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PHIL OCHS: A FORGOTTEN VOICE OF THE 1960S

DR. STEVE GOSCH

HISTORY 489

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

BY

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Introduction

One night in 1966, Phil Ochs stood with guitar in hand, looking out across New York's famous auditorium, Carnegie Hall, filled with people anticipating him to sing. Ochs took a step forward to the microphone and began to play the song "I'm Going to Say It Now." The crowd started to cheer and applaud with the beginning of the first chorus. The song describes a student who makes a vow to learn everything possible and who will also stand up for what he believes. The song stands as a testament to the life of Phil Ochs. Phil Ochs was a musician in the folk scene during the 1960s. Ochs considered himself to be the "president" while he considered Bob Dylan to be "king."¹ Ochs was honored to be the "president" because the masses looked to him as a leader who would tell the truth about what was really going on in society.

Folk music has been described as the one music genre that encourages the expression of political and social activism. Folk music has always existed, but the 'protest-folk music' that emerged during the 1930s and 1940s in the writings of Woody Guthrie directly reflected the events of the Dust Bowl and the ensuing Great Depression. During the 1950s, folk music began to be associated with left-leaning political ideologies through the continued writings of Guthrie to the introduction of Pete Seeger and the group, the Weavers. As the political activism of the

¹ Marc Eliot and Phil Ochs, *Death of a Rebel* (Garden City, New York: Anchor Press/Double Day, 1979), 97.

1960s emerged, the youth movement looked to the earlier folk music genre for their voice and leadership.

The folk scene was cultivated in the Greenwich Village neighborhood of New York City. Pete Seeger, the Weavers, Joan Baez, and a young Bob Dylan were the leading attractions at coffee houses, playing acoustic sets to college students night after night. These coffee houses were not only small-venue concerts, but were an environment that encouraged political discussion and activism. Eventually, an impromptu musical gathering latter termed ‘hootenanny² was introduced at Gerde’s coffeehouse on 3rd Street and Mercer Avenue in Greenwich Village. At Gerde’s unknown and inspiring musicians could perform two-song sets on Monday nights. One night, a youthful Phil Ochs showed up and eventually took the stage. As he began to play the first song, the audience became quiet and immersed in Ochs’ melodies. Pete Seeger was in the audience that night and was impressed. He had not seen talent like this since Bob Dylan had emerged the year before. He befriended the youth and introduced him to the leading musicians within the folk community, including Bob Dylan himself.

Bob Dylan and Phil Ochs quickly became friends and colleagues. They influenced each other and also gave strong criticism their individual work. In an early interview with the weekly newspaper, *Village Voice*, Dylan and Ochs were asked what type of musicians they considered themselves to be. Phil responded that he was a ‘journalist-writer’ who happens to write music. He also went on to say that he felt as though he had to spread the word about what was going on in the world that was being ignored by the media, especially the major television and radio news networks. In contrast, Bob Dylan simply refused to answer the question.³

² Ronald D. Cohen, *Rainbow Quest: The Folk Music Revival and American Society 1940-1970* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002), 22.

³ Phil Ochs, Interview with Phil Ochs, *Broadsides*, no. 63, Oct 1965.

The role and purposes of musicians would become one of the key philosophical differences between Phil Ochs and Bob Dylan. Later interviews and articles in the *Village Voice* often commented on Ochs' unique direct style of writing compared that of the more illusive Dylan. Dylan was often vague and abstract in content, while Ochs' writing was very direct and to the point. This can be seen in a simple review of well-known song titles. Ochs' direct 'reporter' voice straightforwardly named a work "Cuban Missile Crisis" as opposed to a typical Dylan title, "Blowin' In the Wind."⁴

Ochs' writing style was influenced and developed during his four years as a student on the Ohio State University campus. Prior to college, Ochs was fascinated with the music of Elvis Presley, Buddy Holly, and Frank Sinatra. He was not interested in politics and social activism. But while at Ohio State University, his roommate, Jim Glover, introduced him to the music of Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger. Ochs fell in love with the sound of folk music. At this time, he also became a communication and journalism major. He was put in charge of writing a column for the student newspaper about campus, state, and national politics. His articles became widely popular amongst the Ohio State University students, and sometimes aroused strong reactions among administration, faculty, and students. Phil realized that through writing he could encourage people to think and become politically active in the world around them. When he began to play the guitar and began to write and perform politically-themed songs, he realized he could engage a wider variety of students than he ever could as a newspaper journalist. At Ohio State University Ochs began to write intensively and became involved with left-leaning political students. At this time, Ochs' political role models were John F. Kennedy, Robert F. Kennedy, and Fidel Castro.⁵

⁴ Eliot and Ochs, 80.

⁵ "A Folk Singer For Now," *Scope Magazine*, 11 March 1965, 11

Ochs wrote hundreds of songs.⁶ While there have been monographs written on Ochs' life and music, there has been no scholarly dedicated to the analysis of his songs and writings. I am interested in trying to determine if there is a specific or unique Phil Ochs' philosophy that emerges from the songs and writings.

Upon initial analysis, Phil Ochs' life can be divided into five sections. The earliest, his 'Early Life', from the years 1940 to 1964, is necessary to have an initial understanding of his early history from growing up in New York City and eventually moving to Cleveland, Ohio. This phase will also focus on his development as a musician from early influences to becoming a folk musician while attending Ohio State University. This period will also discuss the early left-leaning political scene of the Ohio State University campus that influenced his political ideology. The last stage of his life, 'The Train,' is the closing act of a short, intense life.

His song writing and creative life can be divided, however, into three developmental stages. The first stage is his 'Journalist-Protest Writer' phrase that which encompasses the period from 1964 to 1968. During that time period, Phil became a leading folk musician in the folk scene of Greenwich Village. He produced and released his first four albums during this span and became known for his "topical songs." His unique style of song writing and lyrics developed.

The second stage is classified as the 'Inspirational, Counter-Revolutionary Period' that encompasses the years 1969 to 1975. The term counter-revolutionary period refers to Ochs' involvement in radical youth movement groups, such as the Yippies. Prior to this time period,

⁶ Michael Schumacher, *There But For Fortune: The Life of Phil Ochs*, (New York: Hyperion, 1996), 112. Schumacher restricts his view of Ochs body of work to include the approximately ninety-eight songs appearing on Ochs' recorded albums. Ochs' private archives contains a far greater number of published and unpublished works

Ochs did not participate in organized political groups. During this stage, Ochs' style of writing and subject material developed considerably. Ochs' subject material changed from being initially filled with concrete ideas and changed to abstract ideas. The themes of the songs changed over time, too. The themes originally started in a political context, moved into a social-counter revolutionary context, such as the song "Here's to the State of Richard Nixon", and finally emerged in abstract meaning. During this period, Ochs began to experiment with more types of instruments than just the guitar. His style of writing changed too. His ideas were more abstract as his philosophy was beginning to form. He also began to be highly involved in politics by campaigning for Eugene McCarthy's 1968 Presidential campaign. He also helped form the Yippie movement and participated in the 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago.

The final stage in Ochs' life focuses on the years 1975 and 1976. At this point, Ochs was suffering from his manic depression and alcoholism, which had forced him to give up performing in the public sphere. This 'Train Year' names comes from the fact that Ochs actually assumed a new identity and took the name Train. He would no longer use the name Phil Ochs. He stated in his final concert and to his brother, Michael, that the old Phil Ochs was dead. But during this period of his life, he was still writing. These last collections of writing show a unique composition of subject material that was different from the three other phases. Ochs' philosophy seems to finally emerge and he was no longer the "journalist-writer," but a musician with his own vision. Ochs committed suicide in 1976.

The main primary sources that I used are a large collection of Ochs' song lyrics on the music albums currently available. The primary source is the book, *Death of Rebel* by Marc Eliot and Phil Ochs. The text is considered to be the leading monograph of Ochs' life. The original version of the text was partially co-authored by Ochs before his death in 1976. *Death of Rebel*

provides a wide variety of sources including writings, speeches, concert speeches, and interviews by Ochs. The other main source is the book, *The War is Over* by Phil Ochs. The most important general works are the texts *America's Uncivil Wars: The Sixties Era from Elvis to the Fall of Richard Nixon* by Mark Lytle and *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* by Todd Gitlin. These two works provided the background and context to understand the importance and role of Ochs' songs. The other important monograph is the book written *Rainbow Quest: The Folk Music Revival and American Society 1940-1970* by Ronald Cohen, which provides the background information of the folk music scene from the Great Depression to the sixties.

Early Life

Phil Ochs was born on December 19, 1940 in El Paso, Texas to the proud parents Jacob and Gertrude Ochs.⁷ Jacob Ochs had graduated from the University of Virginia with a medical degree in the late 1930s. He continued his medical studies at the University of Edinburgh, where he met a Scot, Gertrude Phins.⁸ At some point prior to 1941, Jacob and Gertrude returned to the United States where Jacob was drafted into the U.S. Army during World War Two. As part of his training, he was stationed at a CCC camp in Columbus, New Mexico until 1943, when he was sent overseas as a combat medic. He served in the front lines during the Battle of the Bulge in December 1944.⁹ During the years Jacob was overseas, the rest of the Ochs family moved to New York to be closer to Jacob's parents. Phil had two siblings, an older sister, Sonia and a younger brother, Michael.¹⁰

⁷ Marc Eliot and Phil Ochs, *Death of a Rebel* (Garden City, New York: Anchor Press/Double Day, 1979), 11.

⁸ Ibid,

⁹ Ibid, 12.

¹⁰ Ibid, 13.

In 1945, Jacob was medically discharged from the Army. He returned to the family, which was now in Far Rockaway, New York. During his service, Jacob had been diagnosed with manic depression, which would affect him for the rest of his life. Jacob decided to start a medical practice in Far Rockaway.

During these early childhood years, young Phil was known to be a dreamer.¹¹ At this time neither Phil nor Michael nor Sonia saw their father on a regular basis because Jacob lived at his practice instead of living at the Ochs family home. At age seven, Phil would take his brother to the movies. They would often go everyday to see a double feature. Phil was filled with images of soldiers, cowboys and Indians, cops and robbers, and the beautiful movie stars. His strongest role model was John Wayne, who was “the biggest, the toughest, and fairest of all.”¹²

Gertrude often sent the children to the movies to get them away from their father during his occasional visits home when he was often suffering bouts of physical and mental illnesses. She did not want the children to be exposed to the situation. Jacob was institutionalized in 1947 and Gertrude moved with her children to Scotland to live with her family. In Scotland Gertrude encouraged Phil to take up a hobby rather than going continuously to the movies, as he had done in the United States. During the first school term there, Phil joined the band and began to play the clarinet. The band teacher, a Mr. Navaro, said that Phil would play a piece of music over and over until he mastered it.¹³ At the end of five months, he began to perform the difficult solos than other students had been playing for years. Phil would only play classical music. He would refuse to listen to any other types of music at all.¹⁴

¹¹ Ibid, 12.

¹² Ibid, 12.

¹³ Ibid, 17.

¹⁴ Ibid, 15.

In 1951, Jacob Ochs was released from care and the family returned from Scotland to Perrysburg, New York. Upon Phil's leaving, Mr. Navaro stressed the importance of Phil continuing to practice and study the clarinet. Phil did not want to leave Scotland, but later stated that leaving was the first turning point in his life and dedicated the following passage to this "turning time."¹⁵

I'm just a city boy
Born and grown
That's all I've ever known.
Where the lights would greet the dawn
There's a factory for a farm
Sure the city has its charm
When you're a city boy.¹⁶

The family only lived in Perrysburg for a few months due to the health conditions of Jacob Ochs.¹⁷ Jacob eventually received a position as chief physician in a tuberculosis hospital in Columbus, Ohio. When the family arrived in Columbus, Phil began to attend the Capital University Conservatory of Music and eventually began to perform along with the college orchestra at age fifteen.¹⁸ Interestingly, during this period, Phil began to listen to other forms of music on the radio, especially country music. He was mesmerized by the songs of Johnny Cash, Hank Williams, and Faron Young.¹⁹ He would spend hours listening to the radio for songs extolling, as he stated, "heroes, prison, women and booze."²⁰ Phil also began to write short stories and essays during this period.

¹⁵ Ibid, 16.

¹⁶ Phil Ochs, "City Boy," *The Songs of Phil Ochs* (New York: Appleseed Music, 1964), 5.

¹⁷ Eliot and Ochs, 18.

¹⁸ Ibid, 19.

¹⁹ Ibid, 22.

²⁰ Ibid, 22.

Phil and Michael began to listen to the Alan Freed's "Moondog" show from Cleveland.²¹ Freed, known at the man who coined the term 'D.J' from disc jockey, and first used the term 'Rock and Roll' to describe the growing trend in rhythm and blues music played on his show. Alan Freed showcased up-and-coming Black artists, such as, Frankie Lymon, Lee Andrews, the Clovers, and the Drifters. Phil liked country music, but was fascinated with the sound of the "colored music."²²

Earlier in his life, Phil Ochs had collected photos, magazine clippings, and articles about his favorite movie stars, especially John Wayne, who became his particular hero. He turned his bedroom walls into a shrine to John Wayne.²³ After moving to Columbus and hearing more and more of Elvis Presley on the radio, he began to transfer his interest from the film hero John Wayne to the rising music superstar. He cut out pictures and articles and decorated his walls with them, creating a shrine to the new 'king,' Elvis Presley.²⁴

In the fall of 1958, Phil Ochs began to attend classes at Ohio State University.²⁵ The first semester, he kept to himself and spent a lot of time in his dorm room listening to the radio. Ochs later wrote that one afternoon, while working on homework and listening to a Hank Williams song, the song was interrupted by a news bulletin.²⁶ The news bulletin stated that Fidel Castro had marched into Havana and taken control of Cuba.²⁷ Phil began to seek out all information possible about the on-going revolution in Cuba. He became inspired by Fidel Castro and Dr. Che Guevara.²⁸ Phil wanted to help with the Cuban revolution in some way. He told his mother

²¹ Ibid, 22.

²² Ibid, 23.

²³ Ibid, 12.

²⁴ Ibid, 24. Phil would later adopt of Presley's performance tactics, such as the way he held the guitar, talking between songs, and wearing similar outfits.

²⁵ Ibid, 25.

²⁶ Ibid, 26.

²⁷ Ibid, 25.

²⁸ Ibid, 26.

that he was dropping out of college and going to travel to Cuba. His mother, Gertrude, refused to financially support this adventure. Without funds, he eventually arrived in Miami, Florida.²⁹ He was, by this time, broke and was arrested for vagrancy and sentenced to fifteen days in the county jail.³⁰ During his brief time in jail, Ochs learned about the music of Buddy Holly from one of the fellow prisoner and said that he wrote his first song while there.³¹ He became inspired by Buddy Holly's guitar playing and it was now that Ochs decided that he wanted to become a singer. Upon release from custody, Ochs tried to apply for job as a singer at different clubs. With no money or no place to stay, he began to live on the beach.³² He eventually called his mother and told her that he wanted to come back to Ohio State University.

In the fall of 1959, Ochs returned to Ohio State University, where he eventually became friends with a fellow student, Jim Glover. One afternoon, Glover stopped by Ochs' dorm room to study for a test. Ochs was listening to "Heartbreak Hotel" by Elvis Presley continually on the phonograph.³³ Glover asked if he had ever listened to Woody Guthrie or the Weavers.³⁴ Ochs said no and they soon ended up in Glover's room listening to his large collection of records. That afternoon, Ochs was introduced to folk music for the first time. Ochs was impressed with Glover's music taste and sense of politics. They soon became the best of friends. They would stay up endless nights, listening to the political ballads of Woody Guthrie and discussing the importance of the Cuban revolution.³⁵ Ochs also became inspired by John F. Kennedy's campaign for president in 1960. Glover began to show Ochs how to play the guitar. A month later, Phil began writing two-chord melodies. Glover was impressed with Ochs' style of playing

²⁹ Ibid, 26.

³⁰ Ibid, 27.

³¹ Ibid, 27.

³² Ibid, 28.

³³ Ibid, 28.

³⁴ Jerome L. Rodnitzky, *Minstrels of the Dawn: The Folk-Protest Singer as a Cultural Hero* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1976), 65.

³⁵ Eliot and Ochs, 29.

that could turn the simplest tunes into strong, distinctive sounds. Glover played the guitar and sang, too. Soon, the two students began to play, sing, and write together. They would perform Kingston Trio and Pete Seeger songs.

That same fall, 1959, Ochs chose journalism as his major. He began to write for *The Lantern*, the Ohio State University student newspaper.³⁶ He was soon assigned to write cover stories. He wrote an article praising the Cuban leader, Fidel Castro.³⁷ The Ohio State University campus was in an uproar over the article. A few administrators and students wanted Ochs fired from the student newspaper. The other staff members of *The Lantern* decided to ban Ochs from writing political stories. Ochs argued that he had the right to write the article citing the freedom of speech as his justification for declaring Castro a hero. Ochs was angry at the suppression of the free expression, and he decided to start his own newspaper, *The Word*, in retaliation against *The Lantern*.³⁸ *The Word* would print the political truth, as Ochs saw it, for the Ohio State University students. He spent his entire days between classes, writing, typing, duplicating, stapling, and folding the newspaper.³⁹

Ochs and Glover continued to write more songs together. They started to play their music on the campus occasionally. They decided to form a band and called themselves, The Sundowners, after the movie starring Robert Mitchum.⁴⁰ They also referred to themselves as The Singing Socialists.⁴¹ When the Bay of Pigs invasion in Cuba by the CIA occurred in April 1961, Ochs sat down immediately and wrote a song with the following lyrics:

A thousand went to the island
Chances strong as broken twigs

³⁶ Ibid, 31.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 32.

⁴¹ Ibid, 33.

A thousand stayed there on the island
Met their fate at the Bay of Pigs.

Why were they wearing my country's clothes
Why were they spending my country's gold
Who were my friends and who were my foes
The headlines were lying, why wasn't I told?

They were told when they arrived
They'd be helped by Castro's men
Those who survived, they found out,
The CIA was wrong again . . .⁴²

Ochs often stated that was his first topical song.⁴³ After the Bay of Pigs, Ochs and Glover went out onto the campus mall and began to play this song. The initial reaction to it was strong, so they continued to play it on campus a couple of times a week. Students would appear, sit, and listen to the two musicians performing on the campus mall.⁴⁴ They soon began to have gigs at parties all around Cleveland.⁴⁵ But at one of those gigs, The Sundowners broke up due to a disagreement over which song would be performed. Despite the argument, however, Ochs and Glover would remain close friends for the rest of their lives.⁴⁶

Ochs had his first solo performance at Faragher's, a Cleveland bar, in November 1961, opening for The Smothers Brothers.⁴⁷ Faragher's continued to invite him back to perform week after week. Ochs performed a collection of Pete Seeger songs and interspersed a few of his own. One night, Bob Gibson, the Chicago-based folk singer, came to the bar and was impressed with young Ochs.⁴⁸ They soon became friends and Gibson encouraged Ochs to seek out a larger music scene than Cleveland's. In April 1962, Phil decided to drop out of college and head to

⁴² Ibid, 34. These lyrics have no official title.

⁴³ Ibid, 35.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Jim Glover would later go onto be one of the members of *Jim and Jean*, a 1960s folk singing group.

⁴⁷ Eliot and Ochs, 37; Phil was only two months from graduating from Ohio State University when he decided to drop out and move to New York City.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 36.

New York City to pursue a career as a musician there.⁴⁹ When Ochs arrived in New York City, he began to go from bar to bar looking for employment as a singer. He soon realized that there were numerous musicians looking for similar gigs.⁵⁰ Phil began to spend all his time listening and watching the other folk musicians.⁵¹ He realized that he was going to have to somehow stand apart from the fellow artists.

The Days of the Journalist-Protest Writer

As the months went by in New York City, Ochs was composing more songs and rewriting his earlier poems into lyrical verse. Phil remained in contact with Bob Gibson. Gibson continued to encourage Ochs to develop a unique song-writing style that would differentiate him from other artists. Ochs called his new style the “Journalist-Protest Writer.”⁵² One night, Ochs played the song, “Billie Sol”⁵³ to Gibson over the telephone. The song’s content described the financial scandals of Texas businessmen, Billie Sol Estes, and the political contributions and connections with U.S. Vice-President Lyndon B. Johnson.⁵⁴ Gibson was amazed at the political context of the song and he knew that Ochs had finally found his voice as a musician. He encouraged him to continue write songs like this, but gave a word of advice. Ochs wrote that Gibson said:

Be careful, though. When you do political material, it doesn’t always matter if the song is really good or not. If the audience agrees with you, they’ll love it. You can become impressed with yourself easily, and fall into a groove lasting as

⁴⁹ Ibid, 37.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 38.

⁵¹ Ibid, 43.

⁵² Eliot and Ochs, 122.; A term that Phil used to describe himself as.

⁵³ This song was never released during Phil’s lifetime, except in the *Broadside* magazine issue in September 1962. There are only a few existing copies that remain, but the lyrics are different than those appearing in the liner notes of the 1986 CD release of *A Toast To Those Who Are Gone*. A recorded version of the song was discovered amongst Phil’s papers by his brother, Michael in 1985 and was included in the 1986 compact disc release of *A Toast To Those Who Are Gone*.

⁵⁴ <http://www.billiesolestes.com/>

long as there's an issue to sing about. Of course, the other side of it is that you make enemies. Those who don't agree with you might want to silence you, so no one else can hear what you have to say.⁵⁵

Ochs listened to what Gibson said to him and took his words to heart. He knew that writing political songs was something that needed to be done.⁵⁶

The folk music scene was centered around the Greenwich Village neighborhood of New York City. A 'hootenanny' was first introduced at Gerde's coffeehouse in 1959.⁵⁷ The term hootenanny was used by Pete Seeger and Woody Guthrie to describe live performances of folk music to a young college age audience in a small venue.⁵⁸ Prior to the term hootenanny, being used, these live performance events were simply called "talent nights."⁵⁹ The audience consisted of college students from the neighboring New York University and Columbia University.⁶⁰ Other musicians and members of the entertainment industry would circulate at these "talent nights."⁶¹ They were supporting their fellow musicians, but also wanted to be a part of their exclusive society that allowed and encouraged political conversation and debate.⁶²

Ochs first performed at a hootenanny at Gerde's in July 1962.⁶³ The audience became immersed in Ochs' melodies and lyrics as he played a two-song set. There has been debate as to what songs were played that night.⁶⁴ Pete Seeger was one of the audience members. He was impressed with the young musician. After the performance, Seeger introduced himself to Ochs and eventually took him around to meet the other members of the folk community that night,

⁵⁵ Eliot and Ochs, 38.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 101.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 49.

⁵⁸ Ronald Cohen, *Rainbow Quest*, 22.

⁵⁹ Eliot and Ochs, 47.

⁶⁰ Cohen, 24.

⁶¹ Cohen, 22.

⁶² Cohen, 36.

⁶³ Eliot and Ochs, 54.

⁶⁴ Eliot wrote that the songs, "Power and Glory" and "Billie Sol" were sung; while Ochs in an interview stated that night he played the song, "One More Parade."

including Bob Dylan. Every week, Ochs continued to show up at the hootenannies and perform two-song sets. He also started to have a following of college students who would appear wherever he would be performing.⁶⁵

On March 15, 1963, Phil opened for John Hammond at Gerde's.⁶⁶ Phil preformed a new song, "The Power and Glory,"⁶⁷ which brought the crowd to "its feet, hollering and stomping its approval."⁶⁸ Gil Turner, member of *Broadsides* magazine, invited Phil to the next meeting of the organization. *Broadsides* magazine was started by Sis Cunningham, Gordon Friesen and Pete Seeger. The magazine was devoted to the "new music—topical songs."⁶⁹ The first issue came out in February 1962 and on the first page, it stated "*Broadsides* may never publish a song that could be called a 'folk-song.' But many of our best folk songs were topical songs at their inception."⁷⁰

Also during this period, Ochs met Alice Skinner.⁷¹ They met at a hootenanny and she was a friend of Jim Glover's girlfriend. Phil and Alice began to live together and she eventually became pregnant.⁷² They married in April 1963. A few months later, a daughter named Meegan was born. A few months after that, Alice left with Meegan and moved back to California to live with her parents. There is little known information regarding the marriage between Phil and Alice, but Michael Ochs later wrote that at one point, Phil felt that Alice and Meegan were a burden to him. And he was happy when Alice left his apartment. He didn't have to worry about her anymore.⁷³

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Eliot and Ochs, 56.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 57. The title of the song was taken from the Graham Greene novel.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 57.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 58.

⁷⁰ *Broadsides*, no. 1, Feb 1962, 2.

⁷¹ Eliot and Ochs, 49.

⁷² Ibid, 73.

⁷³ Ibid, 79.

Ochs joined the *Broadside* magazine staff and submitted material for its thirteenth issue, in September 1962. He published the lyrics to the song, “The Ballad of Billie Sol.”⁷⁴ He became a regular contributor and eventually an editor. During this time period, Ochs and Bob Dylan became close friends. They would go out drinking at night, discuss politics and music, and help each other develop better techniques for writing and performing their music.⁷⁵ Dylan was also submitting work to different issues of *Broadside*. In an interview with the folk weekly music newspaper, *Village Voice*, Ochs and Dylan were interviewed and asked what type of musicians they considered themselves to be. Phil stated that he was a ‘journalist-writer’ who happened to write music.⁷⁶ Dylan did not answer the question. In the next issue of *Broadside* Ochs wrote an editorial entitled, “The Need for Topical Music,”⁷⁷ in which he stated that:

Every newspaper headline is a potential song and it is the role of an effective songwriter to pick out the material that has the interest, significance, and sometimes humor adaptable to music. A good writer must be able to picture the structure of a song as hundreds of minute ideas race through his head. He must reject the superfluous and trite phrases for the cogent powerful terms, severest critic, constantly searching for a better way to express every line in his song . . . It never ceases to amaze me how the American people allow the hit parade to hit them over the head with a parade of song after meaningless song about love. If the powers that be absolutely insist that love should control the market, at least they should be more realistic and give divorce songs an equal chance . . .⁷⁸

After this editorial, Ochs was asked by the *Broadside* magazine staff to record a few of his songs that would be included in a record consisting of other folk musicians’ work, which included Bob Dylan, Pete Seeger, Jim and Jean, and Joan Baez⁷⁹. After the success of the first

⁷⁴ Eliot and Ochs, 55.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 59.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 53.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 59.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

collaborative album in the Greenwich music scene, Ochs was asked to record more songs and *Broadside* would eventually publish them in his first album entitled *The Broadside Tapes 1*.⁸⁰

The *Broadside Tapes 1* record consisted of sixteen tracks. The first fifteen songs were written by Ochs and track sixteen consisted of a cover of the Smokey Robinson classic, “You Really Got a Hold on Me.”⁸¹ The album consisted of songs that described a wide range of issues in society that needed to be addressed by the United States government.⁸² Some of the songs reflected the start of the Kennedy administration’s War on Poverty. Ochs was inspired by John F. Kennedy.⁸³ He truly believed that the country would improve. Alice said that the only time she saw her husband cry was on November 22, 1963.⁸⁴ Ochs had been writing songs all afternoon in the bedroom. Then, in that evening, he turned on the television set to see Walter Cronkite announce to the nation that John F. Kennedy had been shot to death.⁸⁵ Alice came into the living room from the kitchen and saw Phil and asked him what was wrong. Phil said “I think I’m going to die tonight, Alice. I’m going to die,” and he began to sob⁸⁶

Two weeks later, Ochs was scheduled to perform at the nightclub, The Gaslight. He performed the songs, “Talking Vietnam” and “Cuban Missile Crisis.” These two songs contained material critical of the late President Kennedy. Initially, the crowd was outraged, but during the second song, he stopped playing and said that it was in memory of the President that he was performing the songs. He felt Kennedy would want him to be vocal on issues facing the

⁸⁰ Phil Ochs, *The Broadside Tapes*, Performance by the author, Smithsonian Folkways, 2007, Compact Disc.

⁸¹ Ibid. This song is at odds with Ochs’ own song writing style and it is unknown how or why this song was included on this album. Smokey Robinson wrote and sang it for Tamala (later Motown Records). It was later covered by the Beatles, The Supremes, The Zombies, and Aidan Smith.

⁸² Eliot and Ochs, 76.

⁸³ Rodnitzky, *Minstrels of the Dawn*, 26.

⁸⁴ Eliot and Ochs, 77.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 76.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 77.

nation and the nation needed to move forward the movements, such as the War on Poverty.⁸⁷ In December 1963, Ochs was approached by Jac Holzman of Elektra Records to sign a contract to produce two albums.⁸⁸ At this time, Elektra had other folk artists signed such as Joan Baez, The Weavers, and Judy Collins. Ochs went into the recording studio in February 1964 and in three sessions recorded the album, *All the News That's Fit to Sing*.⁸⁹

Inspiration Leading to Counter-Revolutionary Actions

Ochs conceived the album *All the News That's Fit to Sing* as a musical newspaper.⁹⁰ The first song on the album chosen was “One More Parade.”⁹¹ The song describes a group of men marching off to war together. The song was co-written with Bob Gibson. The songs “The Thresher,” “Talking Vietnam,” and “Lou Marsh” were identified as page one material.⁹² The sidebar material would contain the songs, “The Power and the Glory,” and “Celia.”⁹³ The back page would consist of a cover of Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Bells.”⁹⁴ The second side of the record would include the feature stories in the songs, “William Worthy,” “Automation Song,” “Talking Cuban Crisis,” and “Bound for Glory.”⁹⁵ The fine two songs included were “What’s That I Hear,” and “Bullets of Mexico.”⁹⁶ The song “What’s That I Hear” has been compared to the likes of Dylan’s songs, such as “Blowin’ in the Wind.”⁹⁷ The song brings forth Ochs’s hopes

⁸⁷ Ibid, 79.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 83.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 84.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Phil Ochs, *All the News That's Fit to Sing*. Performance by the author. Elektra Records, 1964. Record.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid. Ochs never fully explained by he used this Poe’s poem as a song.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Gavan Daws and Jac Holzman, *Follow the Music: The Life and High Times of Elektra Records, in the Great Years of American Pop Culture*, (Santa Monica, Cal: First Media Books, 1998).

and optimism for the future. At one point in the song, he speaks about feelings of change that were developing in the contemporary society:

What's that I feel now beating in my heart
I've felt that beat before
What's that I feel now beating in my heart
I feel it more and more
It's the rumble of freedom calling
Climbing up to the sky
It's the rumble of the old ways a falling
You can feel it if you try.⁹⁸

The record was released in the New York area. Ochs began to tour the east coast trying to promote the record. He received a few reviews from music magazines, such as *Variety* saying “the LP gives a fine example of the use of modern folk music for the purpose it was originally styled, the making of social comment.”⁹⁹

Ochs was asked to perform at the 1964 Newport Folk Festival. The Festival was known for several types of music being played, from protest music, to bluegrass, to gospel.¹⁰⁰ Some of the headliners of the Festival included Judy Collins, John Sebastian, The Lovin' Spoonful, and Richie Haven. Ochs performed a several song set including “I Should Have Known Better.”¹⁰¹ Overall, the Newport Folk Festival was the most successful folk festival up to this point, with an approximately seventy thousand people in attendance. Ochs was not asked to perform at the 1965 Newport Folk Festival. There is no account as to why Ochs was not asked to perform at the 1965 Newport Folk Festival.

⁹⁸ Phil Ochs, “What’s That I Hear,” *All the News That’s Fit to Sing*. Performance by the author. Elektra Records, 1964. Record.

⁹⁹ Eliot and Ochs, 85. The *Variety* article is quoted by not cited in this work.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

Ochs began to focus his attention of his next creative project, which would become his second album *I Ain't Marching Anymore*.¹⁰² In an interview with *Village Voice*, Phil said the following:

There's nothing noble about what I'm doing. I'm writing to make money. I write about Cuba and Mississippi out of an inner need for expression, not to change the world. The roots of my songs are psychological, not political. I can tell I'm just beginning to write decent stuff. I feel the images and words coming more easily. As I reach new levels, I can begin to fathom what Dylan's songs are all about . . . I'm beginning to read poets like Brecht.¹⁰³

The album came out in February 1965. The cover of the album shows Ochs sitting against the side of a building with torn political posters and a spray-painted peace symbol. The back of the record consisted of a letter from Ochs proposing the question: "Do you really believe in what your songs are saying?"¹⁰⁴ He then decided to include a list of complaints against his songs on the reverse of the album cover. Some of the list complaints included:

There's nothing as dull as yesterday's headlines,
Don't be so ambitious.
Sure it's good; but who's gonna care next year?
I bet you don't go to church.
I came to be entertained, not preached to.
That's not folk music.¹⁰⁵

After the listed complaints, Phil wrote the following:

And yet every once in awhile an idea grabs me and the familiar excitement returns as I turn myself on with the birth of a song. And I know again that I'll never kick the habit of writing.

¹⁰² Ibid, 93.

¹⁰³ Ibid, 93. Berthold Brecht (1898-1956), German philosopher, poet, and playwright who espoused communist philosophy and who received The Stalin Peace Prize in 1955.

¹⁰⁴ Phil Ochs, *I Ain't Marching Anymore*, Performance by the author, Elektra Records, 1965, Record.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

And people walk up to me and ask, “Do you really believe in what your songs are saying?”

And I have to smile and reply, “Hell, no, but the money’s good.”¹⁰⁶

In the liner notes of the album, Ochs wrote descriptions for each of the fourteen songs he included. The songs were all topical songs that described current events. For example, the song “I Ain’t Marching Anymore” is a direct comment on the Anti-Vietnam war movement. Other songs focused on events such as the burning of draft cards, “Draft Dodger Rag,” and the Civil Rights movement, “In the Heat of the Summer.”¹⁰⁷

The critics were not appreciative of Ochs’ second album. For example, in the *Boston Herald*, dragged the album through the mud by saying

In “I Ain’t Marchin’ Anymore” Ochs’ writing reaches its most pathetic point; it is ironically, a better indictment of his poetstry than any critic could brew . . . A piece (like Marchin’) can not be unhypocratically written or sung by an individual who has not taken a formal stance as a Conscientious Objector . . . an indication of one’s sentiment is not sufficient; anyone can Howl! The measure of Ochs’ success is the measure of the taste, the intelligence and sensitivity of his audience.¹⁰⁸

The album was well received within the folk music scene, however, with the music industry trade publication, *Record World* writing “Folkster Ochs writes and sings a bitter song, but his accusations ring too true to ignore. He seems to respond to the violence of the everyday world and implies that anyone who doesn’t concern themselves deeply is apathetic and worthless.”¹⁰⁹ The album eventually sold more than forty thousand copies. Bob Dylan was interviewed with the *Village Voice* and was asked the question, “Bobby, we know you changed your name. Come on now, what’s your real name?” Dylan responded by saying, “Philip Ochs. I’m gonna change

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Eliot and Ochs, 98

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 97.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 98.

it back again when I see it pays.”¹¹⁰ Joan Baez recorded a version of the Ochs’ song, “There But for Fortune.”¹¹¹ Baez’s single eventually reached number thirteen on the adult contemporary charts in *Billboard Magazine*.¹¹² “There But for Fortune” would become Ochs’s most successful song on the music charts.¹¹³

Ochs was invited to appear at a teach-in at the University of California at Berkley campus as apart of the anti-Vietnam war movement.¹¹⁴ A teach-in organizer, Jerry Rubin, was encouraged by Paul Krassner¹¹⁵ to include his friend Phil Ochs because he believed Ochs would be a good addition to the three day teach-in.¹¹⁶ Ochs felt honored to be asked and he broke a scheduled appearance in order to go to California. Ochs was inspired by “the Berkley campus, the students, the political activists, the free speech movement . . .”¹¹⁷ During the three days he would periodically go up to one of the microphones and sing two songs. After this experience, Ochs wanted to sing at “every college in the country, for every student, for every teacher.”¹¹⁸

Also, Ochs began to talk between songs at his concerts on college campuses. He would often speak about his efforts and experience in the anti-war movement. At one point, he identified what a protest song was by saying:

Now, for a change of pace, here’s a protest song . . . A protest song is a song that’s so specific that you cannot mistake it for bullshit . . .¹¹⁹

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid, 100.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Rodnitzky, 71.

¹¹⁴ Eliot and Ochs, 99.

¹¹⁵ Paul Krassner was the founder and editor of the free thought magazine, *The Realist*. *The Realist* was first published in 1958. He was close friends with Jerry Rubin and participated in the 1968 Democratic Convention protests in Chicago.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, 99.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 100.

With the development of Ochs' new enthusiasm for political motivation, he began to receive more negative feedback about his opinions and music. For example, Ochs had a concert scheduled in Baltimore, Maryland, but the concert was eventually cancelled because the local school board believed Ochs was a Communist.¹²⁰

Loosing the Way

After the success of *I Ain't Marchin' Anymore* and Joan Baez's cover of "There But for Fortune," Ochs was determined to continue his success as a musician. He was asked to perform at New York's Carnegie Hall as a part of the Sing-in for Peace concert in 1965.¹²¹ It was one of the first New York concerts to protest the war in Vietnam. Most members of the folk community participated in the event, including Bob Dylan. Dylan performed "Blowin' in the Wind" and a new song, "Sooner or Later."¹²² According to Ochs' semi-autobiographical account, backstage at the concert, Bob Dylan asked Ochs what he thought about Dylan's new song that he had just performed. Ochs told Dylan he was not impressed with the song. Dylan became "pissed off"¹²³ and walked away. Later on, Ochs and Dylan shared a cab on the way to a party uptown. Dylan told the cab driver to pull over and ejected Ochs from the cab, saying that he was not a song writer at all, but "just a journalist."¹²⁴ Ochs did not argue with Dylan, but quietly left.

Phil stated that he did not see Dylan again and the rift between the two men continued over the next decade.¹²⁵ Ochs was often asked about the situation with Dylan and, particularly, why he listened to Dylan's advice and criticism. He responded "that if Dylan says something to

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Mark Bend, *American Troubadours: Groundbreaking Singer-Songwriters of the 60s* (San Francisco: Backbeat Books, 2001), 104.

¹²² Eliot and Ochs, 104.

¹²³ Ibid, 104.

¹²⁴ Bend, 103.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

you, you've got to listen.”¹²⁶ Dylan had called Ochs a journalist, which to him was a compliment rather than a criticism. Ochs considered himself to be a journalist first, a man who observed and wrote honestly about what he saw.¹²⁷

After the success of the Sing-in for Peace concert, Ochs was asked to perform a solo concert at Carnegie Hall in January 1966. He had also wanted to produce and release a live album. This would be the perfect opportunity for him to showcase his ability to perform live at one of the greatest music halls in the United States.¹²⁸ It was agreed by Elektra Records that they would cut a live album at the Carnegie Hall concert and released it as Ochs’ third album.¹²⁹ Carnegie Hall was sold out three weeks prior to the event. As the concert was about to begin, Ochs lost his voice in a panic attack.¹³⁰ For a half an hour, he was trying to clear his voice and continually drank water, but his voice remained scratchy. Ochs decided to go on with the performance and walked onto the stage. He started to strum the opening chords to “I’m Gonna Say it Now,” his voice came back and the song sounded pretty. The audience approved of the song and began to clap and cheer.¹³¹

The Carnegie Hall concert consisted of several new songs that Phil had never performed in public before such as “Cannons of Christianity” and “Changes.”¹³² In November 1965, Ochs had written wrote the song “Changes,” which marked a breakthrough for him as a songwriter.¹³³ With this work, he had written his first abstract lyrical song with “no political message, no

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid, 104.

¹²⁸ Eliot and Ochs, 105.

¹²⁹ Bend, 104.

¹³⁰ Eliot and Ochs, 106.

¹³¹ Ibid. 106.

¹³² Phil Ochs, *In Concert*, Performance by the author, Elektra Records, 1999, Compact Disc.

¹³³ Bends, 104.

sociological lesson; a wistful song about romance, if not about love.”¹³⁴ The song became known as one of Ochs’ most enduring songs¹³⁵ with the following lyrics:

Sit by my side, come as close as the air
Share in a memory of gray
And wander in my words, and dream about the
Pictures that I play of changes . . .

The world’s spinning madly, it drifts in the dark
Swings through a hallow of haze
A race around the stars, a journey through the
Universe ablaze with changes . . .

Your tears will be tremblin’, now we’re somewhere else.
One last cup of wine we will pour
And I’ll kiss you one more time and leave you on the
Rolling river shore changes.¹³⁶

Ochs said at one time about the lyrics of the song, “listen to the melody . . . listen to the melody, can you dig it?”¹³⁷ At Carnegie Hall, Phil said that the song, “Changes” was the “metaphor for revolution . . . is the reality of young love. Or is the reality of revolution the metaphor for love?”¹³⁸ This concert marked the last performance of “Phil Ochs, the singing journalist” because Ochs realized that his writing style had changed and thought he was now a musician rather than a journalist.¹³⁹

The Carnegie Hall performance would be released as Ochs’ third album entitled, *In Concert*.¹⁴⁰ *In Concert* is a different sort of live album compared to other artists’ live albums of the same era. This Ochs’ album consisted of all new material that had never been recorded before. It was also unusual because the album was believed to be the live recording of the

¹³⁴ Eliot and Ochs, 104.

¹³⁵ Bends, 104.

¹³⁶ Phil Ochs, “Changes,” *In Concert*, Performance by the author, Elektra Records, 1999, Compact Disc.

¹³⁷ Eliot and Ochs, 105.

¹³⁸ Phil Ochs, “Changes,” *In Concert*.

¹³⁹ Eliot and Ochs, 109.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 106.

Carnegie Hall concert.¹⁴¹ Actually, the *In Concert* album was comprised of spliced together tapes of three of Ochs' concerts, including the Carnegie Hall concert. Ochs' scratchy voice at the Carnegie Hall performance was not worthy of release.¹⁴² He repeated the concert in Boston a few days later in hopes of getting a better recording of the new songs to release on the album. The Boston concert was a superior performance, but some of the songs were unusable because of faulty recording equipment.¹⁴³ A third live recorded performance at New York's Judson Hall without an audience provided the final needed songs. The final released version of *In Concert* consisted of the Boston show interspersed with recordings from the Carnegie Hall and Judson Hall concerts.¹⁴⁴

The *In Concert* album marks a transitional phase in Ochs' development as a musician. The album was considered a folk record with "protest songs," but it also included the more abstract, lyrical material contained in songs like "Changes."¹⁴⁵ Ochs also included his own recording of "There But for Fortune." The album went on to be the biggest-selling release on Elektra Records.¹⁴⁶

However, Ochs was becoming discouraged with Elektra Records' continual neglect of his career, while focusing their primary attention on artists like Joan Baez.¹⁴⁷ His contract had been extended to a third album at Elektra, producing similar music, but Ochs wanted to experiment with new material, expand his career, find a new manager, and eventually reach a new international audience.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴¹ Michael Schumacher, *There But For Fortune: The Life of Phil Ochs* (New York: Hyperion, 1996) 154.

¹⁴² Bends, 104.

¹⁴³ Schumacher, 155.

¹⁴⁴ Bends, 104.

¹⁴⁵ Eliot and Ochs, 107.

¹⁴⁶ Gavan Daws and Jac Holzman, *Follow the Music: The Life and High Times of Elektra Records in the Great Years of American Pop Culture* (Santa Monica, Cal: First Media Books, 1998), 98.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, 99.

¹⁴⁸ Bends, 105.

Ochs had not spoken to his brother Michael for almost three years.¹⁴⁹ Michael had come to Greenwich Village in 1963 to support his brother's career. Phil had asked Michael to come to New York to support him. Once Michael arrived in New York, Phil quickly found his younger brother's presence to be tiresome and would ignore him. Michael had loyally followed Phil until he was driven away through a combination of disregard and arrogance.¹⁵⁰ Michael had moved to Los Angles, California where he was working as a photographer. In late 1966, Phil called Michael, demanding that he move back to New York City and become his manager.¹⁵¹ Michael had no management experience, but decided to come back and support his older brother, who obviously needed his help now. Phil gave his brother twenty-five percent of everything he earned, which was an almost unheard of amount for a contract during the 1960s.¹⁵² In January 1967, Michael and Phil negotiated a new recording contract with A&M Records, a west coast recording label.¹⁵³ Part of the contract with A&M Records consisted of a non-censorship clause.¹⁵⁴ Phil wanted to have complete artistic freedom because he wanted to slowly move away from his older sound because he felt the "folk revival was over, protest music was passé, it was The Summer of Love"¹⁵⁵ and he wanted a new sound for himself.¹⁵⁶

Phil and Michael moved to Los Angles and bought a large house, one which included a personal recording studio for Phil.¹⁵⁷ Ochs would not have to leave his own property to record music. In August 1967, Phil began working with producer Larry Marks of A&M Records on material for the new album. During this period of collaboration with Larry Marks, Ochs became

¹⁴⁹ Eliot and Ochs, 118.

¹⁵⁰ Bends, 105.

¹⁵¹ Eliot and Ochs, 119.

¹⁵² Ibid. Personal note: It is interesting to note that Elvis Presley, Phil Ochs' early role model, also gave 25% to his manager, Col. Tom Parker, during the early years of his career.

¹⁵³ Daws and Holzman, 98.

¹⁵⁴ Eliot and Ochs, 125.

¹⁵⁵ Eliot and Ochs, 123.

¹⁵⁶ Bends, 105.

¹⁵⁷ Eliot and Ochs, 118.

liberated from the confines of the topical song and began to focus on a poetic, abstract direction in his lyrics.¹⁵⁸ He continued to have political philosophy interwoven within his lyrics. For example, the song “Crucifixion” is about the assassination of John F. Kennedy with the use of Christian symbolism¹⁵⁹ in the lyrics:

The Spanish bulls are beaten; the crowd is soon beguiled,
The matador is beautiful, a symphony of style
Then this overflow of life is crushed into a liar
The gentle soul is ripped apart and tossed into the fire

Time takes her toll and the memory fades
But his glory is growin’ in the magic that he made
Reality is ruined; there is nothing more to fear
The drama is distorted to what they want to hear
Swimming in their sorrow in the twisting of a tear
As they wait for the new thrill parade

So dance dance dance
Teach us to be true
Come dance dance dance
'Cause we love you
And the night comes true¹⁶⁰

This song leaves no doubt of Ochs’ feelings about Kennedy’s tragic assassination and his equation of it to the equally tragic murder of Christ. Ochs wanted to see how the new collection of songs would be received by people.¹⁶¹ He also had a desire to perform at Carnegie Hall again.¹⁶² Through various negotiations, Michael was able to get Phil scheduled to perform at Carnegie Hall on Thanksgiving Day in 1967. There is not much information regarding the second Carnegie Hall concert, but the concert was again sold out.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁸ Bends, 105.

¹⁵⁹ Eliot and Ochs, 117.

¹⁶⁰ Phil Ochs, “Crucifixion,” *Pleasures of the Harbor*, Performance by the author, A&M Records, 1997, Compact Disc.

¹⁶¹ Eliot and Ochs, 137.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid, 119.

Ochs went into the studio in August 1967 and recorded what would become his fourth album, *Pleasures of the Harbor*.¹⁶⁴ Larry Marks and Ochs agreed to try to broaden his sound with expanding his type of arrangements.¹⁶⁵ Up to this point, most of his arrangements consisted of simple verses and continuous chorus repetitions. Michael said that Ochs knew what he wanted his new sound to be like, but had a difficult time trying to communicate this to Larry Marks.¹⁶⁶ But through a long process of experimentation and exploration, Ochs began to use orchestral instrumentation and new studio technology to compose songs.¹⁶⁷ This sound would be found on the next three albums released by A&M Records. The new style would be considered Phil's crowning achievement as a lyricist and songwriter.¹⁶⁸

Pleasures of the Harbor was produced with a budget of \$40,000.¹⁶⁹ This album consisted of a unique classical-folk-pop sound using the talents of experienced studio accompanists like pianist Lincoln Mayorga and the orchestrations of Ian Freebairn-Smith and Joseph Byrd.¹⁷⁰ The previous albums often had Ochs playing a solo acoustic guitar chords. Most of the songs on *Pleasures of the Harbor* were more than five minutes long and the verses and choruses were different. Ochs also tried to change his style of singing and Larry Marks said “he wanted to make sure that he sounded like a singer as opposed to someone who was delivering his own material. He worked hard on it.”¹⁷¹ Ochs had to record a song many times line by line. This was a different process of recording than he had previously experienced at Elektra Records.¹⁷² He felt that his self-image was inverted with the release of the album. He said, “he was the sailor

¹⁶⁴ Bends, 105.

¹⁶⁵ Schumacher, 167.

¹⁶⁶ Eliot and Ochs, 129.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, 136.

¹⁶⁸ Rodnitzky, 77.

¹⁶⁹ Bends, 106.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Bends, 106.

¹⁷² Schumacher, 176.

at sea, longing for the shore. The observer, responsible for protecting what can't be seen, what is just beyond the horizon, the pleasures of the harbor.”¹⁷³ This was Phil's version of the Protestant Ethic, which is the notion of separation of pleasure and social responsibility.¹⁷⁴ He is no longer the “reportorial everyman . . . he is the reflector or artist.”¹⁷⁵ Phil believed that it was his duty to write music, even if he was a lonely sailor or an artist. Writing music was Phil's way of encouraging social responsibility to exist in the world by writing song lyrics, such as,

And the sea bids farewell. She waves and swells and
Sends them on their way
Time has been her pay, and time will have to tell.
Oh! Soon your sailing will be over.
Come and take the pleasures of the harbor.¹⁷⁶

His next album, *Tapes From California* appeared in February 1968. This album was a continuation of the same sound found on the *Pleasures of the Harbor* album. Larry Marks produced *Tapes From California*. The new album was considered the conventional album of Ochs' new sound.¹⁷⁷ The song, “Joe Hill,” saw Ochs return to his acoustic folk roots with his strumming guitar chords. The seven-minute narrative song would have been better suited to the final Elektra album, *In Concert* than this current A&M release.¹⁷⁸ “The War is Over” made it clear that the Vietnam War was not over, no matter what the politicians were saying at the time.¹⁷⁹ Possibly, the mixed styles could have been one of the reasons that *Tapes from California* not being as successful as *Pleasures of Harbor*.¹⁸⁰

During this critical stage in his career, Ochs did not have many friends besides his brother, Michael. He isolated himself in his house, constantly writing, reading, and listening to

¹⁷³ Eliot and Ochs, 131.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, 137.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Phil Ochs, “Pleasures of the Harbor.”

¹⁷⁷ Ibid, 130.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Schumacher, 177.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

the radio.¹⁸¹ Michael began to worry about Phil's mental stability because some days he seemed to loose a sense of reality regarding the current state of the world.¹⁸² Phil was convinced that the world was falling apart.¹⁸³ Phil maintained contact with Jerry Rubin, the organizer of the Teach-In at University of California. Jerry Rubin sought out Phil in early 1968 for political discussions regarding the aims, tactics, and principles of the Youth International Party, the Yippies.¹⁸⁴ Jerry Rubin and Abby Hoffman were planning an alternative rally in Chicago during August 1968 to coincide with the Democratic Party Convention. The rally was supposed to be the moment when the growing counter-culture movement would steal the initiative from the establishment under the eye of the media of the United States.¹⁸⁵ The Yippies stated that the festival

. . . will take place at the same time as the national Death (Democratic) Convention in Chicago. It will be a contrast in lifestyles. Ours will be an affirmation of life; there is d-e-a-t-h . . . This will be . . . the first coming together of all people who have been in the youth revolution which has been taking place in America in the past decade.¹⁸⁶

The rally started out peacefully. Phil Ochs and Jerry Rubin attracted the media attention they wanted when they were both arrested for breaking livestock laws in the city of Chicago by attempting to publicly nominate a pig for president.¹⁸⁷ At a different time, police broke up a demonstration with the use of tear gas and baton beatings in Lincoln Park.¹⁸⁸ A tense standoff ensued. Ochs tried to get control of the crowd by pleading with the people through a microphone. His efforts seemed to do no good. Ochs then went to the line of policemen and

¹⁸¹ Eliot and Ochs, 140.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid, 141.

¹⁸⁵ Bends, 107.

¹⁸⁶ Bends, 107.

¹⁸⁷ Eliot and Ochs, 144.

¹⁸⁸ Bends, 107.

attempted to persuade them to join the rest of them, “the people.”¹⁸⁹ His attempts failed and the protest rally eventually ended in violence with the arrests of Hoffman and Rubin.¹⁹⁰

Ochs was shattered and depressed by the experience in Chicago. Michael and other close friends warned him that his continued political demonstrations and participation could be used as a trap to detain him.¹⁹¹ Ochs believed that the Yippie movement could seize power from the establishment in America. He chose to ignore his brother’s warnings and continued to promote a possible radical social upheaval in American society. He said later that his “idealism died in Chicago.”¹⁹² Ochs never lost his principles and values, but lost faith and belief that things could effective change for the good. The 1968 Democratic Convention was a contributing factor to the loss of his idealism, but the death of his idealism was greatly impacted by the dual assassinations of Robert F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr.¹⁹³

After the summer of 1968, Ochs secluded himself again in the confines of his house in Los Angeles. For two weeks, he did not let anyone into his house, including his brother, Michael.¹⁹⁴ He wrote and recorded a new set of songs that would become the foundation for his next album, *Rehearsals for Retirement*.¹⁹⁵ This album is the darkest and most introspective album of the trilogy of albums on the A&M Record label. Ochs’ voice was limited in range and he had a difficult time in trying to find a dynamic expression for his songs.¹⁹⁶ On a few songs he sang with old power, restraint and pain, for example, on the song “William Butler Yeats Visits Lincoln Park and Escapes Unscathed.”¹⁹⁷ However, overall, the album was a complete disaster.

¹⁸⁹ Eliot and Ochs, 147.

¹⁹⁰ Bends, 105. Ochs was not arrested during the convention.

¹⁹¹ Eliot and Ochs, 148.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid, 155.

¹⁹⁵ Schumacher, 166.

¹⁹⁶ Eliot and Ochs, 159.

¹⁹⁷ Phil Ochs, *Rehearsal for Retirement*, Performance by the author, A&M Records, 2007, Compact Disc.

It sold less than 5,000 copies.¹⁹⁸ Ochs began to drink heavily and started to believe that his career was over. For about a year, he confined himself within his house with only visits from Michael.¹⁹⁹

Ochs decided to return home in 1969 to visit his mother, who was still living in Far Rockaway, New York.²⁰⁰ After visiting her for a few months, he returned to Los Angeles and attended one of Elvis Presley's comeback shows in Las Vegas.²⁰¹ Elvis Presley had always been one of Phil's idols as a young musician and he was overwhelmed by the power and energy of Presley's performance. Ochs was inspired to form a band with fellow musicians, guitarist Bob Rafkin and pianist Lincoln Mayorga.²⁰² They practiced combination of sets of Elvis Presley and Buddy Holly songs interjected with a few of his own songs. He also started to wear a gold suit like Presley had worn in the 1950s.²⁰³

Ochs considered this the “gold suit era” of his career.²⁰⁴ He went on to explain in an interview that “it’s a parody . . . It is also a study of American hero worship and American folk worship.”²⁰⁵ In April 1970, Ochs performed his last concert at Carnegie Hall in New York City.²⁰⁶ At the concert, he said “If there’s any hope for America, it lies in revolution, and if there’s any hope for a revolution in America, it lies in getting Elvis Presley to become Che Guevara.”²⁰⁷ The last Carnegie Hall concert has been identified as the Phil Ochs’ equivalent of Bob Dylan’s ‘electric set’ at the Newport Folk Festival in 1965.²⁰⁸ The audience was baffled by

¹⁹⁸ Bends, 106.

¹⁹⁹ Eliot and Ochs, 164.

²⁰⁰ Ibid. Jacob Ochs died during the 1960s.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Bends, 106.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Eliot and Ochs, 166.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Phil Ochs, *Gunfight at Carnegie Hall*, Performance by the author, A&M Records, 2007, Compact Disc.

²⁰⁸ Bends, 106.

an overweight thirty-year-old Ochs dressed like Elvis Presley, singing medleys and protest songs and talking about Che Guevara. Toward the end of the concert, Phil was slowly winning over a few sections of the audience.²⁰⁹ But many members of the audience booed and jeered as Phil was performing his new material, but would veer back to clap and cheer when he would sing his classic, protest songs, such as “I Ain’t Marchin’ Anymore” and “Pleasures of the Harbor.”²¹⁰

Ochs had planned on releasing this Carnegie Hall concert as a live record. The president of A&M Records, Jerry Moss, thought releasing the record with booing fans would be a terrible idea and fatal step for his career.²¹¹ Ochs continued to fight A&M Records and the concert album was eventually given a limited release. The album was a complete failure and A&M Records cancelled the rest of the Gold Suit tour.²¹² Many believed Ochs’ career was over.²¹³ The Gold Suit debacle sent him into a spiraling depression from which he never recovered. His alcohol addiction became the center of his life and he was constantly in an alcoholic stupor.²¹⁴ It is possible, at this time that he began to be affected by manic depression, inherited from his father. He also became addicted to Valium and junk food, becoming bloated and unwell. From 1971 to 1975, Ochs wrote only a few new songs and constantly tried to start a concert tour, but no record agency would hire him.²¹⁵

In 1974, Ochs, at one point, said that he felt like no one appreciated his efforts as a musician anymore.²¹⁶ He continued to reference the last Carnegie Hall concert as his example of how his fans had turned on him. He said he still heard the booing of the crowd in his head.²¹⁷

²⁰⁹ Eliot and Ochs, 166.

²¹⁰ Phil Ochs, *Gunfight at Carnegie Hall*.

²¹¹ Eliot and Ochs, 170.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Ibid, 172.

²¹⁵ Bends, 106.

²¹⁶ Eliot and Ochs, 202

²¹⁷ Ibid.

One of the last songs Ochs wrote and recorded was “I’m Tired.” The song was never released during his lifetime, but his brother, Michael, found the recording in a pile of his personal writings in 1986.²¹⁸ The song is quite melancholy, with the lyrics,

Sometime's I feel that the world isn't mine
It feeds on my hunger and tears on my time
And I'm tired,
Yes, I'm tired
Every face on the street is as cold the air
As hard as the pavement moves 'neath my feet
And I'm tired,
Yes, I'm tired
Sometimes I stop and ask to myself

Oh why should I be so alone
It comes and it goes
and nobody knows
For they're blind with a pain all their own
So I start out again with a smile on my face
To hide all the empty and search for a friend
And I'm tired
Yes, I'm tired
Sometimes I stop and ask to myself

Oh why should I be so alone
It comes and it goes
and nobody knows
For they're blind with a pain all their own
So I start out again with a smile on my face

To hide all the empty and search for a friend
And I'm tired
Yes, I'm tired

And I'm tired
Yes, I'm tired²¹⁹

With these lyrics, Ochs almost seemed to know that his life was coming to an end. He had doubts about his future career and was unsure about what he should do.

²¹⁸ Schumacher, 189.

²¹⁹ David Cohen, *Phil Ochs: A Bio-Bibliography* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1999) 134.

The Train

In mid 1975, Ochs decided to leave the west coast and move back to New York City.²²⁰ One morning, Ochs appeared at the front door of the house of his old friend, Jim Glover. He was in a confused state, wearing the Elvis Presley gold suit, caked in vomit.²²¹ Jim contacted Michael Ochs and the two tried to persuade Ochs to get help. He constantly refused their advice or help. Ochs eventually was reduced to living on a small budget supplied by Michael.²²² In the summer of 1975, Phil Ochs changed his name to John Train.²²³ He would say that Phil no longer existed. By this time, he was a homeless alcoholic.²²⁴ He would constantly beg from friends and strangers in Greenwich Village. He continued to drink heavily and eventually became violent. Michael and a few friends assumed that he “invented the persona [John Train] to hide from the gaining insecurity of being Phil Ochs.”²²⁵ Some people speculated that Ochs did not truly believe he was John Train, but the pain and despair to hide behind the persona drove him to participate in extreme and erratic behavior.²²⁶ Fellow 1960s folk musician, Tom Paxton said “Phil was one of the most tortured people I have known personally. I think there was real disease there. For one thing, alcoholism and the clinical depression were there.”²²⁷

By October 1975, John Train was slowly retreating and Phil Ochs was slowly returning to normalcy.²²⁸ He decided to visit his ex-wife, Alice and daughter, Meegan, in California. He had not seen either of them for over six years, and little is known of their reunion. In early 1976,

²²⁰ Eliot and Ochs, 174.

²²¹ Ibid, 176.

²²² Eliot and Ochs, 181.

²²³ Bends, 107.

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Eliot and Ochs, 209.

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Bends, 110.

²²⁸ Eliot and Ochs, 209.

Ochs went to live his sister, Sonja, in Far Rockaway, New York.²²⁹ He seemed happy to settle down in his childhood home. He was also finally diagnosed with manic depression in late 1975. On April 9th, 1976, Sonja found Phil's body in the bathroom.²³⁰ He had hanged himself and was dead.

Phil Ochs body was cremated and his mother, Gertrude, took his ashes to Scotland, where they were scattered over her family's estate.²³¹ A few weeks later in Greenwich Village, the remaining members of the folk music scene gathered at Gerde's to pay homage to Phil Ochs' memory and his music.²³² Some of the people in attendance were Sis Cunningham, the founder of *Broadside Magazine*, Pete Seeger, Joan Baez, Joni Mitchell, Jim Glover, a few members of both the Lovin' Spoonful, and the Weavers, as well as Bob Dylan.²³³ Gerde's was also filled with devoted fans who had seen the evening advertised in the *Village Voice*. Joan Baez performed "There But for Fortune," and also played a medley of her favorite Ochs' songs, which included "I Ain't Marchin' Anymore," "Changes," and "Pleasures of the Harbor."²³⁴ A few fans had composed poems and songs about Ochs and were asked to perform their own works. Approximately six months later, a greatest hits record was released by A&M records in tribute to Phil Ochs' memory.²³⁵

Conclusion

While Phil Ochs' legacy might not be as strong or as well known as other 1960s folk musicians such as Joan Baez or Bob Dylan, he should be recognized as an individual who

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Bends, 109.

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Ibid.

contributed a unique collection of music and lyrics that described the culture and society of the 1960s in pure, direct and unadulterated language. He grew up during the non-confrontational 1950s, idolizing and accepting media-generated heroes such as John Wayne and Elvis Presley. He had actually created personal shrines to each in his own bedroom. When he left home, however, and enrolled at Ohio State University, he entered the real world of education and politics. He delved into current events and political discussions. But his undying love for music helped drive his interests from the academic world into the performing world. He may have started out to be a political follower of Fidel Castro and Che Guevara, but found instead, real life, and authentic music, during his two-week stay in a Miami jail.

His return to Ohio State University led him, fortunately, to fellow student Jim Glover, and an introduction to the sort of music that would become part of his very being. Classic folk music of the 1930s and 1940s was becoming infused and revitalized by the politically astute students who were increasingly protesting the United States' involvement in the Vietnam War. Phil Ochs' great talent was to read the political situation and be able to recapture the tone and the events in his song lyrics. There is no doubt about the subject matter that Ochs wrote and sang about. For example, when he wrote the anti-war song "When I Am Gone," there is no doubt about the meaning of the words nor the intent of the songwriter in telling the story of a soldier going off to his death. This straightforward telling is what Phil Ochs meant when he called himself a "Journalist-Protest Writer." And during this time, he was one of the best singer-songwriters of the protest music movement, recognized by both the early folk musicians, Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger, and the Weavers, and later, by his contemporaries, Joni Mitchell, Joan Baez and Bob Dylan.

Phil Ochs, however, was not content to remain solely in one musical style. He broke out of the “Journalist-Protest Writer” shell in the late 1960s and began to experiment with more poetry and greater abstract imagery in his work. He included a broader musical spectrum in recording, bringing in classical and pop sounds, with additional instrumental backgrounds, which were, for him, a tremendous break with his early style.

As he changed his style, however, his traditional fan base did not continue to support him, wanting to hear his earlier standard works. The more Ochs experimented the less his fans appreciated his attempts at growth. Sadly, as happens in the music world, his final concerts were full of conflict. On one hand, Ochs was singing the music of his latest creative genius, and on the other, his fans were disappointed that he had seemingly ‘abandoned’ the early music genre that had made his reputation in the folk world. At the same time, his latest record label, A&M Records, was adding pressure to produce a commercially successful album.

These stresses and the violent rejection of him by his fans during his last concert appearance caused his life to spiral downward into an increasingly disturbed and uncontrolled lifestyle. Without the help and support of his brother Michael, and to a lesser degree, his sister Sonja, Phil Ochs might have succumbed sooner to the twin illnesses of alcoholism and manic depression. Even after his death, Michael Ochs has continued to maintain ownership of the rights of Phil Ochs’ estate and writings, guaranteeing that his legacy will be preserved for future generations to discover and love. The tragedy of Phil Ochs is that he died at age thirty-six, without having the opportunity to explore and write all the music he could have. He has been forgotten by many in the music world. His success, however, is that he showed the folk world a new way to approach songwriting, with clear eyes, and a straight-forward telling of the unadulterated truth. That ability has been Phil Ochs’ undeniable strength and his legacy to all.

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