Women's Voices across Musical Worlds

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§ CHAPTER SEVEN §

"Thanks for My Weapons in Battle—My Voice and the Desire to Use It"

Women and Protest Music in the Americas

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> Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,
> With conquering limbs astride from land to land;
> Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
> A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
> Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
> Mother of exiles . . .
>
> EMMA LAZARUS,
> "The New Colossus"

Standing at the mouth of New York harbor, the Statue of Liberty has become a symbol of hope and justice for all those arriving from the Old World to the New. As a gift from France to the United States, this female colossus was fashioned after the iconographic emblem of the French Republic. *La Liberté* or "Marianne," as the French call their allegorical figure, was created during the late eighteenth century as a steadfast young woman wearing a Phrygian cap, the symbol of the Revolution. During the political upheavals of the nineteenth century, Marianne came to personify the fighting spirit of the French Republic, appearing after the Revolution of July 1830 in her best-known depiction as *Liberty Guiding the People* in Eugène Delacroix's painting. Here a bare-breasted woman storms the barricades, holding up a tricolor flag with her right hand and carrying a rifle in her left. Her *contrapposto* pose contrasts markedly with her static, massively robed American counterpart, who stands calmly poised with torch raised and book in hand. These two representations of liberty present vastly different idealizations of the female form: one an imposing mother welcoming the "huddled masses,"[1] the other a warrior maiden spurring the people into battle.

It is the duality of this female representation as maternal and virginal figures that inaugurates our exploration of women and protest music in the Americas during the mid-twentieth century, for just as these two images have been pressed into service as concrete emblems of national identity, so too have women folksingers come to signify the unified voice of the people. In Argentina, Mercedes Sosa has been transformed into a maternal icon of the Argentine people, who call her "Mother Courage" or *Pachamama* ("Earth Mother" in Quechuan). By comparison, the American Joan Baez has been identified as a virgin warrior, a "pacifist Saint Joan," as one writer dubbed her.[2]

The physical appearance of these two folksingers has also accorded with the virgin–mother ideal. In a culture where the female figure has become the object of the "male gaze," women protest singers have averted this scrutiny by obscuring their bodies and their sexuality. Just as the female form of the Statue of Liberty is concealed beneath heavy drapery, so too has Mercedes Sosa wrapped her monumental frame up in a black poncho—the outfit of the *pueblo* or common folk. Wearing no makeup and her long hair draped around her shoulders, Joan Baez prefigured the feminist counter-cultural aesthetic about feminine appearance by appearing on stage modestly dressed in a skirt and blouse and sometimes without shoes. In order to become activists in a world dominated by men, Baez and Sosa as well as other female folksingers negated their visual presence. Granted, like the mythological figure of Orpheus, the gift of music, their voices emerged as seats of power for their causes and their constituencies during a time of great social and political upheavals across the Americas.

Folk Music and Politics—North and South

In the 1960s and 1970s, songs of social conscious came to the fore as political turmoil and violence grew apace with the dictatorships, military repression, and mass murders in Latin America, and the civil rights and antiwar movements in the United States. Several similarities existed between the protest music of North and South America. Both were connected with left-wing

politics, and both were deeply rooted in the folk music traditions of their respective countries.

The protest song emanated from the work of earlier *folkloristas* and ethnomusicologists. While indebted in style to indigenous music, the songs were newly composed. A mimetic process took place whereby the music and texts created by protest writers took on the structure and mannerisms of true folk music. Serge Denisoff calls these works "songs of persuasion," since the simple structure of the melodies and accompanimental harmonies stress the message of the lyrics.[3]

Musical performance also incorporated elements indicative of the folk tradition. Since the words related the message of the song, the singing style of the performer became emblematic of the common people. The voice had to be simple, straightforward, and sound untrained. It meant for women singers a pure, clean tone devoid of excessive vibrato. Low tessitura made the voice sound more maternal, less threatening, and in some cases more androgynous than female. It therefore offered a comforting, soothing presence as in the case of Mercedes Sosa, Ronnie Gilbert, and Odetta's rich contralto timbres. The higher soprano voices of Joan Baez, Jean Ritchie, Judy Collins, and Buffy Sainte-Marie conveyed a reedy urgency and intensity to their performances.

The musical instruments accompanying singers also connected with rural cultures. Brought from Spain to the New World, the acoustic guitar had a long association with folk and popular culture throughout the Americas. Its relative cheapness, portability, and the ease with which one could play simple chordal accompaniments to a song, made it the instrument of choice among self-taught musicians. Some protest singers viewed the guitar as a political weapon—Woody Guthrie had the words "this machine kills fascists" inscribed on his instrument.[4] In Latin America, the guitar also communicated a powerful message as the instrument of the *pueblo*.[5]

In the United States, other fretted and/or plucked string instruments, such as the dulcimer played by Jean Ritchie, the auto-harp, and the banjo, would occasionally double, play counterpoint, or replace the guitar. Latin American musicians also employed instruments native to the Andean regions of northern Argentina, Bolivia, and central and southern Peru. The sharp, high-pitched sound of the charango, a small fretted lute and one of the few *mestizo* or mixed native South American and European instruments, became a favorite. Indigenous wind instruments, such as the panpipes (or zamponas, sikus, or rondeador) and kena or quena (end-blown flute) remained popular as melodic accompaniments by such groups as the Chilean Inti-Illimani and Illapu. Percussion instruments, in particular a large drum, such as the bombo leguero on which Mercedes Sosa accompanies herself, were also used.

Yet, despite the striking similarities in the musical character of political songs of the Americas, there were also significant differences between the North and South. In each of their countries, Latin Americans sought a national identity through what they called the *nueva canción* or "new song."[6] They fought at first to free their culture from the commercial "imperialist" influence of North American popular culture by discovering their own indigenous music. Later the *nueva canción* became a powerful weapon against dictatorial regimes. Though protest musicians in the United States, like their southern neighbors, were anti-government, they were not nationalistic. Instead, they struggled for universal concepts of civil rights and peace as personified through the folk music tradition.

One of the most crucial distinctions between the Latin American *nueva canción* and the North American political song, however, turns out to be not one of ideology, but of terminology. Whereas North American singers and songwriters embraced the designation of their politically motivated works as "protest music," Latin American musicians and scholars of the *nueva canción* have tended to eschew this term. In several interviews, the Argentine singer Mercedes Sosa has rejected the protest label, stating that it puts "a stamp on the songs that says 'prohibited' or 'interdicted.'"[7] The *nueva canción*, she says, are "honest songs about the way things really are."[8] The Uruguayan political singer Daniel Viglietti has suggested the word "propose" (*de propuesta*) instead of "protest" (*de protesta*), indicating that the genre rather than being destructive seeks to build bridges.[9] The literary scholar Robert Pring-Mill goes further in coining the term *canciones de lucha y esperanza* (songs of struggle and hope), which he views in the context of Latin American Catholicism.[10] In order to understand these nuanced differences and the important role played by women folksingers, let us take a closer look at the separate movements.

LATIN AMERICA AND THE *NUEVA CANCIÓN*

The *nueva canción* first originated in Chile in late 1950s. It began as an expression of native Chilean culture, countering the widespread domination of North American popular culture in Latin America at the time. The decisive figure in the movement was a woman named Violeta Parra. Known as the "mother of the Latin American folk song," she grew up among the poor of Chile. During the fifties, Parra became a *folklorista*, who, traveling throughout the small towns, mining camps, and Indian villages, collected over 3,000 songs from the different regions of her country.[11] She embarked with her children, Angel and Isabel, on a mission to promote traditional Chilean

songs through radio broadcasts and the establishment of folk cafés or coffee houses known as *peñas.*

During this period, Parra, along with Victor Jara, Patricio Manns, and other younger Chilean musicians and political activists, began to compose and sing their own songs in emulation of traditional music. At first these writers of the *nueva canción chilena* focused on the daily life of rural people, but soon they directed their attention to social and political issues. Their songs appealed to urban, middle-class leftists, especially the young, who aspired to create an alternative cultural expression free from foreign "imperialist" influence. The songs also had an impact on the *pueblo,* who identified both with the message, which portrayed them sympathetically, and the music, with its catchy dance rhythms and simple melodies.[12]

The music of the *nueva canción* fused the different aspects of native Indian, European, and *mestizo* genres to create a musical idiom that went beyond class and ethnic lines. Though they mimicked the sound of indigenous song, *nueva canción* composers did not wish to recover their cultural heritage; instead they sought to promote their message and articulate contemporary concerns through a "folk style" that would appeal to the masses.[13]

In 1960, Parra began to shift from *folklorista* to political activist when she composed "Yo canto la diferencia" ("I sing the difference"), which declares her allegiance to the people and the truth. Observers, however, generally point to her song "La carta" ("The Letter") as an important juncture in the *nueva canción* movement.[14] Parra wrote the song in Paris as a response to a violent confrontation between police and workers in Santiago in the fall of 1961, which resulted in the imprisonment of her brother Roberto. The work became the most popular song of the Left.[15]

Parra soon composed other political songs, such as "Me gustan los estudiantes" ("I Like the Students"), which she wrote to show support of the growing militancy of university students against the government. One of her last and most popular songs, "Gracias a la vida," however, transcends her overtly political works. A deceptively simple love song, it became an anthem of the *nueva canción* movement throughout Latin America.

Following Parra's suicide in 1967, Victor Jara and other Chilean folksingers became more politically active. Aligned with the United Popular Front (UP), they wrote campaign songs and performed at meetings and rallies in support of the socialist candidate Salvador Allende, who was democratically elected president in 1970. With the violent overthrow of Allende by a military *junta* in 1973, the *nueva canción* was banned from the country; its performers and composers were jailed, forced to remain in exile, or in the case of its leading proponent, Victor Jara, killed.

It was at this time that the appeal of the Chilean *nueva canción* spread throughout Latin America. In Cuba, the *nueva trova,* as it was called, represented the Revolution, and as such was recognized and supported by the government.[16] In other Latin American countries, it remained an expression of resistance against repressive regimes. This was particularly the case in Argentina, where from 1976 to 1983 one of the most brutal military dictatorships in the country's history assumed power. The "generals" unleashed a reign of terror, where thousands of people known as *los desaparecidos* (the disappeared ones) were abducted, tortured, and never heard from again.[17] Fearing for their lives, few Argentines dissented. One grassroots group that did not was the Madres de Plaza de Mayo (Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo). Coming from all walks of life, women, in search of their missing loved ones, began to gather together one by one to form illegal assemblies. Wearing white headscarves, they silently demonstrated every Thursday in front of the presidential palace.[18] The military *junta* tried to suppress them and others they deemed subversive. Writers, musicians, and artists, in particular, were forced to go underground or into exile. The singer Mercedes Sosa, however, refused to remain silent. Like the Madres de Plaza de Mayo, whose visual presence embodied the Argentine people, she courageously stood up against the dictatorship by empowering her imprisoned nation with her voice.

MERCEDES SOSA: *LA VOZ DE LA GENTE*

It is no accident that the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo and Mercedes Sosa were perceived as the guiding spirits of the people of Argentina. In a country deeply immersed in Roman Catholicism, these women came to represent the maternal figure of the Virgin Mary—the divine intercessor, who pleads for the cause of humanity. Fervent Marian veneration has remained a prominent feature throughout Latin America, where indigenous cultures have had a long tradition of goddess worship. Each country has its own shrine dedicated to Mary. In Argentina, the Virgin of Lujan has served as a symbol of both national and religious identity. The cult of Mary, in turn, has also led to a secular phenomenon in Latin American *mestizo* cultures known as *marianismo.* Working as a complementary force to *machismo, marianismo* is the social construction of true femininity, whose characteristics of the ideal woman consist of "semidivinity, moral superiority and spiritual strength . . . [with] an infinite capacity for humility and sacrifice."[19] As a *mestizo* of white and Quechuan (Indian) descent, Mercedes Sosa embodies the positive traits of *marianismo* in her conviction of freedom and justice and her sense of social responsibility for the poor and disenfranchised. Her humbleness and

Figure 7.1. Mercedes Sosa in 1980. © Colita/CORBIS.

the personal sacrifices she made during the dangerous years of dictatorship in Argentina also conform to this image (Fig. 7.1).

Sosa was born in San Miguel de Tucum in the northwest Argentine province of Tucuman on 9 July 1935.[20] She came from humble origins; her father was a day laborer and her mother a washerwoman. As a young girl, she began imitating different singers she heard on the radio. Her idol, in particular, was the radio star and *folklorista* Margarita Palacios.[21] Against her father's wishes, she entered and then won, at the age of fifteen, an amateur music contest sponsored by the local radio station. She did not, however, emerge as a professional singer until the early sixties, when she and her husband, the composer Manuel Oscar Matus, gained prominence as performers of the *nuevo cancionero argentino*. She was called "La Negra" for her black hair and the black outfits that she wore.

Sosa's continuing fame during the seventies paralleled the rise in power of the military junta and the emergence of the so-called "dirty war." The dictatorship tried to suppress her public appearances. As early as 1975, she was told that she should not perform on television. Then one by one her

recordings disappeared from the stores. Defying the government, she continued to perform until she was arrested while singing the land reform song, "Cuando tenga la tierra" ("When They Have the Land") in a concert in La Plata in 1978. Bomb scares at concerts, threats on her life, and finally a total ban by the government on any further performances forced her to leave her country and to go into exile in Spain. As she explained in an interview about these dark years: "It wasn't specific songs that I sang that were prohibited or specific recordings of mine that were taken out of circulation, but what was prohibited was I myself. What those gentlemen didn't understand was that you could silence Mercedes Sosa force her into exile, but you couldn't take away *La Negra*, her repertory, what she represented in the heart of the people. And that was much larger than me."[22]

Sosa came back to Argentina in 1982, shortly before the fall of the military regime. With the restoration of a civilian government under Raúl Alfonsín, she returned to the stage, giving thirteen sold-out concerts at the Teatro Opera in Buenos Aires. She then issued a double album, *Mercedes Sosa Live in Argentina*, which sold nearly half a million copies, an unheard-of figure in a nation of thirty million people.[23] For the last twenty years, she has continued to concertize in Europe, the United States, and all over Latin America, where she has performed both the classic *nueva canción* repertory as well as works by younger musicians in different popular music genres.

Sosa has been an inspirational singer known for her intensely riveting interpretations of works by others. The composers, whose songs she has carefully chosen, read like a who's who of the movement throughout Latin America—the Chileans Violeta Parra and Julio Numhauser; the celebrated Cuban *trovador* Silvio Rodríguez; the Brazilians Antonio Tarrago Ros and jazz figure Milton Nascimento; and from her own country, such major figures as Atahualpa Yupanqui, María Elena Walsh, César Isella, Victor Heredia, and Armando Tejada Gómez, to name a few.

She has continued to sing about social issues, but themes of renewal and celebration have replaced the solemn subjects of survival and endurance that resonated deeply during "los años negros" in Argentina. These include the young Fito Páez's "Yo vengo a ofrecer mi corazón" ("I Come to Offer My Heart"), Julio Numhauser's "Todo cambia" ("Everything Changes"), and María Elena Walsh's "Como la cigarra" ("Like the Cicada").[24] From her earlier repertory, the two songs "Los hermanos" and "Gracias a la vida" have remained important touchstones throughout her career.

"Los hermanos" ("The Brothers") was written by Atahualpa Yupanqui (1908–92), a composer, poet, guitarist, and singer who is revered as the premier folklorist of Argentina.[25] For over thirty years—long before the *nueva canción* movement of the sixties—Yupanqui collected songs and poems from

all over Argentina, which he utilized in his own works. Like Violeta Parra, he worked and lived in the countryside among the *pueblo.* Many of his works use the distinctive forms and rhythms of the gauchos of rural Argentina. Much of his imagery—the oneness with nature and the land, with the common people, and with death—is deeply rooted in native Indian traditions, particularly those of the Quechua.

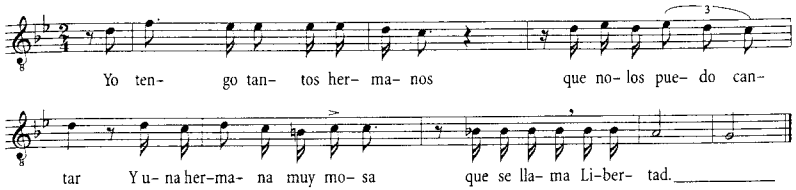
"Los hermanos" calls for unity among people. The message appears in the *estribillo* or refrain, "Yo tengo tantos hermanos que no los puedo contar" ("I have so many brothers that I cannot count them") that begins the song (see Appendix). Each stanza maps the immensity of this brotherhood—shifting geographically in the first stanza from "the valley, the mountain, the prairies, and the sea" to, in the second verse, "a wide open horizon, just beyond the reaching." By the last verse, the bond between peoples intensifies as "we carry on, toughened by loneliness. And within us come our dead, so that no one's left behind." Here the whole history of the *pueblos* moves ever forward until the final return of the *estribillo,* where Yupanqui provides the true message of the song in the additional line: "Y una hermana muy hermosa que se llama libertad ("And a very beautiful sister named Liberty"). Mercedes Sosa describes "Los hermanos" as having "all the depth and the beauty of that moment of our lives when we open our eyes to our earth and its inhabitants, and we decide to unite with them in perhaps a more important bond than that of nation: to share love, pains, and hope."[26]

Just as the lyrics of the song reflect folk traditions so too does the music, which Yupanqui sets as a *milonga decidora.* The term *milonga* has several musical meanings. It began as an improvised rural song/dance form from the gaucho traditions of Uruguay and Argentina. During the mid-nineteenth century, dance steps were added to the genre, and by the 1880s, its duple meter and strong, syncopated dance rhythm became associated with the urban tango. The *milonga pampeana,* as a folk song accompanied by guitar, has remained popular throughout Uruguay and the Argentine pampas.[27] Yupanqui describes the *milonga decidora* as a meditative form, where "man looks for his necessary solitude to say his things."[28]

The accompaniment of "Los hermanos" follows the familiar syncopated rhythmic dance pattern of the *milonga*/tango (Ex. 7.1). Also typical of the *milonga* is the stepwise descending structure of the melody, which appears in its ur-form in the introduction. In the first couplet of the verse, the melody hovers around the fifth step, and then slowly moves down to third step. In each successive couplet, this melody is subjected to a series of improvised variations by the singer. The use of the minor mode with an occasional inflection on the major third imparts a sad, quiet urgency. The song's restless,

searching quality is mainly due to the avoidance of the tonic pitch, which only appears at the end of each refrain as found in the closing *estribillo* of the song (see Ex. 7.2).

EXAMPLE 7.1. Rhythmic pattern of the *milonga* and tango



EXAMPLE 7.2. Closing refrain of the song "Los hermanos"

Just as "Los hermanos" has resonated deeply with the Argentine people, the song that has become most closely identified with Sosa and the *nueva canción* as a whole is "Gracias a la vida" ("Thanks to life"). As previously mentioned, Violeta Parra wrote it shortly before her death in 1967. Many Latin American singers including Parra herself have performed it. Joan Baez first sang it in 1973 as a response to the overthrow of Allende's government,[29] and even the great Mexican-born opera star Placido Domingo has recorded the song. But it is Mercedes Sosa's interpretation that is considered the most powerful and poignant.[30]

The song is a simple strophic one with six stanzas sung to the same music. Set in the tradition of a folk ballad, each stanza begins with the refrain: "Gracias a la vida que me ha dado tanto" ("Thanks to life for giving me so much"). It starts by thanking life for the gift of sight, then hearing, then language; in the fourth verse, the narrator is grateful to life for the strength to walk through cities and rivers, and in the fifth, for her heart. In the last verse, she finally reaches out to connect with the audience with the words:

Thanks to life for giving me so much.
It has given me laughter and tears
with which to distinguish good fortune from heartbreak,
and those are the themes which shape my song;
my song which is the same as your song;
as the song of all people; my very own song.[31]

As Pring-Mill has noted, the *estribillo* does not appear in its traditional position at the end of each stanza but at the start. Serving as a "point of departure" for each successive strophe, this refrain becomes, like that of "Los hermanos," the "conceptual peg on which each stanza hangs."[32] However, it differs from the *estribillo* of "Los hermanos," whose meaning, as we have noted above, remains symbolically incomplete until the very end of the song. The descending stepwise melodic structure of "Gracias a la vida" is also similar to "Los hermanos." Unlike the Yupanqui piece, the tune does not vary with each stanza nor does the accompaniment contain the rhythmic syncopations associated with native folk dance traditions. Parra's song is thus more abstract, and depending on the performer, can be interpreted in several ways. Joan Baez, in her 1974 recording, sings each stanza exactly the same to a driving, duple-meter, Mariachi band accompaniment. Her reading tends to be more martial, more assertive than Sosa's, who treats the work as if it were a private love song. With each strophe, Sosa subtly varies her tone and mood. At first she sounds tentative and introspective, but as the song progresses, her voice (and the accompaniment) change to reveal a more resolute, public persona, culminating in the final strophe when she invites the audience to participate in the song.

More than any other performer, Mercedes Sosa has brought the *nueva canción* to the attention of an international audience. As a *mestizo*, she has straddled the two worlds of Argentina—the cosmopolitan, Europeanized urban center and the indigenous culture of the rural areas. She has acted as a mediator for the poor and disenfranchised people of her country both through her actions and her profound musical talent. As such, she has metonymically become a mother of her nation, emanating from both native Indian cultures and Roman Catholic traditions transplanted in the New World.

FOLK MUSIC REVIVAL AND THE PROTEST MOVEMENT IN THE UNITED STATES

Just before the emergence of the *nueva canción* movement in Latin America; a resurgence in traditional music took hold in the United States. The early sixties was a time of political and social unrest as the baby boom generation came of age. Issues of social concern—civil rights, the threat of nuclear fallout, and then the Vietnam War—began to capture the attention first of university students and then the public at large. Protest music played an integral

role in the struggle for change as a union emerged between political activism and the urban folksinger.

During the fifties and early sixties—the years of the Beat Generation of Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, and Lawrence Ferlinghetti—coffeehouses sprang up in large urban centers and small college towns. Offering young students a refuge, they became ideal performance venues for the new protest folksingers. Folk songs that focused on life experiences from a rural past resonated with urban students rebelling against the materialist complacency of the establishment. The counter-culture with its emphasis on experimentation, individualism, and personal self-expression created a haven not just for male performers, but also for women musicians.[33] Urban folksingers such as Ronnie Gilbert, Jean Ritchie, Cynthia Gooding, and Odetta, as well as the later performers Buffy Sainte-Marie, Judy Collins, and Joan Baez, pioneered in a profession dominated by men.

Ronnie Gilbert was a member of the Weavers, the first musical group to popularize the folk music tradition in the United States. Each person in the quartet was well known in his or her own right. Pete Seeger and Lee Hays were founding members of the Almanac Singers, an early forties group who performed a mixture of traditional and topical songs at Communist meetings and union rallies; Fred Hellerman and Ronnie Gilbert sang in a later, politically left, musical organization, the People's Songs Inc.[34] While Seeger was the most vocal and best-known member of the Weavers, Gilbert must be singled out as its only female singer. Recordings by the Weavers sold over four million copies, and their rendition of Leadbelly's "Goodnight Irene" moved to the top of the Hit Parade.[35] Then in 1952, the group was blacklisted from television and radio. At the height of the McCarthy era, they sang at college campuses and in 1955 made a historic recording at Carnegie Hall produced by Vanguard Records.[36]

Other female singers began their careers as soloists specializing in different aspects of the idiom. Jean Ritchie introduced to an urban audience Appalachian songs from her native Kentucky with her natural, flat-sounding soprano voice. Odetta sang the work songs, spirituals, blues, and gospel music of her African-American heritage in a deep, powerful contralto voice.

During the early sixties, Buffy Sainte-Marie and Judy Collins joined the ranks of solo protest singers. Born on a Cree reservation, Sainte-Marie was known for her biting political songs about the treatment of Native Americans.[37] Her antiwar song "Universal Soldier" gained widespread popularity at the height of the Vietnam War. Judy Collins, a classically trained pianist committed to a variety of social and political causes, extended the folk repertory by singing medieval music, cabaret songs by Jacques Brel and Kurt Weill, and works by Leonard Cohen and Stephen Sondheim. All of these women

gained moderate success as folksingers, yet none of them captured the imagination of the public as much and as quickly as Joan Baez.

JOAN BAEZ: "SIBYL WITH GUITAR"

> The expression suddenly appears reverent yet joyous, Indian yet European, olive-skinned yet white of hue. It is a face that intermingles the Christianity of Byzantine Europe with the overpowering naturalism of New World Indian; a fitting symbol for all the peoples of the great continent.[38]

This passage, which vividly describes the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the national icon of Mexico and the most famous Marian shrine of the Americas, could serve equally well as a portrait of the young Joan Baez (see Fig. 7.2). Of Mexican and Anglo-Scottish descent, Baez represented an intermingling of different cultures. Her modest demeanor and the purity of her voice contributed to her mystique as a figure of innocence and virtue. Even more than her public image, her discipline and unyielding commitment to social and political causes over the past four decades earned her the title of Saint Joan.

Born in Staten Island, New York, on 9 January 1941, Baez was brought up in a liberal, academic family.[39] Her father, a research physicist, was born in Mexico; her mother originally came from Scotland. The family moved around during Baez's early years. When she was ten they resided in Baghdad for a year, and during her high school years they lived in Palo Alto, California. After she graduated from high school, the Baez family once more relocated, this time to Belmont, Massachusetts, a well-to-do suburb of Boston. Baez matriculated as a student at Boston University in the fall of 1958. Attending few classes, she withdrew before the end of her second semester to become part of the burgeoning folk music scene in Cambridge.[40] She performed regularly at Club 47, a coffeehouse near Harvard Square, picking up song repertory and guitar technique from a number of amateur and semiprofessional folksingers.[41] Her career took off only a year later when in June 1960 she created a sensation at the Newport Folk Festival. Only a few months after her Newport Folk Festival debut, the first album she released with Vanguard Records became a top seller. Practically overnight Joan Baez emerged not only as a major female performer, but America's premier folksinger.

The repertory she sang on her first album as well as those that followed during the next three years stems from the Anglo-American tradition. The songs consist mainly of strophic narrative ballads and laments. Several appear in Francis Child's anthology *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* (1882–98) or are broadside ballads. Others are more recent American songs, hymns, and spirituals, some of which were collected and transcribed by Cecil Sharp, the Lomaxes, or newly written by Woody Guthrie, Anne Bradon, and others. Nearly all convey messages of despair and/or death.

Figure 7.2. Joan Baez in 1971. Photograph by Michael Ullman, reproduced with permission.

In an interview with Charles Fuss, Baez characterized one of these songs ("Wagoner's Lad") as "pre-women's lib."[42] While her description of this lyric dialogue is apt, it does not take into account the fact that the subjects of the songs she performed differed radically from those of her male counterparts, for nearly all of them were concerned with women.

Her early repertory presents a panoply of female life experiences. She sings about women who are faithful ("John Riley"), abandoned ("Wagoner's Lad"),

or murdered by rejected lovers ("Banks of the Ohio"). "House of the Rising Sun" is a blues lament of a prostitute, while "Come All Ye Fair and Tender Maidens" and "Silver Dagger" deal with the falseness of men. Other ballads tell the stories of proud and brave heroines: one who pleads for the life of her lover ("Geordie"), another who goes to sea disguised as a sailor ("Jackaroe"), and then there is Mary Hamilton, who hangs for the murder of her illegitimate baby. Most are written in the feminine voice, or if not, Baez changes the pronouns of the lyrics to fit a female point of view. As one reviewer wrote of her 1970 album "One Day at a Time:" "[it is] of a wife, a mother, a lover who sings of liberties and lies, of ghettos and prisons, of bodies and souls. There is the voice of the sorrows of her sisters and herself, each in its place, one at a time, carrying on."[43]

Reviews like this one fed into the myth of Baez as the virgin of sorrows—the *mater dolorosa* who weeps for Christ, her dead son. The ancient, almost eternal quality of the music also fit in with this image. Many of the tunes, while set to major or minor accompaniments, are modally inflected. "House of the Rising Son," "Henry Martin," "East Virginia," and "Lily of the West" are all in the Dorian mode, while "All my Trials" and "Silkie" are Mixolydian. "Wagoner's Lad," "Cherry Tree Carol," and to some extent "Silver Dagger" use the pentatonic scale.

During the mid-sixties Baez became increasingly involved in the civil rights and antiwar movements. Along with Peter, Paul, and Mary, Bob Dylan, Mahalia Jackson, and Harry Belafonte, she performed at the 1963 March on Washington, where she sang the old gospel song "We Shall Overcome," which by that time had been transformed into the unofficial anthem of the civil rights movement.[44] Baez continued to support the cause, joining Martin Luther King in 1966 in Grenada, Mississippi, leading black children in a march to help desegregate an elementary school.[45]

In 1964, Baez began to protest the United States involvement in Vietnam by withholding part of her federal income tax. The following year, she helped found the Institute for the Study of Nonviolence in Carmel Valley, California. Her involvement in the peace movement intensified during the mid-sixties. In 1967 she was arrested twice for blocking the entrance to the Armed Forces induction center in Oakland, California. It was during this time that she met and married David Harris, an antiwar activist, who later served twenty months of a three-year sentence for refusing induction into the armed forces.

Before her marriage, Baez lived the free lifestyle of the counter-culture—having affairs and declaring her bisexuality.[46] Yet her public persona as the "Virgin Mary" continued to play out in the media. She was called the "high priestess of folk song,"[47] the "matron saint of the hippies,"[48] changing over time from "folk madonna to folk matriarch."[49] As Jerome Rodnizky notes, "she blended into the protest tradition, into pacifism, into activism, into a publicized marriage and motherhood into a vicarious martyrdom . . . and finally into a national symbol for nonviolence."[50]

During these turbulent years, Baez's song repertory quickly shifted from traditional Anglo-American ballads to newly composed protest songs. Her first antiwar song, "Last Night I Had the Strangest Dream," was written by Ed McCurdy in 1950.[51] Its naive triple-meter tune conveying a wish for peace fit in well with Baez's public persona. So too did Malvina Reynolds's "What Have They Done to the Rain," which appeared on Baez's third album, *Joan Baez in Concert* (1962). Reynold's child-like melody, however, belies the work's grim message about radioactive fallout.

Songs by other antiwar activists, such as Pete Seeger's popular "Where Have All the Flowers Gone?" and Phil Ochs's "There But for Fortune," also appeared on her early concert programs. But it was Bob Dylan, with whom she was romantically linked in the mid-sixties, who had the most profound effect upon her. The political messages found in his early works, such as "With God on Our Side" and "A Hard Rain's a Gonna Fall," fit well with Baez's intense vocal style.

Dylan based "With God on Our Side" on the earlier Irish Republican Army song "The Patriot Game," written by Dominic Behan in 1957. He borrowed the melody and verse structure, using the second stanza of Behan's lyrics as the inspiration for his opening verse.[52] Dylan's ambivalent message that God will stop a nuclear war can be interpreted as optimistic or bitter cynicism, depending on the performer. Baez's lyrical reading of the song is more full-bodied and less savage than Dylan's. The bittersweet quality of her voice suggests both sadness and hope when she reaches the last stanza.

"A Hard Rain's a Gonna Fall" was written in September 1962, just a month before the Cuban Missile crisis. The five-verse song is structured as a question-and-answer dialogue between parent and son with a chorus containing the title words of the song. As several writers have pointed out, the text of Dylan's song bears a striking resemblance to the traditional ballad "Lord Randal" (Child Ballad No. 12).[53] "Lord Randal" relates the tragedy of a young man who tells his mother he's been poisoned by his lover. Dylan turns this private murder into "the public holocaust faced by the modern world."[54] Using the first line of the folk song as a springboard for his song, Dylan parallels some of the images found in several versions of "Lord Randal." But instead of following the four-line stanzaic structure of the Child ballad, he adds anywhere from five to twelve extra lines to each of the five verses.

Considered one of Dylan's most original early songs, "A Hard Rain's a Gonna Fall" turned out to be an ideal vehicle for Baez, since it became an

effective ballad from a woman's point of view. In comparing Baez's performance with that of Dylan, we notice that a reversal of roles occurs in the song. Whereas Dylan assumes the persona of the son, Baez takes on the part of the mother, who queries her son, then offers the same disheartening reply to his visionary answers. Her reading of the song, while retaining Dylan's universal message, becomes more personal. In these and other Dylan songs, her powerful lyrical singing style coupled with her chaste image offended critics from all sides of the folk music spectrum. Folk purists deemed her voice "too rich and too grandiose to carry the simplicity of the humble folk song."[55] In contrast, those in the Bob Dylan–Woody Guthrie camp felt that "she could not express the heavy contemptuous sarcasm of many of Dylan's songs."[56]

By 1965, Baez and Dylan had moved in opposite directions as she became increasingly committed to social and political causes, and he, abruptly rejecting the protest movement, shifted into rock music. Yet despite their philosophical parting of ways, Dylan continued to have an important influence on Baez. From 1963 until the present, she has recorded and performed in concert no fewer than twenty-six of his songs. At his suggestion, she started to write her own songs.[57] Some of them, such as "To Bobby," "Winds of the Old Days," and her most popular work, "Diamonds and Rust," are about him.[58] Even more significant, the changes in musical style that Baez made later in her career from folk to folk rock and country western had already been prefigured by Dylan.

During her long career, Baez has written over seventy songs, some with personal, others with political messages. Her topical works serve as commentaries on the social and political causes in which she has been actively involved. They include such songs as "Where Are You Now, My Son?," written in 1973 after her visit to North Vietnam; "Warriors of the Sun," her 1982 peace tribute to Martin Luther King Jr., Greenpeace, and the Guardian Angels; and more recently, "China," written in 1991 about the Tienamen Square protesters. Yet it is her identity as a voice of spiritual strength and high morality against political and social injustices that has made her a celebrated icon.

AS THE FOLK REVIVAL and the protest movements have come and gone, Sosa and Baez have endured as influential musicians. Part of their popularity has been due to their continued interest in social and political causes. They have transcended their roles as protest singers through their unceasing advocacy of freedom, justice, and human rights. Both women have used their musical gifts as powerful weapons for their beliefs, and as such, have become the social consciences of their countries: Sosa as an earth mother and symbol of hope and survival for *la gente del pueblo,* and Baez as a virtuous fighter for universal nonviolence and racial equality. Yet at the same time that the two singers have achieved iconic status, their feminine power has been negated. No longer real, no longer women, Sosa and Baez have instead become incarnations of the lofty figure of Liberty—fixed in time as immobile symbols of their nations and their causes.

NOTES

The quotation in the title is taken from Joan Baez, *And a Voice to Sing With: A Memoir,* 258. I am grateful to Blanca Rey and Dr. Celian Rey Casserly for their assistance with Spanish translations.

1. Taken from the last stanza of Emma Lazarus's poem inscribed on the base of the statue. On the statue as a maternal icon see Marina Warner, *Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form* (New York: Atheneum, 1985), and Kaja Silverman, "Liberty, Maternity, Commodification" in *Point of Theory: Practices of Cultural Analysis,* ed. Mieke Bal and Inge Boer (New York: Continuum, 1994), 18–31.
2. Jerome L. Rodnitzky, "Joan Baez: A Pacifist St. Joan," chap. 6 in *Minstrels of the Dawn: the Folk-Protest Singer as a Cultural Hero* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1976), 83–99.
3. R. Serge Denisoff, *Great Day Coming: Folk Music and the American Left* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971), 5–6.
4. Ibid., 4.
5. Jeffery E. Taffet, "My Guitar is Not for the Rich: The New Chilean Song Movement and the Politics of Culture," *Journal of American Culture* 20 (1997): 91–103, at 95.
6. For an excellent general introduction to the *nueva canción* see John M. Schechter, "Beyond Region, Transnation and Transcultural Traditions," in *Music in Latin American Culture: Regional Traditions,* ed. Schechter (New York: Schirmer, 1999), 425–37.
7. Larry Rohter, "Mercedes Sosa: A Voice of Hope," *New York Times,* Sunday, 9 October 1988, sec. 2, 21.
8. Caleb Bach, "Mercedes Sosa, Song with No Boundaries," *Americas* 48 (1996): 40–47, at 42.
9. Mario Benedetti, *Daniel Viglietti* (Madrid: Júcar, 1974), 78, as quoted in Robert Pring-Mill, *"Gracias a la vida": The Power and Poetry of Song* (The Kate Elder Lecture, 1; London: University of London, Department of Hispanic Studies, 1990), 10.
10. Pring-Mill, *"Gracias a la vida,"* 10–15.
11. Albrecht Moreno, "Violeta Parra and 'La Nueva Canción Chilena,'" *Studies in Latin American Popular Culture* 5 (1986): 108–26, at 110.
12. Daniel Ramirez, "The Peña: A Semiological Analysis of the Latin American Folk Music Movement" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, San Diego, 1980), 87.
13. Karen Linn, "Chilean Nueva Cancion: A Political Popular Music Genre," *Pacific Review of Ethnomusicology* 1 (1984): 57–64, at 62.
14. The complete text with some variation appears on several websites, among them "Canciones Interpretadas por Mercedes Sosa" available at http://users.hotlink.com.br/saulob/mercedessosa.htm; also, http://www.ufpel.tche.br/ila/siteletras/espanhol_cancion_la_carta.shtml; www.olgalara.com; and http://152.42.78.132/pena/chile.html.

15. Moreno, "Violeta Parra," 113.
16. On the Cuban song see Rina Benmayor, "La 'Nueva Trova' New Cuban Song," *Latina American Music Review* 2 (1981): 11–44.
17. For a good introduction to Argentina's dictatorship see Martin Edwin Andersen, *Dossier Secreto: Argentina's Desaparecidos and the Myth of the "Dirty War"* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1993).
18. On the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo see Marguerite Guzman Bouvard, *Revolutionizing Motherhood: The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo* (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, 1993) and Jo Fisher, *Mothers of the Disappeared* (Boston: South End Press, 1989).
19. Evelyn P. Stevens, "*Marianismo*: The Other Face of Machismo," in *Female and Male in Latin America: Essays*, ed. Ann Pescatello (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1973): 90–101, at 94.
20. The only full-length study of Mercedes Sosa in English appears in Rebecca Cormier, "The Relationship between Music, Text, and Performer in the Latin American *Nueva canción* as seen the Repertory of Mercedes Sosa" (Master's thesis, Tufts University, 1999).
21. Leopoldo Brizuela, *Cantar la vida: Reportajes a cinco cantantes argentinas, Gerónima Sequeida, Leda Valladares, Mercedes Sosa, Aimé Painé, Teresa Parodi* (Buenos Aires: Libreria "El Ateneo" Editorial, 1992), 76–77. On Margarita Palacios see "Intérpretes folklóricos," 2002. Available from http://www.fortunecity.ed/felices/lapaz/124/margpala.htm.
22. Brizuela, *Cantar la vida*, 93–94.
23. Rohter, "Mercedes Sosa," and Don Heckman, "The Voice Heard Round the World," Los Angeles Times, Sunday, 29 October 1995, Calendar sec., 60.
24. On the poet María Elena Walsh see Caleb Bach, "A Child's Wisdom in a Poet's Heart," *Americas* 47 (1995): 12–17.
25. For biographical information see Felix Luna, *Atahualpa Yupanqui* (Madrid: Ediciones Júcar, 1974); Françoise Thanas, *Atahualpa Yupanqui: Essai* (Paris: Le Livre a venir, 1983); and Norberto Galasso, *Atahualpa Yupanqui: El canto de la patria* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones del Pensamiento Nacional, 1992).
26. Brizuela, *Cantar la vida*, 104–5.
27. On the *milonga* see Ercilia Moreno Cha, "Music in the Southern Cone: Chile, Argentina, and Uruguay," in *Music in Latin American Culture*, ed. John Schechter, 265–81.
28. "La milonga es una forma de meditar . . . y está la milonga decidora, donde el hombre busca su necesaria soledad para decir sus cosas." Available from http://argentina.informatik.uni-muenchen.de/tangos/msg06271.html.
29. Joan Baez, *And a Voice to Sing With: A Memoir* (New York: Summit Books, 1987), 170.
30. Robert Pring-Mill offers an in-depth analysis of the song, with particular attention to its poetic structure, in his "*Gracias a la vida.*" For a musical analysis and transcription see Cormier, "Repertory of Mercedes Sosa," 28–32.
31. The full text and best English translation of the song appear in Pring-Mill, "*Gracias a la vida*," 24–25.
32. Ibid., 31.
33. Sheila Whiteley, *Women and Popular Music: Sexuality, Identity, and Subjectivity* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 72.
34. On the Almanac singers and People's Songs, Inc. see Richard A. Reuss, *American Folk Music and Left-wing Politics, 1927–1957*, with JoAnne C. Reuss (Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 2000), 147–220, and Denisoff, *Great Day Coming*, 77–129.

35. Reuss, *American Folk Music*, 235, and Denisoff, *Great Day Coming*, 146.
36. Vanguard Records, a small but distinguished recording company specializing in folk and jazz as well as classical music, was founded in 1950 by Seymour Solomon and his brother Maynard (the noted musicologist). During the fifties, they had the courage to break with the entertainment industry and record blacklisted performers, including Paul Robeson and the Weavers. In the sixties, they became heavily involved in the folk music revival, serving as the primary recording company of the Newport Folk Festival and of such artists as Odetta, Buffy Sainte-Marie, Ian and Sylvia, and Joan Baez. A brief history of the company is available from http://www.vanguardrecords.com/.
37. On Sainte-Marie as a Native American composer see David P. McAllester, "New Perspectives in Native American Music," *Perspectives of New Music* 20 (1981–82): 440–41.
38. Philip Serna Callahan, *The Tilma: Under Infra-Red Radiation* (CARA Studies on Popular Devotion, vol. 2: Guadalupan Studies, 3; Washington, D.C.: Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, 1981), 14–15, as quoted in Jeanette Rodriguez, *Our Lady of Guadalupe: Faith and Empowerment among Mexican-American Women* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), 23. Reference to Baez as "Sibyl with Guitar," comes from the title of the cover story in *Time*, 23 November 1962, 54–60.
39. One of the best sources for Baez's life appears in her memoir, *And a Voice to Sing With*. Charles J. Fuss, *Joan Baez: A Bio-Bibliography* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1996) offers an excellent concise biography, while David Hajdu, *Positively 4th Street: The Lives and Times of Joan Baez, Bob Dylan, Mimi Baez Fariña, and Richard Fariña* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001) concentrates mainly on the relationships of these four people during the sixties and seventies. Joan Baez Web Pages (http://baez.woz.org/) provides a wealth of information on the singer, including a chronology of her life, discography, song lyrics, photos, and links to other websites.
40. Hadju, *Positively 4th Street*, 23.
41. On the Cambridge folk music scene, see Eric von Schmidt and Jim Rooney, *Baby, Let Me Follow You Down: The Illustrated Story of the Cambridge Folk Years*, 2d ed. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994).
42. Joan Baez, interview by Charles Fuss in brochure notes to *Rare, Live, and Classic*, Vanguard compact disk VCD3–125–27 (1993).
43. Review of record album *One Day at a Time* performed by Joan Baez, *Saturday Review*, 28 March 1970, as cited in Fuss, *Joan Baez, A Bio-Bibliography*, 66.
44. For the origins of the song and a performance by Baez at the March to Washington see the excellent video *We Shall Overcome*, produced by Ginger Group (Beverly Hills: PBS HomeVideo, 1990).
45. Joan Baez, *And a Voice to Sing With*, 101–10.
46. Ibid., 78.
47. *Billboard*, 30 November 1963, cited by Fuss, *Joan Baez, A Bio-Bibliography*, 58.
48. *Stereo Review*, November 1968, cited by Fuss, 63.
49. Rich Kerstetter, "Joan Baez: From Folk Madonna to Folk Matriarch," *Sing Out!* 41 (August–October, 1996): 36–43.
50. Jerome Rodnitzky, *Minstrels of the Dawn*, 84.
51. Baez, *Rare, Live, and Classic*.
52. Todd Harvey, *The Formative Dylan: Transmission and Stylistic Influences, 1961–1963* (American Folk Music and Musician Series, vol. 7; Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 2001), 122–24.

53. Among others Wilfrid Mellers, *A Darker Shade of Pale: A Backdrop to Bob Dylan* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 132; Harvey, *Formative Dylan*, 4; and Hajdu, *Positively 4th Street*, 119.
54. Mellers, *Darker Shade of Pale*, 132.
55. Rodnitzky, *Minstrels of the Dawn*, 92.
56. Ibid., 93, quoting Alan Weberman and Gordan Friesen, "Joan Baez and the Bob Dylan Songs," review of record album *Any Day Now*, performed by Joan Baez, *Broadside* 97 (March 1969), 1–2, 9–10.
57. Ken Hunt, "Baez Reporting," *Folk Roots* 18, no. 1: 157 (July 1996), 26–31 at 29.
58. Baez, *And a Voice to Sing With*, 241.

APPENDIX
BROTHERS (A. YUPANQUI)

I've got so many brothers, I can't count 'em all.
In the valleys and on the mountains, on the prairies and in the sea.
Each one's got a job to do, each one's got his dreams.
With hope leading the way, memories tagging behind.

I've got so many brothers, I can't count 'em all.

Warm-hearted folks 'cause of that we call friendship.
They've got a prayer for the saying, and tears for the cryin'.
With a wide open horizon, just beyond the reachin'
And the strength to get it, with a doggedness and a will.

It's the farthest, when it seems the closest.

I've got so many brothers, I can't count 'em all.

And that's how we carry on, toughened by loneliness.
We get lost through the world, and then find each other again.
And that's how we recognize each other from afar,
By the ballads that we chew, seeds of immenseness.
And that's how we carry on, toughened by loneliness.
And within us come our dead, so that no one's left behind.

I've got so many brothers, I can't count 'em all,
And a very beautiful sister named Liberty.

TRANSLATION BY BLANCA REY