

PRELUDE

*FLASHBACK AND FORESHADOW*¹

FOLK MUSIC, WOODY GUTHRIE, AND BOB DYLAN – A CONTEXTUAL PREVIEW OF JOHN STEWART’S SOLO CAREER AND CONTRIBUTIONS TO AMERICAN MUSICAL HISTORY

¹It struck me that, if I were a professional fiction novelist and owned two dogs, these would be the perfect choices for naming them — probably shortened to “Flash” and “Shadow.” — FWK

“Music wasn’t an obsession until Elvis. I just drew all day long. When I was in high school, I was in a band, three guitars and drums, no bass, and we recorded a song called ‘Rockin’ Anna.’ Some rich lady in Pasadena wrote it, wanted someone to record it, and she paid for the session. I put one of my songs on the back, under the name Johnny Stewart. I went from wanting to be Elvis to wanting to be Dave [Guard]. I never got to be Elvis, but I got to be Dave.”

“When Elvis went into the Army and Rock ‘n’ Roll became Fabian and Frankie Avalon and Bobby Rydell, it had just lost its zip, turning into crap. And the [Kingston] Trio came along, and Folk Music took the place of Rock ‘n’ Roll. So I was signed to Arwin Records. That was Marty Melcher, Doris Day’s husband. Jan and Arnie were on that label before they were Jan and Dean. And I was signed as a Rock ‘n’ Roller, but I had these Folk songs. And they said, ‘No, do a Folk album.’”

“So I wrote a letter to Dave Guard and said, ‘Would you do the liner notes?’ And he wrote back and said, ‘Yes, I [would]. Meet me at the Shrine Auditorium and bring me an acetate.’ So, at that time, the record company thought, ‘Well, we have the publishing.’ — nothing has changed — and that it would be worth more money to sell my songs to the Kingston Trio. So, when I saw Dave, I told him what was going on, and he said, ‘Well, jeez, do you want to do that?’ And I said, ‘Well, they’re not going to put it out, so if you like them, then, great.’ Then he heard the songs — ‘Johnny Reb’ was one of them — and he said, ‘It’s close, but it’s not it.’”

On “Where Have All the Flowers Gone?”: *“We all heard Peter, Paul, and Mary do it in a club in Boston. This is just before they had their first album out. And we said, ‘Jeez, we gotta do that song.’ Recorded it three days later. The [Kingston] Trio did for Folk music what [Elvis] Presley did for R&B: Made it White and collegiate and palatable for the middle class and middle America.”*

— Leland Rucker
(Quoting John Stewart)
“Jukebox in My Head”
Web Log Posting
Saturday, January 26, 2008
www.lelandrucker.com

Question: If someone were to listen to the body of [John Stewart’s] work and not know anything about his background, would they likely would assume he had spent his formative years on a heartland farm?

(Rex Rutkowski/American Journalist, quoting John Stewart) *“I think it comes from travelling with the Kingston Trio and driving through America and seeing the farmlands of Kansas and the plains states, seeing the character of America there, and really touching the soul of America. California is the spirit of America. Kansas is the soul of America, getting to where the real strength of the country lies.”*

Asked to evaluate the Kingston Trio's contribution to contemporary music, John replied, "*They were responsible for exposing American Folk Music to the country and making it fun and accessible for everyone to listen to and participate in. I think they did one of the things that is the earmark of a really significant performer or performers. It transcends being popular. It inspires people to do what they do. Presley did it. Dylan did it. The Beatles did it. I'm sure Springsteen is doing it. I'm sure every group has been influenced by another group. But to turn on a whole nation to do what you're doing (as the Trio did) is very, very significant. There would have been no Peter, Paul, and Mary. Dylan would not be doing what he was doing, I venture to say. The Kingston Trio started the Folk movement in America and received no credit for doing it.*"

— Rex Rutkowski
"John Stewart's Search for the
Soul of America"
BAM Magazine
May 6, 1983
Quoted in *Omaha Rainbow* #33
Autumn 1983
"O'Bsessions With John Stewart"
By Peter O'Brien

When I set about evaluating the validity of what John Stewart was saying about what role The Kingston Trio played in the development and popularization of American Folk Music, it led me to larger questions — all having to do with the legacy of Stewart himself. And *that*, in turn, was difficult to assess without placing him in juxtaposition to other well-known Folk Music figures of our time. And one does not utter the words "...well-known Folk Music figures of our time..." without including Woody Guthrie and Bob Dylan.



"Blooms Hard by the Crossroads"
An Extremely Brief History of American Folk Music

Folk Music "Writ Large"

This essay is not the place for a Folk Smackdown, to determine who (John Stewart, Bob Dylan, Woody Guthrie, or anyone else) is the "more authentic" or "more rightful" inheritor of the American Folk Music tradition.

But the discussion that follows provides a proper framework for understanding that there is a "Folk Music Proper," that is, "Folk Music" *writ large* — the native music of our country, imported here along with the immigrant people themselves in the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries from England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland, Continental Europe, Africa, and the Caribbean Islands. Once it arrived on these shores, it took on a life of its own, with

the different imported versions bumping up against each other and creating hybrids which were increasingly simply “American” in nature, and dividing up into distinct regions, families, and styles. (See, below, and in “*Afterwords*,” the backmatter to this essay, in a later installment, the discussion on the origins of “When Johnny Comes Marchin’ Home,” for a wider context in which the Folk Music researcher Alan Lomax makes it clear that the lines between the regions were not hard-and-fast ones, but, rather, wide border areas, where hybrid strains were most likely to be found.)

A Folk Song Map

The map sings. The chanteys surge along the rocky Atlantic seaboard, across the Great Lakes and round the moon-curve of the Gulf of Mexico. The paddling songs of the French-Canadians ring out along the Saint Lawrence and west past the Rockies. Beside them, from Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, and New England, the ballads, straight and tall as spruce, march toward the West.

Inland from the Sea Islands, slave melodies sweep across the whole South from the Carolinas to Texas. And out on the shadows of the Smoky and Blue Ridge Mountains, the old ballads, lonesome love songs, and hoedowns echo through the upland South into the hills of Arkansas and Oklahoma. There in the Ozarks, the Northern and Southern families swap tunes and make a marriage.

The Texas cowboys roll the little doughies north to Montana, singing Northern ballads with a Southern accent. New roads and steel rails lace the Southern backwoods to the growl and thunder of Negro chants of labor — the axe songs, the hammer songs, and the railroad songs. These blend with the lonesome hollers of levee-camp mule skinnners to create the blues, and the blues, America’s *cante hondo*, (see **page 23 of this installment in this series — FWK**) uncoils its subtle, sensual melancholy in the ear of all the states, then all the world.

The blues roll down the Mississippi to New Orleans, where the Creoles mix the musical gumbo of jazz — once a dirty word, but now a symbol of musical freedom for the West. The Creoles add Spanish pepper and French sauce and blue notes to the rowdy tantara of their reconstruction-happy brass bands, stir up the hot music of New Orleans and warm the weary heart of humanity.... These are the broad outlines of America’s folk-song map. The saga of American folk song, the story of the complex forces that shaped these traditions, follows presently.

Each group of settlers in the New World tried to establish a musical community like the one they had left in Europe. They dotted the map with little Swedens, little Lithuanias, little Italies, and so on, while the music of Spain, Portugal, France, Great Britain, and West Africa spread over domains in the western hemisphere. Everywhere in the New World, we find songs that were popular in the days when the colonists set sail from their homelands. Thus, American folk song is, in one aspect, a museum of musical antiquities from many lands. On the other hand, some European folk traditions, particularly

those rooted in village ceremonial, did not long survive in the American melting pot. More will be said of this, but first a word about a tendency for which America is particularly notable — the mixing and blending of various folk strains to produce new forms.

The isolation of colonial and frontier life sometimes had a benign effect upon the traditional arts, which are normally slow to ripen. Here and there in the wilderness, circumstances permitted a cultural pocket to form, where regional or tribal song families could combine to produce a sturdy new breed. The music of Haiti, for instance, shows the mingling of several West African tribal strains; the music of the Southern Appalachians is an Anglo-Scots-Irish synthesis, more British than anything to be heard on those forever disparate isles. Indeed, the pedant may search in vain for a “pure” American folk song. “There just ain’t no such animal.” Our best songs and dances are hybrids, mixtures of mixtures, and this may be the source of their great appeal to a cosmopolitan age and the cause for their extremely rapid development. Folk music, like other arts and sciences, blooms hard by the crossroads.

— *The Folk Songs of North America
in the English Language*

By Alan Lomax

Pages xv to xvi

(For publishing information, see the
final installment in this series.)

***Folk Music* “Writ Small”**

But there is *another* use of the term “Folk Music” which refers to the Folk Music Revival of the late 1950s and early 1960s, when scholars finished research begun by Alan Lomax and his father, John, in the 1920s and 1930s which uncovered and committed to writing and recording some of these old, old songs from the earliest days of the colonization of North America. Then, young, talented singers and musicians started performing these songs for the American public. *This* is the “Folk Music” that people, such as, say, Leland Rucker and I, refer to when *we and others of our generation, The Baby Boomers*, use the term. And *this* is the “Folk Music” of which John Stewart — alongside many others — was a part.

But the Folk Music Revival of the late 1950s and early 1960s led to a deep schism, a separation-into-camps of sorts among American Folk Music *aficionados* — The Folk Music Purists and The Folk Music Commercial Revivalists.

And so, while it might seem odd to begin a 500-page essay on John Stewart with 30 pages devoted to Woody Guthrie and Bob Dylan, one must — like Dorothy and Toto taking that first step onto the Yellow Brick Road to find the Emerald City and the Great and Powerful Wizard of Oz and, eventually, their way *back to Kansas* — “...start at the beginning...” To understand fully the value of John Stewart’s body of work, some *context* must be provided as to the times, the moving river in which he stood. The

discussion that follows will provide not only a good point of departure for understanding the important distinctions among all the above-mentioned terms that are associated with Folk Music but also a backdrop against which to silhouette and discern — if even only by contrast — the contributions to the American Folk Music Tradition for which John Stewart will, I hope, be remembered.



[The song “Like a Rolling Stone”] was taken to the country at large — the factual country, as it was in that noisy, murderous, idyllic summer of 1965, and the imagined country, which Dylan would map on *Highway 61 Revisited*, which was released on August 30, just in time for everyone to go back to real life.

The first step was Dylan’s performance at the Newport Folk Festival, where, over the two previous years, surrounded by contemporary hit-makers like Joan Baez and Peter, Paul, and Mary, legendary names from the founding blues and country records of the 1920s and ’30s, among them Son House, Mother Maybelle Carter, Skip James, Roscoe Holcomb, Clarence Ashley, Mississippi John Hurt, and Dock Boggs, and such guardians of the tradition as the songster and banjoist Pete Seeger and the folklorist Alan Lomax, [Bob Dylan] had emerged as the biggest draw and the most mystical presence. Dylan’s friend Paul Nelson was at the time a critic for his own *Little Sandy Review* in Minneapolis and for *Sing Out!* the house organ of the folk movement, as he put it in 1975, posing as a private eye for the Watchtower Detective Agency and running down Dylan’s biography for prospective clients “looking for a hero” to promote. “In the mid-Sixties, Dylan’s talent evoked such an intense degree of personal participation from both his admirers and detractors that he could not be permitted so much as a random action. Hungry for a sign, the world used to follow him around, just waiting for him to drop a cigarette butt. When he did, they’d sift through the remains looking for significance. The scary part is they’d find it.”

Also at Newport in 1965 was the Paul Butterfield Blues Band, whose appearance as a white-led electric blues band led to a fight between Albert Grossman, who was managing them as well as Dylan and Peter, Paul, and Mary, and Alan Lomax, who had introduced Butterfield’s band on its own stage as a fraud and a joke. “I was cheering,” Michael Bloomfield wrote in 1977. “I said, ‘Kick that ass, Albert.’” Dylan asked Bloomfield to find him a band, and, along with Al Kooper, Bloomfield recruited drummer Sam Lay and bassist Jerome Arnold from the Butterfield band, and pianist Barry Goldberg. They rehearsed overnight; the next evening, July 25, they took the stage. “I was wearing Levi’s, a button-down shirt, and a sports coat,” Bloomfield said. “The black guys from the Butterfield band were wearing gold shoes and had processes. Dylan wore Rock ‘n’ Roll clothes: black leather jacket, yellow pin shirt without the tie. And he had a Fender Stratocaster. He looked like someone from *West Side Story*.”

“The audience was booing and yelling, ‘Get rid of the electric guitar,’” Nelson reported at the time. There were catcalls and screams and shouts and

cheers. The band played a fierce “Maggie’s Farm,” with Bloomfield leading the way, and a clattering “Phantom Engineer,” a song that would turn up under another title and in an entirely different mode on *Highway 61 Revisited*; in between was “Like a Rolling Stone,” already all over the radio, which escaped from its creators. They couldn’t find the song; it lumbered and groaned, until finally it fell back into its beginnings as a waltz and Dylan gave up singing the song and began declaiming it, as if it were a speech. As music, it was a non-event; after Elvis Presley’s third, above-the-waist appearance on the Ed Sullivan show, in 1957, and The Beatles’ debut there in 1964, as a performance, it has grown into perhaps the most storied event in the history of modern popular music.

It has since become weirdly fashionable to claim that there was no booing — or, if one admits that there was less-than-pleasant noise coming from the audience during and between the songs, at least no condemnation of Dylan’s new music in that form. The sound was too loud, some say, and people, especially the elite of the folk movement, seated up front, who, the argument goes, were inexplicably familiar with the technical side of amplified music, were simply calling for a better mix. Or the sound was not loud enough. Or people in the back, misunderstanding the constructive criticism offered by the people in the front, and not wanting to appear uninformed, imitated what they mistakenly took to be boos and thus drowned out the helpful suggestions.

Or people were booing because Dylan played only three songs, which is imaginable, though that doesn’t account for people booing before the band finished and left. Or, as Geoff Muldaur has recently argued, people in the folk movement were booing because Bob Dylan was playing bad Rock ’n’ Roll, and they knew good Rock ’n’ Roll from bad and appreciated the former. Or, as David Hajdu implied in 2001 implied in his hagiography of the sixties novelist, Don Juan, and Dylan imitator Richard Farina, the whole thing was a fraud cooked up after the fact by Dylan and his sycophants as a publicity stunt.

There was no controversy at the time as to whether or not the crowd booed Bob Dylan. The only controversy was over the music itself, and the controversy was not over whether it was good Rock ’n’ Roll or bad Rock ’n’ Roll. The music was the cigarette butt, and people made up their minds about its significance on the spot.

It was the first time the singer known for his vagabond’s guitar and hobo harmonica had performed with a Rock ’n’ Roll band since high school. One of his first original songs, written in Hibbing [Minnesota] in 1958, was “Hey, Little Richard,” which can be heard in James Marsh’s 1993 television documentary *Tales of Rock ’n’ Roll: Highway 61 Revisited*, with a scratchy home tape of the tune running under an outside shot of what in 1958 was Dylan’s second-floor room in the Zimmerman house, so that the song appears to be coming right out of the window. “Little Richard, ooooooo, Little Richard,” Dylan shouts, hammering a piano. “Little Richard gonna’ find it out — Little Richard.” But Little Richard was not Woody Guthrie, Bob Dylan’s first folk music hero, troubador of the dispossessed, poet of the Great Depression, ghost of the American highway, a man blown by the wind and

made out of dust. Little Richard, though he was for a time someone millions of people actually wanted to hear, was not Of the People; Little Richard was a freak, a foot of pomade, a pound of makeup, and purple clothes. Little Richard was Rock 'n' Roll, and in 1961, when Bob Dylan would offer the scenemakers in Village folk clubs sneering parodies of doo-wop and teenage laments ("I'm gonna' kill my parents, he bumbled in "Acne," as Ramblin' Jack Elliott supplied backing doo-wahs, "because they don't understand") — or in 1964, when at his Halloween concert at Philharmonic Hall Dylan pretended he didn't know "Leader of the Pack" was by the Shangri-Las and not the Marvelettes, since obviously anything in the Top 40 was interchangeable with anything else — or in 1965, to some of the people in the crowd at Newport, Rock 'n' Roll was pandering to the crowd, cheapening everything that was good in yourself by selling yourself to the highest bidder, putting advertising slogans on your back if that's what it took. "To the folk community," said Bloomfield, who had been part of it, "Rock 'n' Roll was greasers, heads, dancers, people who got drunk and boogied. Lightnin' Hopkins had made electric records for 12 years, but he didn't bring his electric band from Texas. No, sir, he came out at Newport like they had just taken him out of the fields, like the tar baby."

Promising an acoustic guitar, and nobody else, Peter Yarrow of Peter, Paul, and Mary got the audience to call Dylan back to the stage. He sang "Mr. Tambourine Man" and "It's All Over Now, Baby Blue" — "a song," Nelson wrote, "that I took to be his farewell to Newport," and in fact Bob Dylan would not appear there again for 37 years.... "In penance — in penance! — Dylan put on his old Martin and played," Bloomfield said in 1977, his disgust as full as it was 12 years before. "Dylan should just have given them the finger."

— *Like a Rolling Stone: Bob Dylan at the Crossroads*
An Explosion of Vision and Humor That Forever Changed Pop Music
By Greil Marcus
Pages 153-158
(For publishing information, see the final installment in this series.)

Purists and Revivalists

As I hinted at in the introduction to this section, the schism among fans of Folk Music that drove Bob Dylan off the stage at the Newport Folk Festival in 1965 when he appeared playing electric guitar and backed by most of the Paul Butterfield Blues Band themselves, of course, all amped up — and which prompted boycotts of his concerts in England and cries of "Judas!" from those who did attend — was not the *first* Great Divide in Folk Music. The *first* Civil War in Folk Music was between the older guard, The Folk Music Purists, and the younger wave of new performers engaged in performing and reviving — and, in most cases, updating — the native music of the United States, The Folk Music Commercial Revivalists.

The Folk Music Purists *despised* the Folk Music Commercial Revivalists. The Folk

Music Purists decried the Folk Music Commercial Revivalists as *fakes*, pretenders, *poseurs* who had watered down the raw, gritty *real* thing that had originated in the hills and the backwoods of the country and was the *true* voice of the common people of America. In contrast, the Folk Music Commercial Revivalists largely were *urban* people — especially Peter, Paul and Mary — and, by and large, *White Northerners*, and middle-to-upper class or sons and daughters of the middle and upper classes (dare we say it — even *Jewish!*) who had never known a day of slavery, poverty, or oppression in their lives.

There was no way, to The Folk Music Purist mind, that these Folk Music Commercial Revivalists could feel or reproduce *the real thing* — and commentators of The Folk Music Purist stripe (usually, they were a generation or two older than the Revivalist performers) did little to conceal their snootiness about this subject. *They alone* were the inheritors of *true* Folk Music, *they alone* were the guardians of the *real* Folk Tradition in America, and these new performers were ruining it for everyone. Unless you *actually* came from the hollows of Appalachia and sang with a high, nasally voice, unless you *actually* hailed from the Mississippi Delta and your ancestors had *actually* all been slaves or sharecroppers, unless you had *actually* spent half your life working in a coal mine, unless you were *actually* a cowboy, unless you were *actually* a logger in the northwest or *actually* a Cajun in the southeast, the music you sang was not Folk Music. It was a pale, *ersatz*, disingenuous imitation, whose only motivation was to, on one hand, rob these poor folk of their contributions to history and, on the other, water down their *genuine* American Folk Music. The Folk Music Purists were sort of the Daughters of the American Revolution of Folk Music, and, to them, The Folk Music Commercial Revivalists were Folk Music's New Deal, New Frontier, Liberal, Pinko, Rooskie-Marxist-Leninist-Communists.

By contrast, the snobs who booed Dylan off the stage at Newport in 1965 were *young people* who considered Dylan's fellow Folk Music Commercial Revivalist contemporaries the *real* Folk singers — Joan Baez, Peter, Paul, and Mary, The Kingston Trio, The Chad Mitchell Trio, The Limeliters, The Clancy Brothers and Tommy Makem and many others, several of whom had helped bring Dylan to prominence by being the first to record his original compositions. These young people were booing not because Dylan was being “too commercial,” that is, *making money* off of Folk Music, but because he had “gone electric,” because he had forsaken the basic *acoustic-guitar orientation* that had defined Folk Music — in both its original, native form and in The Folk Music Revival from its earliest days.

To *these* Pholque Pharisees, the above-named Folk Music Commercial Revivalists *were* the real thing, and this perception, of course, amounted to a simple generational difference. It took the paternalistic whimpering and condescending obsequiousness of Joan Baez and Peter Yarrow to calm down the Newport Folk Festival crowd by promising that “We’re going to have Bob come back out — *with just his acoustic guitar* — and do a few more numbers.” (If the two older camps, The Folk Music Purists and The Folk Music Commercial Revivalists, had anything in common, it was their dislike of Rock ’n’ Roll. I remember being surprised, as a teenager, at the level of vitriol in the liner

notes on a [probably the first] Peter, Paul, and Mary album. It said that, “Before Paul Stookey joined Peter, Paul, and Mary, he played in — of all things, Ugh! — *a Rock ‘n’ Roll band!*”)

Folk Music as an Oral Tradition

The truth of the matter is that, before mankind invented audio recording technology, the Folk Music Tradition of *any* country was, of necessity, an *oral* tradition. The songs were passed from singer to singer, region to region, and generation to generation *by someone listening to someone else singing the songs, trying to remember them, and reproducing them for someone else*. This, of course, accounts for the many versions of the same song over many years and in different parts of the country. Memory fails, singers get creative, and presto! The song morphs slightly from its original version. This is an essential ingredient of what, in the literature surrounding this topic, is called the *Folk Music Process* or, more simply, *The Folk Process*.

Folk songs were songs sung by common people, for the benefit of other common people in their immediate community. Entire generations would pass before the lyrics of some old songs were even written down, and even more time would pass before anyone thought of treating them seriously and scoring them — that is, writing out sheet music for a song. This country will never be able to repay the father-and-son team (whom I have quoted already, above) for recognizing this music for what it was and treating it as important enough to do serious research on and to commit it to writing and sheet music: John Avery Lomax (1867-1948), who “...broke the trail...” in the words of his son, Alan (1915-2002), who took up in the 1930s and 1940s where his father was beginning to leave off.

This is all by way of saying that Folk Music, in the purest, most basic use of the term, was not conceived of originally as “entertainment.” It was not *self-conscious*. It just *was*.

It was just a tradition of people doing something that they had learned from someone else. It was not material written by “show-business people” for the “show business.” There *was* no “show business,” as we conceive of it today. Europe and America were well into the 19th century before the phenomenon we call “show business” developed as a separate, recognizable entity.

We probably owe the fact that Folk Music could be construed as having *entertainment value for other people* — people outside the singers’ original native regions, the ones who themselves did not sing or play Folk songs — to the development of traveling minstrel shows: You know, groups like the *original* — not the “New” — Christie Minstrels.

Bridging the Gap: Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger

But if there can be one, single Folk Music figure *in modern times* about whom it can be said with authority that he was *the* bridge between Folk Music in its original, pure form

and the Folk Music Revival of the second half of the 20th century — *an individual* who is most widely recognized for re-popularizing Folk Music, for keeping the old songs alive and in the public eye/ear and for using established Folk Music forms to compose his own lyrics to comment on the history and mores of his own time and society — his name would be Woody Guthrie (1912-1967).

Besides his own autobiography, *Bound for Glory*, there have been volumes written about this seminal figure in the history of our country's native music, and I will not pretend to cover all that ground again here.

But, to my mind, one of the most important aspects that Guthrie brought to Folk Music was the fact that he *used* it. He used music — which, up until then, was little more than *entertainment* (and in this, it belonged to the class of *palliatives* or *opiates* that Communism said *religion* was to the masses embracing the Capitalist mindset) to comment on the social issues of his day, to give voice to people who had no bully pulpit, the downtrodden and disenfranchised, *common people* of his times — and Woody Guthrie's times were, to say the least, fertile ground for social issues.

Consider what momentous changes were wrought in the 55-year span that 1912 to 1967 represents. The world was changing. Big business grew ever bigger. Society was stratifying daily into ever-more-distinct classes (with the Middle Class being the growth leader). Labor unions were gaining power as a response and counterbalance to the growing dehumanizing power of the industrialists and their near-enslavement of the working class. Communism was born. Fascism arose. Twice, the entire world found itself embroiled in war (and that's not counting Korea or Viet Nam). Assassination gained favor as a political tool. The movement of people off of farms into cities to work at factories occurred simultaneously with the Dust Bowl and Great Depression following the stock market crash of 1929 to change the face of the American experience — less agrarian, more urban — and brought a new look and a different reality to everyday life in the United States. And then it changed again in the post-World-War-Two era, when people started *leaving* the cities and moving to the outlying areas, spawning a new suburban culture that, in turn, created problems of its own.

And Woody Guthrie was kind of the Great Peoples' Commentator on it all — truly, as Marcus Greil referred to him, “...*a man blown by the wind and made out of dust, ghost of the American highway...the poet of the Great Depression....*”

All this, however, is not to say that social commentary had never been a part of Folk Music before Guthrie's heyday in the 1930s and 1940s. To be sure, it has been said that the two primary functions of *any* kind of music — but especially of Folk Music — is to evoke for the listener a sense of security by reminding him of his origins — his *place* — and to give a voice to those who had none. (See the section “***The Literature of Locale/The Prose and Poetry of Place: The American Literary Milieu of the First Half of the 20th Century,***” in a later installment in this series, INTERLUDE #1: “***Just Imagine ...***” and “***On the Importance of Influences***” — FWK.)

The mass of the colonists were poor country folk, carriers of traditional

melodies. Many were rebels, fleeing from political persecution and longing to express their feelings openly. Thus, a note of social protest rang through native American balladry, and the lives and problems of the common people became its main concern.

— *The Folk Songs of North America
in the English Language*

By Alan Lomax

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(For publishing information, see the final
installment of this series.)

But, even though Woody Guthrie didn't *invent* social protest as a legitimate role for Folk Music, he is *the* authentic evolutionary link back to the days before Folk Music became popular, and it is Woody Guthrie, ultimately, who started a process in motion that culminated in the widespread popularity of this country's original music. There were others, of course, from the earliest days of Guthrie's "career" (his musical experience was not so much a *career* as it was simply his *life*) who immediately recognized the importance of what Guthrie was doing and who themselves set about exploring and performing this music.

So, yes, there were others in addition to Woody Guthrie who aided and abetted the short-lived Folk Music Revival of the 1930s and 1940s. I'm thinking especially here of Pete Seeger, but there were others, too. Someday, I'll locate the photo I once saw of Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger, and Burl Ives all stretched out, forming a sort of triangle, on what appears to be the floor of a railroad boxcar, asleep, in a triangular truss cross-beam fashion, each with his head resting on the stomach of the preceding guy. They are all very young. Since someone was there to take a photo, it is probably *not* taken in an *actual* boxcar/riding-the-rails moment. But the existence of the photo speaks to a kind of Royal Folk Triumvirate (I'm sure both Guthrie and Seeger would have preferred to use a more Russian-Pinko word like *troika*), a hard-travelling knot of friends who were determined to keep this music alive for future generations.

(God, I *love* Pete Seeger! Every time I get a little drunk and I happen to tune into the middle of a Public Broadcasting System television program on Pete Seeger or his legacy [as I did tonight, Friday, March 6, 2009], I hope that it's not being aired in commemoration of Seeger's death [tonight, I was relieved to see *current* shots of Pete, sitting and holding his banjo like a scepter, like a shepherd would lean on his staff, like a classical god would hold his trident, doing his part to raise funds for PBS; even in this mundane task, he was engaging and ingenuous]. It just touches me so deeply — the profundity of his convictions, the depth of his beliefs.

The entire *world* owes a debt so profound to Pete Seeger that it can never be expressed in words. Whether or not he wanted, as has been rumored, to pull the plug on Dylan on that night at Newport in 1965, he was the *real thing* — there will never be another "banjoist" like him. He was not only an incredible picker — six-string and twelve-string as well as the five-string banjo and other traditional folk instruments — but a terrifically talented

singer and songwriter whose honest heart and open enthusiasm poured out of every performance he ever gave. He was the figurehead, the symbol, of an entire point of view, an entire generation of liberalism, of environmentalism, of peace. He was like a liberal/lefty Doc Watson — he stayed in shape physically to promote his spiritual and political beliefs for as long as physically possible — into his 80s. “*Turn, turn, turn!*” It was all done out of love. “*Yo soy un hombre sincero/y donde crece la palma/antes de morir me quiero/eschar mis versos del alma....*”)

But Woody Guthrie got fed up with the whole “show business” aspect that came along with recording and writing songs and fled the “suits” in New York and headed to the west coast, like Daniel Boone moving further and further West every few years because some “...furriner..., some “...damned Yankee...” had moved to within a hundred miles of him.

Musical McCarthyism and the Work of the Lomaxes

I read Guthrie’s autobiography *Bound for Glory* in London in February 1972, during a two-month stay in the United Kingdom. One passage that still resonates with me today is Guthrie’s chaffing about “...being tucked into a corner at an apartment party in New York City, so that he could be ‘background music’ for socialites who clinked their glasses and chatted over his songs....” I daresay there is not an acoustic performer on the planet who has not had at least one experience like this.

Pete Seeger formed The Weavers with three other middle-class White people and started playing to large, sold-out concert halls. He also came under the scrutiny of the United States government’s House Un-American Activities Committee for his leftist sympathies (“...card-carrying member of the Communist Party...”) in the 1940s, the time when anyone who had even read a Wobbler brochure was considered a Communist fellow-traveler, a Bolshevik sympathizer. (“Wobblies” was the nickname given to the worldwide labor organization, The IWW — The International Workers of the World).

The *other* member of the *troika* in the boxcar photo, Burl Ives, made a successful transformation into a popular singer and actor (he played the part of “Big Daddy” in the screen adaptation of Tennessee Williams’ stage play *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*) and made inroads into the Top 40/popular-song/radio-music market. Who doesn’t remember “Frosty, The Snowman” and “A Little Bitty Tear (Let Me Down)”?

So, truth be told, what I’ve been referring to here as The Folk Music Revival of the late 1950s and early 1960s actually began back in the 1930s with Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger. But it was more or less strangled in its infancy, tamped down by the *Red Scare* — the massive, hysterical witch hunt for Commies in the government and the corresponding “Musical McCarthyism” that accompanied it. This cancer infected Broadway and Hollywood as well, eventually encompassing the entire entertainment industry. That small 1930s and 1940s burst of revival of popularity in Folk Music amounted to nothing more than a simple false start. The times, while they were a-changin’ and producing an atmosphere for Folk Music to regain some relevance, were just not yet right.

Early musical memories: “*Actually Tex Ritter, the Sons of the Pioneers, Hank Williams. There were some Burl Ives records around, and The Weavers, who started the first folk-music scare....*”

**— Leland Rucker
(Quoting John Stewart)
“Jukebox in My Head”
Web Log Posting
Saturday, January 26, 2008
www.lelandrucker.com
[Emphases mine — FWK]**

Selecting the word “scare” to describe the Folk Music Revival’s sputtering false start with Pete Seeger and The Weavers back there in the 1930s and 1940s was anything but a random, throwaway, stab-in-the-dark choice of words on John Stewart’s part. It was a carefully considered, very ingenious *play* on words — one which reflected not only his very sharp linguistic skills but a thorough understanding of history *and* an acute sense of literary parallelism and irony.

It was during Woody Guthrie’s heyday, the 1930s, 1940s, and early 1950s, that, first John Lomax, and then, his son, Alan Lomax, did the majority of their work. They sifted through old archives and libraries, listened to old Folk Music on some of the scratchy first records ever made, and themselves went out “into the field” — the hollows and backwaters and hidden valleys of the countryside from coast to coast. Carrying their notebooks and big, bulky acetate tape recorders, they were bent on capturing some of this old American music before it disappeared completely, before it was lost in the mist of time, simply because no one of the present generation had ever heard it, or, if they had, could not reproduce it.

Social Issues + Changing Demographics = A Petrie Dish for the Revival of American Folk Music in the Late 1950s

And that brings us up to the 1950s, the time that John Stewart was talking about when he said what he did about Elvis Presley’s real contribution to musical history and the impact Elvis had on American society when he arrived on the scene. Stewart said that Elvis made R&B “...White...” and “...palatable...” to millions of people — the great, growing-in-numbers by the year, sprawling, largely White American Middle Class that both represented and helped shape American thought and behavior — who would otherwise never had been exposed to this kind of music, simply because, well, it had been, up to that point, been made chiefly by “Negroes” — people of a different race. And, in those days — and, sadly, still in ours — racial attitudes, racial segregation, racial discrimination, racial prejudice shaped many, many areas of American thinking and societal action, including exposure to and the consumption/purchasing of artistic and cultural artifacts, including music. The young people of those decades and generations, of course, had been taught by their parents that Blues, Rhythm and Blues, and even Jazz were all “Nigger music.”

For about a 10-year period, from the late 1940s to the late 1950s, military people who had returned from World War II and the Korean conflict began enrolling in large numbers in colleges and universities across America, taking advantage of the GI Bill, which provided benefits to veterans for housing and education. This period coincided with the publication of much of the Lomaxes' and others' (like John Jacob Niles' and Cecil Sharp's) work, and Folk Music suddenly took on the shape of an area of academic study.

Young, mostly White, academics were intrigued by these findings, and a new generation started fanning out across the country to search out still-living legendary Folk and Blues figures like Elizabeth ("Libby") Cotton and Mississippi John Hurt. Al Wilson, of the 1970s Roots/Electric Country band Canned Heat, was one of these geeks in short-sleeved white shirts, horned-rim glasses, and pocket protectors. Appalled by the snubbing and the lack of recognition that these artists were suffering and hell-bent on righting this wrong, Wilson single-handedly convinced Son House to come out of retirement. In this extreme example, it is said that Wilson literally had to teach House his songs all over again. Slowly, the perception — and the visibility — of Folk Music started to change, aided and abetted by the confluence of several other historical, sociological, and economic phenomena.

First, this was the period of the first stirrings of the Civil Rights movement, which would, within the next 10 years, become *the* most important development in the history of race relations in the United States since The Emancipation Proclamation, the flight of Southern Blacks into the Northern industrial cities, the "Separate but Equal" foolishness of the Supreme Court's attitude in *Plessy vs. Ferguson*, and *Brown vs. the Topeka Board of Education*. This struggle became the backdrop and the point around which much social protest of the time, would coalesce; it was ready-made, perfect — in its far-reaching implications and in its timing — to become a major subject matter for a new generation of Folk songwriters. (But it was by no means the only one. Shel Silverstein and Malvina Reynolds, among others, found much to lampoon about the grey and colorless Eisenhower years, steeped in conformity and the pervasive "Company Man" mindset — without ever going *near* the race question.) Indeed, the bland Cold War Truman-Eisenhower years provided as much fodder for social comment for the Folk Music Commercial Revivalists as the changes in the global — and American — situation did for Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger.

Second, the Baby Boom children — the enormous, most statistically significant demographic bulge in the history of United States economics — entered adolescence. With the mini-recessions of the early 1960s still a few years in the future and the economic engines of the country stoked to full steam by post-War prosperity, these kids were now being given allowances and working summer jobs that allowed them to become a new, emerging economic sector and factor in the marketplace. They had spending money — disposable income — and their numbers were legion. And one of the first markets in which they chose to spend it was in the record market, the one that, ever since 1956 and the emergence of Elvis Presley and Rock 'n' Roll, had proven itself to be very viable, indeed.

Third, when all those academics returned from their “field studies,” they were faced with the question of what to do with all their newfound revelations and findings. Slowly, Folk Music began to emerge from the shadows of academia, where it was regarded largely as a subset of sociology or American Culture Studies. Slowly, some young people from university centers all over the country, but mostly in the North and East, began to show some interest in Folk Music as something that had real *entertainment value* to it. They wanted to *learn* the songs and *play* them, sing them, not just study them and put them away into a card catalogue or onto a bookshelf somewhere. They wanted to *perform* Folk Music for audiences, and a thriving coffeehouse and college-campus circuit developed from coast to coast for Folk performers to play in.

The Inevitable: Folk Music Becomes a Business

And then, of course, the inevitable happened. Smart businesspeople saw a niche to be exploited, and the Folk Music Revival recording industry was born. The group that John Stewart would join in the early 1960s, The Kingston Trio, released “Tom Dooley” (which, according to the Lomaxes, is based on one of the oldest folk songs in America, “Tom Dula”) as a single in 1958, and the rest, as they say, is history.

This is what gave rise to the *first* division, the *first* schism among *aficionados* of Folk Music, leaving them split into The Folk Music Purist Camp and The Folk Music Commercial Revivalist Camp (*see above, pages 5-10 — FWK*).

As long as Folk Music remained in its academic Ivory Tower, The Folk Music Purists were happy. Everything seemed OK until Folk Music started making inroads into Top 40 AM radio programming, and Folk singers actually *started making money*.

Popular music of the year [1959] was made slightly more interesting by the inclusion of occasional Folk tunes in the ranks of best sellers. Among these were “Tom Dooley,” “Stagger Lee,” “The Battle of New Orleans,” and “He’s Got the Whole World in His Hands.”

— *The Encyclopedia of American Facts and Dates*
By Gordon Carruth
Page 608
(For publishing information, see the final installment in this series.)

Bob Dylan and John Stewart: Strangers on the Same Train

Because each arrived under vastly different circumstances (Dylan as a loner, solo performer and composer whose songs were first popularized by other artists — and Stewart as a cog in the group machinery of The Kingston Trio), it is easy to overlook one, singularly undeniable historical fact and chronological synchronicity:

Bob Dylan and John Stewart came on the Folk scene at about the same time. Dylan’s

first album was released in 1961, the same year Leland saw John Stewart on TV with The Cumberland Three and the year he replaced Dave Guard in The Kingston Trio.

The separate-but-simultaneous routes they took as they entered the Folk Music arena and began their separate contributions to it diverged widely. And this divergence says a lot about the differences between the two men and between their individual perception and apprehension of the Folk Music tradition as well as about what form their separate places in it might take.

The face that this divergence took on was along two separate — but related — lines:

1. Each artist's understanding of the *narrative element* — sung or spoken — in music generally but especially in the Folk Music tradition.
2. The speed with and degree to which each artist brought changes to this element — and the abruptness or severity with which they broke from it.

1. The Narrative Element

So, what, exactly, *is* the “narrative element” in music?

It's really no different from the element of the same name in literature. “To narrate” means “to give an account or description of,” “to tell a story.” A “narration” is “the recounting of an event or series of events; the act of telling a story.”

Some songs do not “tell a story.” A “story” has a distinct beginning, middle, and ending, usually some characters, always some action — events that unfold and proceed, that propel the story along (a “plot,” if you will) — and maybe even some dialogue. There might even be a *denouement* of sorts, in which the narrator sums it all up and even tries to point out a lesson to be learned, or moral.

For instance, The Beatles' “I Want to Hold Your Hand” (even though it has a *narrator* — someone speaking in the first person) is *not* a “story.” It consists simply of a series of expressions of feelings, with none of the components listed above necessary to make a “story.”

Peter, Paul, and Mary's “Puff, the Magic Dragon,” on the other hand, *is* a “story.” It has characters, they have names, things happen, events unfold, changes in the situation come about, the story winds down, and, finally, it ends. And, oh, yes — it has a *narrator*.

Thus, the *narrator* is the *person telling the story*, and, when a song does *not* tell a story, it will usually *not* have a narrator. It *may* have one (like “I Want to Hold Your Hand” has one), but it doesn't *need* one, and no “story” is being told.

A narrator can be one of at least two different kinds:

1. *A personal, involved narrator.* This narrator usually speaks about the action in the story from a first-person perspective or point of view. He says, “*When I woke up this morning, you were on my mind.*” He can say things about other, more overtly third-party characters, like “Bill fell dead on the floor,” or some such, but, at some point, it will be made clear that the person telling the story *is himself present in the action and involved in the story*. He is called *personal* or *involved* precisely because he speaks from a vantage point of being *inside* the tale.

One of the most famous examples of this kind of narrator is in Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick*, an epic, very lengthy novel, in which the narrator’s position, perspective, and point of view are clearly established beginning with the very first sentence in Chapter One: “*Call me Ishmael...*” The litmus test for a personal, involved, first-person narrator is this: Could the person telling the story *possibly* know about the events that unfold if he was not present during the action? Ishmael goes out to sea with Captain Ahab in search of the Great White Whale and is recounting the epic saga for the reader — either having kept a journal/diary of the events as they were unfolding or writing them down later, safely back on land, in his retirement years, safe, dry, landlocked, still physically capable of thinking and writing, and with some time on his hands.

2. *An impersonal, detached narrator.* This narrator *never* speaks from a first-person (“I”) point of view, because he’s *not* part of the story, does *not* take part in the action, and is *not* a character in the play. He *always* speaks from a third-person (“he,” “she,” “it,” “they”) perspective: Sometimes he will speak simply and directly: “Bill did this, and Susie did that...”

But, sometimes, he will be quoting other, outside parties speaking: “‘*There must be some way out of here*’/Said the joker to the thief...” Sometimes a short, introductory framing device will momentarily mislead the listener or reader into believing that this will be a first-person account, but it turns out to be simply a necessary literary device *to set up* the telling of a story, and then it’s gone for good, never to return — the real point of view is a definite third-person one: “*I’ll tell you a story ’bout a man name Jed...*” The narrator never inserts himself into the story again. This kind of narrator is called *impersonal* or *detached* precisely because he exists *outside of the limits of the story, not inside*.

“Detached” can be understood as “disembodied” — and, indeed, the name sometimes given to this kind of narrator is an *omniscient* narrator. He seems to be kind of floating over the action as he describes it and what the characters are doing and saying, looking down from high above it all, but he himself never appears as a presence or figure in the song or story.

Sometimes impersonal narrators reveal who they are and how they came to know about all this action that they were not involved in — and sometimes they *don’t* reveal this. When they don’t, that is a *true* “impersonal/detached/disembodied/omniscient” narrator. When the song or story is over, the listener or reader has absolutely not a clue about who it was who told the story, and *it doesn’t matter* — it’s as it should be. The meaning of the story, its lesson, meaning, significance, or moral suffers not one bit; it loses nothing from

the lack of identification of the narrator. Indeed, the tale may even gain something from the complete anonymity of the narrator, in that the focus on the characters and actions is made all the more razor sharp without having to insert information about the narrator.

In the most effective storytelling, the narrator never gets in the way or takes the focus off the tale itself.

The other defining characteristic of a “narrative” that I want to emphasize is that *it usually makes sense*. That is, it proceeds in an orderly fashion, with respect especially to the implied chronology it’s presenting and the setting in which the action is purported to be taking place — the infamous “Verities of Time and Space” in the literary-critical vocabulary. Only rarely are events presented out of order. Rather, the characters are introduced, one by one, made to have some interaction among them — that is, *events take place* — and the story moves forward in time, just as real life moves forward in time. The reader or listener always knows where he is in the story. And only rarely — only in the works of the most gifted writers — does the point of view *successfully* shift from one perspective to another. The reader or listener always knows who is doing the speaking and acting. Common, but effective, literary storytelling devices like *foreshadowing* or *flashback* sometimes are employed — in songs, poems, short stories, and novels — but, by and large, a “narrative” is a forward-moving, logical *sequence of events* that conforms to the verities of time and space. Sometimes, dates and years are actually mentioned in a song.

Singing vs. Speaking: Bob Dylan, Woody Guthrie, and the “Talking Blues”

Both John Stewart and Bob Dylan have written many, many songs that are *narrative* in nature — that is, they tell a story. And, as I mentioned in my set-up for this section, in music, a narrative can be either sung or spoken. (In the written word, in literature — especially in poetry — “to sing” and “to speak” have often been used interchangeably. The late American poet John Neihardt called the individual, lengthy epic poems that comprise the separate parts of his masterwork, *A Cycle of the West*, “songs.” Whitman writes “*I celebrate myself, and sing myself....*” and “*...I sing the body electric....*” Virgil begins *The Aeneid* with the words “*Of arms and the man I sing....*”)

Thus, in the literary vocabulary of both Folk Music and poetry, the line between singing and speaking is often a blurred, thin one.

*I stress this because it is this idea — mixing media, consciously using the spoken word, which is most often associated with poetry readings or the theatre, stage plays, and scripts, as an element in songwriting to add emotion and drama — that is one of the factors that most clearly defines John Stewart’s valuable contribution to the evolution of American music and for which he will, with any luck, will be remembered. As much as his emphasis on adding drums to songs written on an acoustic guitar radically impacted the musical part of his work (see a later installment in this series, CHAPTER FIVE: **The Lonesome Picker Sings From His Heart — and Into Mine — FWK**), this mixing in of devices from a realm that exists outside the strictly musical domain — from the*

realm of *literature* — into his songwriting impacted *both* the musical *and* the *lyric-writing* part of his work. (*See a later installment in this series, CHAPTER TWO: False Start/Mixed Signals — FWK.*)

Speaking the lyrics — as opposed to singing them — had been an established Folk Music “form,” part of the music’s tradition, for a long, long time before either John Stewart or Bob Dylan came along. It was called the “Talking Blues.” But it is how each of these artists regarded the idea of “speaking the lyrics” and handled it in their own work that clearly points up the difference in their approaches.

Woody Guthrie — in his characteristic way of using an established form as a vehicle for social protest or comment — used this form to talk about, among other subjects, the widespread Dustbowl conditions that enveloped the American Plains states in the 1930s. He wrote “Talkin’ Dustbowl Blues” in California, after he had moved there in the late ’30s — just about the time John Stewart was being born there. About the origins and spread of this Folk Music form, Alan Lomax said,

The American taste for darn fool ditties and for crazy, surrealist, and rather cynical humour, culminates in the Talking Blues genre. Such songs began to appear on hillbilly recordings in the ’20s and ’30s, and it was from them that Woody Guthrie took his inspiration. The present early text shows that the Talking Blues is ultimately, of Negro derivation.

Most of the stanzas come the *Po’ Mournner* set, the barbershop quartet song in which the leader intones humorous verses against a background of rhythmic chords. Speaking in rhythm over a sung accompaniment is a common device among Negro preachers and blues singers (Leadbelly, for instance), and some early records exist of Negroes “talking” a story over, or to, their guitars.

The Talking Blues, however, with its delayed climax and its double or triple cracker on the end of the jokes, is a modern, white folk creation, put to the purposes of acid social comment by Woody Guthrie.

Note on Talking Blues:

The banjo or guitar accompaniment for Talking Blues is very simple. You merely “talk” the blues in rhythm against a steady background (usually 2/4 or 4/4 of simple plucking, rhythmic strumming, scratching, or single string picking). Chord progressions are basic and usually in a major key (C and G are especially good). Occasionally the blues chords are played, but the modal and relative minor chords are rarely found in talking blues. The talking is done in a monotonous, somewhat lackadaisical tone of voice, but has upbeats and offbeats, just as if it had a tune.

The last small phrases are done *out* of rhythm with the accompaniment as an afterthought or comment on what has gone before. Variation in the accompaniment is achieved mainly by mixing up (1) chords, (2) bass notes, [and/or] (3) strokes. The guitar continues the rhythm and chord changes even when

the talking stops.

— *The Folk Songs of North America
in the English Language*
By Alan Lomax
Page xxiii
(For publishing information, see the
final installment in this series.)

You *talk* this piece off. They say it's four-four time. If that is out of your calibre, try 38 time or 16 gauge, anything — just play chords and talk.

— Woody Guthrie
Quoted in *The Folk Songs of North America
in the English Language*
By Alan Lomax
Page 434
(For publishing information, see the final
installment in this series.)

This form, the “Talking Blues,” appears again and again in Bob Dylan’s first few albums, and he employs it to great effectiveness. He had clearly mastered the form, and the comparisons to Woody Guthrie that he drew on this basis were genuinely warranted (see especially the priceless and hilarious “Talking World War III Blues”). In this regard, Dylan was truly the successor to Woody Guthrie, the inheritor of his genius and style, and a strong, *deliberate* linkage to the authentic Folk forms of America’s past musical history can be traced from Guthrie to Dylan.

2. To Break Suddenly and Forcefully From a Tradition — or to Gently Extend It

But that word “deliberate” is important to the point I’m about to make here.

The question of *continuity* in the world of creative expression has always been a tricky, two-sided coin. Throughout history, some artists have been commended for their competence in “...working in a certain tradition...,” for continuing and perpetuating a certain creative lineage whose credentials, credibility, and high value have long been solidly established.

Sometimes, this is risky. The reputation of an artist of this sort can rest solely in the hands of the critic to whom it falls to review the artist’s work. *Too much* resemblance to the precedents in the artist’s particular school or genre may expose him to charges of being a mere *imitator* or *copyist*, one who slavishly produces pale, unoriginal reproductions of his master’s techniques. These are not salutary critiques.

On the other hand, some artists have gained reputation and respect for making alterations of varying degree to a technique or tradition, for introducing variations that bring a fresh perspective, changes that *extend* the tradition without damaging, destroying, or ignoring it.

It is through this dialectic of thesis-antithesis-synthesis that new schools of expression gradually come into existence. Critics who *approve* of the changes introduced by artists of this sort confer upon them the favorable title of *innovator*.

But the history of change *vs.* continuity in the world of creativity is not as simple, neat, or tidy as this short summation might suggest. There has always been a rogue, iconoclast element in the creative population, and, invariably, some of them take their experimentation *too far* for the critics' — or the public's — taste. Their work is seen to be devoid of any connection or continuity with the past and, thus, to be *so* different, *so* alien, *so* lacking in any reference points as to present barriers to understanding them or embracing them. These artists' works are often seen as an insult or affront to the tradition with which they had formerly been identified.

But, you know what? Critical and popular tastes — like most other things — *evolve*. Initial criticism of a negative nature isn't always the death sentence it was intended to be, and many, many artists who were less than favorably received at first become very, very famous and very, very rich. Pretty soon, those day-glow soup cans and colored squares hang alongside the Dutch Masters and the French Impressionists in the art galleries, those books which once shocked and outraged now line the library shelves next to the classics, and those records and CDs that were initially condemned as “excessive” or “irrelevant” now fill the bins and racks at the music stores next to the music you have always loved.

Bob Dylan, except for a very short stint as the piano player in Bobby Vee's Rockabilly band back in Fargo/Moorhead, Minnesota/North Dakota, worked in the Folk tradition from the very beginning. He moved to New York City (“The Center,” as John Lennon would call it in the mid-1970s) to pursue his career in the burgeoning coffeehouse scene there. But he lied to early interviewers about his background, where he was from, where he had grown up, and what he had been doing before his move eastward. And that *faux Guthrie* Okie twang that was the signature sound in early Dylan interviews and on his first albums was 100% affected. People from Minnesota don't talk like that.

Dylan *consciously imitated* Woody Guthrie's style. He was self-consciously *trying* to carry on a tradition in those first few albums. He was not *innovating*, not trying to build his own “version of the chair” — or at least add on to an existing version. And the difference is very, very important. Like renowned East Coast disc jockey Peter Wolf said one night on late-night TV in the 1970s while introducing Van Morrison, “There have been many musical *imitators* in our times; now, I'd like to introduce one of the few *innovators* — Van Morrison.”

And, no, John Stewart would not make, as Dylan would in 1967, the obligatory pilgrimage to the New York hospital room where Woody Guthrie lay dying of Hodgkin's disease; this “passing of the torch” gesture is now part of the stuff of Folk Music legend. But this visit came *years* after Dylan had stopped consciously composing and performing in the Woody Guthrie style. Dylan was simply making a kind gesture, one of homage; he knew deep in his heart that Woody was dying, and he wanted this great man to know the debt of gratitude he owed him.

Thus, Bob Dylan did not work so much to gently *extend* the use of the spoken word in the Folk Music tradition so much as to slavishly copy it and make reproductions of it. He took the only thing there was in Folk Music that used spoken word — the Talking Blues — and proved that he could do it as well as Woody Guthrie, the most proficient practitioner of that style that his genre — Folk Music — had ever produced.

Dylan's Musical Evolution: Folk to Folk Blues to Folk Rock

This is not to say that Dylan didn't *eventually* get around to some real, *genuine* innovation — boy, howdy. That came later, *after* all the Talking Blues songs and the social-protest songs in the style of Woody Guthrie, like “Masters of War,” “A Hard Rain's Gonna' Fall,” “The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll,” “With God on Our Side,” “Only a Pawn in Their Game,” and others on those first few albums.

He did make some early *musical* changes that, if you were paying attention, served as a kind of preview of coming attractions for the enormously wide swing his style was about to take. It's kind of like he snuck them in the back door on Folk Music. Speaking strictly musically, the way Dylan changed his style was very subtle. It was done almost in the manner of a failing company that clears out its inventories from its factories virtually overnight or over the weekend in anticipation of announcing to their workers on Monday morning that the company has gone under and that they are out of a job. There were no press releases orchestrated by the considerable Albert Grossman publicity juggernaut, no full-page ads or stories in *Variety*, *Billboard*, or *Cashbox* about Dylan's intentions. All of a sudden, there was a Dylan album that sounded different from any of its predecessors, and it took some — probably most — fans of Folk Music by surprise.

I can remember priding myself on my liberality and open-mindedness when I first heard “Maggie's Farm” and “Subterranean Homesick Blues” (from *Bringing It All Back Home*/March 1965/Columbia Records) in my sophomore year of college (1964-1965). I thought to myself, “Hell. This doesn't sound like Folk Music. Aren't those guitars electric? Aren't those drums and bass in the background? What's to stop me from hearing this as electrified 12-bar Blues or R&B or, even — dare I say it? — Rock 'n' Roll? This seems like a whole new direction for Bob Dylan, and, I must say, it doesn't sound too bad!”

But, I must admit, it took me several listenings to warm up to it. And, it's not like Dylan switched his *musical* style into something *really* weird, like polka or Gregorian chant, or something as radically different from Folk ballads or Talking Blues — “Maggie's Farm” was just an uptempo *Blues* song, after all. Hell, I was from the south side of Chicago — I *knew* what *The Blues* was.

The Blues was America's — and Chicago's — *cante hondo*, as Alan Lomax calls it (*see page 4 of this installment in this series — FWK*). In Spanish, *cante* is, of course, “song.” But *hondo* (sometimes *jondo*) is a little trickier (and it has nothing to do with a 1960s movie starring Paul Newman). By itself, as a simple adjective, used outside any musical context, it means “deep,” “low,” or “profound.” It thus carries with it a connotation of

“basic” or “native” (the *lowest, most fundamental, first, original, primordial*). To be truthful, the first impression I formed upon reading the definition of *hondo* in my *Vox New College Spanish and English Dictionary* was that there was a hint of *irreducibility* in it. But, when used in a musical context — especially in Spain (where Spanish originated, as opposed to Mexico) — it means “music from the province or region of Andalusia (a region of southern Spain on the Mediterranean and Atlantic)” or *gypsy music*. Some Spanish dictionaries add “unspoiled” and “pure” to the definition. In this sense, it means “the absolutely definitive native music of Spain.”

But when Alan Lomax calls The Blues “America’s *cante hondo*,” he is not calling it “Gypsy Music.” Lomax was not trying to associate it with traveling, bandanna’d, mustachioed minstrels playing concertina and violin. He is trying to differentiate it as a *uniquely American creation and contribution — originally composed, played, sung, and transmitted from shore to shore on this continent by traveling commoners — to the wide spectrum of musical forms that are to be found across the globe*. This is, of course, what the musical textbooks are always trying to tell us about jazz — that it is uniquely American in origin. But you’ll have to ask Leland about that one (or listen to one of his shows on Public Radio).

And, besides, Dylan’s albums that contained these newer, more-up-tempo, *bluesy* songs still had a number of tracks that featured just Bob and his acoustic guitar. He hadn’t dumped his older, original style completely. So, it was gradual. Dylan was ushering in his new style and phasing out his old little by little — at least for now.

But I can still remember my slight puzzlement at the lyrics. Who was “Maggie,” why had Dylan been working on her farm, and why didn’t he want to work there any more? Was “Maggie’s Farm” like “Parchman Farm,” the notorious prison work camp in the South? Was this a social protest song about runaway slaves or mistreated convicts — both topics which recurred regularly in Folk Music? Suddenly I realized that I could not immediately interpret the meaning of the lyrics. Understanding the anti-war nature of some of his earlier songs didn’t take a genius — although there had already been a lot of controversy generated over the meaning and the images in “A Hard Rain’s ’Gonna Fall.” But I had chalked up some of the strange expressions in that song as the simple license, the simple liberties of a poet. Metaphor and simile are the natural dwelling places of poets. No one, I rationalized, *ever* understands *everything* a poet says.

Then, within a year, Bob Dylan had slipped a two-megaton bomb underneath the narrative tradition in Folk Music, ran to cover, pushed the plunger, and blown it to smithereens. And he did it virtually overnight, with an abruptness and severity that took away the breath of even the most open-minded of Folk Music fans.

His taking on electrified backing musicians a year previously for the songs mentioned above had prepared me for the fact things were changing. Dylan was beginning to realize that the melding of Rock and Pop musical stylings with Folk was not only possible and plausible, feasible and viable, but was indeed what he was *born to do* and the direction in which he wanted to take his “Folk” Music.

The genre called “Folk Rock” was, indeed, being born simultaneously on both coasts in 1965. Out west, in Los Angeles, my fellow Chicagoan Jim (before he took on his Sufi-Option name, “Roger”) McGuinn, having put down his acoustic six-string guitar and banjo and leaving behind the now-seemingly quaint provinces of backing up the Chad Mitchell Trio, was hooking up with Dylan manager Albert Grossman for some Dylan songs to record with The Byrds (McGuinn, Michael Clarke, Gene Clark, David Crosby, and Chris Hillman) — soaring harmonies, three electric guitars (including McGuinn’s 12-string Rickenbacher), electric bass, drums, and tambourine-playing utility singer. Back in New York, Dylan had company in the Bronx, where John Sebastian and The Lovin’ Spoonful were synthesizing Rock, Folk, Country, Jug Band and R&B for their own special take on this new music. Both of these groups would form sort of a Holy Trinity with Dylan as the forerunners of this new, electrified Folk Music.

But labeling new, emerging genres of music is also a very tricky game, and there’s a tendency and a temptation to oversimplify — if for no other reason that just to get it over with, to get it out, get it down on paper, and to move on to the next point. This leads to all sorts of other problems, and the best way to proceed is with caution and with an open mind — to leave room for interpretation and overlap — instead of rushing to summarize, tidy up, and tie everything up in a neat, little, “labeled” package.

John Stewart’s music can be called a lot of things — and it has — but “Folk Rock” has, to my mind, never been the best “label” to affix to it.² Hell, not even all of Bob Dylan’s music after he started recording and performing with bands — which, some critics say, produced much better results than just Bob as a solo Folkie with just his acoustic guitar — can be called “Folk Rock.”

What is Folk-Rock? In commercial terms, the answer is simple: It’s what happened when Bob Dylan went electric. But that’s not adequate or accurate, not when the liner notes to Elvis Presley’s first album refer to him in terms of “commercial folk music,” and the cover depicts him in a pose reminiscent of no one so much as Josh White.

But all Rock is not Folk-Rock, either, and no one today would argue that Elvis singing Little Richard songs really qualifies (although his “Old Shep” may be another matter). Carl Perkins original “Blue Suede Shoes” is another story. Sun is famed for its echo, but there’s no feeling of distance in this record; you can almost see Perkins’ face an inch or so away from the mic, hear his guitar as if it was in the room. Perkins is restrained, keeping a lot more energy in reserve than, say, Jerry Lee Lewis or Little Richard or Buddy Holly, much less Elvis or even Carl himself on tracks like his revamped rendition of the Blind Lemon Jefferson Folk-Blues “Matchbox.” In the sense that we’ve come to understand the music, Elvis’s version of “Blue Suede Shoes” (which also was a hit) is much more a Rock ’n’ Roll number. But Perkins isn’t singing country, and he sure isn’t making Rhythm and Blues,

²(See **CHAPTER FOUR: *The Lonesome Picker Sings From His Heart — and Into Mine***, a later installment in this series, for a wider discussion of the difficulties of pinning a specific label on John Stewart’s music. — FWK.)

and there's no brand of Pop music that he fits into, either. "Folk-Rock" explains "Blue Suede Shoes" better than anything.

Folk purists would reject Perkins's claim (if he'd ever made it) because he wrote his song as a commercial project, based on observation of a community in which he wasn't a participant. But what about "*La Bamba*," a traditional Mexican *huapango*, a wedding song from Vera Cruz? According to Del-Fi owner/producer Bob Keene, even though Ritchie Valens sang "*La Bamba*" for his friends all the time, he was reluctant to put his Rock 'n' Roll arrangement on tape, because "he was afraid that recording it would demean his culture or something." Valens was probably worried because he'd tampered with the song something fierce, both lyrics and music, so much so that those latter-day Folkies, Los Lobos, had to "correct" his interpretation when they had a hit with it in 1987. They did this so successfully that they dispersed all the manic energy of the Valens version — which, for all we know, may have been driven there by Ritchie's fear that Mexican nationalists would stomp him for demeaning their culture. Valens certainly sounds like he's got *something* dogging him as he utters those final dramatic "*Ba-Ba-Bamba's*."

If Folk-Rock really stemmed from Bob Dylan, though, then the first Folk-Rock hit was almost certainly The Animals' "House of the Rising Sun," a traditional Blues whose arrangement bears telltale signs of having been learned from Dylan's all-acoustic first album. (Dylan learned it from Ur-Folkie Dave Von Ronk, although he remarked in that LP's liner notes, "I'd always known 'Rising Sun' but never really I knew I knew it until I heard Dave sing it." Which only shows how much Dylan had already learned from Little Richard.)

Where The Animals exceeded Dylan was in the amount of sheer dramatic power they found latent in the chords themselves. Alan Price's bold organ and Eric Burdon's howling vocal released all of it, as if they'd connected the ancient tune to a live wire. Problem was, Burdon was far too macho — brattish spawn of New Castle coal miners that he was — to sing the song from a female perspective, as it had always been sung. So he turned the lyric around, portraying the prostitute as a male and, thus, himself as a catamite. Between that and the consequences of a heavy Geordie accent aping an Iron Range Minnesotan aping a New Yorker aping a Mississippi sharecropper, which rendered the lyrics marvelously incoherent, The Animals set a new standard for all future Folk-Rock and Blues-Rock remakes.

Dylan's own "I Want You," on the other hand, isn't Folk-Rock at all. It's a Pop song, and a love song at that, as well as his second-biggest hit of the sixties. What might throw a casual listener off is an image of Folk Music that connects that style to quasi-poetic lyrics and therefore labels all of Dylan's pre-*Nashville Skyline* music "Folk." In fact, these lyrics aren't especially poetic anyway, though they *are* so obscurantist that you can play all kinds of games about what Dylan really means when he sings, "*Now all your fathers, they've gone down/True love, they've been without it/But all their daughters put me down/'Cause I don't think about it.*" Having studied the disc in detail since I was sixteen, I can now state that this most likely means two things: 1) Dylan had found a clever rhyme; 2) he thought about it all the

time, maybe even too much. However, the joyful music, with its kinky organ, rollicking piano, and the loopiest singing Dylan's ever done (as if he found the word "bad" intoxicating all by itself) indicate that he'd actually found a way of getting the proportions about right. Which is not a Folk-Rock virtue, either. But he does make "I Want You" a great Rock 'n' Roll record.

— *The Heart of Rock and Soul:
The 1001 Greatest Singles Ever Made*
By Dave Marsh
Pages 64-66
(Marsh places "I Want You" at #94
out of 1001)
(For publishing information, see the
final installment in this series.)

Dylan's Lyrical Evolution: Blowing It Up and Burning It Down

But *nothing* could have prepared me for the bizarre, mind-bending changes in Dylan's lyric-writing approach. The ways in which he melted down the traditional storytelling mode and transformed it — with an easy, yet uncanny and unfathomable sense of alchemy — into something completely different for me, something I had never experienced, changed my mind forever about the possibilities inherent in pop music — beyond those which simply made you want to dance.

The "stories" in Dylan's new "narrative style" had no beginning, no middle, no *denouement*, no resolution, no end. No traditional progression of events in a chronologically forward motion. Characters drifted in, literally out of nowhere, hung around for a few measures, and were gone, without adding anything to the plot — because there was none. Bizarre surrealist images floated in and out — impossible combinations of words, concepts, time periods — like a William Blake with money to burn and leisure time to explore the fantastic inner reaches of his psyche and not having to worry about making a living as an engraver and supporting his family. Like Cage, Varese, and Satie in lockdown and limitless quantities of opium at their disposal while a cadre of French Symbolists and Surrealists, the Ezra Pound/T. S. Eliot/William Carlos Williams axis, and the American "Beats" — Jack Kerouac, Allan Ginsberg, and William Burroughs — slipped sheaves of lyrics through the slot in their cell door.

But, even under these slippery circumstances, some songs were easier to "understand" than others. If you could wade through the layers of surreal images in songs like "Like a Rolling Stone" and "Positively Fourth Street," they made a kind of bizarre sense: The Revenge of the Nerd, Dylan, with some early critical acclaim and an appearance in London on a BBC television show under his belt, starting to feel his oats, getting a taste of success, realizing that there were more than a few people out there who were receptive to his new approach, to his aggressive re-defining of Folk Music, and now, with more than a little bitterness, telling his jealous, snooty critics, fair-weather friends, and opportunistic ex-girlfriends where to get off.

An icy hipster bitch session, Dylan cutting loose his barbed-wire tongue

at somebody luckless enough to have crossed the path of his desires. When people parody Dylan, they mostly go for the hollowed-out 4:00 AM grouch of “4th Street” — a pure single, never released on any album until *Greatest Hits*. But no imitator has ever captured that wash of organ, those stabbing guitars — or the trickle of venom that lubricates Dylan’s throat, turning what might have been merely nasty in other hands into something brilliantly poisonous.

Lyric He Lived to Regret: “*I wish that, for just one time, you could stand inside my shoes...*”

— *The Heart of Rock and Soul:
The 1001 Greatest Singles Ever Made*
By Dave Marsh
Page 229: “Positively 4th Street”
(Number 326 out of 1001)
(For publishing information, see the
final installment in this series.)

But even this loose kind of referential framework was absent from a song with the weirdness of “Ballad of a Thin Man,” which came across like the musical equivalent of spending a night on your *very* first acid trip in a suite in The Chelsea Hotel packed full of New York’s finest — freaks, hustlers, dwarves, pimps, hookers, bisexuals and circus performers, fugitives from Cirque de Soleil and Fellini movies. Even when a small *part* of a song made some sense, like the refrain to “I Want You” — Boy meets Girl, Boy is horny, Boy says so to Girl — the rest of the song seemed an inexhaustible well of incoherency and improbable juxtapositions of images and concepts, completely unrelated to the comparatively simplistic nature of the refrain. If you’ve never really listened to these lyrics, go back and do so now — you’ll understand immediately what I’m talking about.³

Dylan *exploded* the traditional Folk Music narrative like Thomas Pynchon exploded the traditional literary narrative of the novel in his books, and, indeed, comparisons between Dylan and Pynchon were drawn by some early commentators. Pynchon’s chapters began with entirely new sets of characters, seemingly unrelated to any who had been introduced before in the book, with no attempt made to make their action and their settings relevant to anything that preceded them. You keep thinking he’s going to tie them all together, later, somehow. In some cases, *if* he does this, you have to look very, very closely for it. This goes against all the natural instincts traditionally associated with the novel. One of Pynchon’s spiritual descendants, Tom Robbins, another narrative experimenter, had

³ **A Folk Process Footnote:** Noted music critic Dave Marsh says the melody for “Ballad of a Thin Man” comes from a song called “I Believe to My Soul,” written by Ray Charles. Marsh says it was the B side of Ray’s cover of Hank Snow’s country ballad, “I’m Movin’ On” (Atlantic 2043/1959) and that “...it’s pure smoky backroom R&B, and it was a genre classic long before Bob Dylan lifted its melody for “Ballad of a Thin Man.” (*The Heart of Rock and Soul: The 1001 Greatest Singles Ever Made*/By Dave Marsh, 1989, p. 209. For publishing information, see the final installment in this series.)

TIME magazine refuse to review his early work, claiming that it “*wasn’t literature...*”

This is how different this new work of Bob Dylan was seen by the entrenched Folk Music establishment. This new approach to lyric-writing and storytelling was as alien and against the grain of tradition as the *West Side Story*/Little Richard getup that Dylan wore at Newport was to the usual buttoned-down, turtle-necked, sports-coated, cerebral, faux-bohemian collegiate-cool uniform of the Folkies. And he did it with a rush into pot and psychedelic drugs as well as, I’m convinced, a pretty good intake of uppers — look closely at the still photos and documentary-reel footage of him at that time: In *Don’t Look Back*, D. A. Pennebaker’s 1967 documentary film on Dylan’s 1965 tour of the United Kingdom, Bob is as skinny as Hank Williams was at the end, a virtual Auschwitz-survivor physique.

Dylan’s obvious previous absorption of the Beats — Kerouac, Ginsberg, Burroughs — and his new immersion in the French Surrealist and Symbolist poets and the 13th-century Italians converged, resulting in an outpouring of what his critics — even his admirers — dismissed as “absurdist wordplay” but which was really the beginning of a new vernacular of musical poetry that had to be experienced with a very open mind and which, if you did so, made a kind of beautiful, mystical sense that had never before been heard on Top 40 radio. Some of his original fans probably didn’t even know the meaning of the word “iconoclast,” but Bob was about to (“...*take ’em to the finest...*”) school (“...*alright, Miss Lonely...*”) them in it and break it down for them.

This worked better in some songs than it did in others. Reception and appreciation of these songs differed from listener to listener and critic to critic, and, in some cases, it was the music and melodies to which these lyrics were set that made a critical difference, making some songs more palatable and seeming to have a wider popular appeal than others. For me, “Desolation Row” and “Visions of Johanna,” while both brilliant, don’t have the verve and appeal of “Memphis Blues Again,” “I Want You,” “The Hour That the Ship Comes In” or “My Back Pages.” The jumbled, scattered, symbolist/surrealist imagery that seemed to pour forth from Dylan as if he were channeling every poet who had ever lived reached a certain pinnacle — to my tastes — in the passing strange and exceedingly magnetic “Mister Tambourine Man,” a mystically beautiful paean to self-discovery and cosmic joy spread over seven long, extremely wordy verses, which McGuinn and The Byrds trimmed down to a sub-three-minute, mid-tempo ballad for their first Top 40 hit.

But, of course, this wild, new poetic-speak did not last forever. Radically, wildly different can be so only for so long. Pretty soon, everyone else is getting pretty different, too, and the formerly new and bizarre becomes the old and the *passé*. Dylan’s career arc has lasted a very, very long time now, and he has gone through many, many changes. I am relieved that he did not find it necessary, like so many of his contemporaries, to consider a foray into World Music an obligatory next or eventual step in his career. Now, the exploded pieces of the traditional narrative style have all fallen back to earth, and his vocabulary has been tempered and tamed somewhat by the passage of time. It’s just that, now, even that croaking thing he called a voice back then has completely left him, and there are

times, indeed, when, as Greil Marcus said, everything he sings sounds like “A Hundred Bottles of Beer on the Wall” — if you can understand him at all. (Luckily, there are isolated, really beautiful exceptions to this; Leland even compared his vocal delivery on “Beyond the Horizon,” a song from Dylan’s August 25, 2006 Columbia CD *Modern Times*, to Bing Crosby’s....)



On the Other Hand, There Were John Stewart’s Innovations: A Preview

By contrast, Rock ’n’ Roll was John Stewart’s *first* musical style. (See my math extrapolations in the next installment in this series, **CHAPTER ONE: John Stewart: ’Twixt Trio and Solo — What Was It Really Like?** for how long he might have played in Rock ’n’ Roll bands.)

But John Stewart is as important to the history of American Folk Music as Guthrie or Dylan, just in a very different sort of way. Neither in The Kingston Trio nor in his solo career did he ever sound *anything even remotely like* Woody Guthrie.

It has been mentioned several times, both by Leland in his “Jukebox in My Head” Web Log postings and in my essay here, that John Stewart was fond of incorporating spoken-word passages into his songs. But they *never, ever*, amounted to anything with even a passing resemblance to the Guthrie “Talking Blues” tradition.

Stewart’s *very first* song of his post-Kingston Trio career (“Mister Lincoln’s Train,” from *Signals Through the Glass* (September 1968/Capitol Records) employed the spoken word to great advantage, and I will take up that discussion in a later installment in this series, **CHAPTER TWO: False Start/Mixed Signals**.

When we get to the later installment in this series **INTERLUDE #1: “Just Imagine ...” and “On the Importance of Influences,”** I will explore what traditions John Stewart was mining for a song like “Mother Country/The Old Campaigner” and others. Then, in another installment, **CHAPTER FOUR: Willard**, you can read about his unique approach and the influences he is reflecting in songs like “Oldest Living Son.” John Stewart was not so much working to *replicate and continue* an old Folk traditional form as to *innovate*, to take the tradition and gently nudge it up to the next level, to transform it into something new — which is, as I keep reinforcing, in itself a hallmark, a characteristic of the general Folk tradition: Always to change, to invent something new, to elevate the form. But neither was Stewart aiming to completely, wrenchingly transform the Folk Music idiom into another entity altogether, totally unrecognizable from what had come before — *a la* Bob Dylan.

This tendency on Stewart’s part reflects, in great measure, his interest in and involvement with other traditions, particularly some literary traditions that employed the spoken word. Where Dylan turned to the French Surrealists for inspiration, Stewart turned to more characteristically *American* strains like the Narrative Form, represented in such great

American authors as Thornton Wilder, John Steinbeck, Edgar Lee Masters, and John Neihardt. Stewart's re-directing of the American Musical Narrative traditional form was gentle, like Masters' deft extension of the American Poetic Narrative traditional form, not radical and jolting, like Dylan's.

...And in any case, *Masters thought of the formal mode of his book as extending, rather than shallowly and (like some American poets of the next 15 years) modernistically affronting poetic continuity.* It is perhaps just that he was able to put his Browningsque impulses to best work in the collected dramatic monologues of these inscriptions, and to write with greater rhythmic interest and power than when he had kept too literally to older modes of variation to “give scope for *emotion and music.*”

— From John Hollander's Introduction
to *Spoon River Anthology*
By Edgar Lee Masters
The Signet Classic Edition
Page xxix
[Emphases mine — FWK]
(For publishing information, see the
final installment in this series.)

Next: CHAPTER ONE: John Stewart: 'Twixt Trio and Solo — What Was It *Really* Like?