Gene Lees
Jazzletter

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That Tax

Dear Mr. Lees:

I recently received a copy of the March 15 *Jazzletter* editorial and I must comment on it. It seems ironic that you take offense at the recording industry and its artists seeking compensation for their copyrighted musical works — music that they've worked hard and long to produce, that gives the public much enjoyment. Yet, I noticed at the bottom right of the editorial page the words "Copyright 1983 by Gene Lees." Obviously, you treasure your work and want to insure it's not copied indiscriminately by anyone without permission or payment. Then — why should the creators of copyright musical works feel any different about their creative property?

Sincerely
Audrey B. Strahl
Director of Public Relations
Recording Industry Association of America, Inc.
New York, NY

Dear Ms Strahl:

Your letter is, well, frankly, a little embarrassing. You did not refute, did not even attempt to refute, a single point made in that editorial. You chose only to quote the *Jazzletter*'s conventional copyright notice with a sort of small "Aha! Gotcha!" satisfaction while ignoring the issues raised.

Clearly, you did not do your homework, or you would know that I am not some extraneous commentator sticking his nose into an industry he does not understand. I am a songwriter. My lyrics include *Quiet Nights of Quiet Stars, Someone to Light Up My Life, Song of the Jet, This Happy Madness, Waltz for Debby, Yesterday I Heard the Rain*, and quite a few more. You will therefore forgive me, I hope, if your sentimental panegyric in behalf of me and my fellows and the songs we "worked hard and long to produce" elicits from me a somewhat jaded smile. Actually, I didn't work long and hard on the lyric to *Dreamer*; I wrote it in seven minutes. Johnny Mercer wrote the lyrics to *Days of Wine and Roses* in five. And Howard Dietz and Arthur Schwartz wrote *That's Entertainment* in one hour flat — every brilliant chorus of it.

How "long and hard" we work on a song is irrelevant anyway. Some rock groups spend months making an album only because they are so ignorant and untalented. Though *Waltz for Debby* took me a year (as *Skylark* took Mercer a year), professionals generally work quickly as a result of years of experience and observation. You are paying us for our talent, not our time. Or at least you're supposed to. The industry you represent too frequently doesn't pay for either. I will be happy to introduce you to a composer who went to see the president of a certain label about his royalties only to have the executive slap a .38 automatic on the desk and say, "Now, what were you saying about your royalties?" That, of course, is an extreme case. Usually the mistreatment of the artist is more subtle. Among the composers, players, arrangers, and singers who form the bulk of the *Jazzletter*'s readers, you will find few if any who are not angry at the industry's slick now-you-see-it-now-you-don't handling of artists' royalties. Let us not, while we are on the subject, overlook the cases pending in Hollywood regarding non-payment of percentages to actors (James Garner for one) and directors in films and television. And remember that many of these companies are linked to record companies. Morality in a corporation, as Toronto radio executive Don Aynsworth once put it, doesn't seep up from the bottom, it trickles down from the top. Little kids with tape recorders worry me, as a songwriter, much less than big companies with accountants.

You would also have known, if you had done your homework, that I have been an ardent fighter for the rights of the artist since my days at *Down Beat* and before. I submit that your organization, RIAA, is not a champion of the rights of the artist, it is a champion of the practices of the record industry, whose policy much of the time has been to screw the artist in every way it can imagine or invent. The RIAA represents just what its name says it does, the record *industry*. You are in a position only to do the special pleading of the record companies who ultimately pay your salary. In view of the industry's track record, you can hardly expect me or any other creator or performer of music to trust it to conscientiously collect, scrupulously account for, and equitably distribute our royalties. To do so would be, in someone's apt phrase, like putting Dracula in charge of a blood bank. And so the industry's weepy hypocrisy about the rights of the artist is a bad joke.

You are not a subscriber to the *Jazzletter* or you would be better informed on certain pertinent issues. Some time ago, I commented on the aging of the populace, which affects every phase of American life. I ran a table of comparison between twelve- and thirty-year-olds in the population which, since you missed it, I shall reproduce for you now.

	12-year-olds	30-year-olds
1960	3,942,000	2,311,000
1965	3,800,000	2,260,000
1970	4,172,000	2,486,000
1975	4,062,000	2,951,000
1980	3,442,000	3,682,000
1985	3,164,000	4,189,000

You can see a primary reason for the fall in record sales.

In 1974, I noticed a pattern emergent in television advertising. For one thing, Johnson and Johnson was pitching baby shampoo and powder for use by adults. Then I read that Gerber's, the manufacturer of baby foods, was diversifying its holdings because of the slump in the birth rate. Since the advertising industry does excellent market research, I became curious about what they knew that the rest of us didn't.

A few weeks ago — June 9, 1983 — the Associated Press carried a story on the fall in the sale of hard candies, which caused Life Savers Inc., to close its oldest factory. "To the government officials who monitor lollipops, lemon drops, sourballs, and suckers, it's all a matter of demographics," the story said.

"America's median age rose from twenty-eight to thirty between 1970 and 1980, meaning half the population is now thirty or older. Neil Kenny, an analyst for the Commerce Department in Washington, said the changing population mix and the growing sophistication of adults had an effect on candy sales.

"'As the population matures, its taste preferences mature,' Kenny said."

Exactly. And this happened in music too. But the record industry has persisted in putting out some sort of musical equivalent of hard candy.

About the time I read of the Gerber actions, I encountered another news report saying that between 1975 and 1985, 20,000 primary schools would be closed in the United States for lack of pupils to fill them. It was at this point that I became curious to know what the tendency toward zero population growth would do to the record industry. I researched the subject carefully with the help of the National Education Association, which was well aware of the trend and worried about future employment for teachers, and the Bureau of the Census. The RIAA could have done the same research I did; it didn't. Indeed, I talked at the time to people at the RIAA, including Stanley Gortikov, and I encountered not only a complete ignorance of the trend but a complacent indifference to it. (I met only one man in the industry who was familiar with the trend, a market research specialist at Capitol Records, and two others who were interested: Ken Glancy, then president of RCA Records, and Bruce Lundvall, then head of CBS Records. And Lundvall foresaw a diversification of purchasing patterns.)

My article, which ultimately appeared in the *Saturday Review*, was titled *Zero Population Growth and the Record Industry*. Among those I quoted was Stan Cornyn of Warner Bros. Records, a consistent and articulate critic of the industry for its continuing blinkered concentration on an adolescent audience that was already shrinking. I predicted that the industry, unless it changed its ways (which I hardly expected it to do, given its past), would be in trouble by 1980. (The first signs of trouble, in fact, appeared even before then.)

About that same time, Ben Sidran — himself a songwriter, pianist, and journalist — wrote an article for *Rolling Stone* approaching the subject from a somewhere different angle but essentially corroborating my own conclusions. He discussed *The Limits of Growth* in the record industry. Between us, Sidran and I pretty well documented that the industry's period of wild and weedlike growth was over. The industry could have and should have settled into a period of sustained and responsible sales to the thirty- and forty-year-old audience that was emerging, the same old record buyers grown longer in the tooth. Its greed — manifest in the past payola scandals and even drug distribution to artists and disc jockeys — would not allow it.

When my article appeared, some executives on the hardware side of the industry — those who make the turntables and tuners and speakers — contacted me to say that my research had confirmed their own. One company, which had been planning to introduce a line of cheap speakers for rock-and-roll fans, had decided to stick to high-quality merchandise on grounds of the aging population. (Incidentally, I was shocked to discover that the record industry had almost no working contact with the hardware manufacturers. It might have learned something from them.)

The aging of the population is not of course the only factor in the fall of record sales. There is evidence that another important cause is the extremely poor quality of American pressings. It is only the more tempting to tape rather than buy a recording if sound quality is not an important factor. And how can it be important, given the sandpaper surfaces of so many recordings? The quality of American pressings is such that the Japanese laugh at and won't own them. I have heard Mexican pressings that were superior to ours. Many audiophile labels print "Imported Pressing" on their wrappers, which in itself suggests the quality of domestic pressings — just as that notorious line of music publishers to songwriters, "And we'll give you an honest count," is an inadvertent confession of the general level of ethics in the music biz.

Besides poor pressings and the continued output of a dull music that an older population doesn't want, the sale of video games — to that smaller market of teen-agers that does exist — has unquestionably cut into record sales, particularly in a time when "disposable income" has been reduced drastically. And one of the biggest companies in that field is Warner Communications, which gives us the exquisite example of one division of a company cutting into the profits of another division and expecting the public to compensate for this loss. Warner, as I hardly need remind you, is one of the big supporters of the Home Recording Act. Meantime, music stores report a heavy demand for electronic keyboard instruments selling from $1,000 to $2,000 — money that will not be spent on records. And neither will the time that the buyer will subsequently expend on playing the instrument. Let me remind you that CBS, one of the companies pushing for the HRA, is very big in the keyboard-instrument field, having gobbled up Steinway, Fender-Rhodes, and Moog. Thus we have the Big Two (see the following) pushing for the HRA.

Finally, slipshod management is a major plague of the record business. I refer you to the letter by Robert Golden in the Oct. 15, 1982, *Jazzletter*.

You did not take time to explain in your letter how you would devise a system that tells us who is taping what in secrecy and how you are going to send money to, say, Tony Bennet and me for a lost sale on *Yesterday I Heard the Rain*. Nor did you refute the point that the RIAA and other organizations are pushing a bill that would allow a private industry to level a tax on the American consumer. You did not attempt to prove that this is even constitutional.

Some years ago the American and British record industries combined efforts to try to force into legislation in Canada a bill that would have provided for the payment of airplay royalties to performers and the record companies. My writings, clarifying the issues involved, helped get that bill defeated. As the legislation was written, the record industry would have collected the money and distributed some of it to the performers.

In fact I favored (and still do) the establishment of a new *artist-administered* organization, parallel to ASCAP and BMI, to collect money from broadcasters on behalf of the performers and distribute it directly to them. But I could not then and would not now condone an *industry-administered* collection system for performers.

We have a not dissimilar situation now in the United States with the bill you champion. Let me repeat: of the two pending bills, I oppose that which would levy a sales tax on blank tape because someone might tape a song with it. I favor the other bill, the one that would halt the practice of some stores of charging a rental fee for allowing customers to tape albums.

I would urge that you study the corporate structure of the communications industries. Approximately fifteen corporations, including CBS, RCA, Warner Communications, Gulf and Western, and Transamerica, control virtually all significant communications in the United States. I recommend that you read Robert Metz's book *CBS: Reflections in a Bloodshot Eye*. There you will learn how CBS, choking on profits that can only be described as obscene, diversified into conglomerate holdings. I suggest that you learn, among other things, how much of the book-publishing industry is now owned by the electronic communications giants. The implications for the free expression of ideas in America, the very cornerstone of democracy, are terrifying.

I wouldn't, therefore, worry too much about poor old CBS and NBC and Warner Communications. Take a look at their profits *as a whole*.

It used to be that such corporations had a commitment to our culture and, while they made money on *How Much Is that Doggy in the Window, Rag Mop*, and *The Little White Cloud that Cried*, some sense of *noblesse oblige* resulted in the spending of a certain amount of it on music, classical included, of genuine value. Amazingly, some of it even became popular. But the mass record industry ceased to be culturally responsible when the lawyers and accountants — what Ayn Rand, in *The New Intellectual*, called

the appropriators — took it over. It is committed now only to the unprincipled acquisition of profits, no matter what offal it sells.

All these things render your citation of my copyright notice a little bogus. And there is one thing about it to which I must draw your attention.

You said that I "obviously treasure (my) work and want to insure it's not copied indiscriminately by anyone without permission or payment". Well, somebody obviously copied or distributed it *to you* without my "permission or payment." And your ethical sensitivies were not sufficient for you to enclose a check.

A certain amount of copying of our work — whether songs or the *Jazzletter* — is inevitable. One simply cannot help it if someone makes a photocopy of the lead sheet of a song, any more than one can help it is someone tapes the same song. I suspect that we are losing far less to the copiers than to the companies. If you and the RIAA have acquired a sudden ardent interest in the earnings of the artist, maybe you can check on the mechanical royalties for my song *Bridges*. I haven't received a penny in four years.

Indeed, if you are so concerned for the "rights of the artist" — and let us not forget that the big corporations have never tried to do anything but beat us down — I would suggest that the RIAA establish strict standards of ethical behavior for the record industry, including a committee of investigation *not* comprising executives of the major labels, and that expulsion from the organization be just one of the punishments for serious violations, with attendant publicity.

In the meantime, I would ask you to forego pretending to speak for us, the artists. I have talked to many of my colleagues about this issue, and a typical response is a letter from the fine and respected vibraharpist Mike Mainieri:

"Congratulations on (the) recent editorial blasting the proposed HRA of 1983.

"I fully support your views, based on my own experience in the recording industry for the past thirty years. I've been quite active not only as a player but as a producer and studio musician, which has given me the opportunity to delve behind the scenes at the company level. I totally agree that the industry is crumbling from its own ineptitude and greed. Its failure to serve artists fairly has crippled careers and stunted the growth of American cultural arts."

Furthermore

While perhaps fifteen companies control communications in America, even fewer control the distribution of music. At the moment, the industry speaks of the Big Six. But this may soon become the Big Two, since Warner Communications and PolyGram plan to merge.

This would leave the resultant giant and CBS — which recently overtook Warner as the U.S. leader — in total domination of the music marketplace. RCA Records, Capitol-EMI, and MCA Records would be "relegated to second-tier status," according to a report in *Advertising Age*.

"The trend in the music industry," the publication said, "has been to cut overhead through consolidation, in an effort to withstand the rocky road the industry has been travelling since it peaked in 1978.

"The $3 billion business, buffeted by counterfeiting and lost sales from home audio taping of albums, shipped 576 million units last year, down from 726 million in 1978, according to the Recording Industry Association of America, a trade association."

Advertising Age, it should be noted, did not question the industry's claim that home taping is a major cause of sales losses. A recent article in *Washington Journalism Review* — a magazine produced for journalists — deplored the level of foreign news coverage by the American press which, it said, is "definitely not as good as in most other countries that have a free press." Neither is domestic coverage. It has slipped badly in recent years, and the passive acceptance by *Advertising Age* and other publications of RIAA arithmetic concerning this issue is an example of the erosion of that skepticism that is the life blood of good journalism.

In the sale of music — called "software" nowadays — CBS accounts for 23%, Warner 21%, RCA 13%, PolyGram 10%, Capitol-EMI 9%, MCA 6%, Motown an estimated 3%. "RCA and MCA are operated by U.S. conglomerates, while Capitol-EMI's parent is based in the U.K.," *Advertising Age* said.

With these huge companies now controlling substantial shares of book and magazine publishing (*High Fidelity*, for example, is now owned by ABC-TV), the chances of the true artist reaching his public grow increasingly slim — unless and until he and his fellows finally establish co-operatives and new means of distribution, rather than praying and waiting for the largesse of the new "Big Two".

The War that Died of Singing

Twenty-one years ago, I visited every country of Latin America except Cuba with the Paul Winter Sextet, and I made at that time an extensive study of the various regions — aided considerably by our baritone player, Les Rout, who had a degree in Latin American history. The only thing that surprises me about events in El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Honduras is that they didn't occur long ago. The abuses suffered by the people there — often as the result of American foreign policy, the U.S. support of ghastly dictatorships — left a mark on all of us who made that tour.

About that time, Fred Cooke, a veteran of the New York *Herald-Tribune*, wrote a book called *The Warfare State*, documenting the extent of the intrusion of the armaments industry into every corner of American life. The subject has recently been re-examined in articles in the Los Angeles *Times*, which showed among other things that even those politicians who make the most dove-like speeches will vote for armaments purchases if they mean jobs in their own states. This includes liberals and conservatives alike. A knee-jerk condemnation of "the military" won't do: some of *them* are appalled at the money wasted on equipment they don't even want. (The B-1, for example, is being built; but it's obsolete.)

Now, at the same time, we read that draft registration, initiated by Jimmy Carter and continued by Ronald Reagan (in spite of pre-election speeches opposing it), has been something less than a universal success. Many young men still have not registered. And there is no way to know how many merely registered rather than make trouble for themselves but did so, as it were, with fingers crossed. How many of them would, in the case of an active call-up, take off for Canada or Sweden? How deep is the opposition to military service and to these incessant wars? It is doubtful that the Harris or Gallop polls could tell us, because the average young man probably doesn't know what he would do if Ronald Reagan and those who made him succeed in getting yet another war going, so that they can use up some of the inventory of materiel. But there is a way to examine the American attitude to war and military service — the nation's songs.

And what America's war songs indicate is a profound and ubiquitous change in attitude. The polls *do* indicate that the Reagan administration (and remember, he made no secret of his bellicosity in his election campaign) is having a hard time stirring public enthusiasm for a war in Central America. Henry Kissinger's committee of study may make whatever recommendations it wishes, but they cannot alter attitudes that have apparently become deep-rooted, part of the American psyche, nor can they readily eradicate memories of Viet Nam.

World War I songs rang with enthusiasm for the slaughter in Europe. But during the Viet Nam war, there was really only one

song expressing a remotely comparable sentiment — Sgt. Barry Sadler's *Ballad of the Green Berets*. And although there was a vigorous publicity campaign for Sadler and the song, it never had the character of a true and natural hit. The song and the campaign in fact had all the earmarks of a bought-and-paid-for CIA job.

At the time, the government and the military were under the pressure of the youthful sentiment against the war. That sentiment had been largely generated by popular music which, as has now been recognized, had become the *lingua franca* of the young. As brainless as the stuff was musically, it was political gelignite. That the government or its agents would attempt to offset that sentiment with a song of praise for the war was perhaps inevitable. Sadler's *Ballad of the Green Berets* was even more tuneless and pedestrian than the run of music at the time, and poorly recorded. Given the sentiment of the young people who dominated the record market, no producer in his right mind, and no company, would have willingly put it out, unless there were some strong extraneous reason for doing so, such as a request or pressure from the government. It should be remembered that RCA is also a major military supplier and earns massive amounts of its income from government contracts.

Guessing that the Sadler album was a rig, I pretended to a high RCA executive that I knew all about how it had come to be made — an ancient deception of cops and journalists — and, to my amazement, he admitted it.

There is an irony to the situation. RCA was also one of the primary purveyors of anti-war and anti-establishment sentiment, as expressed by the Jefferson Airplane, among others. This collective call for the overthrow of the war machine and the establishment, put on the market for profit by this pillar of the establishment, recalled almost eerily Lenin's prognosis that when capitalism committed suicide, Communism would sell it the rope.

In countries under authoritarian rule, politicians and the military understand the power of songs to shape public opinion. The government of Brazil, a dictatorship supported by the United States, some years ago took control of the output of that country's record industry. During the rule of the military junta in Greece, censors were actually stationed in recording studios. (Indeed, a censor told a Greek composer acquaintance of mine that he could not record a song because its lyric was too revolutionary. When the composer replied that the "lyric" was in fact drawn directly from the New Testament, the censor said it didn't matter, it was still too revolutionary.) Having no recourse to direct control of communications, American officialdom had to be satisfied with covert manipulation. Barry Sadler's song and the album built around it constituted a clumsy attempt to maneuver in the world of popular music. Other than Sadler's song, now a forgotten oddity, all the songs of the Viet Nam war were in opposition to it.

The United States, like other countries, has traditionally gone to war singing. The Revolutionary War, the Civil War, the Spanish-American War, each produced its share of songs, some good, a lot of them saccharine and silly. *My Sweetheart Went Down with the Maine* celebrated an event that some historians think was even then a covert operation of the United States to provide a pretext for war in Latin America. It had its moment and then went to the special limbo of obsolete songs. The best-known song of the Spanish-American War of course was *Break the News to Mother*, which was not a protest against war but a sentimental bid for war sentiment.

Whatever their value as art, the songs that became successful then were usually enthusiastic or at least acquiescent toward American military intercession. The classic song of World War I was *Over There*, full of confidence that the Yanks would settle things forthwith and with minimal fuss upon their arrival. It was the work of George M. Cohan, who was given a Congressional Medal of Honor for his patriotic songs.

World War I produced an astonishing number of songs. Close behind *Over There* in popularity were *K-K-K-Katy, When the Boys Come Home, Hinky-Dinky-Parlez-Vous,* and *Oh How I Hate to Get Up in the Morning.* The last of these had a touch of realism, since it voiced objection to the military life. It was, however, a good-natured gripe at most. Cohan's *Give My Regards to Broadway* was actually written before the war, but it gained a sort of honorary war-song status. *It's a Long Way to Tipperary* and *Pack Up Your Troubles in Your Old Kit Bag*, two British songs, were warmly adopted by American troops.

The optimism of the time is evident in *Keep Your Head Down, Fritzy Boy; I'd Like to See the Kaiser with a Lily in his Hand;* and *We'll Knock the Hell Out of Heligoland.* A dreadful pun is found in *We Don't Want the Bacon, What We Want Is a Piece of the Rhine*, and classic kitsch in *If He Can Fight Like He Can Love, Good Night, Germany.* That was not the longest title of the war. This distinction probably belongs to *Just Like Washington Crossed the Delaware, General Pershing Will Cross the Rhine.* (General Pershing didn't. That honor went to some of George S. Patton's men a quarter century later.)

Inter-service rivalry was apparently an issue even then: perhaps irked by all the publicity the army was getting, some pro-navy songwriter petulantly asserted *The Navy Took Them Over and the Navy Will Bring Them Home.*

Love had its moments in *My Buddy, My Belgian Rose*, and perhaps the most beautiful song to come out of the war, *Roses of Picardy.* Among the most lugubrious, and certainly one of the most successful, was *Rose of No Man's Land*, which was sung around player pianos all over America. ("Through the war's great curse stands the Red Cross nurse; she's the Rose of No Man's Land")

In somewhat the same class was *Hello, Central, Give Me No Man's Land.* In 1901, during the early days of the telephone, Charles K. Harris wrote the tear-jerker *Hello, Central, Give Me Heaven*, about a little girl trying to reach her dead mother on the phone. It was a huge hit, and it inspired any number of *Hello, Central* songs. At the very utterance of these words, audiences duly wept. *Hello, Central, Give Me No Man's Land* was built on its model.

But wistfulness was on the whole kept to a minimum in WW I songs. It was a simple-hearted, matter-of-fact, naive, and to large extent rural America that went off to the seeming great adventure, and possibly the most typical title was *Goodbye Ma, Goodbye Pa, Goodbye Mule.*

America's songs grew much more sophisticated in the time between the two great wars. It was the era of Kern, Gershwin, Youmanns, Porter. Even the purely intuitive Irving Berlin had evolved as a composer, using more complex harmonies, subtler melodic lines, and more literate lyrics. It was inevitable that World War II's songs would be different from those of the previous war, but the difference was more than one might have expected. There was much more melancholy in them. And those meant to inspire the patriotic fervor seemed contrived compared with the convinced outpourings of Irving Berlin and others in the preceeding war.

The best-known songs of this kind in the second war were *Ballad for Americans, Coming in on a Wing and a Prayer, Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition, Rosie the Riveter, The Ballad of Roger Young, Any Bonds Today,* and *There's a Star-Spangled Banner Waving Somewhere.* They sounded as if they had been written at the request of the Office of War Information. Some of them were. And whatever the frequency of their performance, it is questionable how much actual grass-roots popularity they had. One heard soldiers and their girls sing *Deep in the Heart of Texas* around a beer table. But does anyone remember anyone actually singing *Any Bonds Today*?

For the most part, the songs the people sang and danced to had

a melancholy cast to them, such as the Jerome Kern-Oscar Hammerstein *The Last Time I Saw Paris,* and *I'll Be Seeing You* — which was also about lost Paris, as one discovers on hearing the seldom-sung verse. Woven deeply into the fabric of the war's mood were *When the Lights Go On Again All Over the World, Goodbye Sue, I Don't Want to Set the World on Fire, This Will Be My Shining Hour, I Left My Heart at the Stage Door Canteen, The White Cliffs of Dover, Lily Marlene,* a German song taken up by Allied troops, and *A Nightingale Sang in Berkeley Square,* which was an import from England. Typical too was *My Sister and I,* about two little girls lost in the turmoil of war. Much more than in World War I, the most popular songs were about loneliness and disruption. Many of course made no direct mention of war, but its wretched hovering presence was implicit in the lyrics. Even the cheerful songs, such as *Don't Sit Under the Apple Tree,* centered on the separations caused by the war. Johnny Mercer had clever fun with the argot of the time in *The G.I. Jive,* and the Howard Dietz-Arthur Schwartz song *They're Either Too Young or Too Old* described the limited sexual choices of the girls left at home.

World War I was, in almost all ways, the watershed between the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries. War in those earlier days was a far-away thing, still tinged with romance. (To be sure, news came faster than it did when General Custer's men were exterminated at the Little Big Horn; the news of that event took two days to reach the New York *Herald.*) But news still was not vivid, as it later would become. Battles were things people read about in gray and lifeless print. Photojournalism was new.

But in the 1920s, radio came to the world, and by World War II people got their news within hours from H.V. Kaltenborn, Gabriel Heater, and Eric Sevareid. Indeed, they sometimes got it sooner than that: in some of Edward R. Murrow's broadcasts from London, they could hear the bombs and, because of radio's curious effect on the imagination, "see" them falling on working men and women like themselves and children like their own. The movies too made war vivid. Though Hollywood covered war's face with makeup — John Payne or John Wayne or someone of that kind saving the world at critical junctures — the newsreels did not. Those were real dead bodies lying there and real tanks burning in the North African desert, and the dirty weariness of those G.I.'s trudging up the hot dry roads of the Italian peninsula were almost palpable. At the same time, the newspapers were becoming if not more honest, at least more vivid and their power was augmented by the picture magazines. Nobody who saw it can forget the *Life* magazine photo of a dead American soldier half-buried in the sand of a nameless Pacific atoll, the uniform of his bloated body lightly sprinkled with maggots. Oh, so *that's* what happens to you in a war! If Richard Harding Davis was the correspondent of the Spanish-American war, faithfully disseminating Teddy Roosevelt's deceits, the beloved Ernie Pyle was the writer of World War II, telling the story of the G.I.'s war, the pain, ignominy, and death of it. The communications media were taking all the fun out of war, and it would have been hard, perhaps impossible, to sell the public a cheerful image of it in song.

But two more new means of communication were on history's horizon — the tape recorder and television. Korea was America's first televised war, although compared with the saturate coverage TV would expend on Viet Nam, its reportage was slight. Nor did most homes have TV sets yet. Still, the coverage had impact even then.

Perhaps another factor was at work. America joined World War I three years after its beginning, when it was almost dead of attrition anyway, and entered World War II more than two years after its outbreak. Korea came suddenly, and the propaganda machine had no chance to prepare the public for it. Furthermore, World War II was only five years in the past, and people were still yearning for peace. America went to Korea achingly.

And a curious thing happened, or rather didn't happen. The Korean War produced almost no songs at all. It was the war that Tin Pan Alley ignored. Actually, it produced one song, *Dear John Letter,* about a soldier who receives word that his woman is going to marry someone else.

That song could be interpreted as the turning point in America's expression through song of its feelings about war. (Wingy Mannone in 1941 recorded a song called *Stop the War, the Cats Are Killing Themselves,* but no one much ever heard of it.) Korea is a conspicuous silence in American musical history.

Then came Viet Nam, the most thoroughly-reported war in world history. Napoleon said that history is an agreed-upon fiction. And it undoubtedly is, since it is written by the victors, who always state that the cause of the vanquished was unjust. This leads to the curious cumulative illusion that the good guys never lose, which in fact they frequently do. Had the faction headed by the Clantons won the gunfight at the O.K. Corral, Ike Clanton doubtless would be portrayed as the hero in Hollywood's periodic exploitations of the event, with Wyatt Earp and Doc Holliday the deep-dyed villains.

The military lied about Viet Nam, and so did the executive branch of the government, and they both compounded the confusion by saying that the press was lying when it was telling the truth. Orwell's prediction of newspeak and double-think had come true: lies are truth; truth is lies. Had the struggle to find fact been limited to verbal exchanges, truth would no doubt have lost before the jury of the American people. But by now every home, indeed nearly every hovel, had television. And the motion picture crews were swarming over Viet Nam, the still cameramen right beside them. A G.I. gave a flip of his Zippo lighter and touched the flame to the thatch of some peasant's pathetic home, and a cameraman caught it. The chief of police of Saigon put a pistol to the head of a prisoner and killed him, and a cameraman caught it. Agents of the CIA dropped a prisoner out of a helicopter, and a cameraman caught it. Americans murdered men, women, and children at My Lai, and a camerman caught it, all of it. The illusion that only the enemy is cruel, that Our Boys and Our Allies are endlessly benign, died. War was *seen* to be — not said to be, but *seen* to be — exactly what Sherman called it, Hell. And Hell was a vividly ghastly place, and the voices justifying American presence and participation in it gradually fell silent as the evidence of the pictures, moving and still, came day after day and night after night.

It would have been absolutely impossible to sell the public a song in the style and sentiment of *Over There* under such conditions, against such imagery. Not that the music industry wanted to: sentiment in the popular music world was instinctively anti-war anyway.

And for the first time in American history, all the songs, with the exception of Barry Sadler's, which in any case came early in the war, were *anti*-war songs, reflecting both the sentiment of the song-writers and the growing bias of the public. One such song was *The Eve of Destruction.* Another was Joan Baez's *Saigon Bride,* about a soldier who marries a Viet Namese girl and begins to feel guilt over killing her people.

Satirist Tom Lehrer turned out murderously mocking songs such as *Who's Next* (about the spread of atomic weapons), *So Long, Mom, I'm Off to Drop the Bomb* (which he called "a bit of pre-nostalgia" for World War III) and *Send the Marines,* satirizing the tendency to hair-trigger military intercession. His viewpoint was hardly a popular one at the time. Yet within a few years it would find its echo in speeches of even some conservative politicians.

But the most powerful voice was that of Bob Dylan. All of his songs, broadsides, really, were anti-Establishment, and some of them very harshly so. But it was one of his gentler songs, *Where Have All the Flowers Gone?* that became the theme song of the

war. Beyond the specific content of its lyrics, it became associated with the general mourning of human folly and destruction. On July 4, 1968, I happened to be in Montreux, Switzerland. The townspeople had arranged a lake-shore bonfire party for the American students there. In the glow of the flames, they sang. What? *God Bless America?* No, they sang *Where Have All the Flowers Gone?* They sang it at least three times in the course of that evening. Such was its power.

The cumulative effect of the anti-Establishment and anti-war songs in the 1960s is impossible to estimate. But by the same token, it would be hard to overestimate it, either. We can say only that it was profound and pervasive, undoubtedly the most powerful single force in shaping the general sentiments of the young, and there can be no doubt that popular songs were at the heart of the protest movement. This is fairly widely understood. What has been little noted is the effect of anti-war songs on the morale of the military units in Viet Nam.

In World War II, the Germans employed Lord Haw-Haw to broadcast propaganda to the British, and the Japanese used several girls who became collectively known to American troops in the Pacific as Tokyo Rose. The troops even became fond of "her", laughing at her propaganda and enjoying the American popular music she brought them.

The North Vietnamese and Viet Cong had no need of such propaganda programming. The Americans were doing the job for them. A naval officer friend of mine, who had been stationed off Viet Nam, put it this way: "The Armed Forces Radio station in Tokyo was playing the same stuff the civilian stations were playing back home. And it was heavily anti-war and anti-military. There were beaming it right in to front-line combat troops, and believe me, it had one hell of an effect. One record could influence the performance of an entire fighting organization."

One of the most powerful anti-war songs ever written is *Johnny I Hardly Knew You*, and one of the most touching is *Danny Boy*. But when they were written, their immediate influence was limited to the range of the unamplified human voice, and they did little to alter the course of history.

But the 1960s was an era of phonograph records and radio, an age of reproduced music, not of live performance. The consumers of it were the wartime and post-war babies, a statistically large group in the population. At the age of maximum yearning to be part of their "peer group", as the sociologists put it, seeing each other every day in classrooms and corridors, listening to the same disc jockeys, they were a remarkably easy group to reach and influence. A given statement of political or social sentiment could be released on a record to radio stations and stores one week, be known to most of the young people of America the next, and sink into their subconscious within a month. No printed publication had anything approaching that kind of power to shape opinion.

Asked once why men went to war, T.E. Lawrence said, "Because the women are watching." This new medium of propaganda told not only the young men that war was wrong, but their women as well. Instead of pinning white feathers of cowardice on men who were not in uniform — the practice of English and Canadian women in World War I — American girls joined in the protest against the Viet Nam war. Even if a young man's father was a veteran of World War II, proud of his own service and apoplectic at his son's refusal to serve, the boy had the moral backing of his "peers", girlfriends, favorite disc jockey, and Bob Dylan.

So wide did opposition to the war become among the young that a boy might desert to Sweden or Canada, or dodge the draft, or even go to jail, without arousing the contempt of his friends.

If popular songs had the greatest influence in shaping opposition to the war among the young, television was the major factor in changing the thinking of their parents. Songs came first, and had already hardened the dissent of the young by the time television news began convincing their elders that the kids might not be so wrong after all.

When Eugene McCarthy began his campaign to wrest the nomination for the presidency from Lyndon Johnson, a formidable body of young adults, already anti-war and anti-Johnson, formed the most important element of his constituency. They cut their hair and shaved and, Clean for Gene, went to New Hampshire to help him win his 1968 primary victory. Johnson decided not to run again.

Johnson's political youth was a time of hand-shaking personal contact, and direct campaigning. It was a time before electronic politics, a time before McLuhan. It is doubtful that he ever understood that he was evicted from the White House not so much by Eugene McCarthy as by some unsung camermen and a songwriter named Bob Dylan.

Thus far we have discussed only the popular music of war time, not the folk music. At one time popular music was defined as music for the people, folk music as music by the people. By definition, you cannot call rock and roll a folk music, no matter how much its advocates may wish to use that ah-shucks term to apologize for its banalities.

Throughout the history of war, there has been a folk music, the music of the soldiers, the songs they sing while marching or drinking. They are almost invariably anti-heroic, anti-military, and salacious. In previous eras they were very rarely heard by women, although every veteran knew them. The origins of some of them are lost in antiquity. They include *The Ball of Kerry Moor*, which is said to go back at least as far as the Sixteenth Century in Scotland, and is one of the most erotically imaginative songs in the English — or any other — language. Another is *The Good Ship Venus*, one of the more printable of whose quatrains is:

> Our ship's the good ship Venus,
> you really should have seen us:
> our figurehead was a whore in bed
> and the mast an upright penis.

There are numberless songs of this genre, irreverent, bawdy, sexually inventive, and hilarious. But there is also something sad about them, for they express, even in their mockery, a yearning for woman and the life process. If, as Hemingway said, courage is grace under pressure, these songs are very brave, the laughter at life of young men facing death. Perhaps the archetypical soldiers' song is the French classic, *Au pres de ma blonde (il fait bon dormir)* — it's good to sleep at the side of my blond. It beats the hell out of death in a wet ditch.

Psychologists and others have hypothesized that the true cause of war has been overlooked by Marx and other historical theorists. This school of thought holds that war arises from the sexual jealousy of the old men who rule toward the young men who don't. To such men, it is always nice to get as many as possible of the young men killed so that the girls with the firm bottoms are left to their own tepid and fading lecheries. Certainly it is a theory that fits Lyndon Johnson, in view of what we have been learning about his gargantuan appetites and perpetual dreary boasting about the size of his testicles.

Reagan is the oldest man ever to inhabit the White House, a fact that has apparently not been entirely lost on young people. As much as he beats the drum for war in Central America, popular music is not taking up his rhythm. There are no songs exuberantly praising intercession and invasion, no clarion cries to *Kick the Hell out of El Salvador.* Nor are there likely to be.

For the baby-boom kids are forty. They were, are, and will be till they die the most numerous element in the population.

And the melodies of youth linger on.