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North American Folk Rock Songs from the 1960's about protest and Activism

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Let the Lyrics Shine

By: Claire Oelfke

I've found that sometimes the simplest songs have the most to offer listeners. "For What It's Worth," by Buffalo Springfield is musically and instrumentally uncomplicated, but it contains poetic activist lyrics. The dynamics throughout the entire song are relatively soft, never reaching a loud climax. This gives the song a calming ambience while alerting listeners to the lyrics rather than complicated musical elements. The narrow melodic range plays into the vocal simplicity that allows the lyrics to outweigh the singing. The song is also constructed of a very straightforward structure beginning with verse-chorus alternations and ending with multiple chorus repetitions, driving the lyrics home. Although this song is simple, it still features electric guitar solos, giving it a folk-rock feel. "For What It's Worth" is about protesting and urging the younger population to use their voices. I recommend this song to those who enjoy simple lyrics with a deep-rooted message.

Blissful Yet Heavy

By: Claire Oelfke

“The Times They Are a-Changin’” by Bob Dylan is an upbeat, blissful-sounding song that defies expectations by containing powerful activist lyrics. The song features a simple triple (3/4) meter, giving it a comfortable, predictable feel for listeners. It is also played in a major key, making it pleasant to listen to. On the surface, this song sounds cheerful, but the lyrics contain a dominant yet poetic anti-war message. The song follows a homophonic texture that centers around Dylan’s gritty voice accompanied by an acoustic guitar and harmonica. This laid-back sound allows listeners to pay more attention to the beautifully written lyrics that carry significant meaning, especially for the time they were written (1964). I think the reason this song became so popular is because its melody sounds charming while its message weighs heavy on one’s heart. I recommend it to anyone who isn’t familiar with Bob Dylan’s artistry/poetry.

A Gentle Cry for Freedom

By: Claire Oelfke

“Chimes of Freedom” by the Byrds is a timeless cry for freedom of groups within the war or violent societies, specifically that of the 1960s. This Bob Dylan cover contains a strong tambourine backbeat that keeps the unchanging buoyant tempo alive. It is also made up of a simple upbeat melody that likely appeals to many listeners. I think both of these musical elements likely made the song sound more appealing to audiences in the 60s who were fed up with the war and likely wanted positive relief through music. There is no climax in the melody of the song, leading me to believe all the lyrics are equally as valid and relevant. Although this song is pleasant on the ears, it still contains a cry for freedom and a meaningful message. I would recommend this song to all folk-rock lovers because of its timeless message and pleasant melody.

Why did you choose this topic?

We chose to research North American folk-rock music from the 1960s, specifically songs related to activism, after diving deeper into the historical context of the 60s in class. We all enjoy listening to folk-rock music because of its unique musical elements and calming instrumentation, but we feel it is important to understand its origin and goals as well. After researching the Vietnam War and other political movements in the 60s, we have come to understand the importance of activism at the time, and we wish to convey that truth to others. We are also interested in how the folk-rock artists of the 1960s and their activist poetry have set a foundation for the folk-rock artists of later decades and their spreading awareness of different important topics.

What should the listener know about the topic in order to appreciate it more?

North American folk-rock music from the 1960s has many admirable qualities, but the most important thing to note about it is that it stemmed from nonconformity and individuality. The 1960s were crucial years that set a strong foundation for all future folk-rock music. In 1965, Bob Dylan broke free from folk music norms by using an electric guitar at the Newport Folk Festival. Many traditional folk music critiques and artists were unhappy with this creative choice, but it ended up being an important step for folk-rock music. Dylan's choice to use electric guitar influenced many other artists like the Byrds and Simon and Garfunkel to do the same, giving it the dynamic sound listeners know and love today.

Another important thing to note when listening to folk-rock music from the 60s is that the lyrics play a major role in what makes each song unique. Folk-rock artists are poets who convey great truths and messages through their lyrics. It is important to pay attention and try to interpret

the lyrics while listening to fully appreciate the song. The 1960s were a time of immense political change and unrest due to events like the Civil Rights Movement and Vietnam War. Because of this, many of the folk-rock songs from the 60s contain anti-war and activist lyrics to spread important messages to a larger audience. This paved the way for folk-rock music for decades to come since it is often used to transform issues of the time into poetry.

<https://www.liveabout.com/folk-rock-101-1322485>

<https://www.history.com/topics/1960s>

<https://www.masterclass.com/articles/folk-rock-music-guide#5-characteristics-of-folk-rock-music>

Folk-Rock: Eternal Relevancy

By: Sara Hoppe

Word Count: 148 Words

Originally written and recorded by Bob Dylan in 1964, “Chimes of Freedom” was recorded by the Byrds in 1965 and became a staple in their performance repertoire. With lyrics highlighting the underprivileged, “Chimes of Freedom” presents the concept of freedom through the flash of lightning as a cry for the downtrodden.

Released on the Byrds’ album “Mr. Tambourine Man,” it is fitting that a tambourine maintains a steady backbeat throughout the song. Even though it has quite a narrow melodic range, the song truly shines through the homophonic harmonies present in the chorus.

Despite being released in the tumultuous 60’s, Dylan’s lyrics like, “flashing for the refugees on the unarmed road of flight, flashin’ for each an’ every underdog soldier in the night” combine with the Byrds’ yearning harmonies to make a song pertinent to the current state of the world; I highly recommend giving it a listen.

Has Anything Really Changed?

By: Sara Hoppe

Word Count: 149 Words

In his 1964 hit “The Times They Are A-Changin’,” Bob Dylan is eager to remind us that “...the present now will later be past.” This is the theme of the whole song; the present differs from the past, but the future is quickly approaching. Dylan’s poetic lyrics are laid out in five pairs of verses, each ending with “for the times they are a-changin’” and following an ABCBDBEFBE rhyme scheme.

The song is in triple meter, with acoustic guitar keeping the rhythm behind Dylan’s vocals. Harmonica solos break up the verses, which heed warnings to congressmen, writers, parents, and all who experience a changing society.

Written in a time when young people began embracing free-loving counterculture and protesting war, the lyrics are eerily applicable today, making for a song everyone should listen to. The continuing relevancy of folk-rock songs leads us to wonder if anything has changed at all.

Paranoia Strikes Deep

By: Sara Hoppe

Word Count: 149

“For What It’s Worth” is a 1967 protest song by Buffalo Springfield. The song was inspired by a 1966 protest on Sunset Boulevard in Los Angeles, California and remains relevant today with themes of paranoia, violence, and resistance.

The homophonic song slowly builds instrumental layers, creating the song’s mystique. Starting with a steady snare drum and an acoustic guitar’s repetitive chord progression, the focus is on the two-note repetition of an electric guitar and the lead singer. Soon, backing vocals create harmony, a change from the narrow melodic range of the main vocals, and the electric guitar gets a solo. By the end, claps are added to the snare drum and the continuous repetition of the chorus, “Stop, hey, what’s that sound? Everybody look what’s going down.”

I highly recommend this song; the building layers and narrative lyrics make a song that is not only meaningful, but also enjoyable.

Bob Dylan

Born Robert Allen Zimmerman in Duluth, Minnesota in 1941, Dylan played a big role in establishing the folk-rock genre. “Dylan sold tens of millions of albums, wrote more than 500 songs recorded by more than 2,000 artists, performed all over the world, and set the standard for lyric writing” (“Bob Dylan”). Dylan was even awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2016. He became fascinated with Beat poetry and folk artist Woody Guthrie while in college, so he began performing in coffeehouses. Although his first album was met with mixed reviews, he established himself as a folk artist and a prominent figure of the 60’s counterculture. By the time he released “The Times They Are A-Changin’” in 1964, the song quickly became a protest anthem, branding Dylan as a politically charged folk artist. Soon after, Dylan’s use of electric instruments caused contention among folk purist fans, but his mix of folk themes and rock elements made Dylan one of the early establishers of the folk-rock genre.

Source:

“Bob Dylan.” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc.,

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Bob-Dylan-American-musician>.

“The Times They Are A-Changin’”

“The Times They Are A-Changin’” was written towards the end of Dylan’s folk period and the beginning of his journey into folk-rock, and it was at this time that Dylan became intensely political. Though his friends in Minneapolis said to avoid writing protest music, Dylan argued “...the message was more important than the music.”

The song, adopted by the younger generation of the 60’s, has even been described as “apocalyptic,” with its most recognizable allusion being to the New Testament: “Many who are first will be last, and the last, first” (Mark 10:30, Matthew 19:27). For the youth, the song was a

powerful statement of the generation gap and the Vietnam War, and it was even adopted by the Civil Rights Movement. Despite being one of his most popular songs, Dylan stopped including it in his performance repertoire after the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

Source:

“The Times They Are A-Changin’.” *Voices Across Time United/Divided*, University of Pittsburgh,

<https://voices.pitt.edu/TeachersGuide/Unit8/TheTimesTheyAre%20AChangin.htm>.

The Byrds

The Byrds were a popular American band from Los Angeles, California formed in 1964. The band consisted of Roger McGuinn, Gene Clark, David Crosby, Chris Hillman, Michael Clarke, Gram Parsons, and Clarence White. Their debut single was a cover of Bob Dylan's "Mr. Tambourine Man," which went to number one in 1965 and broke the British Invasion's dominance of Top 40 airplay and record sales in the U.S. They combined Dylan's songwriting with their 12-string electric guitars and vocal harmonies to create music that appealed to the changing mood of the younger generation. The Byrds are also considered the first folk-rock band, as the term "folk-rock" was coined by the press to describe their sound. Despite their popularity and musical consort, there were many disputes within the band, causing members to come and go as soon as 1966.

Sources:

"The Byrds." *TeachRock*, 28 June 2018, <https://teachrock.org/people/byrds/>.

"The Byrds." *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc.,
<https://www.britannica.com/topic/the-Byrds>.

"Chimes of Freedom"

Written by Bob Dylan, The Byrds covered "Chimes of Freedom" on their 1964 album *Mr. Tambourine Man*. This song became a staple in their concerts up until their split in 1973. One of the most notable performances of "Chimes of Freedom" was at the Monterey Pop Festival in 1967. The Byrds' performance at this festival is often overshadowed by the performances of Janis Joplin, The Who, and Jimi Hendrix. Many remember The Byrds' set for David Crosby's long tangents between songs at the dismay of his band members, which later led

to his departure from the band. Despite his ranting, Crosby's talent still shined in their performance of "Chimes of Freedom," which was not only enjoyed by the crowd but was also one of the band's favorite songs to play.

Source:

Taysom, Joe. "Watch the Byrds Perform 'Chimes of Freedom' at the Iconic Monterey Pop Festival, 1967." *Far Out Magazine*, 18 Aug. 2020, <https://faroutmagazine.co.uk/the-byrds-bob-dylan-cover-chimes-of-freed-om-monterey/>.

Buffalo Springfield:

Buffalo Springfield was a Canadian American folk-rock band formed in 1966 and consisting of original members Stephen Stills, Neil Young, Richie Furay, Dewey Martin, Van Nuys, and Bruce Palmer. The group formed in Los Angeles after Stills and Furay, who were familiar with the folk scene of Greenwich Village, and Young and Palmer, who were Canadians with an interest in the new folk-rock movement, met in a traffic jam. The group broke up in 1968, but many of its members went on to have successful music careers in other bands or in solo acts, and the band was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1997.

Source:

“Buffalo Springfield.” Encyclopædia Britannica, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc.,

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Buffalo-Springfield>.

“For What It’s Worth”

“For What It’s Worth” is Buffalo Springfield’s most well-known song. It was written after Stephen Stills encountered a rally of kids protesting the implementation of curfew and the closing of a club on Sunset Strip in Los Angeles. The protestors were met with busloads of police officers, who Stills said, “...looked very much like storm troopers.” Stills saw the event unfold and thought, “Jesus, America is in great danger.” Stills wrote the song in 15 minutes and the band recorded it only weeks after the protests. The song transcended its origins of L.A. and became an anthem for the counterculture movement and the protests against the Vietnam War. The song’s themes of paranoia, police, and violence have remained relevant for generations, making “For What It’s Worth” one of the most-covered protest songs.

Source:

Browne, David. "For What It's Worth': Inside Buffalo Springfield's Classic Protest Song."

Rolling Stone, Rolling Stone, 25 June 2018, <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-features/for-what-its-worth-inside-buffalo-springfields-classic-protest-song-106435/>.

Jaymeson Ungar

Final Reviews

4/12/2022

Times Still Are A-Changin'

Word Count: 150

Bob Dylan's song "The Times They Are A-Changin'" has simple tones and beats throughout. Although this song sounds peaceful it is a cry from Dylan that the times need to change. At the start, Dylan's voice stays in a mellow and low tone throughout and the guitar in the background is about the only other sound. Throughout, Dylan takes breaks from singing and switches to just a harmonica and that follows the beat previously set in the song. Because there are not many other elements to this song it gives it a real folk-rock feel, but also makes it easy to focus on the intensity in Dylan's voice. The mellow tone makes it easy to understand the lyrics, but the background guitar invites the listener to become overly engaged. I would recommend this song; it has a wonderful flow and a message that people can still relate to this day.

Hear Their Chimes

Word Count: 149

The Byrds' song "Chimes of Freedom" is an upbeat song that has inspired many artists. The Byrds use a few different vocalists and a strong guitar to set the beat and rhythm. They then also incorporate a trombone to help them keep tempo. The vocals and electric guitar are the two strongest aspects of the song. The electric guitar's rhythm and the tone of the vocals is what defines this song as folk-rock. Just one listen from this song and you feel like you have heard the

peak of folk rock with the precision on the guitar. Overall, it is an upbeat song that utilizes the electric guitar but has a deeper meaning that was the cause for several artists and bands to follow in their footsteps. I would recommend this song; I think the unique sounds and relevant messages are more than enough to warrant a serious listen.

Springfield Speaks the Truth

Word Count: 150

Buffalo Springfield's song "For What it's Worth" has a lovely flow with a simple rhythm and tone. This song has a smooth tone color from his vocals the background vocals. They also use an electric guitar that helps with the beat and the rhythm. The background vocals are used to emphasis Springfield's message when they primarily come on during the chorus. The tone color of this song makes the listener relax and enjoy. The homophonic texture allows this song to be blissful to the ears while still sending a powerful message. A lot of the lyrics in this song are about protesting and reveal his inner thoughts. These are similar themes that are seen throughout most songs in the genre. There are not too many textures in this song, but they go together seamlessly to make an elegant yet simple song. I would recommend this song to anyone who inquires.

About Folk Rock

Folk rock music combines traditional folk, country, and elements of rock to create its sounds. There are five main elements to folk rock and those include electric instruments and drums, emphasis on lyrics, songs based on diatonic harmony, rock and roll rhythms mixed with folk themes, and melodic singing with lots of vocal harmonies. Bob Dylan was one of the first people

to start this genre. He inspired lots of other singers and even still has influence today. A big reason as to why this inspired so many people was due to the deep lyrics. Lots of people enjoyed hearing someone talk about how they felt and how the world needs to change, and this is probably one of the main reasons this genre has inspired so many and lasted for so long. This genre has also inspired other genres like psychedelic folk, country rock, and even folk metal. Overall, this genre includes great vocals, guitar, and deep lyrics that inspire the listeners.

<https://www.masterclass.com/articles/folk-rock-music-guide#what-is-folk-rock>