

MUSIC

He concentrates on the interpretation of natural rights and of human nature offered by the radical dissenters of the late 18th century: Price, Priestly, Paine, Wilkes, Burgh and others. These men and their 19th-century heirs were not satisfied with the environmentalism that prudent readers of Locke, from the Commonwealthmen of the 1720's to the Jeffersonians of the 1770's, found in the *Essay on Human Understanding*. They preferred the psychological assumptions of the *Second Treatise*, which implied that men were born with moral ideas and the politics of the religious republicans of the English Civil War. From these sources they developed a version of natural rights that held that the higher law was accessible to the intuitions of ordinary men — and that in government as well as in society equality must therefore prevail. The moral power that this position conveyed became extraordinarily clear during the next century in the abolitionists' critiques of slavery and the socialists' attacks on private property.

All this suggests a continuity in the radical tradition from the Revolution through the Civil War. But Mr. Lynd goes further, arguing that radicals today make essentially the same affirmations that the radicals of the Revolution did. Perhaps he is right. There is the same easy reliance today on the higher law and a similar tendency to trust intuition, even to assume that there is a universal moral truth present in the heart of every man. And certainly there is an urgent desire among radicals to create a society that brings the moral principles of the American Revolution into practice.

What Mr. Lynd desires, as far as one can tell from the last chapter in this brief book, is that ordinary men will insist upon their rights of self government, and, in fidelity to their consciences, reconstruct society from below. If their consciences are guided by the great radical principles of the Revolution, they will create a society characterized by democratic devolution. Mr. Lynd has great faith in local institutions, so long as they are popularly controlled. He calls this method of change "bicameralism from below." It is one more expression of the New Left's devotion to community.

Now that reviews of Rock music have been instituted by the *New York Times*, the *New Yorker*, *High Fidelity* and *Hi Fi Stereo Review*, those of us who have been bred on Bach, Mahler and Bartok and who like the best of Rock must express our dissatisfaction. For the most part, the reviews of Rock LP's are written by under thirty "seni-boppers" who accurately reflect the appeal of the music to the college and bop crowd, but who share one remarkable shortcoming: they almost never discuss the *music*, only the "poetry" or the ideas.

For example, in the *New York Times*, Sunday, May 5, 1968, Colin Turner reviews the latest Simon and Garfunkel disc, *Bookends*:

"Until *Bookends* my image of Simon and Garfunkel was of a couple of young guys crowded into a tiny confessional, the one humming, clapping and generally keeping time, the other playing the guitar and holding up little water colors of himself against the grating."

Comparing Simon and Garfunkel's earlier records and their latest, the reviewer continues:

"It's this *looking* that's different, the looking *out* instead of looking *at* (one's own reflection). Gone is the self-involvement of 'I am a Rock,' 'Patterns,' or 'The Dangling Conversation'."

In the entire course of the review, the music is never referred to, never discussed. The question arises: Is this record to be judged as poetry, as philosophy, or is it a matter of songs to be judged (and listened to) as music?

Considered as poetry or as ideas, most Rock songs leave much to be desired. The words have little to say that we haven't heard before. To kids in high school, or to less sophisticated segments of the college crowd, they are perhaps a rather radical, visceral

Eyes of Blue, Ears of Tin

expression of deep feelings. But if Rock songs are to be justified as adult as well as adolescent art, it cannot be because of their ideas. Compared with the usual vapid chatter of pop songs, Rock lyrics are often poetically sensitive and reveal inspiration. The writers have read plenty of good poetry and the effects are evident. But the poetic and emotional materials of the lyrics to "A Day in the Life" or "The Sounds of Silence," however superior for pop music, are not seriously to be thought of as in the same league with, say, Auden's "Petition":

Send to us power and light, a
sovereign touch
Curing the intolerable neural itch,
The exhaustion of weaning, the
liar's quinsy,
And the distortions of ingrown
virginity.
Prohibit sharply the rehearsed
response
And gradually correct the coward's
stance;
Cover in time with beams those in
retreat
That, spotted, they turn though the
reverse were great.

Even if the "poems" of Rock songs were first-rate poetry, it would mostly be a waste of effort, for any musician knows that music not only does not require first-rate poetry — it cannot support it. Even the loveliest of Shakespeare or Ben Jonson poems set to music suffer a great loss, as they must when the poetic meter is violated to accommodate the music's. Handel's *Alexander's Feast* is a great oratorio, but it doesn't do anything for Dryden's words. A few composers (Purcell at his best) can set excellent verse to music with minimal destruction of the poetic structure, but that's rare. (Rossini's *Stabat Mater* is a hilarious example of total destruction of a text by musical setting.) In his famous review of *Tristan*, Bernard Shaw told us that even Wagner, for all his inflated

notion of the importance of his librettos, realized how insignificant the words would become when the music was passionate and exciting. In the ecstasy conveyed by the music of Act Two of *Tristan*, all the lovers can do is scream each other's name.

Because Colin Turner dislikes the "narcissism" of the earlier Simon and Garfunkel lyrics, he finds the new LP superior to its forerunners in its celebration of more public subjects. For him, this makes the new songs superior to "Patterns," and presumably to "The Sounds of Silence," "Cloudy," and some of the other excellent songs of the previous LP's. Still, musically the new record, *Bookends*, is a step backward, with the exception of the delightful "Mrs. Robinson" song—a step backward into gimmickry and Beatlemania. Mr. Turner singles out "Fakin' It" as an example of special excellence to be found on the new record. What we really find here is the absence of the unique Simon and Garfunkel timbre, while in its place we have a series of almost straight borrowings from the Beatles. The song begins with the repeated notes that end "Strawberry Fields Forever," moves on to sudden tempo changes like those of many of the Beatles' songs, then "borrows" two passages from the Beatles' "I am a Walrus," the "English Garden" sequence (in Simon and Garfunkel it appears as "And a walk in a garden") followed immediately by the music of Walrus' "semolina pilchard" line (which appears in the Simon and Garfunkel song as "Tangled in the fallen vines," metrically and musically almost identical with "semolina pilchard"). The whole song is a melange of thefts from the Beatles. "Old Friends" from the new LP is a reworking of the music of the Beatles' "She's leaving home," right down to the familiar "Eleanor Rigby" strings in the background. "Save the Life of My Child" and "America" are built up from materials taken from the Beatles' "A Day in the Life," especially its beat and its crescendoes of wild noises. In all cases, the Beatles songs are first-rate specimens of their kind, and the Simon and Garfunkel songs are manufactured products that fail to come off. Despite the inferior music, however, Mr. Turner likes the new album better than the earlier ones be-

cause he prefers social subjects to psychological ones. The music is irrelevant. Would anyone want to read:

We might as well be apart.
It hardly matters,
We sleep separately.
And drop a smile passing in the
hall
Because there's no laughs left
'Cause we laughed them all
In a very short time . . .

by itself, as a "poem," any more than one would want to sit through *Die Walkure* as a play without music? Let's take a quick look at the music of the best song in the *Bookends* album, "Mrs. Robinson."

To begin with, the song holds together as music, because it consists of a sequence of repeated refrains and maintains a regular tempo and pattern. The major attraction of Simon and Garfunkel, their timbre—a tenor and countertenor harmonization of voices against a simple Rock beat—is strongly present. Its beauty shines through in the lovely sounds that are produced at "We'd like to know a little bit about you," "Hide it in a hiding place," and the other parallel passages—soft, high-pitched, mellifluous. The excitement, mostly achieved through this gentle timbre against a firm Rock beat, is heightened by the unusual and sudden crescendoes that occur at "And here's to you Mrs. Robinson," in all of its appearances (last time around as "Where have you gone, Joe DiMaggio?"). In brief, it is the sound that makes the song. The words are pretty good, though their relation to the Mrs. Robinson of "The Graduate" is a bit tenuous. But the words are well

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

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set to the music—"Sitting on a sofa on a Sunday afternoon," with its soft "s" sounds, is a pleasant verbal complement, for example. And the grotesque anachronism of the traditional religious language as applied to the subject of the song is, whether intentional or not, witty. The successful mating of the words to the music can be contrasted with the failure in "The Sounds of Silence," where weak syllables (the "ing" of "speaking" and all the other "ing" words at the ends of lines) of the lyrics are set to strong accents in the music, resulting in "speakING"—a jarring experience.

If "Mrs. Robinson" is a good song, it is good, then, for musical reasons. Simon and Garfunkel cannot compete with the Beatles on the Beatles' ground. They should stick to what they do best. Without the inventive counterpoint, harmony, metrical shifts, variations of melodies and inspired use of speeded up and slowed down tapes of the Beatles at their best, Simon and Garfunkel's derivations are bound to seem flat. The critics will not help these musicians by failing to examine the music.

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