



# ROCKIN' ★ THE ★ FREE WORLD!

HOW THE ROCK & ROLL  
REVOLUTION CHANGED AMERICA  
AND THE WORLD

SEAN KAY



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Sean Kay

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# Introduction and Acknowledgments

On November 13, 2015, Paris, France, was struck by a terrorist attack, which included mass killing at a rock and roll concert. Several hours later and thousands of miles away, in Columbus, Ohio, Bob Weir of the Grateful Dead took stage and shared the news from France. They were killed, Weir said, by, "... religious extremists who, if they had their way, would outlaw music in all the world. We should celebrate their lives and the joy that they found in music." Weir and his band, Dead & Co., rocked in defiance with songs of joy, defeating fear. The night ended with the band and the audience singing "We will get by, we will survive!" This is the power of rock and roll.

Rock and roll is more than a music form—it is an idea, an attitude, a way of thinking about the world. This book shows that rock and roll has renewed and sent American values rippling across the world—freedom, equality, human rights, and peace advanced via education and activism. The book also offers a warning that changes in the music business simultaneously expand and put at risk the rock and roll revolution. The central voices in this book come from interviews with people working across the spectrum of rock and roll, complemented by secondary sources. The list of people interviewed is not exhaustive but rather illustrative of the influence of artists and activists—and, the conclusions are the responsibility of the author.

Born in the San Francisco Bay Area during the Summer of Love, 1967, my family moved to Ohio in 1979—where I came of age to the soundtrack of America's heartland and where I began playing the guitar at age 12. In college at Kent State University, we made our own small contributions to the vibrant northeast Ohio music scene with our bands, the Good Rockers and the Flying Locomotives. While at Kent State University, I was privileged to perform at the annual May 4th commemoration. Since 1999, I have played with rock and roll groups around Central Ohio, even once opening for O.A.R.

(Of a Revolution ). From the 7th grade onward, I have worked with some of the best musicians one could hope to play with. I was inspired to do this book over pints at Grogan’s Castle Inn in Dublin, Ireland, by my brother-in-law Des Mullan. I subsequently received funding from the Great Lakes College Association. I would not have been able to do this project without the advice of Tim Prindle—one of America’s great historians and musicians. Tim, his wife Heather, and their children Colin and Liam are the best of friends. Same goes for Jim Breece, who offered extensive comments and who rocks away in Ohio on any given weekend. This project would not have been possible without the friendship of Mark, Deb, and Raven Tilford and Jarrod, Amanda, Dylan, and Caleb Owens, who, with the Prindles, Josh Anderson, and Brooke Bloom, have rounded out the “Michigan Crew.” Thanks to Pam Laucher, Scott Calef, Ted Cohen, Mary Howard, Jim Franklin, Kim Lance, Deanne Peterson, Charles Stinemetz, and to Elaine McGarraugh, Katelyn Powers, Jon Sisk and Chris Utter at Rowman & Littlefield. The author is appreciative of a number of artists who were able to meet but schedules did not allow for extended interviews including Jackson Browne, Joan Jett, Kenny Laguna, and Bob Weir. I am also appreciative to Nadya Tolokonnikova and Maria Alyokhina, from Pussy Riot, for fruitful exchanges on democracy and for their keeping the rock and roll spirit of freedom alive in Russia and beyond.

This book is a tribute to my grandmother, Anne Grimes. From 1942 to 1946 she was a music and dance critic for the *Columbus Citizen* in Columbus, Ohio. Also a performer, she recorded with Folkways Records. I am grateful for my parents, David and Jenni Kay, who exposed me to the power of rock and roll and to Matt and Anna Madigan for sharing Ireland with me. While interviewing, David Crosby asked if my daughter Alana (who was traveling with me) and I wanted to hear some new songs. Crosby performed just for us. I was thrilled to involve our children—Cria talking politics with Bob Weir, Siobhan hanging with Little Feat, Alana chatting with Joan Jett—and my lovely wife Anna-Marie, a teacher, meeting Graham Nash who wrote the song “Teach Your Children Well.” *Rockin’ the Free World!* is dedicated to Anna-Marie and our children—and to all the artists who have provided the soundtrack for our lives while making our world a better place.

Delaware, Ohio, July 2018

*Part I*

**POWER AND PROGRESS**



## *Chapter One*

# **Bob Dylan's America**

### **WITH GOD ON OUR SIDE**

When inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2004, *Rolling Stone* magazine founder Jann Wenner said: “Bob Dylan is the voice of my America.” What did it mean—that Bob Dylan voiced a vision of America? From the first beats of Bill Haley and His Comets singing “Rock Around the Clock” to Dylan’s “With God on Our Side” to the Beatles “Revolution” to the Clash rocking the Casbah to Joan Jett loving rock and roll to Kathleen Hanna championing a new feminism to System of a Down rocking B.Y.O.B. about war and to Pussy Riot championing freedom—the rock and roll revolution ripples across the world. Rock and roll affirms and spreads freedom, equality, human rights, and peace advanced via education and activism. As Irish rocker Sinéad O’Connor says: “The most powerful words in rock and roll is, ‘A whop-bop-a-lua—a whop bam boom,’ Do you know what I mean?” “Although Little Richard’s intention,” she says, “may have been completely different when he authored those words, those were very political fucking words.”<sup>1</sup>

### **TROUBADOURS OF TRUTH**

Rock and roll is as much an attitude or an ethic as a music style. As Ice Cube said on N.W.A.’s induction to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2016: “The question is—are we rock and roll? And I say you God damn right we rock and roll!” He continued: “Rock and roll is not an instrument—rock and roll is not even a style of music. Rock and roll is a spirit. It’s a spirit that’s been

going since the blues, jazz, be-bop, soul, R&B, rock and roll, heavy metal, punk rock—and yes, hip-hop. And, what connects us all is that spirit—that’s what connects us all, that spirit. Rock and roll is not conforming to the people who came before you, but creating your own path in music and in life. That is rock and roll.” Rock and roll’s power has consistently taken what was once marginal and brought the mainstream to it. As bassist for Nirvana, Krist Novoselić (being inducted to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2014) explained: “Nirvana didn’t go mainstream, the mainstream came to Nirvana.” This revolutionary power exists in the interconnections that music creates between ideas and people. And, most of these rock and roll interconnections travel on the path laid down by Bob Dylan.

### *“It’s Part of Our Job”*

Bob Dylan articulated an enduring critique of the American experience blending folk traditions with rock and roll. David Crosby, co-founder of the Byrds and Crosby, Stills and Nash, and Young, says of his friend Dylan: “Often odd—but always interesting,” he pauses, “because you really don’t know where it’s going to go—it could go anywhere.”<sup>2</sup> Bob Dylan amplified durable changes in America in the 1960s, for example, in “With God on Our Side,” Dylan exploded the myths behind the nation’s heroes—“with guns in their hands, their God on their side.” Jann Wenner recalls first hearing a Dylan song as a student at U.C. Berkeley in 1964:

There was this one rally that started where the students swarmed the main campus square and surrounded a police car where they were holding, they were trying to arrest a guy for demonstrating, I believe. They were surrounded by seas of people and they kept the police car hostage for a long long time. Joan Baez showed up at this rally, this event, and sang ‘With God on Our Side.’ I mean—what a setting to hear something like that. When you’re in the middle of this energy-charged atmosphere of the event going down, where you are just at the center of this moment—that is electrifying. And then somebody gets up and starts to articulate a poetic and beautiful linkage of this event with all of the injustices of American society. You never ask questions with God on your side, and the civil war, the nuclear bomb and all that in one.<sup>3</sup>

Jann Wenner summarizes Dylan’s impact:

It’s profound in giving meaning to something that you’re thinking and feeling. Then you go dig deeper into what he’s written and he tracked, or led, this whole generation of people and artists by elaborating a vision of getting more sophisticated. And then getting more personal and taking out of the political

world and into the more personal, philosophical level that was more intense than ever. When you get to 'Highway 61' and 'Desolation Row'—that's not a specific issue-oriented thing or specifically political. It's a powerful thought about bankruptcy of materialism and society and the craziness of it. His own stuff just got more and more intense than ever and you sort of follow along with it. It became your America. If you weren't thinking then about America obviously you saw it through new eyes, and that's how it becomes your America too. He defined in great part and gave meaning—a way of meaning, of looking at so much around you that you didn't quite understand. I mean, why are people possessing fucking nuclear weapons to blow up the world? You can talk about it in geopolitical terms. But you can just talk about it in terms of sheer fucking madness. There is a Dr. Filth that keeps his world locked up inside of a leather cup.<sup>4</sup>

Serj Tankian, of System of a Down, says of this legacy now, the artistic role is diverse: "You've got a lot of artists that are there to entertain—which has always been kind of like the mainstay of our industry. People want to be entertained. They want a mood change. On the cheezy side you've got elevator music. Then, on the more consumer side, you've got the big pop hits. But then you also have a cadre of artists that specialize in narration—telling stories and truths through what they do whether it's music or films or any of the above. It's an interesting difference, neither is wrong or right. I think both are necessary."<sup>5</sup>

In terms of global events, the Cold War that shaped a young Bob Dylan was nudged out with a rock and roll backbeat by Billy Joel (who with his band played the first major rock concerts in the Soviet Union in 1987), Crosby, Stills and Nash (who were at the Berlin Wall in November 1989, singing with the crowds as it came down), and Roger Waters of Pink Floyd (who performed the Pink Floyd masterpiece *The Wall* at the Berlin Wall in 1990). After the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on New York City and Washington, D.C., a concert in Madison Square Garden coordinated by Paul McCartney a month later lifted the spirits of a grieving nation. At that concert, Roger Daltrey's penultimate scream in "Won't Get Fooled Again" gave the song new context while Pete Townshend's guitar windmills were juxtaposed against British and American flags. The Who emboldened a nation to stay confident, not guided by fear. Two years later, however, America invaded Iraq on false pretenses. In 2006, Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young resurrected the legacy of music and protest with their "Freedom of Speech Tour 2006." Performing songs such as "Let's Impeach the President" in Atlanta, Georgia, many people were upset and about a third walked out. Yet, history shows Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young were right. Graham Nash says: "What I'd like to do is talk to those people that walked out—and say, 'O.K., in hindsight would you still have walked out? In hindsight—when you know what George Bush and his cronies

did—would you still walk out? And my God—holy shit—if you buy a ticket to a Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young concert—what the fuck did you expect?” Nash adds that songs resonating decades ago remain vibrant:

Because there’s a certain anger when you realize—like for instance, ‘Military Madness’—written about my father going off to World War II—has anything changed? No. So that makes me angry. So I have to deliver that song ‘Military Madness’ or ‘Chicago.’ It’s still going on to this day. And so what happens is that you get angry that it’s still the same—that we still haven’t learned. And I get more intense on the delivery of those songs. Those songs aren’t, ‘Oh well let’s do ‘Chicago’ because people love it.’ I’m pissed off that I have to sing ‘Military Madness.’ I’m pissed off that I have to sing ‘Chicago.’<sup>6</sup>

Even when, in the 2006 election, the Democrats won Congress, little changed. The Democrats were elected into a majority in Congress promising to end the war in Iraq. The war in Iraq, however, waged on until 2011 and then began again in 2014 under a Democrat, Barack Obama.

The vision of America that Bob Dylan offered stresses it is good to make the world a fairer place; it is heroic to champion freedom, equality, human rights, and peace. This vision came through in songs such as “Chimes of Freedom,” “Oxford Town,” “Only a Pawn in their Game,” “A Hard Rain’s A-Gonna Fall,” and “Masters of War.” Of course, Dylan also offered a soundtrack for the quest for a better world with “Blowing in the Wind.” Dennis McNally, one of America’s leading historians of rock and roll and culture (and former publicist for the Grateful Dead), traces the roots of Dylan’s America up and down the Mississippi River—building on traditions coming from ragtime, blues, and jazz—eventually finding their way via modern communications to Elvis Presley in Memphis, Tennessee, and the songs of young Robert Zimmerman upriver.<sup>7</sup> By the 1950s, McNally shows, this came to fruition with the art of Jack Kerouac, Jackson Pollack, and Charlie Parker. This improvisational freedom emerged alongside the tradition of the troubadour—travelers who sing songs or tell stories. Artists such as David Crosby and Graham Nash, for example, performed in 2011 at the Occupy Wall Street movement in New York City. They do it because, Crosby says: “It’s part of our job. Part of our job is to be the town crier, the troubadour, and it always has been. We learned it from people like Pete Seeger and Woody Guthrie.”<sup>8</sup> Crosby recalls: “We were at a time, when Bob showed up, where black people couldn’t vote in their own country—in the South.” Crosby reflects: “They were citizens. They were born here. They were being prevented from voting. The Civil Rights Act hadn’t happened yet. Martin Luther King hadn’t walked from Selma to Montgomery yet—with Harry Belafonte on his arm, by the way—and Joan Baez.” Crosby observes:



*Pete Seeger arrives at Federal Court with his guitar over his shoulder (1961). World Telegram photo by Walter Albertin. LC-USZ62-130860 (black and white film copy negative). Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C.*

You can go back further than Woody. There was the folk tradition in this country and folk singers have always been partly the nightwatchmen—so to speak. Part of their job has been to take you on a voyage and tell you a tale. Part of their job has been to say, ‘Hey! It’s 11:30 and all is well,’ or, ‘It’s midnight and Congress just got bought by the Koch Brothers and you’re in deep shit.’ It’s part of the job. It’s part of what we inherited from folk singers.<sup>9</sup>

“Troubadours,” Crosby adds, “were the ones who carried the news from town to town in the Middle Ages, and if you look at the lineage it makes sense. It is something we inherited as part of the job if you were a folkie. That’s where all of us came from. I mean, we went electric and became rock and roll, but our ethos was based in stuff that we learned as folk singers.”<sup>10</sup>

Pete Seeger worked in that troubadour tradition using music to challenge society, furthered on by artists such as Peter, Paul and Mary and Joan Baez—who became activists in the civil rights and antiwar movements. Dylan and Baez performed together at the 1963 March on Washington organized by Martin Luther King Jr. And, on a freezing January day in 2009, Pete Seeger

sang (on the same site) all the verses of his friend Guthrie's "This Land Is Your Land" for Barack Obama's presidential inauguration. As the song was popularized, controversial lyrics were often discarded, including: "In the shadow of the steeple I saw my people, by the relief office I seen my people; as they stood there hungry, I stood there asking—is this land made for you and me?" At a 2009 benefit honoring Seeger, Bruce Springsteen said: "He's gonna look a lot like your granddad that wears flannel shirts and funny hats. He gonna look like your granddad if your granddad can kick your ass. At 90, he remains a stealth dagger through the heart of our country's illusions about itself."<sup>11</sup> Months before he died there was Pete Seeger at the New York-based Farm Aid in 2013—on stage with Dave Matthews, John Mellencamp, Willie Nelson, and Neil Young, singing "This Land Is Your Land." Seeger added a new verse: "New York is my home—New York is your home—from the upstate mountains—down to the ocean foam. With all kinds of people—yes, we're polychrome. New York was made to be frack free!"

The influence of folk traditions on rock and roll shows up in diverse places. For example, Kate Pierson of the B-52s formed the Sun Doughnuts, a folk protest group, while in high school. Pierson says: "I wrote the song about Collie Lee [Leroy] Wilkins, who was a Klansman who shot a civil rights worker. I got interested in politics through these songs. It brought me into the civil rights movement. My father was in a union, so I kind of went into union songs. And, it also introduced me to blues." "It was in the air," Pierson adds, "everything in that era, because of the late '50s and '60s, things were happening, things were changing. I think the knowledge, the specific knowledge of a lot of those events kind of came through these folk songs. And also bringing in people like Odetta, people of color, felt completely inclusive in that kind of group too—which weren't always included in the mainstream."<sup>12</sup> Billy Bragg was embraced by Woody Guthrie's family, who invited him to put Guthrie's unpublished lyrics to music. Bragg recalls Bob Dylan shaped his own approach to music, which began with Motown, led him to the Clash at a Rock Against Racism concert in 1978, and then found his way back to Dylan—and then to Woody Guthrie:

You'd get to listen to the hits [from Motown, via various compilation records that worked their way to the United Kingdom, where he grew up]—but gradually as you would get from Vol. 3 to Vol. 4 to Vol. 5, something changed. Volume 5—after the Jackson 5, you get Edwin Starr singing 'War,' then you get the Supremes singing 'Stoned Love'—and then you get Marvin Gaye singing 'Abraham, Martin, and John,' and 'Ball of Confusion' by the Temptations. You're getting the feeling that something is changed in America. What you're hearing, I didn't realize it at the time, was the effects of the civil rights movement as it was filtering through Motown. I was hearing these songs that were saying something more than just standard love song lyrics. The other music

I was listening to at the time—since I was about 11, 12, 13, was Simon and Garfunkel and that pretty quickly led me to Bob Dylan. In fact, I exchanged my copy of the Jackson Five's *Greatest Hits* [with] a kid in my class who wanted to give that record to his sister for her birthday. I swapped it with him for his father's copy of *The Times They Are A-Changin'*—by Bob Dylan, which was undoubtedly the most political, most raw, most visceral music I'd ever heard up to that point.<sup>13</sup>

Bragg says: “There are certain times where music can play a role in that process by bringing people together to express their solidarity about an issue which is what happened to me at Rock Against Racism. So I think that's the thing that Woody and Dylan have in common with the Clash. Both, at certain times, important times, used their music for that role.” Billy Bragg references Guthrie as being the first punk rocker and the last Elizabethian balladeer. “On the later of those two,” Bragg says, “he recorded a song called ‘Gypsy Davy,’ which is a very very old English ballad that was first written down in my country during the reign of James I, who succeeded Elizabeth I. So, probably it was around before then. And, he learned that early from his grandmother. So he was at the tail end of that whole balladeer tradition. At the other end, he writes ‘This Land is Your Land’ because he's sick and tired of hearing on jukeboxes, after hitchhiking to New York in 1940, he's sick and tired of hearing Irving Berlin singing ‘God Bless America.’ So he's an alternative songwriter.”<sup>14</sup>

### *“When People Are in Pain, You Go to Them”*

The folk tradition remains embodied in the voice of Peter Yarrow of Peter, Paul, and Mary. In 2013, he traveled to Newtown, Connecticut, to perform for those who had lost 20 elementary students and six staff members in the December 2012 Sandy Hook school shooting. Yarrow led the audience through a heart-wrenching rendition of Bob Dylan's “Blowin' in the Wind.” Francine Wheeler, a local music teacher and the mother of Ben Wheeler—one of the children killed—sang: “How many times must the cannon balls fly, before they're forever banned?” One of America's great contemporary songwriters and performers, Dar Williams, joined the stage asking: “How many times can a man turn his head—and pretend that he just doesn't see?”<sup>15</sup> Williams describes the event:

If Peter Yarrow had been Svengali, this world would have been in a lot of trouble. But he chose to use his sense of the power of a stage for the ‘good.’ I really admire him because he, at the last minute, changed who was going to sing which line when he suddenly understood that if Francine wanted to sing this line, she should be able to sing this line. And her community should be able to witness

her singing this line of pure agony and frustration. That was Peter understanding that this was a historical moment, a communal moment to share—and I just love him for that. He’s just so unafraid of looking at the theatrical beauty of a community event as it’s unfolding.<sup>16</sup>

Dar Williams says she was nervous to perform. But she recalls Yarrow told her: “‘When people are in pain, you go to them.’” Williams recalls: “There were a lot of tears, a lot of kindness, and it felt a little old guard—to be congregated, to use pure music as a way to be together and to heal.”<sup>17</sup>

## IN MY ROOM

Jann Wenner says rock and roll also gained influence through shared introspection: “Like Chuck Berry, just writing about how boring school was, ‘ring ring goes the bell’—can’t wait to get out of there! There’s an expression of young people’s frustration even in that limited area. Then as the ’60s came into full swing you had artists like the Beach Boys, Phil Spector groups, sort of dealing with, you know, more ‘grown-up’ teen-age concerns.” Wenner highlights the Beach Boy’s song “In My Room.” That song, Wenner says, is “...a real meditation about privacy and daydreaming and the need to be alone and find yourself. A series of issues that are within that song are part of the maturation process.”<sup>18</sup> Kate Pierson elaborates about such common experiences and her band, the B-52s:

When we started the band, we definitely had no intention of like, ‘Let’s write songs that uplift people.’ I mean, unlike the folk movement where that was a conscious, ‘Let’s bring people together’ and ‘let’s rally people.’ This was like: ‘Let’s have fun! Let’s just write these crazy songs.’ It was totally unselfconscious, but, it had this incredible effect, years later of people telling us: ‘Oh my God, your first album, and all your music, but particularly the first album, got me through high school, and helped me through hard times. I was this loner. I was the only one that liked your music and then I found someone else who did and it saved my life.’ And how many people have told me that over and over—it’s kind of amazing!<sup>19</sup>

Kathleen Hanna, who spearheaded the Riot Grrrl movement of feminist punk rock in the early 1990s, recorded much of her 1997 album “The Julie Ruin” in her bedroom—noting that for girls, so much of who they are comes from that shared introspection.<sup>20</sup> Sini Anderson, who directed a documentary film on Kathleen Hanna says: “I’m so proud to see, 20 years later, real change has come in women’s confidence—in the ability to voice what they feel is morally right or wrong. It’s created empowerment in this way so that the art can be that much stronger.”<sup>21</sup>

### *All You Need Is Love*

The nexus between Bob Dylan's America and Brian Wilson's introspective meditations turned a liberating dance party into a socially conscious endeavor. This vision peaked with the Beatles, who took inspiration from the Beach Boys and the Byrds. The Byrds, meanwhile, were inspired by Dylan and Pete Seeger—with major hits covering Dylan's "Hey Mr. Tambourine Man" and Seeger's "Turn, Turn, Turn." David Crosby says of his band's ties to the Beatles: "I knew them, they were nice to me, they liked the Byrds—we were pushing the envelope. They made it very public."<sup>22</sup> The flow between Dylan, the Byrds, the Beach Boys, and the Beatles rippled fast and far. Graham Nash, with the Hollies, shared a bill in 1962 at the Cavern Club in Liverpool with the Beatles. Just five years later, Nash was an invited guest singing for the worldwide broadcast of "All You Need Is Love." "It was a very transformational moment," Graham Nash says: "That moment of realizing that the four kids in front of me that I'd known since November of 1959, who now were calling themselves the Beatles—were talking to over a billion people at once."<sup>23</sup>

Glen Ballard represents one of rock and roll's most successful interconnections among producers and song writers. He is a protégé of Quincy Jones and has production and songwriting credits including Aerosmith, Michael Jackson, Dave Matthews, Alanis Morissette, Wilson Phillips, Lisa Marie Presley, and Van Halen. He is credited with discovering Katy Perry. Growing up in the 1960s in Natchez, Mississippi, Ballard recalls: "The Beatles records were the thing that got me interested in all of it, really. I mean, I loved music. I'd been playing music—but their actual records were so astonishing to me on every level. I think I was hearing for the first time this sort of sonic—this next step in recorded music."<sup>24</sup> He says:

The gulf between 2014 and say 1965—its light years, man! Its light years! The differences are as varied as the universe now. Hearing the Beatles records and hearing the George Martin produced records, I had no way of knowing at that moment that I was just kind of sitting there at the dawn of kind of a new art form. I also didn't realize that it was going to be over relatively quickly, too. I mean, that kind of golden age of people spending a year to make a record—that kind of investment in that art form. If it was really great you could expect people would listen to it for a year. I mean there was like this whole kind of relationship between what went into making a record and writing it and knowing it was so embedded in everybody's way of life and the Zeitgeist.<sup>25</sup>

Ballard says, "I mean, the *Sgt. Pepper* record—what's better than that? Just in terms of it being an indelible sonic masterpiece—for all time. I was having

this conversation with Ringo this year and I said, ‘When that record came out, I was in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade and I listened to it—my mother had to come and make me get out of my room because she thought there was something wrong with me.’ So I probably listened to it like 50 times in a row...just mesmerized—no drugs, no nothing—that was the drug.”<sup>26</sup>

It’s not just harder to achieve now, Glen Ballard says: “It’s impossible. It will never happen again.” He argues:

I don’t think music will ever have the sort of same cultural weight, on every aspect of our lives, starting at the time of which we speak—in the ’60s—where music—the sound of it changed; the intention of it and its purposes changed. The whole scope of what it could accomplish changed and expanded in ways that no one could even anticipate. You had everything, from the political commentary—obliquely—of Bob Dylan; who had ever really done that in sort of a serious way and in an unpremeditated way? A kind of real response to the moment. Music seemed to lead the charge in terms of our emotional response to everything at that time.<sup>27</sup>

Ballard notes of songs like “Ohio” by Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young: “They were meaningful in the political moment—hugely political—hugely important. Nixon had a lot of musicians and writers and singers on his fucking enemies list.” He adds, “Nixon was not wrong to fear what was coming in terms of the awareness—and the music seemed to represent all of that—a new sense of awareness and possibilities.” Ballard says: “The technical growth and the artistic growth happened at the same time. Those early records were made on four track, and they ended up with eight or sixteen tracks, which really was important. It cut down the amount of time they had to figure out how to multitrack. They hadn’t got to the point like we are today where the technology is driving the process.” Ballard recalls: “They were very efficient in the way they used that growth in these simple records from there, all the way to the end, that are these complex, sort of orchestrally influenced records—just genius sort of cinematic-like records. It was a huge arch, but it was not that long. It was—severe.” Decades later, Glen Ballard found himself writing songs with Ringo Starr: “It’s still about peace and love to Ringo, that’s still his message, man. I’ve talked to him about it many times.” Ballard adds, “Ringo’s committed to it, without question, what else is there? He’s seen everything. He’s been among the most famous people in the world—and the perspective he has is that—if we’re not striving for peace and love, then what the heck are we doing?”<sup>28</sup>

That severe arch of musical and social change was not limited, of course, to the Dylan–Beatles nexus. Few artists have been present at major moments of musical change as George Clinton, founder of the groups Parliament and

Funkadelic. George Clinton was there with his first record at the origins of rock and roll, in 1958, recording with the Parliaments from New Jersey. Then he went to Motown and served as a staff songwriter. From there, Clinton heard acid rock—especially Eric Clapton’s band Cream. Clinton blended that with Motown to create funk, which eventually sowed the seeds of rap and hip-hop. “It’s all,” Clinton says:

...funk, bass, blues, rhythm—funk, blues, and rock and roll. That’s the tempos from the 40s and the 50s. That was the basis of it. Boogie woogie, a la Louis Jordan, and all of that instilled that element of dance. Boogie Woogie went into three different directions: the slow version of it becomes the blues, the mid-tempo—they don’t say funk, but it becomes like the New Orleans mainstay, all this nasty stuff, which is also Motown. Motown spruced it up—they made it pretty with strings and things. We took the same thing and took it back into the blues and the rock and roll; loud Motown and psychedelic. We went in every direction you could possibly go in the ’70s—with horns and James Brown and the African type of groove thing—which hip-hop basically sampled. The other side was sort of the loud, psychedelic music of Motown and R&B being played loud.<sup>29</sup>

Clinton says it was the kind of freedom you: “...could get at church, or any kind of ritual, but especially to do it on your own terms—not to get psyched into it, because you’re still opening yourself up. But once you can be free enough—to do it—which is what rock and roll did to the ’60s kids.” It was an Englishman, Eric Clapton, who exposed Clinton to his American roots. When asked about the impact of Clapton’s band Cream, Clinton says:

Oh wow! That blew my mind. I felt real bad—before, we were doing funk. We were doing funk but we hadn’t really named it, cornered it and got into it like that. I heard Eric Clapton talking about Robert Johnson—doing ‘Crossroads’ and a couple of other songs. I remembered those songs, well, with my mother—I had no idea. You know, the history of this dude that was writing these songs that all these new pop, the new Motown was coming in—these were songs that my mother listened to. I would pay attention to the history of what I’m doing and give more respect to it...The rock and roll, Jimi Hendrix had took me into it already. By the time I heard Cream, I’d heard Jimi Hendrix at the same time. When I heard their version of that beat that they had—there was no resisting that!<sup>30</sup>

George Clinton hums a few notes from Cream’s “Sunshine of Your Love” and says, “they were playing that sound like it was regular R&B, but when you pay attention, it’s not. And they were playing like serious, heavy—from the Yardbirds on, Eric Clapton—and all of them.”<sup>31</sup>

The ripples from the rock and roll revolution also spread across generations. Mark Karan was 11 in San Francisco in 1966. Two decades later, he was playing with the Rembrants and Paul Carrack, becoming the lead guitar player for the first post-Jerry Garcia incarnation of the Grateful Dead and joining Bob Weir's band Ratdog. Karan reflects: "That ethic that I fell in love with in the mid-60s in the Haight—even when I was doing the '80s, when I had big hair and whatever the current clothing were and I was doing new wave or whatever the hell it was, somehow at the core of my philosophical self, musically and otherwise I've always been connected to that whole Haight thing." Karan adds the Beatles were key, saying in effect: "Be whatever color you want to be. Paint whatever picture you want to paint. Say whatever the hell you've got to say. Kiss, love, fuck—do whatever is real for you—what's authentic, what's loving. Be that."<sup>32</sup> Michael Stanley similarly gave voice to the Midwest ethic of his hometown, Cleveland, Ohio (with national hits like "Lover" and "My Town") in the 1980s. Stanley graduated from Hiram College, near Cleveland, in 1970:

When I started at Hiram, 1966, women had to be in their dorms at 10:00. You couldn't hold hands walking across the campus. Dinner was sit-down—ties, dresses, this and that. By '70, when I got out of there, there were co-ed dorms, half the people were tripping, the offices and buildings had been taken over by the black student union or by this group or by that group. For some people, it completely freaked them out. For others, it completely opened up things. It was so completely different from the four years from when I went into college from when I came out. I think that sent a lot of us in whatever direction we ended up going. Whether it be right, left—or completely shell-shocked.<sup>33</sup>

This change in America's heartland resonated nationally when the government of Ohio killed four students protesting the Vietnam War at Kent State University in May 1970. It was, Stanley says, "...unbelievable—it would have been unbelievable if it had happened anywhere. Let alone for it to happen where I was at the time—from like 15 miles away."<sup>34</sup>

Today, it can be harder to get a "breakthrough" moment where an artist transcends a moment in time—as Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young did with "Ohio" following Kent State. To Graham Nash, "Every song that we write needs a reason to exist. I did my share, with the Hollies, of writing my, 'moon tune, fuck me in the back of the car song.' I've done my share of that. But, I realized when I joined David [Crosby] and Stephen [Stills] and watched how they wrote, and watched how Neil [Young] wrote, and watched how Joni [Mitchell] wrote, it changed the way that I wrote."<sup>35</sup> There are risks, however, for artists speaking out. In June 2014, a Columbus, Ohio, radio host attacked Tom Morello of Rage against the Machine for being political, arguing that

people should walk out of his shows. Serj Tankian (who, with Morello, cofounded “Axis of Justice”) says:

Tom has been on the circuit and done those same radio shows and I’ve done some of those radio shows with him. I remember one in particular where we got on and we were talking about Axis of Justice. The first thing that the D.J. said is, ‘Although I don’t really agree with any of the things that you guys talk about, you are on this show because you are great musicians and we respect what you have to say.’ And we looked at each other like, ‘What the fuck?’ It’s kind of like pandering to the right. They do their numbers. They do their research. A lot of radio D.J.s play that right wing kind of thing that we’ve noticed. Some of them believe it, some of them don’t.<sup>36</sup>

There can be severe professional costs to artists’ protesting, as Sinéad O’Connor discovered after ripping up a picture of the pope on *Saturday Night Live* in 1992, at the time effectively ending her career in America. The Dixie Chicks were boycotted by conservative groups in 2003 for criticizing George W. Bush’s plans to invade Iraq. O’Connor and the Dixie Chicks were proven right—and the Dixie Chicks returned with the hit “Not Ready to Make Nice” protesting the death threats that Maines had received.

Erin Potts, now a consultant, founded and headed RPM, a nonprofit advisory group for musicians engaged in social and political movements. She says:

...there’s an imagination process that happens in art for social change, meaning that we can envision a future. I think often times we get too stuck in reacting to the present and being negative. But I think that also helps energize and articulate frustrations that people are feeling. I think Serj [Tankian]—he may be preaching to the choir but, he’s getting the choir really amped up. And that choir is hopefully going forward and fighting the good fight.<sup>37</sup>

Potts adds RPM’s research shows that, as to the Dixie Chicks:

They apologized for how they said it and that some people were angered by that. I think that’s the key; they stuck it out. They didn’t immediately say, ‘Oh my God, I’m so sorry we shouldn’t have said that.’ They were like: ‘We shouldn’t have said how we said it, but we meant it. We really don’t like this guy and we think his policies are awful.’ And in that way, people respected them even in disagreeing with them.<sup>38</sup>

The other thing about the Dixie Chicks, Potts adds, “...is that they really cared about that. It wasn’t just a flippant thing that they said. Same with Tom [Morello], he’s not entering these really difficult issues just sort of off the tip of his tongue.”<sup>39</sup> Jann Wenner acknowledges risks for activist artists: “You

don't want to push it too far to the point where you get marginalized or your message gets marginalized." Referencing Sinéad O'Connor's *Saturday Night Live* appearance, he says: "I mean there's no percentage in attacking the pope. Or, if there is, choose your time and place."<sup>40</sup>

### *"Follow That Guy"*

Shortly after Sinéad O'Connor's *Saturday Night Live* appearance, she was set to perform at a tribute for Bob Dylan in New York City. She was loudly booed when she walked on stage. This was ironic for O'Connor as exposure to Dylan, growing up in Ireland, shaped her introspective sense of purpose:

At the time, between the age of 9 and 13, I didn't see my father—through no fault of his own. My mother excluded him. And perhaps I got to the age where you need a bit of a role model. So it just happened at the same time that Joe [her brother] came home with *Slow Train Coming* and that really was it for me. In some ways, Dylan became a bit of a godfather if you like, or a male role model; someone to follow spiritually. And also it was the coolest religious music I'd ever heard. It was right sexy—proper sexy.<sup>41</sup>

For O'Connor, Bob Dylan "...opened up a certain type of a priesthood for me. There was something in the presence of him in the sitting room when you're listening to that record—you're thinking, 'Well, follow that guy. He's going somewhere that I'm interested in going.'<sup>42</sup>

## **"WE WON THE CULTURE WAR"**

Inspired by the 1960s' revolution in music, literature, and psychedelic drugs, the Grateful Dead symbolized a countercultural wave that expanded exponentially. Jerry Garcia said in a 1968 press conference: "We're not thinking about any kind of power. We're not thinking about any kind of struggles. We're not thinking about revolution or war or any of that. That's not what we want. Nobody wants to get hurt. Nobody wants to hurt anybody. We would all like to be able to live an uncluttered life. A simple life, a good life. And think about moving the whole human race ahead a step, or a few steps."<sup>43</sup> Jerry Garcia, decades later, reflected that by 1967 when this countercultural community was noticed:

It no longer had any power. I mean really. It did for the first couple of minutes—and then it went 'whoosh' and it was gone. It wasn't relevant anymore; not to the people who started there. As soon as that happened, everybody started to disappear—over to Marin County and other places—because nobody wants to

be in the center of the spotlight, not in your life. Maybe in your work, but not in your life. Those of us who were performers, like the Grateful Dead, we just performed and at that time we started going national. We started touring the whole United States. So it was no longer a community to us in the real sense. In the real sense, America became our community.<sup>44</sup>

Garcia noted he had some "...incredible psychedelic experiences that were so cosmic, so huge in scope that I knew that all the sudden I had to revise everything I thought I knew about anything. It doesn't matter to me whether it has any historical value or whether it's measurable in some objective way. I don't care. For me, the subjective reality is what counts." He added: "... that energy has gained enough momentum over the years. It's partly responsible for all the things that have happened historically since then—in some way—it's part of the gain in consciousness that the last half of this century has represented."<sup>45</sup>

### *We Will Get By*

This American community resurged in the 1980s when the Grateful Dead had their first radio hit, "Touch of Grey." It celebrated that we're still here, "we will get by." Back in 1968, however, the "system" had left a generation saddled with the horrors of the Vietnam War and visionary leaders assassinated. So it was understandable if people wanted to "drop out." Jann Wenner asks: "Who would want to be a part of that political system which seems to leave its heroes in blood on the floors of hotels and motels?"<sup>46</sup> Cameron Sears, longtime manager of the Grateful Dead, now leads their charity foundation Rex. He recalls: "What made that San Francisco scene somewhat unique was that the notion of giving back was elemental to what it was all about. It started with free concerts." Cameron Sears says the Grateful Dead "...didn't want to use the stage as a holy pulpit. You never heard them say anything at a Rex benefit, or a Rainforest Action Network benefit. People were there to be entertained and have a good time." Sears recalls a key moment with Jerry Garcia who was doing a press conference in 1989 for a Save the Rainforest benefit that the Grateful Dead did at Madison Square Gardens in New York City. He says Garcia was asked: "'How is it that you guys are the ones doing this?' and Garcia effectively said: 'Well, to be perfectly honest, it's really pathetic that it's up to us to be the messengers... We're not the experts. We're not the people who should be on the front line of this. But we're forced to do it, because there's a vacuum. It's ridiculous that it's up to us.'"<sup>47</sup> By 2008, however, the remaining Grateful Dead members went political—performing a concert in State College Pennsylvania for Barack Obama's presidential campaign.

Frank Zappa was nevertheless right that there are limits to the rock and roll revolution. In 1987, Zappa told a Danish television interviewer that: "Pretty much rock and roll has been reduced to a product itself whereas in the '60s there was a little bit more life to it. It was connected a little more closely to the lives of the people who made the music."<sup>48</sup> Yet, in 1985, there was Frank Zappa testifying before Congress as an expert witness on behalf of freedom of speech. At the time, there was a conservative backlash against rock and roll—waging a "culture war" to marginalize its impact. Entering the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum in Cleveland, Ohio, one is greeted by these artifacts of irrational fear. One woman tells a television audience about rock and roll, "We're talking about the kind of rebellion that can be so deadly." Another plays a rock record and says, "...someone sung this song for Satan." Another says: "There's anarchy, there's just blatant, raw sex." Rev. Jimmy Swaggart can be seen preaching: "...rock, sex, heroin, marijuana—four, five, six hours a day!" Defeated in part by generations of artists and fans embracing the rock and roll ethic, it was clear by 2016 that this iteration of America's culture wars had failed, badly. Jann Wenner says: "It's not completely over, but yeah, we won the culture war."<sup>49</sup>

Alice Cooper represents a more skeptical view: "I go out of my way to be non-political. I'm probably the biggest moderate you know. When John Lennon and Harry Nilsson used to argue politics, I was sitting right in the middle of them, and I was the guy who was going, 'I don't care.' When my parents would start talking politics, I would go in my room and put on the Rolling Stones or the Who on as long as I could to avoid politics."<sup>50</sup> Perhaps, however, it can depend on what one means by politics. The Who's "Won't Get Fooled Again" challenged authority. The Rolling Stone's "Salt of the Earth" called on listeners to raise a toast to the working people "who need leaders but get gamblers instead." However manifested, with each subsequent generation, rock and roll has helped to advance and accompany progress—sometimes for individuals, specific communities, and for the nation and the world.

For Jann Wenner, advancing progress is largely what rock and roll is about. He points to a picture and says: "Look over there at that picture with Mick [Jagger] and Bruce [Springsteen] and Bono. Mick, though not directly involved in politics, has put out so much stuff about revolutionary, evolutionary attitudes and stood for such a questioning of the system." Bono, he says, "is on a full-out crusade" with his work in Africa. Wenner adds: "We have the power—and someone like Bono really consciously uses it. You know, I mean his Africa thing; all the wonderful things that they've done. Bruce has finally come around to doing benefit concerts and tours for presidential campaigns. That's revolutionary for

a rock and roll star.”<sup>51</sup> Internationally, groups such as Pussy Riot risked prison to advance freedom in Russia. In Iran, the Muckers were forced underground because people dance to their songs. Meanwhile, for every fun, but generic Pharrell-type “Happy,” there was also a debate over Annie Lennox’s and Beyoncé’s definitions of modern feminism. There was Meghan Trainor, who in “All About That Bass” was telling young girls that confidence in oneself defines beauty. Taylor Swift’s “Shake It Off” was a song of freedom—escaping people’s hang-ups by dancing. George Clinton says, referencing his hit “One Nation Under a Groove”: “Dance your way out of constriction, man. That’s what ‘One Nation’ was about—and that’s what people did. Funk—with or without drums, you can get into it like that. It’s like church—whether you’re into religion or not, you get caught up. With a good choir cooking—you’re going. Those tones move you. They move the human spirit. Intent is there, intent is felt. We portray the intent to the audience, and they pick up—and do it for themselves, they get into the music.”<sup>52</sup>



*Rock the Sun: Leilani Munter, Sammy Hagar, Bob Weir, and Michael Franti—Modern Troubadours. Photo taken January 24, 2016, by Bob Minkin.*

*“This Is the Land of the Free”*

In 2004, Bob Dylan was asked by *CBS* interviewer Ed Bradley if he ever looked back at what he had accomplished. Dylan said: “I don’t know how I got to write those songs... Those early songs were almost magically written—‘Darkness at the break of noon, the handmade blade, the child’s balloon.’ Well, try to sit down and write something like that—there’s a magic to that.” When asked why he changed his name—from Robert Zimmerman to Bob Dylan—he said: “You call yourself what you want to call yourself—this is the land of the free.” To Dylan, “If you examine the songs, I don’t think you’re going to find anything in there that says I’m a spokesman for anybody or anything.” At the time, Dylan viewed himself: “I’m a ‘60s troubadour, a folk rock relic—a wordsmith from bygone days. I’m in the bottomless pit of cultural oblivion.”<sup>53</sup> Yet, in 1998, as with America—which has risen, crashed, and risen again—Bob Dylan won three Grammy awards for his record *Time Out of Mind*. By 2018 Dylan thrived, playing new music on an almost endless world tour.

**POWER TO THE PEOPLE**

As John Lennon suggested in his song “Power to the People,” it is from the people that freedom advances, equality is gained, human rights are protected, and peace made real—and all are connected and amplified by rock and roll and secured via education and activism. Graham Nash says, “I have children. I have grandchildren. I’ve got to remain positive. I’ve got to think that I can help make the world a better place for myself and my family and my friends. Everything starts inside, doesn’t it? How far can the ripples go once you throw that stone into the pool?”<sup>54</sup> Bob Dylan once said, “I think of a hero as someone who understands the degree of responsibility that comes with his freedom.”<sup>55</sup> Then again, he also said: “If I wasn’t Bob Dylan, I’d probably think that Bob Dylan has a lot of answers myself.”<sup>56</sup> More than anything, Dylan captures the power of rock and roll. When inducted in 1988 into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, he thanked three people—Muhammad Ali (the legendary boxer), Alan Lomax (the legendary chronicler of folk songs), and Little Richard—“I don’t think I’d have even started out, without listening to Little Richard.”