

# **The Words and Music of Paul Simon**

*James Bennighof*

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# The Words and Music of Paul Simon

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# The Words and Music of Paul Simon

James Bennighof

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For Dori, Elspeth, and Samuel



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Among several websites that contain helpful bits of information, two warrant particular mention. Rich Kent's *The Simon and Garfunkel Homepage* (<http://freespace.virgin.net/r.kent/index.html>) usually proved to be the most efficient route to guitar tablature; while I take responsibility for all of the observations about guitar technique in this book, the ready availability of these tablatures often expedited the process of initial orientation to a song's key and so forth. A similar role was played by Melinda Hesbacher's site, *The Unofficial Capeman Website* (<http://members.aol.com/Pretybelle/enter.html>), which is devoted to the 1998 musical; again, while all the points made in the book about the songs in *The Capeman* are my own, the synopses and other information on Ms. Hesbacher's site provided me with a very useful point of departure for interpreting these songs within the context of the narrative.

A.M.D.G.



# Introduction: Paul Simon as an Artist and Composer

Born October 13, 1941, in Newark, New Jersey, Paul Simon was to become one of the most popular singer/songwriters in the second half of the twentieth century. Simon was like many of the other performers to whom the label “singer/songwriter” was first applied, including such luminaries as Bob Dylan and Joni Mitchell, in several important respects. Unlike many of the most successful songwriters of the generation before them, these artists usually performed their own songs and, although many others also recorded versions of these songs, those produced by the singer/songwriter were usually the best-known. Furthermore, unlike many of the other popular-music performers of their own day, the singer/songwriters tended to be “solo acts”—that is, while they often worked with other musicians, these took the role of accompanists or occasional collaborators, rather than sharing equal status as members of a permanently established band. In Simon’s case, of course, both of these characteristics are qualified in one important way—in the initial part of his career, he performed most of his songs not solo, but as part of a phenomenally popular duo with Art Garfunkel.

As a teenager, Simon began to write and perform songs, often in collaboration with Garfunkel, in the rock and roll style of the late 1950s. The duo first attained lasting success, though, with songs that were identified with the newly popular folk styles of the early 1960s. They recorded five studio albums together: *Wednesday Morning, 3 A.M.*; *Sounds of Silence*; *Parsley, Sage, Rosemary and Thyme*; *Bookends*; and *Bridge over Troubled Water*. Several songs from these albums found a permanent place on the landscape of American popular culture, including “The Sound of Silence,” “I Am a Rock,” “Scarborough Fair/Canticle,” “Homeward Bound,” “The 59th Street Bridge

Song (Feelin' Groovy)," "America," "Mrs. Robinson," "Bridge over Troubled Water," "Cecilia," and "The Boxer."

These early hits took advantage of the wide variety of styles that were available to the American popular songwriter of the 1960s, including "folk" sounds as well as others. Known for valuing thoughtful, literary lyrics, Simon has consistently sought musical resources that can most effectively complement his textual ideas. As he began to make solo albums, he frequently collaborated with musicians whose specific stylistic strengths provided additional grist for his creative mill. In albums from the 1970s, such as *Paul Simon*, *There Goes Rhymin' Simon*, and *Still Crazy after All These Years*, for example, this approach yielded songs like "Mother and Child Reunion" with Jamaican studio musicians; "Duncan," with Los Incas; "Kodachrome," with the Muscle Shoals Rhythm Section; "Loves Me Like a Rock," with the Dixie Hummingbirds; and "Gone at Last," with Phoebe Snow and the Jessie Dixon Singers.

This eclectic sensibility is even more clearly demonstrated by the works of the following decade. The somewhat idiosyncratic *Hearts and Bones* included a variety of instruments (including contrabass guitar, vocoder, and synclavier) and collaborators as varied as classical minimalist composer Philip Glass, jazz guitarist Al DiMeola, and the doo-wop vocal group the Harptones, but its popularity didn't match its broad range of resources; its best-known song was probably the relatively obscure title track. (The preceding album, *Still Crazy after All These Years*, had included not only the title track, but also the other hits "My Little Town," "50 Ways to Leave Your Lover," and "Gone at Last.") More significant, though, was the next album, *Graceland*. Drawing heavily on material that Simon culled from various African traditions, this production took a giant step into world music (creating a worldwide furor over issues related to apartheid at the same time). Following this, *The Rhythm of the Saints* similarly explored Brazil, and *You're the One* shows the influence of these global forays. Finally, Simon's most recent album, *Surprise*, is probably most distinctively characterized by the combination of a generally simple instrumental texture with a "sonic landscape" credited to Brian Eno; again, though, the album draws stylistically on a variety of influences.

It is clear that Simon's central strength is writing popular songs and creating the albums that they inhabit. He has written songs in other contexts as well, though, most notably in two dramatic efforts. Following the inclusion of a few of his songs in *The Graduate* in 1968 and a bit of his music in *Shampoo* in 1975 (as well as a small acting role in Woody Allen's *Annie Hall* in 1977), in 1980 Simon wrote and starred in a feature film, *One-Trick Pony*, which contained 10 original songs. Then in the 1990s he collaborated with the Nobel Prize-winning poet Derek Walcott to write a Broadway musical, *The Capeman*, which ran briefly in the fall of 1997.

Throughout his career, Simon has written relatively slowly, and so the catalog of his work is smaller than one might expect for a career that now spans 50 years. Nevertheless, his achievements and influence have been formidable.

Eight Grammy awards from the Simon and Garfunkel years were followed by two in 1975 and two more in 1986–87, and 14 of his songs have reached the top 10 on the Billboard charts. Most recently, he was awarded the first annual Gershwin Prize for Popular Song by the Library of Congress. This style-spanning achievement is reinforced by perhaps one of the most significant indications of Simon's impact on the music world: the wide range of performers who have recorded his compositions. These include icons as varied as Bob Dylan and Joan Baez, Frank Sinatra and Rosemary Clooney, Aretha Franklin and Roberta Flack, Perry Como and Tom Jones, Bill Evans and Paul Desmond, Chet Atkins and Floyd Cramer, Yes and Wings, and the Bangles and Annie Lennox. It is clear that Simon's fellow musicians have found much of value in his work, and it seems equally certain that listeners will find his music rewarding for years to come.

## THE SCOPE AND ORGANIZATION OF THIS BOOK

Almost all of Paul Simon's mature work is readily available on his albums and collections. In almost all cases these recordings feature him as a performer, and in the few exceptions (solos by Garfunkel and songs from *The Capeman*), he was centrally involved in the production process. In this volume I present a thorough study of this body of work.

Because there are relatively few songs, each that appears on an album can be discussed in this survey. This examination will proceed chronologically, addressing not only the individual songs, but also important observations about the albums that they comprise. In addition, it will include, insofar as it bears upon the listening experience, information about Simon's personal circumstances and the musical and cultural milieu in which he created these works.

The survey will examine how each of Simon's songs integrates text and music into a unified work of art. Usually the central issue will be the way the musical setting relates to the textual ideas: What form or forms are applied to the music and text? Upon what styles does the setting draw? How does its melodic and harmonic structure define, complement, or comment upon the text? How do other factors, such as instrumentation, arrangement, recording techniques, and so on contribute to the work?<sup>1</sup> I might note here that, while the primary purpose of these discussions is not to specify exactly *how valuable each song may be*, I hope that much of the information they contain may apply to the reader's appreciation of *how each song may be valuable*.

Each discussion of a song is most informative if the reader is listening to the song as well as reading about it (or if the reader at least has a vivid memory of the way the song sounds). For even more detailed study, the reader may wish to consult a sheet-music publication of the music. (Most of these include piano parts that relate to the actual recorded performance—the object of this study—in deceptive ways; for many purposes, a simpler lead-sheet format, which provides just the sung melody, words, and chords, may be more useful.

This version of almost all the songs except those on the recent *Surprise* is provided in *The Definitive Paul Simon Songbook* [New York: Amsco Publications, 2005].) It is also worth noting that the discussions often include specific technical chord names. This level of detail is intended to provide specific information for the musically trained reader who will benefit from it. However, when knowledge of how a particular chord is constructed is crucial in understanding the point being made at the time, I attempt to clarify this information. In any event, additional information about the construction of simple chords is provided in the appendix, and a brief explanation is also provided along with the glossary that follows this section.

I conclude my discussion with a brief assessment of Simon's creative identity that is based on the analyses of individual songs in the book. Here in particular I draw conclusions about his aesthetic perspective as revealed in the compositional methods, and the results of those methods, that these songs reflect throughout the evolution of his career.

I have included at the end of the book two sections that may enhance the reader's understanding. The first of these, the appendix, discusses the general principles that apply to the musical languages and styles upon which Simon draws. Taking major-minor classical tonality as its point of departure and drawing on examples from Simon's work, this material may be particularly helpful for readers without formal music-theoretical training, but it should also provide an interesting survey for others as well.

The section following the appendix is a brief discography of Simon's albums and songs. Those interested in a much more extensive discography (including cover versions of Simon's work by other artists), videography and filmography, and bibliography may consult *Paul Simon: A Bio-Bibliography* by James E. Perone (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000). Finally, the book concludes with an index of songs and important names and terms discussed in the text.

# Glossary and Brief Guide to Chord Structure

**Aeolian mode:** A diatonic scale with the following pattern of whole- and half-steps ascending from the tonic note to the tonic note an octave higher: whole-half-whole-whole-half-whole-whole. The white keys on a piano from A to A exemplify this pattern. (See Appendix for more information.)

**arpeggio:** A chord played one note at a time, ascending or descending.

**bridge:** A section of a song that conveys the sense of connecting between two sections that are more thematically primary.

**capo:** A device used by guitarists to raise the sounding pitch of the strings. Ordinarily each string can vibrate along its entire length, from the “nut” at the end of the neck to the bridge below the soundhole on the body of the guitar. When the capo is clamped onto the neck of the guitar behind a fret, all of the strings can only vibrate between that fret and the bridge, thus producing higher notes. The effect of this is to create a guitar at a higher pitch, so that a chord that would ordinarily sound as D major, for example, would sound as E $\flat$  major if a capo were to be placed at the first fret, E major at the second, and so forth.

**chromatic:** Not belonging to the fundamental diatonic scale of a piece. (See Appendix for more information.)

**coda:** A section of music that occurs after the main portion of a piece has concluded (from a Latin word meaning “tail”).

**diatonic:** In music based on seven-note scales, having a pattern of whole and half steps in which a group of two whole steps is separated from a group of three whole steps, above and below, by single half steps. The white keys on a piano exemplify this pattern. (See Appendix for more information.)



**dominant:** In a major or minor scale, the fifth scale step (such as G in the key of C major or C minor), or a chord that uses this note as its root. (See Appendix for more information.)

**doo-wop:** A style of rhythm-and-blues singing popularized during the 1940s and 1950s, often featuring a soloist and accompanying vocal ensemble.

**Dorian mode:** A diatonic scale with the following pattern of whole- and half-steps ascending from the tonic note to the tonic note an octave higher: whole-half-whole-whole-whole-half-whole. The white keys on a piano from D to D exemplify this pattern. (See Appendix for more information.)

**fret:** One of several metal low metal barriers embedded across the neck of a guitar or similar instrument; a string depressed behind a fret can only vibrate between the fret and the bridge, thus sounding a higher note than it would if it were allowed to vibrate along its entire length.

**hammer-on:** The production of a note on a guitar or similar instrument by striking the string with a finger of the left hand that remains on the string behind a fret; this differs from the more common method of plucking the string with the right hand using a finger or plectrum (pick).

**hook:** A distinctive musical figure in a popular song, often considered an essential ingredient because of its attractiveness and/or memorable nature.

**interval:** The distance between two notes.

**legato:** Played smoothly, with minimal separation between notes.

**lick:** A characteristic, brief musical figure played in a prominent way as an embellishment in a performance of a piece; the term is usually used in the context of popular or vernacular music.

**Mixolydian mode:** A diatonic scale with the following pattern of whole- and half-steps ascending from the tonic note to the tonic note an octave higher: whole-whole-half-whole-whole-half-whole. The white keys on a piano from G to G exemplify this pattern. (See Appendix for more information.)

**modal:** Relating to the diatonic modes, as contrasted with major or minor scales. (See Appendix for more information.)

**obligato:** A prominent musical line that accompanies the primary line, often with a sense of improvisation and/or ornamentation.

**ostinato:** A repetitive, usually accompanimental musical pattern.

**pedal point:** A note that is sustained or repeated while other parts or harmonies change against it.

**riff:** A characteristic musical figure that recurs throughout a piece; the term is usually used in the context of popular or vernacular music.

**scat:** A style of jazz singing characterized by improvisational, instrumental-sounding nonsense syllables.

**syncopation:** Rhythmic emphasis that falls off the strong beat or part of the beat, rather than on.

**subdominant:** In a major or minor scale, the fourth scale step (such as F in the key of C major or C minor), or a chord that uses this note as its root. (See Appendix for more information.)

**submediant:** In a major or minor scale, the sixth scale step (such as A in the key of C major or A $\flat$  in the key of C minor), or a chord that uses this note as its root. (See Appendix for more information.)

**tonic:** The central note of a key, that is, the note toward which other notes gravitate, and which provides the most stable point of arrival; or a chord that uses this note as its root. In major and minor keys, and in most other scales, this is the note after which the key or scale is named. (See Appendix for more information.)

**vamp:** A repetitive accompanimental pattern; the term is often used to describe a pattern that can continue indefinitely, for example while waiting for a soloist to begin playing or singing.

**vocalise:** An exposed, improvisatory-sounding vocal line.

## BRIEF GUIDE TO CHORD STRUCTURE

This guide describes the structure of chords discussed in this book. The chords are usually named by a note name and other letters, numbers, and/or symbols. Most of these are explained below, with each section preceded by the symbols to which it applies (using as an example the note-name C). References to chords as they function in keys, using words like *subdominant*, *tonic*, and so forth, are explained briefly in the preceding glossary, and more extensively in the Appendix. The very rare references by Roman numerals are explained in the Appendix.

Most chords, and most chords discussed in this book, contain a *root* after which the chord is named, a *third* (two steps above the root), and a *fifth* (two steps above the third). A C major chord, then, contains the root C, the third E, and the fifth G. These three basic notes constitute a *triad*.

**C, Cm, C minor (major and minor triads):** Major triads are usually named in this book with only the note of their root, so this would be called a *C chord*. The exact size of the intervals among these notes determines whether a chord is major or some other *quality*; if the E is changed to an E $\flat$ , this chord becomes minor, and would be called *C minor* or *Cm*.

**C7, Cm7, Cmaj7 (seventh chords):** Other notes can be added to the triad, most typically a *seventh*, two steps above the fifth, which in this case would be a B or B $\flat$ . Chords that would result in this case could be major seventh chords (C-E-G-B, called *Cmaj7*), minor seventh chords (C-E $\flat$ -G-B $\flat$ , called *Cm7*), or major-minor seventh chords (C-E-G-B $\flat$ , called *C7*).

**C9, Cadd9, C6, Cm6, C11, Cm11 (added-note chords):** Less commonly, a ninth could be added (this would be a D if the root is C, making a *C9* chord—sometimes called *Cadd9*), a sixth could be added (some kind of A, resulting in a C-E-G-A (*C6*) or C-E $\flat$ -G-A $\flat$  (*Cm6*)), or even an eleventh could be added (an F, making a *C11* or *Cm11* chord).

**Csus4, C+, Cm7 $\flat$ 5, C diminished 7 (alterations of triad):** Finally, the basic triad can be altered in ways other than lowering the E to an E $\flat$ , as described above with reference to minor chords. The E could be replaced

with an F, usually regarded as a *suspended* note that wants to resolve back down to the E; since the F is a fourth above the C, this chord is commonly called a *Csus4*. The fifth of a major chord could be raised; the resulting C-E-G# chord is called *augmented*, and is symbolized with C+. Or the fifth of a minor chord could be lowered to make a *diminished* chord—C-E $\flat$ -G $\flat$ . Such chords in this style usually contain a seventh, either B $\flat$ , making a C-E $\flat$ -G $\flat$ -B $\flat$  chord, commonly identified here by *Cm7 $\flat$ 5*; or B $\flat\flat$ , making a C-E $\flat$ -G $\flat$ -B $\flat\flat$  chord, commonly identified here by *C diminished 7*.

# The Urban Folk Influence

Paul Simon and Arthur Garfunkel, three weeks his junior, came to know each other well as schoolboys in Forest Hills, New York, and it was at this time that they began to perform together at school, as well as at venues such as private parties and bar mitzvahs. As they grew into their teen years, they listened to the early rock and roll music that was popular in the late 1950s—with one notable influence being the Everly Brothers—and Simon became interested in writing his own songs. They began to frequent the music publishers' offices in New York, and at the age of 15, performing as “Tom and Jerry,” they actually had a Top 40 hit, “Hey Schoolgirl.” This led to an appearance on *American Bandstand*, and then to not much else in the way of fame. The duo recorded a few more songs without further commercial success, and Simon continued to write songs, some of which were recorded by other performers. Almost all of these efforts disappeared quickly.<sup>1</sup>

After graduating from high school, Simon and Garfunkel matriculated at college (Garfunkel at Columbia to study mathematics, and Simon at Queens to study English literature), but each continued his involvement in the music business. For Simon, in addition to continuing to write, this meant recording demos for other writers (sometimes in the company of Carole Klein—later to become known as Carole King) as well as other occasional activities. One of the most important benefits of this period of time for the aspiring musician was the thorough knowledge that he gained of the popular music industry, including both business practices and technical studio procedures.

*WEDNESDAY MORNING, 3 A.M.*  
AND *THE PAUL SIMON SONGBOOK*

After college (and a brief stint at law school), Simon continued his musical pursuits. No doubt influenced by his studies of English literature, he was becoming increasingly interested in the literary potential of his songwriting work. He found that the aesthetic environment and musical traditions of the early urban folk movement provided fertile ground for nurturing this impulse. Beginning to incorporate these styles into his own writing, he performed, sometimes with Garfunkel, in clubs in New York and England. A positive reaction to their music on the part of Tom Wilson, a producer of Bob Dylan's early work at Columbia records, resulted in their recording their first record album (LP), *Wednesday Morning, 3 A.M.*, in 1964. Intended to capitalize on the folk-music boom, the album combined five of Simon's songs and an original Simon-and-Garfunkel arrangement of a sixteenth-century sacred work with six more "proven" songs by other writers. It did not enjoy significant commercial success, however, and Simon returned to England.

There, his contact with a supporter named Judith Piepe led to his recording 12 of his songs, accompanied only by his guitar, to make an album called *The Paul Simon Songbook* (originally released only in the United Kingdom, but now available in the United States as well) in 1965. He was continuing to perform, write, and produce music in England and Europe when a song from *Wednesday Morning, 3 A.M.*, "The Sound of Silence," began to attract attention. In response to this, and unbeknownst to Simon and Garfunkel, Wilson added new instrumental tracks to the recording in order to give it a "folk rock" sound, and the reconstituted single was a huge success.

Simon was rushed back to the United States, and he and Garfunkel quickly recorded an album, *Sounds of Silence*, around the new version of the song, using the existing Simon compositions (along with one instrumental, "Anji," written by the British guitarist Davey Graham) that were felt to complete the album most effectively. *Sounds of Silence*, released in 1966, sold extremely well and established the duo in the public consciousness; the rest of their studio albums, each tremendously popular, followed in regular succession. *Parsley, Sage, Rosemary and Thyme*, also released in 1966, was the first of these and was the first opportunity that Simon and Garfunkel—along with recording engineer Roy Halee—had to exercise artistic control over the production of an album as a whole.

Of course, Simon and Garfunkel had had enough experience in the business even by the time *Wednesday Morning, 3 A.M.* was produced that they (or just Simon in the case of *The Paul Simon Songbook*) would have had some influence on the way the first three albums were assembled. All the same, each of them was shaped largely by external circumstances—the label-influenced "assembly" of *Wednesday Morning, 3 A.M.* and *Sounds of Silence* was discussed earlier in this chapter, and the haste with which *The Paul Simon Songbook* was recorded gives it more the character of a live set than that of a carefully produced

album. These first four albums were in some ways the result of sorting out how to release quite a few songs that had accumulated, and in fact, all but two of the songs on *The Paul Simon Songbook* appear in different versions on at least one of the duo albums (and “The Sound of Silence” actually appears on the first two duo albums<sup>2</sup>). Because of this, it is not essential to consider the composition of each album as a whole as a reliable reflection of Simon’s creative process. More revealing of his development will be a discussion of the songs on *Wednesday Morning, 3 A.M.*, along with the two that appear only on *Songbook*, as they show how some of Simon’s initial urban folk efforts led up to the landmark “The Sound of Silence.”

Probably the earliest-composed of these songs, “He Was My Brother,” appears on both *Wednesday Morning, 3 A.M.* and *The Paul Simon Songbook*.<sup>3</sup> (It is credited to a Simon pseudonym, “Paul Kane.”) Its theme and style are clearly products of Simon’s interest in the urban folk movement, as it tells the story of a civil-rights worker who dies in the struggle to bring about racial equality. Simon implied at one point that it had been written in response to the devastating news that an acquaintance of his, Andrew Goodman, had suffered just such a fate.<sup>4</sup> However, according to notes that Garfunkel wrote for *Wednesday Morning, 3 A.M.*, the song had been composed by June 1963, a year before Goodman’s death, although the *Songbook* version does change a reference to “this town” to “Mississippi” in order to refer more specifically to Goodman.<sup>5</sup>

The four verses of the song use a simple antecedent-consequent structure. In the first half of each, the progression of simple folk-guitar chords, strummed in “boom-chick” alternation with bass notes, first prolongs the tonic chord (D) and then moves to the dominant chord (A): D-C-D-Bm/F#-G-A. The second half repeats the same series with a final resolution to the tonic: D-C-D-Bm/F#-G-A-D.<sup>6</sup> The modal (Mixolydian in this case) nature of the C chord recalls the use of modal scales in rural folksongs. The melody follows a similarly parallel structure in the halves of the verses, moving from a sustained A down to an E in each verse’s first half, and then completing the journey from the A to a concluding D in the second.

The verses unfold the story directly, first introducing the listener to the brother who died at age 23, then describing the antagonistic reaction to his civil-rights work, then relating his murder, and finally mourning his death, but declaring that “he died so his brothers could be free.” The simplest recording of the song, the Simon-plus-solo-guitar version on *Songbook*, reveals four ways that the repetitive verse pattern is brought to a convincing conclusion. Two of these are typical folk-song formulas—the melody of the last line moves triumphantly to a new, higher register, and the last line is repeated. But two are more subtle.

First, the “brother” idea, when introduced in the titular first line, seems to be meant literally, or at least to indicate intimate companionship, and thus it encourages the listener to empathize with the narrator. But at the end, the idea is inverted to indicate the martyr’s embrace of many “brothers” (and, implicitly, especially those of a different race), thus praising his generosity of

spirit. Second, the sustained word “free” at the end rounds out the song by connecting with the sustained syllables “He” and “Free-” at the beginnings of the verses.

This song’s virtues as an essay in the newly popular folk style had actually been crucial in leading Tom Wilson to produce *Wednesday Morning, 3 A.M.*<sup>7</sup> The version of the song that appears on that album includes added instruments that create a fuller, more jangly sound. Garfunkel provides a high harmony line throughout until the end, at which point he takes the newly ascended melody and Simon sings a lower harmony. This version is thus a bit sweeter than that on *Songbook*, but essentially the same structurally.

The next of the recorded songs to have been written is the little-known “The Side of a Hill.” This song appears only on *The Paul Simon Songbook*, although almost half of the “Canticle” text from *Parsley, Sage, Rosemary and Thyme*’s “Scarborough Fair/Canticle” is drawn from its lyrics.

The simple poetic structure of the song’s three four-line stanzas is emphasized by an identical melody (with very minor variations) for each. The first verse tells of a boy lying “asleep” in the earth on the side of a hill while a war is fought in the valley below “in a land called ‘Somewhere,’” the second reveals that a soldier killed the boy and describes a cloud watering his grave “with its silent tears,” and the third describes continued, senseless fighting, while recalling the image of the weeping cloud.

This text, with its political commentary expressed in the context of a narrative implied by a few vivid images, is quite typical of the urban folk genre. Its musical setting makes full use of the resources available to a singer with a single acoustic guitar. Simon fingerpicks his accompaniment in the guitar-friendly key of G major (capoed three frets to sound in B $\flat$ ), and uses all six major and minor chords within the key (GM, Am, Bm, CM, Dm, Em) and none outside of the key, and his playing is full of typical folk-guitar elements such as hammer-ons and runs.

The music presents several interesting subtleties, though. Most importantly, Simon manipulates the sense of stability in the key to reflect the unsettled nature of the text. The first verse is preceded by a brief interlude that strongly implies the key of A minor, and this leads to the A minor chord that begins the verse. This “sideways” beginning sets the text “On the side of a,” and then the real tonic chord, G major, arrives on the stable word “hill.” The last word of each of the first three lines is set with a G chord but avoids closure with a non-G melody note (either B or D). Then, in the first two verses, the last line finally concludes with G in the melody, but this arrival is undercut with a deceptive cadence to an E minor chord.

Only in the third verse does the last word receive a stable G melody note and G chord. This final stability is underscored by a brief guitar coda that solidly emphasizes the G harmony (in contrast to the A minor introduction). Simon further achieves closure by ending the third verse with the phrase “on the side of a hill,” which opened each of the first two verses but was withheld until this point from the third.