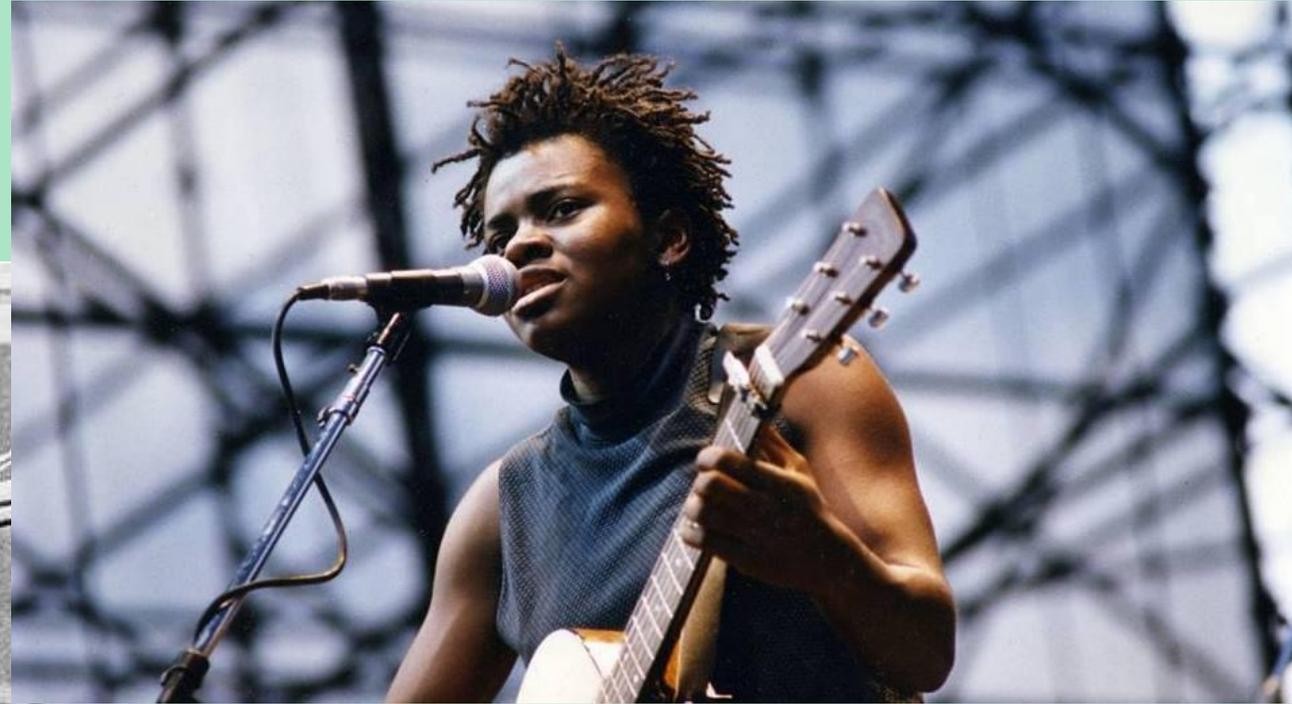


4. Folk, Folk Rock, Singer-Songwriters



Lecture Outline

- Traditional folk definition and folk song features
- Three different ideas of “folk”
- Professionalization of folk in the 1950s and 1960s
- Singer-songwriters
- Some newer folk artists and sounds

Traditional Folk

- Oral/Aural transmission
- Anonymous composition (and communal composition)
- Heavy ideological side to the term
 - Authenticity claims, ideas that change with time

- Some Folk Song Types:
 - Ballads
 - Narratives (love, war, heroes, disasters, etc.)
 - Work Songs
 - Sailors, fishing, mining, lumber, sewing, etc.
 - Other
 - Lullabies, children's songs, drinking songs etc.

Traditional Folk Song Features

- Often unaccompanied (a cappella)
- Simple melodies (and harmonies, if present)
- Usually solo singer or solo instrument
 - Simple accompaniment
 - Fiddle, guitar, accordion, whistle, spoons, etc.
- Strophic form (AAAAA, etc.) or verse/chorus
- Modal (not major or minor, but Dorian, Lydian modes, etc.)
- Dancing often accompanies folk music

Three different ideas of “folk” music

1. 19th Century

- Romantic nationalism
- European classical composers use folk melodies for new compositions
- Start of song collecting
 - Turns it into a pop music
 - Shapes folk culture in terms of what is and isn't collected
 - Turns it into a written music (as opposed to purely oral/aural)

2. 1930s and 1940s

3. Folk Revival Period (1958-1965)

Folk in the 1930 and 1940s: Three Trends

- Folk music starts to be used as a political tool
 - Beginning of connections with folk and protest music
 - Folk singers often advocated for social change
 - Usually left wing positions, socialism, helping the poor or marginalized
- Creation of new “folk” songs
 - These were often written to sound old-timey, but were also often about current events
- Some of these new songwriters became celebrities
 - One of the best examples of these three trends (left wing politics, new songs, and celebrity), was Woody Guthrie...

Woody Guthrie

Ex: Woody Guthrie “Do Re Mi” (1940)

- Similar to 19th C. folk, tells a story
 - Dustbowl migration of the 1930s
- There were many changes to “folk authenticity” in the 1930s:
 - Folk became more urban and intellectual in its associations
 - More political and protest-oriented
 - No longer as anonymous
 - No longer as firmly centered on old songs



Folk Revival Period (1958-1965)

- Popular with college-aged young adults
- Seen as a more “real” and “authentic” alternative to mainstream pop
 - Meaningful lyrics often touching on social issues
 - Musical simplicity and non-theatrical performances
 - Good looks not important (different emphasis on image)
- Huge increase in number of acoustic guitars sold in US in the early 60s
 - Passable voice, a few easy chords: anyone can do this
 - Reinforces idea that folk music was for and by the people
 - As opposed to mainstream pop

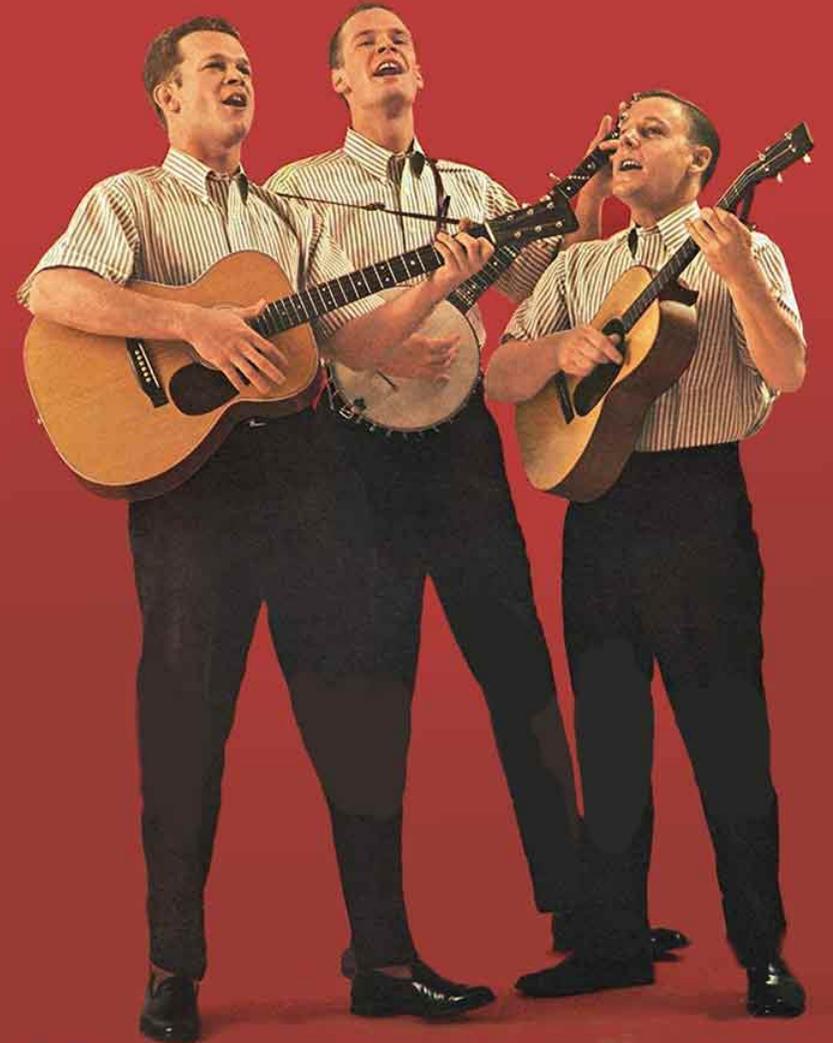
Professional Folk Music

- In the late 1950s, folk becomes a major commercial genre, and folk/pop hybrids became very popular (i.e. pop folk)
- Similarities with Brill Building pop:
 - Carefully crafted to appeal to a particular part of youth market
 - Pop seen as superficial, folk as serious; same business marketing for both
 - Both polite and tame in comparison with first wave rock and roll

The Kingston Trio

- One of the biggest hits of this era:
- **Ex: The Kingston Trio**
 - “Tom Dooley” (1958)
- Start of folk revival in mainstream pop market
- Q: How does this song adapt folk for a commercial market?
- What are the pop and folk elements?

THE
KINGSTON TRIO



Peter, Paul and Mary

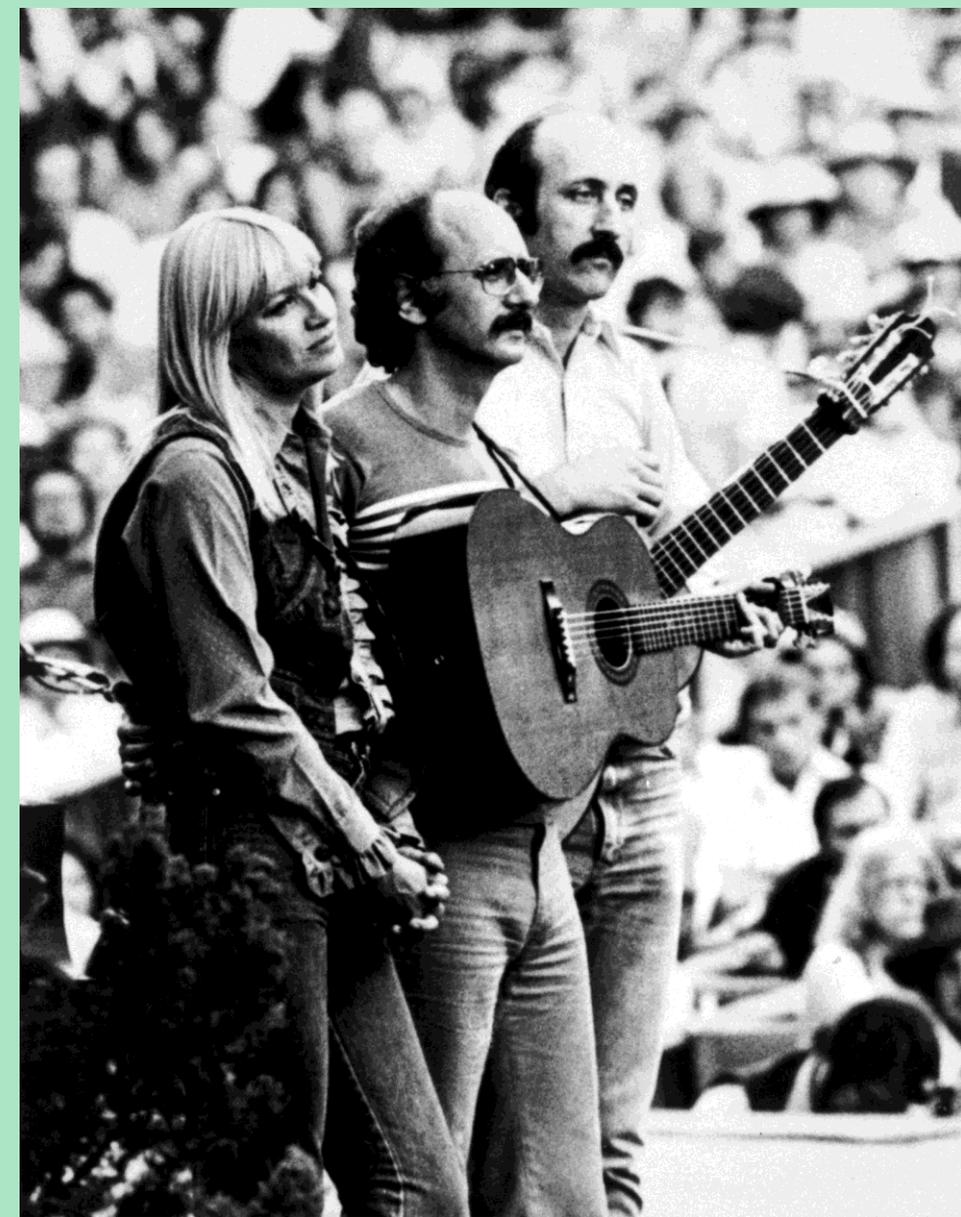
- Most successful pop folk group of the 60s
- Manager Albert Grossman
- Despite a capitalist start, they were well received by folk fans
- Played both sides: pop sensibility and “authentic” performance style

Ex: Peter, Paul and Mary

– “Blowin’ in the Wind” (1963)

Compare with the original version:

Ex: Bob Dylan – “Blowin’ in the Wind” (1963)

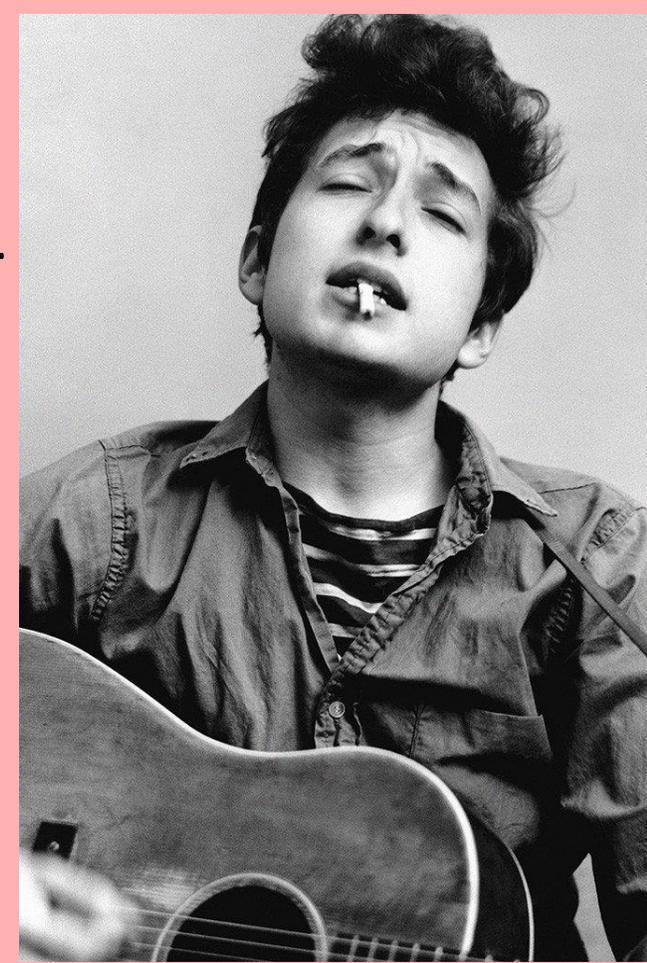


Split in Folk Market

- The folk scene - and the idea of “folk” music - becomes more complicated
- The newer ideas of folk do not erase the older ones
 - Instead they co-exist and influence one another
- Older-style: Joan Baez; Bob Dylan; Gordon Lightfoot
- Newer pop-style: Kingston Trio; Rooftop Singers; Peter, Paul and Mary

Bob Dylan

- From Minnesota to Greenwich Village, NYC, 1961
- Quickly became a leader in the scene
 - Although his recording career was slow to take off
- Manager Albert Grossman
 - Innovative management style
- Many of Dylan's songs were hits for other artists
 - It was Grossman who had Peter, Paul and Mary record "Blowin' in the Wind"
 - An example of his leverage style of management



Bob Dylan (cont.)

- “Protest singer”
- “Voice of a Generation”

Ex: Bob Dylan

– “Masters of War” (1963)



- By 1964/65, less political lyrics, more rock image and musical style

Dylan Goes Electric

- Seen by some as a rejection of the traditional folk scene
- Not a sudden event, but spread out over a few stages
- March 1965 he released an album which had an entire side of electric material (*Bringing It All Back Home*)
- July 1965: The most famous incident, when he performed with an electric band at the Newport Folk Festival
- Hostile reactions during the 1966 UK tour
 - Which included the famous “Judas” moment



Ex: Bob Dylan – “Like a Rolling Stone” (1965)

- Early electric Dylan
- 6 minute single - which says it’s not pop - although it was on the radio
- Four long sections (with one verse and chorus in each section)
- Campbell/Brody: “a cinematic portrayal of a privileged princess who’s strung out and trying to survive on the streets”
- In what ways does this still resemble his acoustic folk material?
- Rock songs can now *be about anything*



- Dylan was a major influence on the mid-1960s transformation from Rock and Roll to a style that would be called simply *Rock*
 - Compare 1950s Rock and Roll with mid-to-late 1960s rock
- New potential for pop music: broad and important lyrics
- New musical sounds as well
- In July 1966 Dylan had a motorcycle accident
 - Out of the spotlight for awhile, still influential



BOB DYLAN HIGHWAY 61 REVISITED



Folk Rock

- “Meaningful” lyrics with beat and electric instrumentation of rock
- Most songs were newly composed
- But not all:

Ex: The Animals

– “House of the Rising Sun” (1964)

- British band
- First folk rock song?



The Byrds

- Formed in Los Angeles, 1964
- Several early rock versions of folk songs
- Ex: Bob Dylan “Mr. Tambourine Man” (1964)**
- Ex: The Byrds “Mr. Tambourine Man” (1965)**
- US and UK #1
- Brings together folk revival (Dylan)
- Girl Groups (Phil Spector/Wrecking Crew)
- Surf (Beach Boys)
- and with the 12-string, the Beatles/British Invasion



Simon & Garfunkel

Ex: Simon & Garfunkel – “Sounds of Silence” (1964) – original acoustic version

- Not a hit when first recorded
 - S&G broke up, but reformed when this became a hit
- After the success of Dylan and the Byrds, the record company added other instruments (without S&G’s knowledge) and released it; became a hit

Ex: “Sound of Silence” (1965) – overdubbed version

- Featuring members of Dylan’s band
- Increased instrumental and vocal intensity as song builds



Singer-songwriter

Many similarities with folk:

- The emphasis is on lyrics and melody
- Minimal instrumentation, often solo, usually acoustic instruments
- Often features socially-minded lyrics and/or personal expression
- Connection between music, text, listener
- Historical context: folk, country, blues songwriters were “singer-songwriters” by definition
 - Hank Williams’ “3 chords and the truth”

Leonard Cohen

- From Montreal
- As much a literary figure as a musical one
- Mid-1950s: Poetry, novels
- By 1966, musical performer



Ex: Leonard Cohen – “Suzanne” (1967)

- First published as a poem, 1966

Joni Mitchell

- First woman folk singer with a large body of work
- Many different styles: jazz fusion
- Revered as a songwriter
- Painter, photographer

Ex: Joni Mitchell – “All I Want” (1971)

- Love song, but unusual in that it seems like we’re listening to her subconscious thoughts
- Strophic form, 3 stanzas of lyrics



Newer singer-songwriters

Ex: Tracy Chapman – Fast Car (1988)

- About escaping poverty
- Strong emotion connection in lyrics and music

Ex: Ani DiFranco – “Overlap” (1994)

- Influence as a guitarist as well as performer and songwriter
- Socially active as a performer and through her record label
- Why do you think there are so many female singer-songwriters?
- How does this genre fit in with gender stereotypes?



Newer Folk and Folk Rock

Ex: Great Big Sea "Run Runaway" (1996)

- Late 80s/early 90s this kind of updated folk-rock sound became quite popular
 - One of the other leading bands of the type
 - Play some (traditional) Canadian and Newfoundland folk songs and new songs written in this style



Ex: The Lumineers – "Ho Hey" (2012)

- "Indie-folk"
- Similarities and differences between these two examples and 1960s folk rock?

