



The Words and Music of Carole King

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The Words and Music of Carole King

James E. Perone

PRAEGER

Westport, Connecticut
London

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Perone, James E.

The words and music of Carole King / James E. Perone.

p. cm.—(Praeger singer-songwriter collection, ISSN 1553-3484)

Includes discography, bibliographical references, and index.

ISBN 0-275-99027-3 (alk. paper)

1. King, Carole, 1942—Criticism and interpretation. I. Title.

ML410.K636P47 2006

782.42166092—dc22 2006027248

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data is available.

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Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 2006027248

ISBN: 0-275-99027-3

ISSN: 1553-3484

First published in 2006

Praeger Publishers, 88 Post Road West, Westport, CT 06881

An imprint of Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc.

www.praeger.com

Printed in the United States of America



The paper used in this book complies with the Permanent Paper Standard issued by the National Information Standards Organization (Z39.48-1984).

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Series Foreword

Although the term, *Singer-Songwriters*, might most frequently be associated with a cadre of musicians of the early 1970s such as Paul Simon, James Taylor, Carly Simon, Joni Mitchell, Cat Stevens, and Carole King, the Praeger Singer-Songwriter Collection defines singer-songwriters more broadly, both in terms of style and in terms of time period. The series includes volumes on musicians who have been active from approximately the 1960s through the present. Musicians who write and record in folk, rock, soul, hip-hop, country, and various hybrids of these styles will be represented. Therefore, some of the early 1970s introspective singer-songwriters named above will be included, but not exclusively.

What do the individuals included in this series have in common? Some have never collaborated as writers. But, while some have done so, all have written and recorded commercially successful and/or historically important music *and* lyrics at some point in their careers.

The authors who contribute to the series also exhibit diversity. Some are scholars who are trained primarily as musicians, while others have such areas of specialization as American studies, history, sociology, popular culture studies, literature, and rhetoric. The authors share a high level of scholarship, accessibility in their writing, and a true insight into the work of the artists they study. The authors are also focused on the output of their subjects and how it relates to the their subject's biography and the society around them; however, biography in and of itself is not a major focus of the books in this series.

Given the diversity of the musicians who are the subject of books in this series, and given the diversity of viewpoint of the authors, volumes in

the series will differ from book to book. All, however, will be organized chronologically around the compositions and recorded performances of their subjects. All of the books in the series should also serve as listeners' guides to the music of their subjects, making them companions to the artists' recorded output.

James E. Perone
Series Editor

Acknowledgments

This book could not have been written without the valuable assistance of a number of people. I wish first to thank Karen Perone for offering moral and technical support for this and all of my book projects for Greenwood Press and Praeger Press, and for offering much-needed input at every stage of every project.

Over the course of writing several books, the entire staff of the Greenwood Publishing Group has been most helpful and cooperative. I wish to extend special thanks to Acquisitions Editor Daniel Harmon for his assistance in putting this book together and for his continuing support in the development of the Praeger Singer-Songwriter Collection, and to the entire staff of Apex Publishing for helping me fine tune this book. I also wish to thank Eric Levy and Rob Kirkpatrick for their assistance in getting the Praeger Singer-Songwriter Collection off the ground over the course of the first few years of the twenty-first century.

Before beginning to write this book, and throughout the writing of it, I have been communicating with Sheila Weller, a *Glamour* magazine writer who has been writing a book on Carole King, Joni Mitchell, and Carly Simon. I wish to thank Sheila for the chance to share thoughts and insights about Carole King's songs and their importance.

I also wish to thank my graduate mentor and dissertation advisor, the late John Clough, for initially instilling in me the love of academe and the belief that there is a place for me in the academy. Likewise, I would like to thank my friend and former colleague Kelly F. Lowe, whose obvious love of, and expertise in, rhetoric reaffirmed the lessons in the importance of academic scholarship that Professor Clough taught me years ago.

Finally, I wish to thank the entire staff of Carole King Productions, especially Leah Reid, for their assistance in selecting and obtaining permissions for the photographs of Ms. King that are included in the photo essay. Special thanks goes to Lorna Guess, Carole King's personal manager, for all that she has done to help this project along.

Despite my own best efforts and the assistance of those named here, there are bound to be errors in this book, and these are solely my responsibility.

Introduction

CAROLE KING AS MUSICIAN AND CULTURAL ICON

Born Carole Klein, on February 9, 1942, in Brooklyn, New York, Carole King became one of the most successful songwriters of the rock era. She wrote or co-wrote such hits as “Up on the Roof,” “Pleasant Valley Sunday,” “Will You Love Me Tomorrow,” “You’ve Got a Friend,” “The Loco-Motion,” “Hey Girl,” “(You Make Me Feel Like) A Natural Woman,” “I’m into Something Good,” “Go Away, Little Girl,” “I Wasn’t Born to Follow,” “Jazzman,” “I Feel the Earth Move,” “Now and Forever,” “One Fine Day,” and “It’s Too Late.” King had worked as a teenager in the music industry, recording demo songs with fellow high school student Paul Simon, and recording several singles in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Her career as a singer/pianist, however, was slow to develop; all of the hit songs King wrote during the decade of the 1960s were popularized by other performers, including the Drifters, the Animals, Steve Lawrence, the Cookies, Little Eva, the Byrds, the Monkees, the Shirelles, Aretha Franklin, and Blood, Sweat and Tears. King was one of the first, if not the first, woman in American popular music history to have a composing, arranging, and conducting credit on a recording—this for the 1962 Little Eva album *The Lilliloco-Motion* (Dimension 6000).

After more than a decade as one of the greatest behind-the-scenes musicians in popular music, Carole King made it into the spotlight. Her 1971 solo album *Tapestry* eventually sold more than twenty million copies, stayed in *Billboard*’s Top 200 album charts for 302 consecutive weeks, and was viewed by many as one of the most important feminist statements of the day. The social statement of the album was not found in the words or in the

music nearly as much as it was in the fact that King wrote, sang, arranged, played, and controlled her product. In short, *Tapestry* was feminism in action. And *Tapestry* appeared at precisely the same time as other seminal works by some of the performers who, along with Carole King, defined the early 1970s singer-songwriter movement, including James Taylor, Paul Simon, Don McLean, Cat Stevens, Carly Simon, Jim Croce, and Joni Mitchell. Critics credited King's work on *Tapestry* as freeing female pop vocalists from having to affect a diva-esque approach to singing, and her gospel-inspired work as a pianist on the album has been called "the first widely recognized instrumental signature ever developed by a woman in American popular music."¹

Although *Tapestry* still stands as Carole King's masterpiece—indeed, it is frequently listed as one of the most important record albums of the entire rock era—she recorded other albums from the 1970s through the present, including *Fantasy*, *Colour of Your Dreams*, *City Streets*, *Music*, *Pearls: The Songs of Goffin and King*, *Wrap Around Joy*, *Simple Things*, *Love Makes the World*, *Welcome Home*, and *Thoroughbred*. She set *Really Rosie*, by noted children's author Maurice Sendak, to music for a television program that eventually turned into an off-Broadway stage musical. And King has contributed new songs to films such as *One True Thing*, *You've Got Mail*, *I'll Do Anything*, and *A League of Their Own*.

Carole King became a spokesperson for the environmental movement in the 1970s and has continued to be socially and politically active for progressive causes into the twenty-first century. Today, King supports the Rockies Prosperity Act, "an ecosystem approach to protecting and restoring the Northern Rockies bioregion,"² and the White Cloud Council, an organization devoted to preserving green space and which she cofounded. She has performed benefit concerts for a variety of Democratic political candidates, including George McGovern during his 1972 presidential campaign, Gary Hart during his failed 1984 primary campaign, and John Kerry during his 2004 presidential campaign. She also performs for charitable organizations that support children's and environmental causes. In addition to her benefit appearances, King performs live from time to time in a variety of venues, including a July 15, 2005 concert appearance on NBC's *Today Show* that coincided with the release of her live album, *The Living Room Tour*.

In addition to the recognition she has received from the public (via record sales), Carole King has been officially recognized by her peers in the entertainment industry. The National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences presented King with the 1971 Grammy Awards for Best Record of the Year ("It's Too Late"), Album of the Year (*Tapestry*), Song of the Year ("You've Got a Friend"), and Best Female Vocal Performance (*Tapestry*). In addition, James Taylor's recording of "You've Got a Friend" earned him a Grammy for Best Male Vocal Performance, thereby making the most widely recognized Grammy categories a sweep for Carole King. King was inducted into

the Songwriters Hall of Fame in 1986. In 1988, their peers in the National Academy of Songwriters presented King and her one-time husband and musical collaborator Gerry Goffin with the prestigious Lifetime Achievement Award. For their songwriting contributions, Goffin and King were inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame as nonperformers in 1990. Both because of her popularity as a singer-songwriter-pianist in the 1970s and her longstanding association with the music publishing establishment, Carole King remains one of if not *the* best represented composer of the rock era in sheet music publications of her songs.

SCOPE AND ORGANIZATION OF THIS BOOK

This book focuses on the music, lyrics, and recordings of Carole King; therefore, the book is arranged chronologically and has biographical information woven into the discussion of King's songs and recordings. I have also devoted a chapter to a discussion of other artists' recordings of the compositions of Carole King during the 1960s when King was one of the best-known members of the Brill Building establishment.

Carole King has more than 500 copyrighted songs, some written in collaboration with others and some solo-written works; thus a detailed analysis of the collected compositions would be impossible. Because of the nature of the Praeger Singer-Songwriter Collection, I have focused on the songs that King herself recorded, although I have also included study of some of the better-known songs that King—usually in collaboration with Gerry Goffin—wrote for other performers. It should be noted that the vast majority of King's pre-1970 songs are collaborative efforts. She often wrote the music while Goffin wrote the lyrics. Even after she became an established solo artist, however, Carole King collaborated with such lyricists as Toni Stern, David Palmer, Rick Evers, and others. My focus is on the lyrics that King has written, but I will also discuss the lyrics of her collaborators to the extent that such discussion relates to King's work as a composer and a singer/vocal interpreter of lyrics.

The bibliography includes many sources for further information on Carole King and her work. I have not included references to concert reviews, with a few notable exceptions (King's 1973 concert in New York's Central Park and several of the major performances on her various comeback tours, for example). For a detailed listing of important concert reviews of King's pre-1999 performances, the reader may wish to consult my book *Carole King: A Bio-Bibliography* (Greenwood Press, 1999). I have included annotations for most, but not all, bibliographic citations.

Note that in the "Discography," I have included information pertaining to the principal medium for each release. Most of King's albums were also issued on 1 $\frac{7}{8}$ ips audio cassette (and several were also issued on 3 $\frac{3}{4}$ ips 8-track tape). I have not included information pertaining to these tape

releases because tape was not the primary medium through which the music was sold by King's record companies and because cassettes and 8-tracks of Carole King albums of the early 1970s and 1980s are not likely to have survived into the twenty-first century to the extent that vinyl and CDs have. Speaking of compact discs, it should be noted that most, but not all, of King's albums of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s that were originally released on vinyl have been reissued on compact disc. King's albums that remain unreleased on CD, those during the late 1970s when she recorded for Capitol Records, can still be found, providing that the listener who wishes to investigate this music can find the original releases in a specialty shop, or perhaps on an online auction Web site such as eBay.

I have included an index of names, places, and song and album titles. Song titles include those written by Carole King and by others; however, the album titles in the index are only those recorded by King. I have included only the most extensive and most important discussions of King's work in the various subheadings of her entry in the index.

Other Voices

The story of the words and music of Carole King does not begin with her own work as an internationally known performer in the 1970s. She first became a well-known figure in the music industry as a composer, specifically, a composer of songs for other performers. Although this book focuses on her work as a singer-songwriter, it is necessary to study the music she wrote before she became a successful singer for two main reasons: (1) her early compositional work helped set the stage for her later famous solo recordings, and (2) her compositional work from the late 1950s through the late 1960s represents one of the most important and most popular bodies of American popular songs of the era.

THE BRILL BUILDING

Scholars and fans alike argue about just when rock and roll music came into being. Certainly, Hank Williams's "Move It on Over" (1947) exhibits elements of what would come to be known as rock and roll, but the song is really more of a country song that is in 12-bar blues form and has a strong beat to it—and, significantly, an electric guitar solo. It also happened to anticipate the melody almost note-by-note and the musical style of "Rock around the Clock" by seven years. Some would argue that Fats Domino's "The Fat Man" (1949) is the first true rock and roll record, but that song is really more of a fairly easy-going New Orleans-style rhythm-and-blues piece that fits pretty squarely into a musical tradition consistent with the city of Domino's birth. Other scholars would argue—more persuasively in my mind—that Jackie Brenston's 1951 recording of "Rocket 88," a composition, arrangement, and performance

probably influenced more by the session's producer/writer/arranger/pianist, Ike Turner, than by Brenston himself, signaled the birth of rock and roll. In this piece of rhythm and blues, with its distorted electric guitar, jagged piano licks (played by Turner) and lyrical themes of women, drinking, and cruising in a fast automobile (and its none-too-subtle sexual subtext), we hear something that is missing in the songs by Williams and Domino—a strong teen appeal and an authentic-sounding teen rhetorical “voice.” Ultimately the merger of musical styles like rhythm and blues with country, gospel, and jazz, *and* lyrics that speak to, and of, the emerging post-World War II youth culture defines the start of the rock era.

By the second half of the 1950s, corporate America had taken notice of rock and roll, and a new take on the longstanding Tin Pan Alley tradition emerged in the form of the Brill Building publishers, record companies, songwriters, and performers.¹ Like New York City's Tin Pan Alley of the late nineteenth century through the World War II era, this new version of Tin Pan Alley was characterized by a well-defined corporate ladder and was largely dominated by Jewish-American musicians who lived in the immediate New York area: the George and Ira Gershwins, Cole Porters, and Irving Berlins were replaced (as it were) by the Neil Diamonds, Paul Simons, Neil Sedakas, Cynthia Weils, Barry Manns, Gerry Goffins, and Carole Kings. The song pluggers of the first half of the twentieth century were replaced by the teenagers who cut the demo records of the 1950s and early 1960s.

After she formed a group—the Co-sines—while in high school, Carole Klein (who would take the professional moniker King in the late 1950s) cut demo records with a young high school friend, Paul Simon, for \$25 apiece. King would provide the piano and drum tracks, while Simon played guitar and bass; both sang. This high school experience set the stage for King's and Simon's later work as record producers—quite independently from one another—by giving them valuable experience in multitrack recording at a time when the technology was still new.

After high school, King attended Queens College, where she met chemistry major and lyricist Gerry Goffin. Goffin and King began collaborating on songs, married, dropped out of college, and began working as staff songwriters at Al Nevins and Don Kirshner's Aldon Music, which was founded in 1958, at 1650 Broadway in New York City, right across the street from the Brill Building. As had been the case during the Tin Pan Alley era, Brill Building songwriters like Goffin and King operated in what has been widely characterized as an assembly line environment, cranking out as many songs as possible, in the hopes that one might become a hit. Since the songwriters typically were paid on a per-song basis, generating large amounts of material was to the songwriter's advantage. Similarly, record companies of the era took a “shotgun” approach, issuing lots of singles and hoping to have at least a few hits along the way (this was well before the album-oriented era). By 1963, more than 200 of Carole King's compositions had been recorded commercially.² Despite the quantity of material that

Goffin and King and their colleagues produced, King has said, “I don’t think it was an assembly line, because it was still a creative endeavor.”³ Indeed, creativity was in ample evidence, as well as competition between the songwriting teams. Among the more significant features of these Brill Building songwriters was the trend of male-female writing partnerships: Jeff Barry and Ellie Greenwich, Barry Mann and Cynthia Weil, and Gerry Goffin and Carole King. This feature was important because it represented the first time that women made a sizable impact in the American popular music industry as writers—and, especially, as composers.

Gerry Goffin and Carole King excelled in two particular areas among the Brill Building songwriters: (1) they wrote more hit songs than their colleagues, and (2) they truly mastered the art of making top-quality demo records of their songs. In fact, one of their greatest commercial successes, Little Eva’s recording of “The Loco-Motion,” was not originally intended to be released commercially: it was made as a demo, designed to show the song’s potential to the “real” singer for whom the song was intended.⁴ Other recordings, like the Monkees’s recording of “Sometime in the Morning,” simply had Carole King’s lead vocals wiped from the Goffin-produced demo track, with those of another lead singer—in this case Micky Dolenz—recorded on top of the work of the studio musicians. The care with which Goffin and King produced their demo records gave musicians a clear vision of the commercial and artistic possibilities of their songs.

All of this work in the Brill Building era of the late 1950s and early 1960s meant that King, from her high school years on, had a knowledge of and experience in commercial popular music. She was both a part of the grand Tin Pan Alley tradition, and a part of the new post-World War II youth culture. King learned just what worked for particular performers for whom she wrote. At the start of her career, she was primarily a composer, setting others’ words to music. All of these aspects of Carole King’s experience as a young woman would inform, add to, and, at times, detract from her later career as a solo performer.

THE SONGS OF GOFFIN AND KING, 1960–1969

Although Carole King wrote and recorded several songs before she began collaborating with Gerry Goffin, our discussion here focuses on the compositions of the songwriting team—compositions that were meant for other performers.⁵ Because Goffin and King wrote so many songs that were commercially recorded and because the most successful of these were covered by dozens of artists, these discussion focus on some of the most notable songs and recordings.

The “Girl Groups,” the Drifters, and Other African American Singers

Gerry Goffin and Carole King’s first big hit composition was “Will You Love Me Tomorrow,” a song popularized in 1960–1961 by the Shirelles.

This was an especially fitting first hit because it transcended musically and lyrically many of the pop songs of the day. Gerry Goffin's lyrics find a woman asking her boyfriend if he will still love her tomorrow if the two make love tonight (in not so many words). She senses his unspoken vow that she will "be the only one" solely through the look in his eyes and wants verbal confirmation of his love before they take the next step in their physical relationship. Goffin treats the subject with sensitivity.

King's music, in a slow ballad style, solidly supports the lyrics. The real highlight of her setting, though, is in the harmonic writing on the line, "Tonight the light of love is in your eyes." This lyrical suggestion, that tonight really might be the night that the couple goes all the way, as it were, is supported by King's unexpected use of the major mediant (III) chord, which acts as a secondary dominant leading to the submediant (vi) in this major-key piece.⁶ In a 1950s pop/rock song, this harmonic shift is unusual and, as such, adds emphasis to the text. It is this harmonic emphasis that brings out the seriousness of the young woman's plight, as it highlights just how close she is to making an important decision—a decision that she will be able to make only if and when the young man makes a verbal declaration of his love and commitment.

Although King's use of the major mediant chord as a secondary dominant may be unusual in the context of 1960, it nevertheless illustrates her ties to the great American Tin Pan Alley song tradition of the past: this is the sort of harmonic text painting done by the George Gershwins and Cole Porters of the 1930s and 1940s. Ultimately, the Shirelles's recording of "Will You Love Me Tomorrow" stayed at No. 1 on the *Billboard* pop charts for two weeks, and remained in the magazine's top 100 charts for nearly five months.

Incidentally, the story of the recording of "Will You Love Me Tomorrow" illustrates King's early desire to be in charge of her compositions and the strength of her musical talent. According to writer Fred Bronson, King, "unhappy with one of the musicians, played kettle drums herself."⁷ As we shall see later in this chapter, Goffin and King's focus on what they felt was the correct production of their songs would extend to demo records, making their demos just as definitive as the fully realized commercial releases of the day.

Like "Will You Love Me Tomorrow," many of the early 1960s Goffin/King collaborations were written for the so-called girl groups like the Shirelles. Among the duo's hits not recorded by female African American singing groups, a fair number were initially recorded by African American solo singers. An unnamed reporter for *Time* magazine wrote in 1971 that, "though R&B lost some its ethnic honesty" when Goffin and King began having huge chart successes through these African American singers, the style "still had considerable emotional sweep, plus a new sophistication."⁸ It should be noted that although many of these recordings made it into the upper reaches of the *Billboard* and *Cash Box* pop charts, they were also widely successful specifically among the African American audience, as measured on the R&B charts.

Some of this success might be attributed to the popularity of the various performers with different demographic groups, but it was also due to the way in which King, in particular, was able to integrate African American pop music styles into her own writing style. Although a thorough analysis falls outside the scope of this study, it should be noted that the relative chart success of the songs produced by Aldon Music (white, predominantly Jewish-American songwriters, arrangers, and producers working with African American performers) forms a truly fascinating counterpoint to the relative chart standings of records produced by Motown. More often than not, the Goffin–King hits performed better on the R&B charts (which measured sales among a predominantly African American audience) than on the pop charts; generally, Motown recordings did a little better on the pop charts (which measured sales among the majority white population) than on the R&B charts. The irony is that Motown was a black-owned business that incorporated mostly African-American performers, writers, and producers. In a way, this might not be as surprising as it might appear at first glance when one considers that Motown’s entire focus in the early 1960s was reaching the widest (and, thereby, the whitest) possible audience. In any case, it does suggest the extent to which Goffin and King were able to bridge racial and ethnic gulfs and to write what appears to have been thoroughly convincing R&B material.

In the twenty-first century possibly the best known of Goffin and King’s early 1960s compositions is “The Loco-Motion,” a 1962 hit for Little Eva. Eva Boyd became a babysitter for the Goffin’s daughter Louise. She had come to the attention of Goffin and King through the Cookies, one of the girl groups who had chart success with Goffin/King material. In addition to her skills as a babysitter, however, Eva Boyd had a voice that worked well on the demo records that Goffin and King cut of their compositions. “The Loco-Motion” was a dance song—a form that was quite popular at the time—with (pardon the pun) a twist: it was not written about a currently popular dance. According to various accounts, the dance was either made up to fit the song, or the song may have been inspired by Eva’s dancing around the Goffin household. In any case, Boyd sang on the demo record, which was promptly shipped off to and rejected by singer Dee Dee Sharp. Goffin and King’s boss, music impresario Don Kirshner, decided that rather than shop the song around to other popular African American singers, he would simply release the demo as a single. For one thing, this suggests the care with which Goffin and King made demo recordings—they wanted to impress prospective recording artists with the full potential of their material—it also points out that Brill Building songwriters really were essentially contract players, even those who had produced some commercially successful hit songs.

The Little Eva recording of “The Loco-Motion” made it to No. 1 on the pop charts, as did a 1974 recording by the band Grand Funk Railroad. Australian singer/actress Kylie Minogue was only slightly less successful when her 1988 recording of the song topped out at No. 3 on the *Billboard*