOW IN THE NIGHT,
ALL FEARS OF THE FOREST ARE GONE.
BUT WHEN THE MORNING BREAKS, THEY'RE SWEPT AWAY BY
GOLDEN DROPS OF DAWN, OF CHANGES.

6. PASSIONS WILL PART TO A STRANGE MELODY,
AS FIRES WILL SOMETIMES BURN COLD.
LIKE PETALS IN THE WIND, WE'RE PUPPETS TO THE
SILVER STRINGS OF SOULS, OF CHANGES.

7. YOUR TEARS WILL BE TREMBLING, NOW WE'RE SOMEWHERE ELSE
ONE LAST CUP OF WINE WE WILL POUR.
I'LL KISS YOU ONE MORE TIME, AND LEAVE YOU ON THE
ROLLING RIVER SHORE OF CHANGES.

8. (REPEAT FIRST VERSE).



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an interview with Phil Ochs

Editor's Note: This is a taped conversation with Phil Ochs made earlier this month by Sis Cunningham and Gordon Friesen of B'Side.

SIS: Phil, we'd like to hear your reaction to the fact that protest songs are beginning to reach a nationwide audience. For example, the song EVE OF DESTRUCTION made it to number one nationally on the charts, and many predict it is obviously a forerunner of similar songs. What is your opinion of this development and where will it lead?

PHIL: Well, as you know I was writing about this very same thing three years ago, and saying it had to happen sooner or later—that protest songs had to get in the top forty. And now it's happened--and it's happened in a big way, and a way that's disappointing to me because the quality has been terrible and the philosophy has been juvenile. Dylan has made such an impact with his style that these guys who are writing songs are writing like tenth-rate Dylan. And it comes out that way. And they stick in the harmonica and everything, and the whole thing becomes an obscene game, I think. They're peddling a product, and a bad product at that. Which is not to say there aren't some good lines in EVE OF DESTRUCTION -- some very good lines. And it's most important that it happened. But since the imitation made it that way, now what we're going to be subjected to is imitation of the imitation, which will bring it lower and lower down the scale, so that EVE OF D. is going to stand up well compared to the deluge about to follow. I'm sort of worried about it because I can see a bad thing developing. Even right now I can hear disc jockeys saying "Oh no, not another protest song!" And being totally turned off to it like another garbagey unartistic attempt — which is what's happening. All kinds of people like Bobby Vinton are all of a sudden discovering their values and selling their values to the public—to the teenage public. And it's become ridiculous. It's right now more important to my mind that LIKE A ROLLING STONE, Dylan's single, almost got to be number one rather than EVE OF D, even though ROLLING STONE is not a protest song. ROLLING STONE is, I think a much more revolutionary song than EVE OF DESTRUCTION because it's much better -- much better written and much more thought out. And it's a long song -- six minutes. It's the first time this has ever happened that a song of that revolutionary quality in writing got on the charts and hit so hard. I think LIKE A ROLLING STONE and a new single called YESTERDAY sung by one of the Beatles, where they have cellos and an almost classical arrangement, a beautiful quiet ballad -- I think that these two songs are more revolutionary than EVE OF DESTRUCTION. What I foresee is these imitations falling into a swamp and then disappearing beneath the quicksand of the top forty. Because the top forty revenge is one of the fastest revenges in the country. When people get turned off, that's it--it's instant death. They just turn their backs on everything to do with it when a certain style is going out. And I think the protest thing at this period will be a preliminary bout--it'll happen fast. It'll die out pretty fast, because what has to happen is quality material on the top forty, not just the protest material. And certainly not teenage protest material. People essentially have to be educated culturally to higher levels. And Dylan is doing that, which is why I say it's more important -- because people aren't being educated culturally to any higher level with EVE OF DESTRUCTION. It's just that Dylan took over somebody's head, and that somebody wrote a bad song, which is now number one. And it's value lies in the fact that it is a strong song. But its value as a song is very bad, per se. It's going to give a lot of people a bad impression of protest songs. So it'll be a good and a bad thing. It will be an introduction of protest songs to many people, but it's a bad introduction. Better things have to happen. Better songs have to get on the charts.

SIS: Don't you think that these better songs are bound to come? When the disc jockeys get tired of "protest" songs, as you say they will, are there going to be enough songs like ROLLING STONE and YESTERDAY?

PHIL: Well, that's what I'm hoping.

SIS: Will they go back to the songs they had before EVE OF DESTRUCTION?

PHIL: I really don't know. I think protest songs are going to fluctuate on and off the charts.

SIS: These Rock-and-Roll songs about love in 57 variations, for instance, have been going on ever since Elvis Presley.

PHIL: Yeah. Yeah, yeah. But some of these have been very good songs. But what I'm looking for is just a general uplift in quality. The key word with everything I think about in terms of all these protest songs, or songs of the fifties, is quality. And I think the Beatles and the group The Rolling Stones and Bob Dylan, all three of these have significantly raised the quality of the top forty. They set standards that are higher for this teenage music. And EVE OF DESTRUCTION hasn't done that. It has philosophically done that in the sense that here's a song with a message. But it hasn't done it artistically. And it has to be done artistically — I'm just waiting for a better quality of protest song to make it. I mean a song as strong or stronger than "EVE..." but of better quality.

SIS: Where will such a song come from?

PHIL: It could come from any place. Even if THE TIMES THEY ARE A-CHANGIN' became number one --that would be much better to my mind. A tasteful arrangement of TIMES THEY ARE A-CHANGIN'.

GORDON: That's one Dylan would like to see buried, along with his other earlier songs.

PHIL: I don't think he can succeed in burying them. They're too good. And they're out of his hands.

GORDON: What do you think of the fact that EVE OF DESTRUCTION and LIKE A ROLLING STONE are utilizing the R&R beat — the electric guitar, drums, harmonicas etc. Plainly Dylan must feel that it's the use of this kind of music that's getting his material heard by the largest possible audience.

PHIL: Well, I like the music. I like the background of ROLLING STONE. I think it's classic. It's great. LIKE A ROLLING STONE is one of the best singles ever — in terms of musical background.

GORDON: What I'm trying to ask is are the lyrics - which in Dylan's songs are so extremely important -- are the lyrics getting through to the listeners, these young kids? Or are they just going with the beat?

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PHIL: Well, I'm quite sure the words are getting through with Dylan. Dylan was known for that before hand. Dylan was known as the writer— the poet -- first. And in ROLLING STONE the idea comes across pretty clearly. It's one of Dylan's clearest recent songs. And on his brand new album HIGHWAY 61, that song is the most down-to-earth. And I'm quite sure people listen to the lyrics. And Dylan is maturing musically. This is one thing people overlook. His musical ideas are getting more sophisticated. For instance, in LIKE A ROLLING STONE, he has a great musical pause which leads in to the chorus "How does it feel...." that's incredible — it's great. It's one of the few cases where he actually put in a musical idea so striking and original that it equaled his words, or more than that — it enhanced his words and gave them a double impact. I'm convinced that LIKE A ROLLING STONE is one of Dylan's best songs of all his work, even going back through all his early stuff. If I had to pick Dylan's five best songs, that would be one of them, along with TAMBOURINE MAN and IT'S ALL RIGHT MA, IT'S ONLY LIFE. I think it's great -- and most important.

SIS; Well, how do you feel about the use of Rock & Roll music? Would you use it in the way Dylan does, to reach a wider audience?

PHIL: Well, I don't know. I have mixed feelings about it. A few years ago I was thinking about it-- before it happened — when I was writing articles about Rock and Roll and Protest. I was thinking then that I ought to do it. But...

SIS: You'd certainly agree that Like a Rolling Stone or Eve of Destruction wouldn't have reached but a fraction of the audience had they used the acoustic guitar — like you do. Right?

PHIL: Right. That's true. And that's my dilemma. It's a choice I've got to make. I really don't know what to do. I've got a new song called CHANGES and I've got to do something with it. I'm going to put it on a single, and I don't think I'll use electronic instruments on it — there's just a kind of conotation about electric instruments that disturbs you now, but didn't a few years ago. But there's so much imitation going on. There's so many Johnny-come-latelies that turn me off, on the pop field. It would be really very disturbing to me to join that flock, so I tend to think that I won't do it. I want ELEKTRA to put out a single more along the line of the Beatle's YESTERDAY which I think is more tasteful than the usual thing.

SIS: We've been getting various responses to Dylan's new LP Highway 61 Revisited. Some say, I guess for lack of a more imaginative term, that it's drivel -- he's just putting the people on again. These presumably are the people who left Dylan at the time "The Other Side of Bob Dylan" came out. And then we also have people who say "hey, have you heard Dylan's new LP — it's a great piece of poetry, it's an outpouring of poetry which hasn't been equaled since Walt Whitman or Woody Guthrie — to listen to it is an all-engrossing, almost monolithic experience." What is your reaction?

PHIL: Well, I fall into the latter category. I feel that it's great poetry. But I think Dylan's reached his peak. When he made the record before this one - Bringing It All Back Home with TAMBOURINE MAN and IT'S ALL RIGHT, MA..., I thought this was just too much -- how can a human mind go beyond this. But he had. In several songs, MR. JONES and DESOLATION ROW and LIKE A ROLLING STONE, Dylan has brought this whole thing up to a brand new level. You can see a pattern emerging now, a real pattern. He just keeps raising the whole thing — his stream of consciousness just gets higher and higher, and you can see a mastery — a control of words — developing that he didn't have before. Even in his best songs he would be eratic — go up and down. But now he seems to have matured in his control of music. He starts in a certain thing and he keeps up and he reaches climaxes. And his writing becomes — I guess you could almost describe it as symphonic. He takes themes and builds on them. People worry, "Is he putting me on, is he talking about me?" and so on. It doesn't matter actually. Dylan is putting everybody on. It wouldn't bother me—it wouldn't surprise me either— if Dylan is putting himself on, and knows it — or doesn't know it. That wouldn't surprise me. None of these things I feel are that important. I feel what's important is that he's produced the best album ever made — the most important and revolutionary album -- because he's reached such heights of writing. He's right in his style, he's right in his poetry, he's right in his presentation of his senses of life, in his perception and his feelings. And listening to Dylan lately is almost like climbing a ladder; you look at it as you would look at a painting. You don't look at a painting and say "That's great" and right away walk away from it. And you don't listen to Dylan once and say "That's good." It's the kind of music that plants a seed in your mind and then you have to hear it several times--ten times. And as you go over it you start to hear more and more things, and you start to see Dylan's maturing use of words and images as paralleling. And his control. Dylan is growing up as a writer. Without sacrificing his searching into his own mind and his pioneering, he's set a fantastic style. He's done it. He's done something that's left the whole field ridiculously in back of him. He's in his own world now. He was getting into his own world in his last record, but now what's happening is that he's in control of his own world. Before his world was controlling him. Control and discipline are the key words. Dylan is developing a discipline he never had before. There were flashes of genius before, but now his flashes of genius are under his conscious control. And the conbination is devastating. But what it's going to lead to next, God only knows ---or you might say, Dylan only knows.

GORDON: Well, would you consider Dylan a great poet apart from his music?

PHIL: Oh, definitely. He's one of the great minds of all time when it comes to words. He's a natural with words. He knows how to create images without straining. It just comes naturally. And when he does strain — when he does work — it comes to him better. He's never written a bad song. His weaker songs are just more eratic. But even when he uses trite things -- when he uses cliches and steals whole ideas, there's still enough of him in there and enough of his obvious penetration working.

GORDON:Well, do you think his music is an integral part of his poetry? I'd like to put it this way: America, for many years now, probably since Longfellow, hasn't shown any great respect for its poets, especially the poets of modern times -- except when Jack Kennedy got Robert Frost out for the inaugeration — and these poets have received very little mass recognition. They've had to be satisfied with editions of 500 or 600 copies of their books of poems, and have

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had to live not by their poetry but by grants or patrons, or by teaching English in some college. Do you think that Dylan by putting his poems to music has broken through this barrier of indifference? He has by now actually reached millions of people. Do you think he's using the music just as a device to get his poetry over to all these people, vastly greater numbers than any American poet has ever reached, or do you think his music is an integral part of what he is creating?

PHIL: It's a combination of both. I tend to think his music is an integral part -- it's poetry in song form. And therefore not really subject to all the disciplines of classic poetry, but subject to the disciplines of the ballad and of music. And he's combined the two. And as to Frost, Kennedy could bring Frost out, but that doesn't mean anything really. I mean, it's a nice gesture, but Robert Frost didn't speak to the mass; Robert Frost as all of the other poets of the past spoke to the intelligentsia, spoke to a small minority of the country. And a truck-driver couldn't care less whether Robert Frost was there with Kennedy or not --

GORDON: Whitman wanted very much to speak to the masses, but he really reached only a handful of the intellectuals --

PHIL: Some poets want to, yes, want to reach everybody. But you see, Dylan has in fact done this. This is one of the incredible things about Dylan. He's the first poet to speak to everybody --to the mass audience. And it has been through the vehicle of music. And also that his poetry is -- even when he gets way out — is basically down to earth. His poetry can be followed. His images can be understood. He hasn't broken into complete mystical allusion where there's no way of following him, logically, without intense study. He hasn't broken into complete literary allusion where you can only listen to him by being incredibly well-read yourself, as you have to be to read T. S. Eliot. So Dylan is still reachable. Even in his new record where he goes way out in his poetry it's all quite clear -- you can follow it. You can sit there and listen to it and if you want to spend the time for two or three hearings you can follow him quite clearly, even though there may be many different interpretations of what he is saying. The level of his writing stays on the level of the common mentality, which makes Dylan the great common poet -- perhaps the greatest common poet ever.

But there's something about this that I've got to bring out. There's something very dangerous, something very frightening about this whole thing now. Dylan is very disturbing. Dylan gets up there and sings great thoughts and great poetry to everybody; and when you say everybody you mean also to neurotics, to immature people, to the lumpen proletariat, to people not in control of themselves. Dylan is forcing everybody to listen to him, the quality of his work is so good and so communicative. He's forcing everybody to listen to him, and I wonder what's going to happen. I don't know if Dylan can get on the stage a year from now. I don't think so. I mean that the phenomena of Dylan will be so much that it will be dangerous. One year from now I think it will be very dangerous to Dylan's life to get on the stage. In other words, he's gotten inside so many people's heads -- Dylan has become part of so many people's psyche, and there're so many screwed up people in America, and death is such a part of the American scene now. The Kennedy assassination is a part of this story.

People are much more conscious of death because when Kennedy was killed youth was killed, beauty was killed, security was killed. You see, America has been living a kind of floating existence. This is what alienation means essentially --they had been divorced from life. They left the farm, they're in the cities and they've been separated from life. Everything is solved —"Don't worry about this; you can get an operation for that" — everything is going to be taken care of. But one thing that can't be taken care of, even in America, is death. And Kennedy's assassination brought this realization home to everybody. And Kennedy, for the first time in history brought this thought home to the young. Dylan has become of such mammoth proportions, this great quality reaching so many minds and Dylan is part of so many peoples' psyches and is inside so many heads that I can even foresee his having to leave the country — go to France, go to Cuba, and sit there and write. Or, you know, the next step for Dylan should be movies. By his appearance, by the way he moves — this makes for a most valid screen figure. Every time I see Dylan I'm struck by how incredibly photogenic and how alive he is, and what I'm waiting to see is not that he stop writing songs but how he can expand his writing. I'm not so much excited by the idea of Dylan's book because I tend to feel that Dylan's book will limit his form, that it'll be too much of a good thing, that Dylan is most effective when he's taken in small doses, that to plough through several hundred pages of free-wheeling verse will be too much. I'm sure it'll be the same great images and the same great ideas, but I don't feel he's carried discipline to the point where he can carry a book. But I think he can carry a movie. With the ideas inherent in Dylan, as obviously visual as he thinks and with the right director — and with Dylan working on the script as he goes along — it could once again be a floating, a free-wheeling type of thing. It could be that type of movie which hopefully would not make the mistake of being an imitation of the Beatles' movies. It should be much more than that. I think that's the next step.

What is happening to Dylan now could have been foreseen. Even without the going into Rock & Roll -- all this storming onto the stage — he's playing with teenage minds by being in the pop market, and it's a dangerous thing. And I think he's going to have to quit. Dylan, I think, will become the most successful entertainer of all times, and by being so successful and so right, will have to quit. That's the paradox. On this immediate level, it won't make sense for Dylan to get on the stage again. I mean Dylan would feel so uncomfortable, and there'll be too much of a strain in that concert, or even in the outdoor concert hall, that he'll just have to leave. And that's really an incredible thought. But I can see it happening — already.

SIS: But at his Forest Hills concert, and at Newport, the audience was divided.

PHIL: But that was a Rock-and-Roll thing there. But that is part of what I'm talking about too. The Beatles can get away with it in all the screaming and attack because they are essentially selling youth and being flip and young and just going out there and having a good time when they sing-- you know, have a ball, have a great time. But Dylan is doing much more psychological things than that. He's doing it in much more psychological terms and going much deeper in his words. And I can just picture young teenagers all over the country sitting up in

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their bedrooms listening to Dylan again and again and again trying to find out what he is saying. And Dylan, or course, has this whole aggressive thing — this whole attaking, putting down. This is part of his style like in his new single, "I wish you were standing in my shoes so you could see what a drag it is to see you..." And also in LIKE A ROLLING STONE, the same way there: once you hung around with the in-crowd, and now you're on your own— how does it feel? — and screw you, you're out and it's too bad — no sympathy, but a hatred, a real aggression coming out. And all this done on the stage, and done great. It's not done in any sophomoric way at all. And it has a very disturbing effect on people. It's really an incredible thing.

GORDON: It drives a man to drink — or to LSD.

PHIL: Dylan is LSD on the stage. Dylan is LSD set to music — that's Dylan.

SIS: You'd say than that these masses of teenagers listen to Dylan with no other thought or feeling than one of complete absorption. Do you think this is a form of hypnosis — would you say that it is?

PHIL: It's a form of hypnosis. It's not that everybody sits there listening to him with a single-track mind; Dylan has managed to convene a very dangerous neurotic audience together in one place, who are all hipped on him on different levels. They aren't all listening to him in the same way. That's the danger of it — they're all listening for different things. Some of them are there looking for the lost symbol of the message singer. And none of them have any right to him. You see that's the thing that none of them really understand: none of them have any right to Dylan. Dylan is an individual singing. And these people want to own him. And that's what a lot of Dylan's songs are about: You can't own me— I'm free; you can't own me even though you want to, and you can go to hell — for even trying to own me. And that's absurd— that's a joke — sitting there and saying we want the old Dylan, or we want the new Dylan. That's bullshit, that's nonsense. It's evil. It's a very sick thing going on there. And it's because of this neurotic audience that Dylan has got. And that is why Dylan has got to be careful, and that is why he'll have to quit singing.

But there's another major step that hasn't been brought into focus yet: Dylan in translation — Dylan in Russian, in Chinese, in African languages. This is a major step, a major hurdle that he's going to make now, or that's going to be made for him. And the implications of that are going to be very, very far reaching.

GORDON: — or even Dylan really translated into American. He had a much more understanding audience in England, more appreciative, more —

PHIL: More mature. Because America is a country in turmoil, a country without any backbone — a country that doesn't understand itself — and that's also why I say Dylan has to leave, because he's playing with a country that doesn't understand itself. And he's putting it down for that; he's putting down a mass of people that don't understand themselves, that are totally screwed up. And when he goes to England he gets a more intelligent audience, a more common audience. I got the same thing in Canada — I went to Canada and was struck with the difference. And that was just over the border in a country considered similar to the U.S., but there was an incredible difference. I walk on the street in America and I sometimes think somebody is going to shoot me in the back, I see the look in other peoples' faces and I feel this terrible tension. In Canada I never felt that.

SIS: You draw a different audience than Dylan, don't you? Here in this country, aren't your audiences dissimilar?

PHIL: We overlap to a surprising degree.

SIS: It's that part of the audience which calls for the "old" Dylan and boos the "new" Dylan which, I feel, follows you — the audience that wants the straightforward, uncomplicated protest song, the audience that likes "With God On Your Side".

PHIL: I'm quite sure Dylan despises what I write. I've talked to him about this at some length—and I get the impression he can't accept what I'm doing. Because in his mind it's political and therefore bullshit. Because I'm not writing about myself and my deepest emotions, he feels. And I'm not facing the thing as brutally honestly as he is — in other words, he thinks that I could be much more honest with myself. And this is the disturbing thing. Here's the man I most respect in the world, Dylan, telling me that — "hey, your writing is bullshit", essentially. And I keep on writing it, after him telling me this. And I have to search myself all the time, ask myself what am I doing, am I kidding myself, is Dylan kidding himself about politics, and the more I think about it the more I'm convinced we're both valid. I think Dylan's telling me I'm writing the wrong thing has been a help to me in a sense, because it's made me look at myself in the deepest way — because, here's one of my main sources attacking me and I have to look at myself and question what my reasons are for writing these songs. Am I a complete phony as he thinks — is that true? And I keep coming up with the answer that I think I am doing the right thing. I think that Dylan makes a basic mistake here in rejecting his old writing and my writing — this relates to what I have said many times before, namely that there are a lot of bad protest songs being written, and they've been very blunt and unartistic and very unreaching and unsearching songs. I wrote an article about the BROADSIDE Hoots saying that exact same thing. But I'm trying to be a writer, and I'm trying to be as good a writer as I can. And I'm taken with the art form of social realism. There is a basic question here: can you reject any form of art? I don't think so, and I also think that social realism is a valid form of art. Take, for example, social realism in movies. I think a lot nowadays in terms of movies and I go to see them all the time. I'm struck with the art form of movies, and I've seen a number that bear out my idea that great art can be achieved in the use of social realism. There's the Italian movie of the forties, OPEN CITY — an anti-fascist movie — a great movie — and it's a social realism movie. In America THE DEFIANT ONES compares to it, and that is also a great movie of social realism. There is no reason why this can't also be done in song. HERE'S TO THE STATE OF MISSISSIPPI becomes — in performance — a very moving, an overpowering, a punching out form of social realism.

And what I try to say to Dylan — to a lot of people — is: why can't you grow as a poet within the framework of social realism? Why can't you develop your craft, your discipline, in this area, too? The use of one art form does not exclude another. For example, I've written a new song called CHANGES which is very important to me because it is a very personal and poetic song. But by writing that song I did not prove to myself that what I was doing before was nonsense — it is just another form, and frankly, a more satisfying form

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personally -- I can sing CHANGES to myself more than I can the political songs and get more intense feeling out of it. So when I write CHANGES and find it satisfying I say to myself: what have I done that works so well in this song that I can apply also to the songs of social realism? Going back to Dylan, I really hope he doesn't become too violent in putting down his former self, because in the end, I think, that will limit him as a writer. He will limit his scope. I still maintain he could have gone much further than he did in the idiom of social realism. And even now he can go back and do it. I think that's what he did, essentially, when he wrote IT'S ALL RIGHT MA. In it he combined the old Dylan and the new and it's one of his very best songs because it brought together the best elements of the two. But Dylan feels that protest denies the esthetic. This is, of course, an historical argument, a classical view of art: that protest denies art by the mere fact that you're protesting. However, I think that there can be esthetic protest. The esthetic plus social realism plus music plus a sense of art plus discipline plus understanding where you are at and trying persistently to improve your work.
I ask myself, why does an artist feel impelled to write about society -- about what is going on. And I look at the American society and I get the view that America has become quite fat and quite alienated from life and from a sense of struggle and from a sense of conflict. I'd like to illustrate this also by my journeys to the movies. Two days ago I saw a movie called TO DIE IN MADRID, a documentary on the Spanish Civil War. And it's very strange -- here I am a comfortable middle class Jewish guy sitting there watching movies from 1936 and 1937 and seeing young men volunteering for the International Brigade and going to fight in Spain and you see the pattern emerging from the movie that they're just not going to win. They're going to be fed into the German military machine as fodder to test out new weapons and they're going to die, thousands and thousands are going to die and they're going to be tortured. And I sit there wondering, questioning myself all the time: could I do that? And I've got this great streak of cowardice in myself and I'm most afraid of dying -- and I sit there wondering, could I? Then I walk outside and I go down to the Village and I see people running around with long hair, climbing on the Beatle-Dylan bandwagon and I'm struck with this incredible difference of the young man going off to die in Spain and the young man growing his hair long and trying to sound like John Lennon. It becomes a revolting thing. You see it adds up to this: when you try to develop your sense of perception you come to the inevitable view, the world is absurd. Which is essentially what Dylan says. How can you even think about it! It just can't be possible. No amount of work can ever change the absurdity.

This leads to -- and somehow this is the thing -- this is what I can't understand as part of my own psychological make-up. Something inside of me gets greatly disturbed at seeing this absurdity, and this as it turns out is probably the root of my songs. And yet I'm totally turned off -- as I have written in recent articles -- by the protest songwriting movement, because it tends to have too much disregard for quality. There is a further paradox here, and I'm trying to resolve it by thinking and talking about it. Something in my psyche has to feel the responsibility of what goes on in Viet Nam. When we bomb North Viet Nam I have to be disgusted and repelled. But I can also look at Viet Nam and laugh, can make jokes like it's a fun war. And laugh about the napalm. I admit this -- I do laugh about it, and say, well, it must be a joke, it's so ridiculous. I can make jokes about it in what you might call sick humor. But then I go off and I write a very serious song about it. In the notes of my last record there was one very important part that ELEKTRA cut out -- in which I said that some of these songs are so intense that when I'm singing them on the stage sometimes my view of the absurd will carry me one step beyond how evil something is. And I fear that one day I might have to break out laughing on stage. ELEKTRA was afraid to print that because they thought it would hurt my image. They were worried about my image. But I sure wish they'd printed it -- well, at least we'll get it out here in BROADSIDE. You see, it's a paradox inside my head, to laugh at something and at the same time take it seriously and deal with it.

Another thing -- I can look at Viet Nam and I can write songs against it and raise money. It disturbs me incredibly. Yet what disturbs me also is to pick up The Worker and read about the genocide in Viet Nam because I can't look at it that way either. I can't say that is genocide. I can't look at Lyndon Johnson at times as the caricature that is made of him by the leftwing press, because I recognize that he is a human being with the same sense of humor, I'm sure, that I have. I feel he'd laugh at some of these things, too. Or that many times our views would cross. And so this is the contradiction inside of myself.
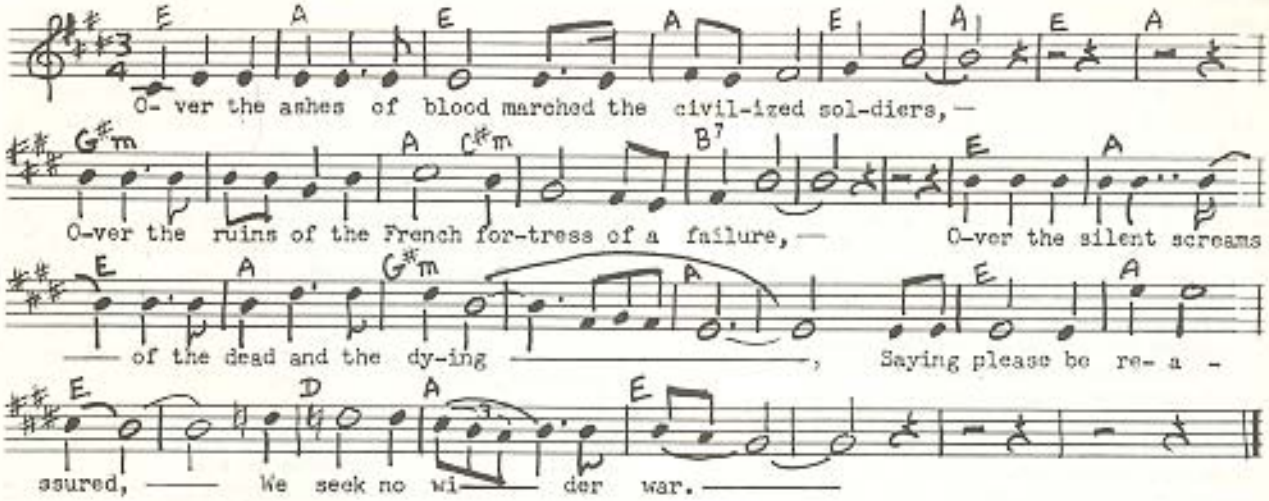
To sum up. This is one thing I feel is a driving force: that I get so repelled by certain things -- or they strike me as funny -- or weird or strange -- or ridiculous -- and my response comes out in the form of a song. And there is one thing that helps carry me through: this close identification with the problems of the world where things like Viet Nam go on. And as I said before, it's not enough to know the world is absurd and restrict yourself merely to pointing out that fact. To me this was the essential flaw of the fifties, great perception leading to inaction. If there is to be any hope for the world this perception must lead to action. In the song MY BACK PAGES Dylan laughs at himself as an impotent musketeer fighting false battles. I often laugh at myself in the same way and many times consider my role ridiculous, but still I am forced to go on. Because the ugly fact is ingrained in my mind that if I don't go on the world will be left to the hands of the Hitlers, the McCarthys and Johnsons. I don't want to have to read Dylan's works smuggled out from prisons. I like to bring in the great Greek writer Katzenakis to illustrate this point. He says it is wrong to expect a reward for your struggle. The reward is the act of struggle itself, not what you win. In other words, even though you can't expect to defeat the absurdity of the world you must make the attempt. That's morality, that's religion. That's art. That's life.

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WE SEEK NO WIDER WAR

Words & Music: PHIL OCHS
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Barricade Music, Inc.



2. The treaties were signed, the country was split into sections
But growing numbers of prisons were built for protection
Rapidly filling with people who called for elections
But please be reassured, we seek no wider war.

3. Ngo Dinh Diem was the puppet who danced for the power
The hero of hate who gambled on hell for his hour
Father of his country was stamped on the medals we showered
But please be reassured, we seek no wider war.

4. Machine gun bullets became the bloody baptizers
And the falcon copters don't care if someone's the wiser
But the boy in the swamp didn't know he was killed by advisers
So please be reassured, we seek no wider war.

5. And fires were spitting at forests in defoliation
While the people were pressed into camps not called concentration
And the greater the victory the greater the shame of the nation
But please be reassured, we seek no wider war.

6. While we were watching the prisoners were tested by torture
And vicious and violent gasses maintained the order
As the finest Washington minds found slogans for slaughter
But please be reassured, we seek no wider war.

7. Then over the border came the Bay of Pigs planes of persuasion
All remaining honor went up in flames of invasion
But the shattered schools never learned that it's not escalation
So please be reassured, we seek no wider war.

8. And the evil is done in hopes that evil surrenders
But the deeds of the devil are burned too deep in the embers
And a world of hunger in vengeance will always remember
So please be reassured, we seek no wider war,
We seek no wider war.

A MARINE WRITES HOME

'I Had to Kill a Woman...'

"The Lieutenant had us move out toward the firing," the corporal wrote. "We killed eight Cong and about 30 got way. Anyway we were searching the dead Cong when a wife of the one I was checking ran out of a cave and picked up a sub-machine gun and started firing at us.

"I shot her and my rifle is automatic so before I knew it I had shot about six rounds. Four of them hit her and the others went in the cave and must have bounced off the rock wall and hit the baby.

"Mom, I had to kill a woman and a baby. For the first time I felt sick to my stomach. The baby was about two months old."

And finally he recited this undisciplined—and undoctrinaire—lament:
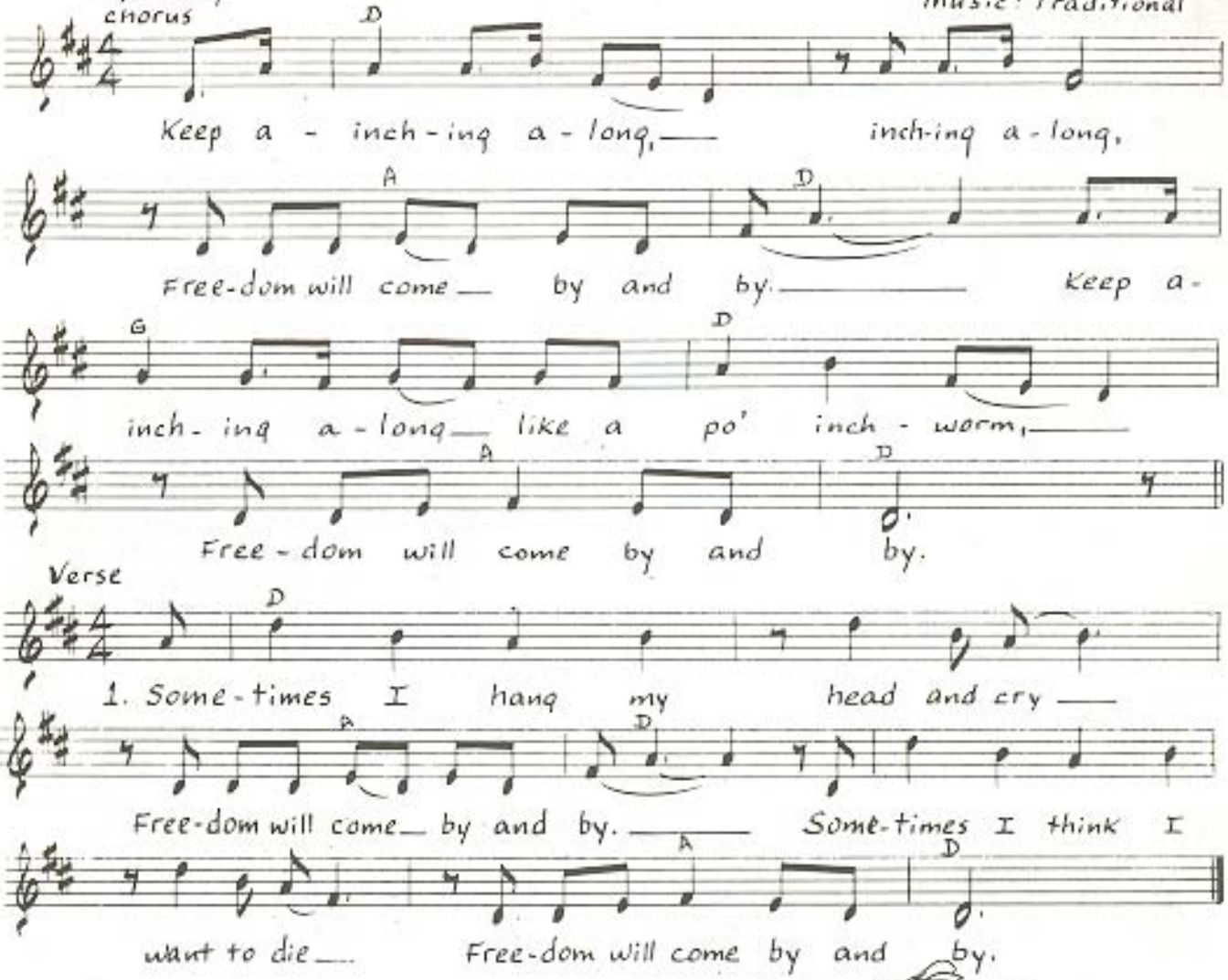
"I swear to God, this place is worse than Hell. Why must I kill women and kids? Who knows who's right? They think they are and we think we are. Both sides are losing men. I wish to God this was over."

* * *

KEEP A-INCHING ALONG

Verses written by
JULIUS LESTER
Chorus words adapted from
the traditional words
Music: Traditional

Vigorously
chorus



Hush, little baby, don't you cry
Freedom will come by and by;
It's only the pain of the freedom fire
Freedom will come by and by. Chorus

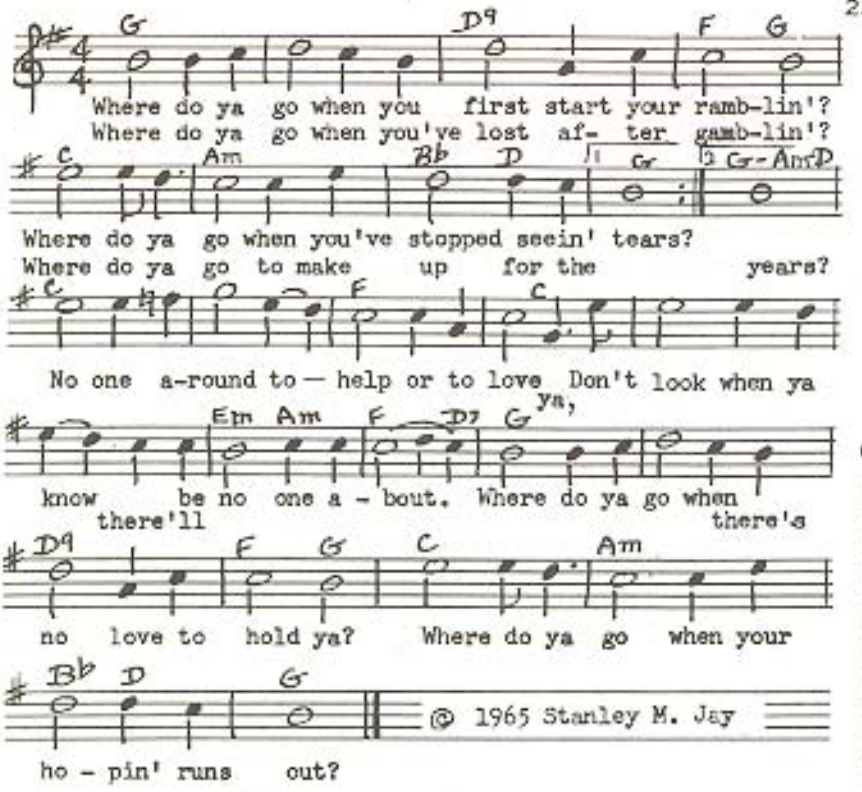
I used to walk with my head
bowed down
Freedom will come by and by;
But then I heard that freedom
was comin' 'round,
Freedom will come by and by
Chorus



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Where D'Ya Go?

Words & Music by STANLEY M. JAY

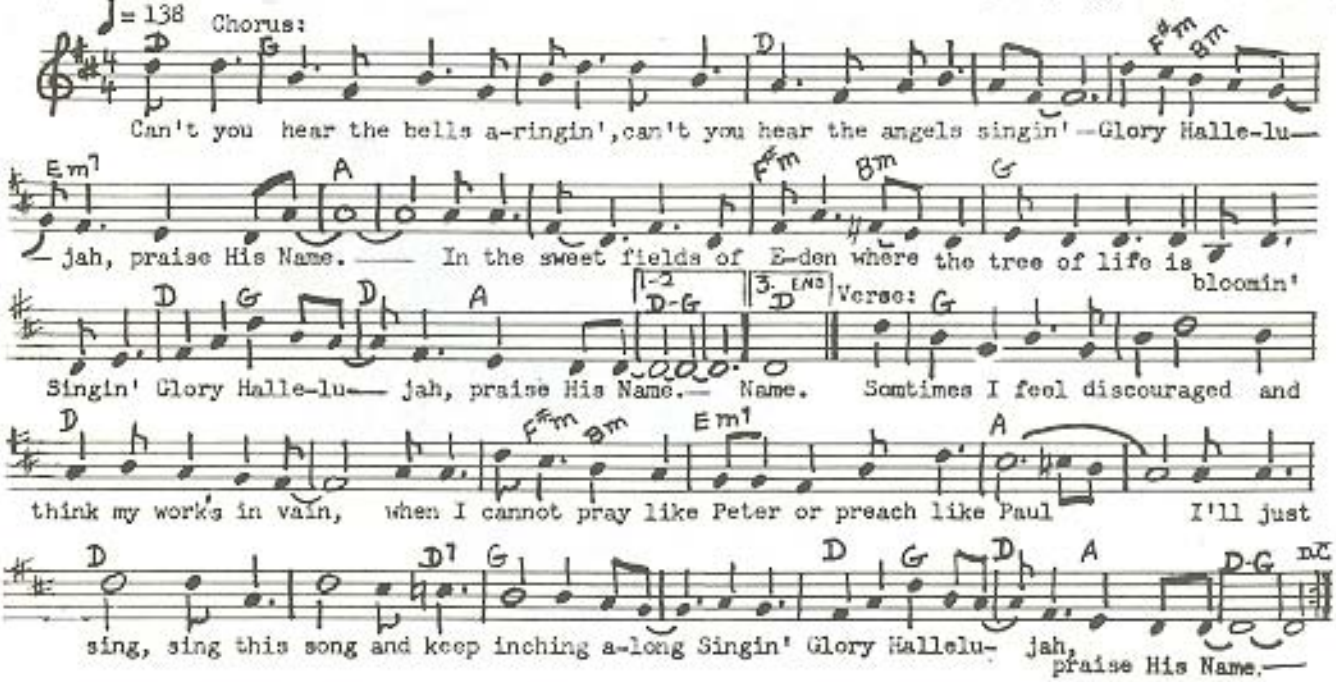


2. Where do you walk when the one who you walked with
Would walk with another, would not walk alone?
Where do ya go when there's no one to talk with,
Where do ya go when your love's not your own?
No place to look when your brain is a-bustin'
You can't see the road and you can't find the way;
Where do ya go when your heart starts to rustin' -
Where do ya go in the dark of the day?

"In keeping with the tradition of the folk poets, and what the folk poets are doing, I asked the question everybody is talking about. Their girls left them and they're all confused. So the first thing they do is get out there and ramble--and ramble and ramble. But I mean what happens if you're in college and there's no place to ramble. You can't really ramble because you lose your tuition — you face practical problems like this. So, thinking about this—deliberating on the subject — I came up with this song." - - Stan Jay

CAN'T YOU HEAR THE BELLS A-RINGIN'

By DAVID SEAR
© Copyright 1956 David Sear



2. Now when you see them tombstones busting and the thunder starts to roll,
When the blind can see and the lame shall walk away
We will sing and shout hurray, there will be a better day,
Singin' Glory Hallelujah, praise His Name. CHO.

YOU GOT TO WALK
YOU GOT TO WALK
THROUGH THIS OLD WORLD, FRIEND

By KAY COTHRAN

You got to walk through this old world,
friend,
You can't walk it by yourself;
Everybody else has to walk it with you,
You can't walk it by yourself.

You got to face your time of trial,
You can't face it by yourself;
Everybody else has to face it with you;
You can't face it by yourself.

You got to feed your little children,
You can't feed them by yourself;
Everybody else has to feed them with you,
You can't feed them by yourself.

You got to have your rightful freedom,
You can't have freedom by yourself;
Everybody else has to be free with you,
You can't have freedom by yourself.

We got to walk through this old world,
friends,
We can't walk it by ourselves;
We got to walk in peace together,
We just can't walk it by ourselves.

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Tune: You Got To Walk That Lonesome Valley

"I disagree with the original words to this tune. I don't think I have to walk it by myself; I don't think it's possible or desirable. I don't know just where I'm bound, but I know I don't want to go alone."
-- Kay Cothran

I BEEN WALKIN' DOWN THE RAILROAD

By KAY COTHRAN

I been walkin down the railroad
To Washington today;
I been walkin down the railroad
Just to find old LBJ.
Will they let me in the White House?
Or will somebody say,
"You're not dressed so very well, boy,
Clean up, come back some day."

I been walkin down the railroad
Not a dollar in my fist;
I been walkin down the railroad,
I'm going to enlist.
Is it going for us or against us?
That's what I've got to see --
Not the war in Viet Nam, friends,
The War on Poverty.

I been walkin down the railroad
Readin my welfare check;
I been walkin down the railroad
With a chain around my neck.
Every link's another debt,
Though they say the economy is swell.
I am goin mighty hungry
And my job has gone to hell.

I been walkin down the railroad
On my way to the capital town,
I been walkin down the railroad
Seein jobless men all round.
Some never made it out of high school,
Some are on the dope and booze;
Some were born and raised on welfare,
Some just born to lose.

I been walkin down the railroad
To Washington today;
I been walkin down the railroad
Just to find old LBJ.
Maybe he really means to help, friends,
He may find the right plan yet;
But I wouldn't put a dollar on the
chances
If I had one left to bet.

I been walkin down the railroad
Through this land of ours;
I been walkin down the railroad
And how the future glowers.
I don't want to live on welfare;
It's justice, boys, or bust,
Though I don't much believe in
politicians,
Friends, I believe in us.

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Tune: I Been Workin' On The Railroad

(Ed. Note: Kay Cothran, although only 18, has already written well over 100 songs. "I didn't make these songs to be held up as great writing or shining examples of anything -- I just want to start something that may eventually mean a crack in the wall that keeps people apart." Kay belongs to what might be called "the Atlanta School" of topical songwriter-performers. Some others: Bud Foote, Ernie Marrs, Eleanor Walden, Chip Baker. Their work appears regularly in STRAY NOTES, put out monthly by the Atlanta Folk Music Society, P.O.Box 7813, Atlanta, Ga. 30309. Kay's fine ballad "Coal In The Stone" is in the Society's new songbook, .50¢, same address).

R E C O R D R E V I E W S

THE SINGER-SONGWRITER PROJECT ELEKTRA EKL-299

Elektra ought to get a medal for this one. They have shown that topical songwriters do not have to resort to comparing LBJ to Hitler (however tempting it might be), or setting liberal editorials to music word-for-word, or writing obscure pseudodylan "Rorschach tests" in order to write effective songs. The four writers represented here are Richard Farina, Pat Sky, Bruce Murdoch, and Dave Cohen (now Dave Blue), and they are about as different as they could possibly be in spite of a seeming similarity. Richard Farina contributes three songs ("House Un-American Activity Dream", "Birmingham Sunday", and "Bold Marauder") which are among his best topical (as opposed to personal statement) songs. The drone of the dulcimer in "Bold Marauder" has an emotional wallop to it that is hard to describe. The "Dream" compares favorably with Dylan's best and is in the same "folk-rock" style. (I wonder how long it will be until the r&r boys pick up Farina as they have done with Dylan?) Pat Sky offers "Too Many Times", "Talking Socialized Anti-Undertaker Blues" and a repeat from his earlier album of "Many a Mile." Here he exhibits the fine insight and warm wit that have endeared him to audiences everywhere. Bruce Murdoch sounds rather ordinary until one discovers that he is seventeen years old. The songs aren't too smooth, and the accompaniments tend to sound like each other. However, I think it is a safe bet that one can expect better things soon from this performer. A song like "Farewell, My Friend" portends the arrival of a fine talent. Dave Cohen could be performing traditional blues, judging from the sound of his songs, but there is a sort of indefinable quality which brands them as the work of a talented writer. A song like "I Like To Sleep Late In The Morning" is just what it sounds like-- a happy statement of freedom. Cohen is fun to listen to and makes a strong point in favor of staying alive. Liner notes by Josh Dunson and Richard Farina are informative and I liked especially Farina's point about much of the present topical song flood being influenced by Dylan - - - - Thomas!

EDMUND O. WARD

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FINE TIMES AT OUR HOUSE (Indiana field recordings) FOLKWAYS FS 3809

This is undoubtedly one of the finest albums to come from Folkways in the last few years. The music is excellent, the notes are informative, and the jacket wins the Broadside Award for "most beautiful, tasteful cover". That is primarily because of Art Rosenbaum's wonderful sketch and the spartan use of printing. The music consists of field recordings made in the Hoosier state by Art Rosenbaum and Pat Dunford. It is mainly fiddle music and traditional singing. The best performances are by a truly great fiddler, John W. Summers ("Un-named Tune", "Rye Straw", and Sherman's Retreat"). Mr. Summers deserves an album of his own. The singing is of a high standard; however, one could not help wishing that Vern Smelser had sung "Young Charlotte" unaccompanied. That track shows how a guitar can inhibit a traditional singer. On the whole the album demonstrates the varied, rich musical traditions of Indiana. An excellent record!

HOBART SMITH FOLK-LEGACY FSA 17

When Hobart Smith died last year America lost one of its finest traditional artists. Fluent on banjo,guitar,fiddle,piano and with a fine voice, Hobie made wonderful music almost all his life. This album is more than a great tribute to Hobart Smith and his musicianship; it is simply a great album by any standards. Excellent notes by George Armstrong and Hobie, himself. Belongs in any collection!

BED ON THE FLOOR WOODY GUTHRIE VERVE-FOLKWAYS FV/FVS 9007

This record could aptly be called "the worst of Woody". The songs are,for the most part,good; some, like "Slip Knot", are great. However, the recording is technically so bad it is difficult to listen to the songs, let alone appreciate them. This record should be listened to only by people who know how good Woody can be when recorded well.

STU COHEN

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Chords for Mark Spoelstra's WHITE WINGED DOVE (B'side #62)

F(no 3rd) D♭ F(no 3rd)
I can play this guitar, I can sing a few notes, I'm old enough now in this country to
D♭ C
vote, So I wrote me a song 'bout the White Winged Dove & a toy gun for Christmas in
F CHO: C B♭ F7 B♭
place of love./ Just a toy, just a toy, just a toy. Just a toy, just a toy, just a
F C B♭ F(no 3rd)
toy -- A real one, a steel one -- Just a toy.

NOTES: BILL ELLIOTT and DAVE SEAR will appear at a TWILIGHT HOOT in N.Y.C.'s TOWN HALL,5:30 PM Fri.,Oct.22.Tickets at TOWN HALL,113 W.43rd St.at box office or by mail. $1.80 to $3.45... A singing tribute to the late BILL OLIVER Oct.22 at the FIRST UNITARIAN CHURH,Los Angeles, 2936 W. 8th St.M.C. will be VERN PARTLOW,author of "Old Man Atom". Spanish Civil War veteran BART VON DER SCHELLING and FRANK HAMILTON also to appear... The photo of PHIL OCHS on the front cover of this issue is by DIANA DAVIES ... TOM PAXTON'S 2nd LP has been released by ELEKTRA ("Ain't That News"EKL 298). Besides the title song,other songs on TOM'S new album that have been in BROADSIDE:"We Didn't Know", "Lyndon Johnson Told The Nation", "The Willing Conscript", "Goodman, Schwerner And Chaney", "Bottle Of Wine", "Georgie On The Freeway"... VANGUARD is to release JULIUS LESTER'S first LP this month (titled: Julius Lester VRS 9199). Half traditional material,half JULIUS' own songs... The SING IN FOR PEACE in New York last month filled Carnegie Hall... KALIEDOSCOPE,the new mimeographed magazine, has put out 2 issues and is readying a 3rd. Welcomes poetry and songs.Write to PETER V.B. MAY III,1926 Shamokin St., Pittsburgh,Pa.15203... Sent to BROADSIDE: a new song on Pope Paul's recent visit to N.Y.,title using the Pope's own words at the U.N.:"NO MORE WAR,NEVER AGAIN!"Pope Paul may just have in his own hands the power to end war forever,if he put this power to practical use. The Catholic Church has some 500,000,000 members.If the Church was to rule they could not bear arms or participate in war or war endeavors in any way whatsoever that just might swing the balance toward everlasting world peace. This indeed would be a great gift to the PRINCE OF PEACE...We disagree with Folksinger THEO BIKEL who renounced ARTHUR MILLER'S refusal to attend LBJ'S ceremony of signing the arts (and humanities yet!) bill because he, MILLER,opposed LBJ'S war policy in Viet Nam. BIKEL saw no connection between the two. Yet the same TV news show where he spoke showed weeping Vietnamese mothers and children in a village over-run by American marines... Italians forgave Mussolini many crimes because he made the trains run on time,Hitler because he put the unemployed to work. (Including unemployed artists who,as it turned out, wound up creating fancy swastikas to raise on concentration camps and city halls of enslaved countries),..When war's end exposed the ghastly horrors committed by the Nazis many Germans began a whining chorus of: "WE DIDN'T KNOW"(see TOM PAXTON'S song in B'Side #62). We Americans won't have that excuse. We do know... BROADSIDE will be studied seriously by scholars a hundred years from now looking for how things really were in the 1960's. They'll get precious little help from, say, the tapes of the billion-dollar American TV industry. This fall, TV has sunk en toto to an abysmal low almost 100% detached from reality. There is even a thing portraying a Nazi run prisoner-of-war camp as a place of hilarious fun and laughter. Next season the producer undoubtedly will move his cast to a Nazi concentration camp for some simply side-splitting episodes... A top executive of one of our biggest TV networks said it,at a top level meeting of the network's big brass. He sat silent while one vice-president after another made pious speeches about TV's "obligation to the public", it's "duty to raise the cultural level of the nation",et cetera. When these cats finished he rose and said: "Men, television exists for one purpose only -- and that's to blow some sunshine up the ass of the American people." ... G.F.

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