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So Many Reasons for Revival: Politics and Commercialism in the Second Wave of the Folk Revival in the United States, 1958–1965

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Abstract

Numerous scholars have taken positions which place the political music of the second wave of the folk revival in the United States from 1958 to 1965 at odds with commercialism of the time. Commercial and political motivations have been seen as mutually exclusive factors that detracted from the efficacy and cultural applicability of one another. This research will show that such a viewpoint is inconsistent with evidence in certain instances, especially with regard to increasing college audiences, organizations such as the Newport Folk Festival, and the highly intentional partnership between political musicians such as Pete Seeger and Phil Ochs on the one hand and commercially successful musicians such as Theodore Bikel, Judy Collins, and Peter, Paul, and Mary on the other. Through a meta-analysis of scholarship on the subject, an examination of sources within the movement and outside of it, and an analysis of the music and lyrics created by musicians within the movement, this paper will show that far from being mutually exclusive, political action and commercialism in the second wave of the folk revival supported and sustained one another in numerous instances.

Keywords: Folk, Revival, Politics

Introduction

Between the years 1958 and 1965 folk music underwent dramatic changes in the United States especially with regard to the political and commercial nature of the music. Folk music assumed a more prominent role in popular culture, especially with younger generations of listeners and participants.¹ Based primarily out of Greenwich Village in New York City, this

¹ Robert Cantwell, *When We Were Good* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 2; Stephanie Ledgin, *Discovering Folk Music* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2010), 39–40; Kip Lornell, *Exploring American Folk Music* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2012), 259.

second wave of the folk revival would dramatically alter music in the United States in terms of lyrics, musical content, message, and the lifestyles of both professional and amateur musicians. Certainly, some listeners would be attracted to the new wave of the folk revival because of its revitalization of folk song outside of its original political context.² However, the revival was also marked by topical singers involved in songwriting about the political issues of their time such as Phil Ochs, Tom Paxton, Joan Baez, Bob Dylan, and Mark Spoelstra.³ This paper will explore through historical analysis and a meta-analysis of the literature how the music of this second wave of the folk revival both shaped politics and was shaped by political ideologies held by musician and listener participants in part through the mechanisms of commercialism.

Definitions and Background

In the context of this paper, the term “folk music” is used to refer to primarily acoustic singer-songwriter music that was newly composed as well as traditional music from the United States or elsewhere which was performed, re-written, or re-purposed during the time period in question. The second wave of the folk revival should be understood for the purposes of this research to refer to the portion of the movement which happened roughly between the years of 1958 and 1965 and which resulted in part from the first wave of the movement started in the 1930’s.

² Cantwell, *When We Were Good*, 22.

³ Lornell, *Exploring American Folk Music*, 259.

The Political Roots of the Movement

Numerous scholars and musicians address a conflict between commercialism and political action in the second wave of the folk revival in the United States.⁴ While there is little doubt that this conflict existed on some level, there is substantial evidence that commercialism and political ideology were not always at odds. Far from standing in the way of political actors, commercialism in many cases supported them.

Arguably, the first commercial breakthrough in the second wave of the folk revival came in 1958 when the Kingston Trio released the song “Tom Dooley” with Capitol Records.⁵ In less than 2 years, the record sold nearly four million copies. The trio’s success was driven largely by a key group for the movement which developed their support following the release of the song, college students. As William J. Bush says, “Of all the audiences the Trio performed for during their many cross-country tours, none was more enthusiastic and loyal than the college market. The Kingston Trio was *theirs*; the embodiment of the collegiate good-time ethic.”⁶ Though the trio was intentionally “deciding not to stir up any waves” politically,⁷ they had unknowingly developed an excellent environment for protest singers. Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, Peter, Paul, and Mary, and others would use the newly developed market as their stage, “siphoning off the Trio’s record buying audience in the process.”⁸ These new revival musicians would be “drawn into political activism by their revival activities, and vice versa” as folk enthusiasts (many of whom were student activists) started to align with the new sentiments of the American Students for a

⁴ Ron Eyerman and Scott Barretta, “From the 30s to the 60s,” *Theory and Society* 25, no. 4 (1996), 535, <https://doi.org/10.1007/bf00160675>; Pete Seeger, *Incomplete Folk Singer*, ed. Jo Metcalf Schwartz (NY: Simon and Schuster, 1972), 438–439; Phil Hood, *Artists of American Folk Music* (New York: W. Morrow, 1986), 157.

⁵ Mary DesRosiers, “Tom Dooley,” *Sing Out! The Folk Song Magazine*, Spring, 2000.

⁶ Phil Hood, *Artists of American Folk Music* (New York: W. Morrow, 1986), 64.

⁷ Hood, *Artists of American Folk Music*, 60.

⁸ Hood, *Artists of American Folk Music*, 67.

Democratic Society and other groups.⁹ College campuses would become home to folk music gatherings associated with the political ideals of the civil rights movement, the new left, and anti-war groups, and participants would help to support a new generation of folk musicians such as Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, and Phil Ochs.¹⁰

The many supportive coffee houses and festivals in the folk scene became the apparatus of the folk revival in the late 1950's and early 1960's, and the "epicentre of the coffee-house scene was in New York City, and particularly in the Greenwich Village area... where well-known musicians could perform, and where budding talents could experiment."¹¹ According to John Cohen, Greenwich Village had all the institutions necessary to build up the second wave of the folk revival; the Beat Generation, small art galleries on Tenth Street, Washington Square Park gatherings on Sunday afternoons, MacDougal Street gatherings at night, and cafés such as The Bitter End, Cedar Tavern, Limelight Café, and the White Horse Tavern.¹²

In 1961, Washington Square Park in Greenwich Village would serve as host for political action as well. Roughly 50 folk musicians led by Israel Young, owner of the The Folklore Center in Greenwich Village, stood in the park in defiance of local ordinances since they were denied renewal of their permit to gather there.¹³ According to Oscar Brand, the police started the physical contact with "courteous shoves", which eventually turned into an exchange of blows and the singing of "We Shall Not Be Moved" with instrumental accompaniment.¹⁴ The

⁹ Gillian Mitchell, "Visions of Diversity: Cultural Pluralism and the Nation in the Folk Music Revival Movement of the United States and Canada, 1958–65," *Journal of American Studies* 40, no. 3 (2006): 610, <https://www.doi.org/10.1017/s0021875806002143>.

¹⁰ Jonathan Friedman, *The Routledge History of Social Protest in Popular Music* (New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 2013), 103.

¹¹ Mitchell, "Visions of Diversity," 596–598.

¹² Eyerman and Barretta, "From the 30s to the 60s," 524.

¹³ Paul Hofman, "Folk Singers Riot in Washington Sq.," *New York Times*, April 10, 1961, <https://www.nytimes.com/1961/04/10/archives/folk-singers-riot-in-washington-sq-10-arrested-several-hurt-as.html>.

¹⁴ Oscar Brand, *The Ballad Mongers: Rise of the Modern Folk Song* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1979), 168.

Washington Square riot represents a certain type of political action seen in the movement. In this case, participants were not incendiary with their political goals, but they held firm to their ideals and defended them when necessary.

Seeger as a Political Leader

One key example of a political actor, and in fact, perhaps the primary political actor in the second wave of the folk revival was Pete Seeger. His group The Weavers, despite being blacklisted and therefore largely prohibited from performing on radio and television, were “especially popular on campuses and were continually booked for university programs despite the objections of local black-listing authorities.”¹⁵ This outreach to college students was key. Israel Young addressed the perception of Seeger as “the catalyst that gets things started”, contributing to a process which resulted in thousands of college students listening to folk music in small on campus parties and concerts or on their radios.¹⁶ College campuses would even see the start of political folk groups such as Jim Glover and Phil Ochs’ The Singing Socialists at Ohio State University which was partly inspired by Pete Seeger and the Weavers.¹⁷ In 1955, Seeger testified before the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), was cited for contempt of congress a year later, and was indicted in 1957. He was tried in 1961 and found guilty of “refusing to answer ten of HUAC’s questions.”¹⁸ In his testimony, the singer appeared firm and unmoving, a political martyr for his cause. In the transcripts from the trial, Seeger asks the court if he may sing a song mentioned in the trial, “Wasn’t That a Time”. He is told he may

¹⁵ Brand, *The Ballad Mongers*, 146.

¹⁶ Israel Young, “Folk Music Guide * USA 2, No. 1” (January, 1960), in *The Conscience of the Folk Revival*, edited by Scott Barretta (London: The Scarecrow Press, 2013), 52.

¹⁷ Michael Schumacher, *There But for Fortune: The Life of Phil Ochs* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1966), 38.

¹⁸ Seeger, *The Incomplete Folksinger*, 468–470.

not. He ends his subsequent response with “Do I have a right to sing these songs? Do I have a right to sing them anywhere?”¹⁹ Seeger said of his testimony that he aimed to make the statement that “you [the Committee on Un-American Activities] have no right to ask *any* American such questions.”²⁰ It is a clearly political appeal. Though it can certainly be debated whether or not Seeger was effective in his political action, there is little question whether or not his actions were politically motivated. Seeger said as much in his statements regarding the matter, asserting that his statements were a defense of First Amendment constitutional rights. It also seems unlikely that he would suffer through years of testimony, citation, indictment, trial, and subsequent conviction if he were not attempting to achieve some politically motivated goal. So, it seems likely his statements were genuine.

Seeger was publicly involved with political causes including those of civil rights, anti-war, workers’ rights, and environmental issues, and those causes would certainly affect folk singers of the time.²¹ Seeger said of his followers “Though I cannot get on network TV, many of my friends do. Though I cannot get a job in a university, those whom I have helped get interested in folk music are getting them.”²² When the ABC television show “Hootenanny” refused to allow Seeger and his group The Weavers on air, *Broadside*, *Sing Out!* and *The Village Voice* would all report that it was the result of blacklisting.²³ As a result Joan Baez, Bob Dylan, Tom Paxton, and Peter, Paul and Mary refused to perform as well, but Seeger “encouraged these

¹⁹ Seeger, *The Incomplete Folksinger*, 471.

²⁰ Seeger, *The Incomplete Folksinger*, 468.

²¹ Hood, *Artists of American Folk Music*, 30; David Ingram, “‘My Dirty Stream,’ Pete Seeger, American Folk Music, and Environmental Protest,” *Popular Music and Society* 31, no.1 (2008): 23, <https://www.doi.org/10.1080/03007760601061456>.

²² Seeger, *Incomplete Folk Singer*, 212.

²³ Gordon Friesen, “ABC-TV Hootenanny: End of the Line,” *Broadside*, June 30, 1964, <https://singout.org/downloads/broadside/b047.pdf>; Nat Hentoff, “That Ole McCarthy Hoot,” *The Village Voice*, March 14, 1963, <https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=KEtq3P1Vf8oC&dat=19630314&printsec=frontpage&hl=en>. Nat Hentoff, “Hootenanny on TV: McCarthy Style,” *Sing Out!*, April-May, 1963.

singers to appear on the show in the hope that they would help introduce good folk music to the young audience; even his half-brother Mike Seeger performed with his group the New Lost City Ramblers.”²⁴ This represents a key example of Seeger advocating for the use of commercial popularity for the betterment of the movement. Mary Travers of the group Peter, Paul and Mary would say of Seeger “We are the children of Pete Seeger. We came from the folk tradition in a contemporary form where there was a concern that idealism be a part of your music and the music a part of your life.”²⁵ In Travers’ statement, there is the sense of both a message in the music and a lifestyle associated with the message. It was insufficient to write idealistic songs. Travers suggests that one was expected to actually be idealistic and live a life indicative of one’s idealism.

Groups like Peter, Paul and Mary would be the ones to make the message of Pete Seeger “accessible to a contemporary public” and “define a tradition of their own”.²⁶ The trio, which Phil Hood calls “perhaps the most popular folk act of [the 1960’s] folk boom” released “If I Had A Hammer”, a song composed by Pete Seeger and Lee Hays on their first album in 1962.²⁷ Even as Seeger was losing performance opportunities and therefore political influence due to the blacklist, those he influenced were performing his music and spreading his message. Seeger also had a hand in the career of another important singer during the revival, Joan Baez. When she performed with Bob Gibson at the Newport Folk Festival in 1959, Seeger took a liking to her, which proved especially important since Seeger would gain a key role in the Newport Folk Festival Foundation.²⁸

²⁴ Rachel Donaldson, *“I Hear America Singing:” Folk Music and National Identity* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2014), 134.

²⁵ Hood, *Artists of American Folk Music*, 82.

²⁶ Hood, *Artists of American Folk Music*, 82.

²⁷ Hood, *Artists of American Folk Music*, 80.

²⁸ Donaldson, *“I Hear America Singing,”* 135.

Activism Among Musicians

Joan Baez was incredibly adept at combining her political activism with her popularity as a folk singer. As Jäger says, “Her attainments during the most successful decade of her career – the 1960s – have been co-influential for a whole generation’s political conscience.”²⁹ Her activism started in high school when she refused to participate in a civil defense drill and subsequently appeared in newspapers. She would go on to make many other politically motivated decisions during the course of her career, including going on a no discrimination tour of the South in 1962, refusing to pay income taxes in 1964 because her taxes would be used to fund the Defense Department, founding the Institute for the Study of Non-Violence in California in 1965, participating in Anti-war marches in West Germany, performing for striking farm workers in California, and publicly supporting the abolishment of the death penalty.³⁰

Baez adeptly navigated the music industry to achieve political and social goals throughout her long career.³¹ Perhaps her most significant political decision was performing at the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom in 1963 alongside Odetta, Peter, Paul, and Mary, and Bob Dylan.³² In videos of the event, Baez can be seen surrounded by camera-wielding reporters capturing every angle of her performance as she sings the civil rights protest ballad “We Shall Overcome.”³³

²⁹ Markus Jäger, *Popular is Not Enough: The Political Voice of Joan Baez: A Case Study in the Biographical Method* (Stuttgart, Germany: Ibidem Press, 2014), 11.

³⁰ Hood, *Artists of American Folk Music*, 71–72.

³¹ Jäger, *Popular is Not Enough*, 79.

³² Richard Weingroff, “Road to Civil Rights,” *Federal Highway Administration Highway History* (March, 2020): 166, <https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/highwayhistory/road/road.pdf>.

³³ John Akomfrah, dir., *The March*, Aired August 27, 2013, on PBS, <https://youtu.be/DQYzHIIQ1O4>.

It was political action that was well publicized, and it was well publicized because Baez and others were becoming commercially successful. The pro-civil rights sentiments were widespread among other folk revivalists as well. Mitchell says they “did not merely cling to this fascination with, and longing for, diversity and tolerance, but also developed it further via the media of their movement” in a social environment in which “considerable abundance and prevalent consumerism were characteristics of life, at least for many white Americans.”³⁴ Phil Hood said of Bob Dylan, “[his] political sensibilities were no doubt heightened by the involvement of many folksingers in the civil rights movement. Certainly, this seemed to be the first political issue that really moved Dylan.”³⁵ Considering songs such as “The Death of Emmett Till”, it is hard not to agree with Hood. Dylan’s song, an attempt to further the civil rights movement, would be performed around the nation in various high profile environments by both Dylan and Joan Baez.³⁶ Certain purists and folk writers would criticize Dylan and others for commercializing their ideals, however. Israel Young said of them that “everyone was part of it except the people managed by Albert Grossman—Peter, Paul and Mary, and Bob Dylan. When the war in Vietnam became ‘popular,’ three years later, Peter, Paul and Mary flew down to Washington D.C. to take their place in front of the cameras.’”³⁷ Yet, Young’s statement shows that at the very least, the political action of the artists was garnering attention. The industry was conducive to political music, and musical artists were a part of that system, attracting attention by way of their own commercial success and popularity.

³⁴ Gillian Mitchell, “Visions of Diversity: Cultural Pluralism and the Nation in the Folk Music Revival Movement of the United States and Canada, 1958–65,” *Journal of American Studies* 40, no. 3 (2006): 606, <https://www.doi.org/10.1017/s0021875806002143>.

³⁵ Hood, *Artists of American Folk Music*, 86.

³⁶ Philip Kolin, “Haunting America: Emmett Till in Music and Song,” *Southern Cultures, Chapel Hill* 15, no. 3 (2009): 119–121.

³⁷ Eyerman and Barretta, “From the 30s to the 60s,” 534–535.

In 1963, Time Magazine would report that Peter, Paul and Mary's recording of Bob Dylan's song "Blowin' in the Wind" was Warner Bros. Records fastest selling single ever and that Pete Seeger was performing integrationist songs to crowds of 45,000 at the Boston Arts Festival.³⁸ Columbia Records advertised the inclusion of "all the revolutionaries" in their lineup,³⁹ just as the Newport Folk Festival sought to give political artists a more substantial audience. Even as musicians such as Mark Spoelstra would deliver scathing critiques of the commercially successful "pop" music "referred to by some as folk music",⁴⁰ the Newport Folk Festival would put popular folk artists on the same stage as highly political singers, which included Spoelstra himself in 1965.⁴¹ According to Rachel Clare Donaldson, "Newport quietly advocated the Americanism of the revival—an advocacy that would become increasingly overt as the decade progressed."⁴² After a two year hiatus, the Newport Folk Festival returned under the leadership of a group of musicians including Pete Seeger. Donaldson writes that "because of Seeger's prodding, Newport fell in step with the revival after 1963, for it now brought traditional music to the stage and raised social and political awareness through topical singers."⁴³ The goal was to put politically active musicians on stage with popular performers in an effort to create a larger audience for the political message. In 1963, the festival presented the Freedom Singers, a group comprised of members of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, a political

³⁸ Roy Alexander, "They Hear America Singing," *Time*, July 19, 1963, <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,896904,00.html>.

³⁹ Eyerman and Barretta, "From the 30s to the 60s," 534.

⁴⁰ Mark Spoelstra, "Dear Casey Anderson c/o Broadside," *The Broadside of Boston*, June 26, 1963, <https://folknewengland.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Volume-II-No.-8.pdf>.

⁴¹ Robert Shelton, "64 Folk Festival Ends in Newport," *The New York Times*, July 27, 1964, <https://www.nytimes.com/1964/07/27/archives/64-folk-festival-ends-in-newport-weekend-event-presented-music-and.html>; Dave Wilson, "New Folks at Newport on Elektra Records," *The Broadside of Boston*, July 21, 1965, <https://folknewengland.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Volume-IV-No.-11.pdf>; Robert Shelton, "Folk music fills Newport coffers," *The New York Times*, July 26, 1965, <https://www.nytimes.com/1965/07/26/archives/folk-music-fills-newport-coffers-the-4day-festival-attracts-76000-a.htm>.

⁴² Donaldson, "*I Hear America Singing*," 135.

⁴³ Donaldson, "*I Hear America Singing*," 136.

group involved in civil rights. That year, Joan Baez even led a group of over six hundred audience members to Truro Park in Newport for a rally supporting the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. The first evening concert ended with the civil rights anthem “We Shall Overcome”.⁴⁴ During the course of the festival, Tom Paxton, Peter La Farge, and Dave Von Ronk collected postcards from attendees to be sent to ABC in protest of the blacklisting of Pete Seeger and The Weavers on the show “Hootenanny.”⁴⁵ This suggests that certain musicians and leaders in the second wave of the folk revival intentionally and successfully used the commercial music industry and the popularity of its artists to further their political goals, and in the case of the 1963 Newport Folk Festival, they would see great success. The New York Times reported \$70,000 in revenue and 47,000 paid admissions.⁴⁶ After troops were sent into Vietnam in 1965, the revivalists once again mobilized. Phil Ochs, Judy Collins, and the Freedom Singers all attended the subsequent march on Washington D.C.⁴⁷

Political Music

The same year as the march against the Vietnam War, Phil Ochs’ frustrated, sarcastic, and at times violent album *I Ain’t Marching Anymore* was released on the Elektra label.⁴⁸ The title track ended with the lyrics:

Now the labor leader’s screamin’ when they close the missile plants
United Fruit screams at the Cuban shore
Call it, “Peace” or call it, “Treason”
Call it, “Love” or call it, “Reason”

⁴⁴ Donaldson, “*I Hear America Singing*,” 152; Schumacher, *There But for Fortune*, 61.

⁴⁵ Agnes Cunningham, “Blacklist,” *Broadside*, August, 1963, <https://singout.org/downloads/broadside/b030.pdf>.

⁴⁶ Robert Shelton, “Folk-music fete called a success: 3-day Newport event ends with \$70,000 in box office,” *The New York Times*, July 29, 1963, <https://www.nytimes.com/1964/07/27/archives/64-folk-festival-ends-in-newport-weekend-event-presented-music-and.html>.

⁴⁷ Donaldson, “*I Hear America Singing*,” 154.

⁴⁸ Jerome Rodnitzky, “The Sixties Between the Microgrooves: Using Folk and Protest Music to Understand American History, 1963–1973,” *Popular Music and Society* 23, no. 4 (1999): 8, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03007769908591755>.

But I ain't marchin' any more⁴⁹

Ochs is very clear in these lyrics. After attacking the ideas of the Revolutionary War, the violent conflicts of the American West such as Little Big Horn, the acquisition of California, the Civil War, and World War II, Ochs delivers his final verse defiantly challenging the draft despite the fact that conviction of treason was not an impossibility in the political climate at the time.⁵⁰ In the liner notes to the original Elektra release, Ochs says of the song, “This borders between pacifism and treason, combining the best qualities of both. The fact that you won't be hearing this song over the radio is more than enough justification for the writing of it.”⁵¹ In fact, the song was one of his more popular, and Ochs would perform it on the ABC television special *Dissent or Treason* in 1967.⁵²

The dotted eighth note, sixteenth note pattern in the melody and simple, repetitive rhythmic patterns are vaguely reminiscent of a military march (see Example 1).⁵³ Ochs uses the patterns somewhat more freely in his song about conscientious objection, but as Schumacher points out, “Phil may not have been marching, but he couldn't help hearing the drum beats.”⁵⁴ What's more, the melodic line features repeated descending scalar patterns from D \flat to A \flat until the line “I ain't marchin' anymore,” which is preceded by an attention-grabbing leap of a major sixth to the highest note of the song, highlighting the liberating nature of the text. The melody

⁴⁹ Phil Ochs, “*I Ain't Marchin' Anymore*,” *Broadside*, January 20, 1965, <https://www.singout.org/downloads/broadside/b054.pdf>.

⁵⁰ Rodnitzky, “The Sixties Between the Microgrooves,” 8.

⁵¹ Ochs, “*I Ain't Marchin' Anymore*.”

⁵² Marc Eliot, *Death of a Rebel: A Biography of Phil Ochs* (New York: Franklin Watts, 1989), 151; Michael Schumacher, *There But for Fortune: The Life of Phil Ochs* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1966), 179.

⁵³ Erich Schwandt and Andrew Lamb, “March,” in Grove Music Online, 2001, accessed March 27, 2020; <https://www-oxfordmusiconline-com.unco.idm.oclc.org/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000040080?rsk=Cwiplk>.

⁵⁴ Schumacher, *There But for Fortune*, 91.

puts the anti-war concept in a lighthearted but somewhat ironic tone in keeping with Phil Ochs' style and the message of his collegiate folk revivalist culture.

The image shows a musical transcription of the melody of "I Ain't Marching Anymore" in G-flat major (three flats) and 2/4 time. The tempo is marked as ♩ = 130. The melody is written on a single staff with Roman numeral analysis above it. The first line contains measures 1 through 11, and the second line contains measures 12 through 16. The Roman numerals are: I, V, I, V, I, VII, vi, IV, ii, V.

Example 1. Transcription of Melody and Roman Numeral Analysis of excerpt from “I Ain’t Marching Anymore.”⁵⁵

Ochs also commented on the interaction between commercial music and protest music. In a 1965 interview appearing in *Broadside*, he commented on Barry McGuire’s “Eve of Destruction” and its Top 40 status on the Billboard charts. Ochs called the event “disappointing” because “the quality has been terrible and the philosophy has been juvenile.”⁵⁶ In the interview, he also painted a darker picture of commercial success, suggesting that for Bob Dylan, success could eventually be dangerous. In the aftermath of the assassination of John F. Kennedy and in the context of a tumultuous time in history, Ochs predicted that “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.”⁵⁷ Clearly,

⁵⁵ Ochs, “*I Ain’t Marchin’ Anymore.*” In the audio recording made for Elektra, Ochs’ is heard as somewhat more sharp than concert G \flat Major, but in his transcription of the song for *Broadside* magazine, he writes a simplified version of the song in G Major, which suggests that he may have tuned somewhat flat for his recording with Elektra.

⁵⁶ Agnes Cunningham, Gordon Friesen, and Phil Ochs, “An Interview with Phil Ochs,” *Broadside*, October 15, 1965, <https://singout.org/downloads/broadside/b063.pdf>.

⁵⁷ Cunningham, Friesen, and Ochs, “An Interview with Phil Ochs.”

Ochs had a complex relationship with popularity.⁵⁸ Though he sought it and gained it at times, he also saw popularity as a danger to the movement and sometimes even a danger for the performer. In a sense, popularity had even been dangerous to Ochs himself, whose growing popularity contributed to the beginning of the FBI investigation into his political beliefs when he published the lyrics to his song “Bound for Glory” and an essay on Woody Guthrie in *Mainstream* magazine in 1963.⁵⁹

At the 1964 Newport Folk Festival, Ochs performed on the same lineup as Peter, Paul, and Mary and Judy Collins. The New York Times reported that at the festival “There was the expectable professionalism of Theodore Bikel, Judy Collins, and Peter, Paul and Mary” as well as “new talent, mostly young professionals of the urban folk revival, who were heading off into innovation and experimentation in the folk idiom.”⁶⁰ Pete Seeger’s goal for the festival had come to fruition. On the same lineup as several nationally-known stars, the highly political Phil Ochs performed his song “Draft Dodger Rag”. Like other topical singers of the time such as Tom Paxton and Odetta, Ochs used a simple rhythm guitar accompaniment to his vocals so as to clearly highlight his lyrics. The lyrics of “Draft Dodger Rag” themselves are imbued with Ochs’ characteristic sarcasm describing the story of a “typical American boy from a typical American town.”⁶¹ In speaking to the sergeant handling his enlistment, the subject of the song claims he cannot go to war because he is a medically unfit homosexual with family to take care of, a lover at home, and school to do. Clearly advocating for lying under oath in an effort to avoid being drafted, Ochs is a key example of the topical folk revivalist singer in this time period, and the

⁵⁸ Schumacher, *There But for Fortune*, 5.

⁵⁹ Schumacher, *There But for Fortune*, 75.

⁶⁰ Shelton, “64 Folk Festival Ends in Newport.”

⁶¹ Phil Ochs, “I Ain’t Marchin’ Anymore,” *Broadside*, January 20, 1965.
<https://www.singout.org/downloads/broadside/b054.pdf>.

system of the Newport Folk Festival supported him by using the commercial success of musicians like Theodore Bikel, Peter, Paul, and Mary, and Judy Collins to allow Ochs to perform in front of larger audiences. Far from discouraging political statement, the commercial aspects of the revival were being used to support musicians like Ochs.

Conclusion and Implications for Future Research

In an interview with Mark Humphrey of *Frets* in 1983, Richie Havens said, “We had a vision in the Sixties of how it could be, but most of us never got together to form the foundation of how it could be. We overextended our musical projection. The few who tried on their own either failed or are still holding on. But I think that attitude of evolutionary change has finally permeated the globe.”⁶² The use of the growing commercial culture and popularity of folk music between 1958 and 1965 to support political ideologies of participants achieved certain successes, but for some, it was not enough. Indeed, the political work of the folk revivalists of this time period has almost certainly not come to fruition. To make the claim that pro-civil rights or anti-war movements have concluded in the United States would be folly. Likewise, it would be folly to suggest that all of the political action as a part of the movement was genuine in nature. However, what is clear is that, by design or by chance, the second wave of the folk revival in the United States was highly political, and the political messages of the movement were carried all over the United States in part because of the commercial music industry that drove the distribution of its music. Where Seeger was the heart of a generation, Baez, Dylan, and Peter, Paul, and Mary were its voice. Where Ochs was its fury, Judy Collins and Theodore Bikel were

⁶² Hood, *Artists of American Folk Music*, 124.

its face. For better or worse, together they spoke the message of the movement to countless listeners.

These ideas carry great significance for a holistic understanding of the music of the United States in the 1960s as well as folk music in North America in general since the movement was closely tied to perceptions and movements in Canada as well.⁶³ It is important to understand that the perceptions held by musicians and participants in the second wave of the folk revival were not necessarily the whole story. Though active and vocal participants in the second wave of the folk revival in the United States such as Pete Seeger, Israel Young, Mark Spoelstra, and Phil Ochs made certain negative statements and likely held certain negative views of the increasing commercialism and popularity of folk music at the time, those same participants and many of their counterparts benefited from the commercial success of popular folk artists. This suggests that scholars might benefit from a more careful and nuanced understanding of the views of those who would place commercialism and politics in this movement at odds with one another.

While this idea has certain historiographical implications, it should also inform understandings in areas of performance and musicology concerned with folk music and American music in general. In the future, it would be a great benefit to the literature if research were conducted regarding the actual effects of the political actions of folk musicians in this time period. That is to say that while the research and analysis presented here compared perceptions and statements with commercial associations and some results of commercial distribution, an inquiry into how much the efforts of political actors in the movement actually affected listeners would be fascinating. Perhaps future research could also shed additional light on the extent to

⁶³ Gillian Mitchell, "Visions of Diversity: Cultural Pluralism and the Nation in the Folk Music Revival Movement of the United States and Canada, 1958–65," *Journal of American Studies* 40, no. 3 (2006): 594, 611, <https://www.doi.org/10.1017/s0021875806002143>.

which music in the modern day has been affected by commercially aided political actions of folk musicians in the 1960s.

It seems likely that the commercial, political, and ideological effects of the second wave of the folk revival were more far-reaching than one might initially be led to believe. The narrative presented in this research and analysis points to a certain critical stance among participants which may have contributed to the types of political views held but may also have muted the perceived effects of the expression of those views in music. In light of their apparent disdain for commercialism, did these participants understand the effects it had on the dissemination of their ideologies? Musicologists, historians, and performers could all benefit from a certain skepticism regarding the interaction between politics and commercialism in the folk music of this time period. Such skepticism should not only involve the sort of questioning of motives that Israel Young and others have done but also a questioning of the how political and commercial aims actually interacted. Perhaps the effects of the music of the second wave of the folk revival in the United States have yet to be determined, and perhaps those effects are still being experienced and still evolving today. The research and analysis presented here suggests that there are still many questions to answer, especially in the interpretation of narratives concerning this unique music.

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