

Hear Her Voice: An Analysis of Selected Songs by American Female Songwriters of
the 1960s and 1970s

by
Miranda Renzi

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by Miranda Renzi

APPROVED:

Dr. John M. Dougan, Thesis Director
Professor of Music Business and Popular
Music Studies in the Department of Recording
Industry

Dr. John R. Vile, Dean
Honors College

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Abstract

This creative project analyzes selected songs written and recorded by prominent American female songwriters from the 1960s and 1970s. The purpose of this analysis is to underscore the cultural and musical significance of both the individual songs and the pioneering female artists who wrote and recorded them. This analysis was accomplished by re-recording selected songs from four different genres and studying the lyrics, the musical composition, the historical context in which the songs were released, and the individual artists who wrote and recorded each song. The conclusions drawn from the analysis reveal that American female songwriters of the 1960s and 1970s have had a lasting impact on popular culture, the music industry, and popular music overall.

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Introduction

Gender inequality has been especially prevalent in the entertainment industry, specifically in the music business. For decades, female musicians were only allowed to exist as attractive objects without strong personalities or political views. Female songwriters were nearly unheard of, so the vast majority of songs that female musicians performed were actually written by men. Even when a female singer performed a song, the narrative was not entirely her own—the song would not convey her original thoughts, feelings, or frustrations as a woman in the 20th century. However, as American culture began to shift in the 1960s, more female songwriters and feminist anthems appeared and gained traction. Women began to assert themselves as songwriters and as performers with their own opinions and emotions. In the 1960s and 1970s, the music written and performed by female songwriters and artists would have a permanent, beneficial impact on American popular music and the culture at large.

The 1960s and 1970s did not contain the first-ever American female songwriters—rather, the 1960s and 1970s were the first decades where a significant number of American female songwriters achieved mainstream success and notability equal to their male counterparts. The variety and depth of the material written by American female songwriters in the 1960s-1970s ultimately opened the door for future generations of female songwriters across many genres. From the Civil Rights movement to the sexual revolution to the second wave feminist movement, songs written by American female songwriters made essential contributions to the social dialogue and culture of their eras, the overall artform of songwriting, and ultimately, to American history. By creating music and setting an example, the work done by female songwriters

in 1960s-1970s America profoundly impacted popular music. Without the influence of these songwriters, popular music would not be nearly as diverse, honest, or excellent.

Repertoire Selection

For this project, I have recorded cover versions of songs by American female songwriters whose careers flourished in the 1960s and 1970s. The songwriters featured in this project each represent a prominent genre of music: R&B/Soul, Country, Singer-Songwriter/Folk, and Rock. While there are many other musical genres beyond these particular four genres, R&B/Soul music, Country music, Singer-Songwriter/Folk music, and Rock music were especially significant and popular in America during the 1960s and 1970s and remain relevant to this day. The female songwriters profiled in this project were selected because they achieved significant artistic and commercial success in one of these four genres during the 1960s and 1970s. These songwriters are Aretha Franklin (R&B/Soul), Dolly Parton (Country), Carole King (Singer-Songwriter/Folk), and Ann and Nancy Wilson of the band Heart (Rock). These songwriters are meant to serve as top-tier representatives of their respective genres based on their material, career, and achievements.

The four songs that were re-recorded and analyzed were chosen from the discographies of each of the female songwriters. Each song was selected based on the following criteria: the song showcases a unique female perspective, the song was commercially successful, and the song has a socially or thematically relevant message or subject matter. The songs I recorded are “Respect” by Aretha Franklin, “9 to 5” by Dolly Parton, “You’ve Got a Friend” by Carole King, and “Barracuda” by Heart. The process of analyzing, arranging, singing, playing, and recording these four iconic songs has given me tremendous insight into the artists who wrote them and the impact they have had on popular music.

Song Analysis

R&B/Soul – “Respect” by Aretha Franklin

I. Background

The song “Respect” is one of the most notable works by legendary singer-songwriter Aretha Franklin. Known as the Queen of Soul, Aretha Franklin was the daughter of acclaimed minister and civil rights activist C. L. Franklin and spent her early life singing gospel music in church. With one of the most powerful and beloved voices in American music, Aretha Franklin had an incredible career as a vocalist and is possibly best known for her impeccable delivery and reinterpretation of the song “Respect.” The song was originally written by Otis Redding but was modified lyrically by Aretha Franklin and her sisters, Erma and Carolyn. Otis Redding’s 1965 version of the song came from the perspective of a man telling his wife to respect him because he’s the man of the house, implying that he was entitled to her obedience and affection. Franklin’s version of “Respect,” which was released in 1967, flipped the script and switched the song to the female perspective. A song that was once meant to scold a woman for not knowing her place was transformed into a powerful anthem in which a woman commands the respect she knows she deserves. Franklin’s version of “Respect” became associated with both the civil rights movement and the second-wave feminist movement due to the pertinence of the song’s message. At a time when black Americans were unjustly treated as lesser citizens due to Jim Crow laws, and women were still largely considered subordinate to men, the song rang true for so many disenfranchised Americans. Given America’s

continuous struggles with sexism, gender equality, systemic racism, racial injustice, the message of “Respect” has remained relevant in America to this day. Aretha Franklin’s song “Respect” features a woman of color owning her narrative, commanding respect, and asserting herself in a way that has inspired listeners for generations. The overall impact of the song “Respect” is an example of how raising one’s voice can inspire and influence others to take charge, stand up for themselves, and refuse to be subjugated.

II. Link to Recording:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1LdeEhWl6A4q2CQ_ZrMVWuttXXGBSOyyM?usp=sharing

III. Lyrics

“Respect” - Written by Otis Redding with lyrical alterations by Aretha Franklin, Erma Franklin, and Carolyn Franklin

[Verse 1]

What you want, baby, I got it

What you need, do you know I got it?

[Chorus]

All I'm askin' is for a little respect when you come home

(Just a little bit) Hey baby

(Just a little bit) when you get home

(Just a little bit) mister

(Just a little bit)

[Verse 2]

I ain't gonna do you wrong while you're gone

Ain't gon' do you wrong 'cause I don't wanna

[Chorus]

All I'm askin' is for a little respect when you come home

(Just a little bit) Baby

(Just a little bit) When you get home

(Just a little bit) Yeah

(Just a little bit)

[Verse 3]

I'm about to give you all of my money

And all I'm askin' in return, honey

Is to give me my props when you get home

[Refrain]

(Just a, just a, just a, just a) Yeah, baby

(Just a, just a, just a, just a) When you get home

(Just a little bit) Yeah

(Just a little bit)

[Verse 4]

Ooh, your kisses, sweeter than honey

And guess what? So is my money

[Chorus 2]

All I want you to do for me, is give it to me when you get home

(Re, re, re , re) Yeah baby

(Re, re, re , re) Whip it to me

(Respect, just a little bit) When you get home, now

(Just a little bit)

[Verse 5]

R-E-S-P-E-C-T, find out what it means to me

R-E-S-P-E-C-T, take care, TCB, oh

[Outro]

(Sock it to me, sock it to me, sock it to me, sock it to me)

A little respect

(sock it to me, sock it to me, sock it to me, sock it to me)

Whoa, babe

(Just a little bit) A little respect

(Just a little bit) I get tired

(Just a little bit) Keep on tryin'

(Just a little bit) You're runnin' out of fools

(Just a little bit) And I ain't lyin'

(Just a little bit)

(Re, re, re, re) Start when you come home

(Re, re, re, respect) Or you might walk in

(Just a little bit) And find out I'm gone

(Just a little bit) I gotta have

(Just a little bit) A little respect

IV. Analysis

(Lyrics denoted in blue font)

The lyrics of “Respect” reveal a relationship between a man and a woman from the woman’s perspective. The woman is informing the man that he has not been giving her the respect she deserves. The woman works hard and possesses things that the man desires, both romantically and monetarily (*what you want / what you need, you know I got it / I’m about to give you all my money / so is my money*) and remains loyal to him (*ain’t gonna do you wrong while you’re gone / ain’t gonna do you wrong ‘cause I don’t wanna*) but will only continue to give the man her loyalty and the things he desires on the condition of respect (*All I’m askin’ is for a little respect when you come home / And all I’m askin’ in return, honey, is to give me my propers when you get home*). It is clear from the lyrics the man needs to step up and start meeting her needs (*R-E-S-P-E-C-T, find out what it means to me / R-E-S-P-E-C-T, take care, TCB*) because the woman’s patience is running thin (*I get tired, keep on tryin, you’re runnin’ out of fools, and I ain’t lyin’ / Start when you come home, or you might walk in, and find out I’m gone*). While the lyrics depict a romantic relationship, the defiance expressed by the woman as she refuses to be mistreated and neglected applies to many other kinds of relationships, which is why the song became relevant in Civil Rights movement (demanding respect on the basis of race) and second-wave feminism (demanding respect on the basis of gender).

Musically, the tempo¹ and groove² of the song “Respect” reflect the persistence and spunk of the song’s lyrics. The piano, horns, and percussion drive the song forward with

¹ The speed at which a passage of music is or should be played.

² A rhythmic pattern in popular or jazz music.

a determination that matches the spirited attitude and opinions expressed in the lead vocal. The lead vocal is punchy and bold, and the sentiment of the lead vocal allows it accurately to convey the assertive message of the lyrics. Throughout the song, the background vocals, which are female voices like the lead vocal, reinforce many of the assertions made in the lead vocal by constantly accentuating and agreeing with what the lead vocal says. In a sense, the background vocals support and “back up” what the lead vocal says by elevating and reemphasizing the points made by the lead vocal. The song’s instrumental arrangement becomes fairly sparse when the lead vocal delivers many of the song’s most pertinent lines, often featuring only the rhythm section (the piano and percussion), which allows the message to ring loud and clear without instrumental interference. The lead female vocal and the female background vocals are at the center of the song, and the instrumental production supports these vocals in the strategic sparseness of the arrangement. This most prominently occurs during the song’s fifth verse, in which the lead vocal spells out R-E-S-P-E-C-T almost entirely acapella with the exception of short, staccato³ hits by the piano, horns, and percussion. The emphasis on wanting to receive “Respect” that is achieved by literally spelling out the word and the demand for “TCB” (an acronym meaning “taking care of business”) drives the message of the song home right before the song’s outro begins, which features a fuller instrumental, more prominent background vocals, and flashier singing in the lead vocal that collectively bring the song to its conclusion.

³ Performed with each note sharply detached or separated from the others.

Country – “9 to 5” by Dolly Parton

I. Background

“9 to 5” is just one of many iconic songs by beloved country singer-songwriter Dolly Parton. Born to a poor family in rural Tennessee, music was an important part of Parton’s life from an early age, and her undeniable talent and savvy have made her one of the most celebrated and successful female country music artists alive today. Parton wrote the song “9 to 5” as the theme song for the film *9 to 5*, a film which Parton starred in alongside actresses Jane Fonda and Lily Tomlin. The film follows three working women at a company who are all fed up and frustrated with their notorious, chauvinistic boss. The women, played by Fonda, Tomlin, and Parton, all come from different backgrounds (a divorcee new to the workforce, a single mother who is passed over on a promotion because she is a woman, and an outcast secretary who is constantly sexually harassed), but they come together to support one another and to end their boss’s misogynistic tyranny in their workplace. The women refer to the boss as a “sexist, egotistical, lying, hypocritical bigot,” a sentiment that many women in the workforce can unfortunately relate to, and the song reflects this frustration in the lyrics “the boss won’t seem to let me,” “the boss man,” and the “rich man’s game.”

Both the film *9 to 5* and the song “9 to 5” achieved tremendous commercial success, and the sentiment displayed in the film and the song clearly resonated with women across America and around the world. To this day, women are treated differently and unfairly in American workplaces—the wage gap persists, mothers are judged for choosing to work instead of staying home, and women continue to experience unwanted advances,

harassment, and other discrimination in spite of the legal protections that have been passed. In writing “9 to 5,” Dolly Parton created an anthem that highlights the struggles of working women and discusses the solidarity they share with each other in order to navigate their workplaces and the workforce overall.

II. Link to Recording:

[https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1LdeEhWl6A4q2CQ_ZrMVWuttXXG
BSOyyM?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1LdeEhWl6A4q2CQ_ZrMVWuttXXGBSOyyM?usp=sharing)

III. Lyrics

“9 to 5” – Written by Dolly Parton

[Verse 1]

Tumble outta bed and stumble to the kitchen
Pour myself a cup of ambition
Yawnin' and stretchin' and try to come to life
Jump in the shower and the blood starts pumpin'
Out on the streets, the traffic starts jumpin'
With folks like me on the job from 9 to 5

[Chorus]

Working 9 to 5, what a way to make a living
Barely gettin' by, it's all taking and no giving
They just use your mind and they never give you credit
It's enough to drive you crazy if you let it
9 to 5, for service and devotion
You would think that I would deserve a fair promotion
Want to move ahead but the boss won't seem to let me
I swear sometimes that man is out to get me
Mmmmm...

[Verse 2]

They let you dream just to watch them shatter
You're just a step on the boss man's ladder
But you got dreams he'll never take away
In the same boat with a lot of your friends
Waiting for the day your ship will come in
And the tide's gonna turn an' it's all gonna roll you away

[Chorus]

Working 9 to 5, what a way to make a living
Barely gettin' by, it's all taking and no giving
They just use your mind and you never get the credit
It's enough to drive you crazy if you let it
9 to 5, yeah, they got you where they want you
There's a better life and you think about it don't you
It's a rich man's game no matter what they call it
And you spend your life putting money in his wallet

9 to 5, what a way to make a living
Barely gettin' by, it's all taking and no giving
They just use your mind and they never give you credit
It's enough to drive you crazy if you let it

9 to 5, yeah, they got you where they want you
There's a better life and you think about it don't you
It's a rich man's game no matter what they call it
And you spend your life putting money in his wallet

IV. Analysis

(Lyrics denoted in blue font)

The lyrics of “9 to 5” tell the story of a working woman who has a typical 9 to 5 job that runs her ragged. Monday through Friday, 9 AM to 5PM, she is required to give her all at work even though she’s not adequately appreciated or promoted. She gets up every day and has to muster the motivation to get to her unrewarding job (*pour myself a cup of ambition / try to come to life*). She makes it clear that many employed people work these hours (*Out on the streets, the traffic starts jumpin' / With folks like me on the job from 9 to 5*), but it is clear that women are particularly disadvantaged because they are systemically undervalued (*Barely getting by / It’s all taking and no giving / They just use your mind and they never give you credit / It’s enough to drive you crazy if you let it*). Despite the adversity the working woman faces, she still hopes to succeed but is well aware that the hierarchy of her workplace is stacked against her (*You would think that I would deserve a fair promotion / Want to move ahead but the boss won’t seem to let me / I swear sometimes that man is out to get me*). While not explicitly expressed in the lyrics, the implication is that women are being held back by sexism in the workplace—they are incorrectly viewed as less intelligent or less capable than men, and they are also expected to be caregivers and homemakers in addition to any jobs they may have.

In the second verse, the lyrics further delve into the workplace’s hierarchy and criticizes how the system takes advantage of workers (*They let you dream just to watch them shatter / You’re just a step on the boss man’s ladder*). The second verse also discusses the dynamic of the young, ambitious female employees who all have their own aspirations, indicating that they hope to shatter the glass ceiling someday (*You’ve got*

dreams he'll never take away / In the same boat with a lot of your friends / Waiting for the day your ship will come in / And the tide's gonna turn an' it's all gonna roll you away). In the second chorus of “9 to 5”, the second stanza discusses how workers, regardless of their gender, are just pawns being used to perpetuate the wealth and power of the upper class. (They got you where they want you / There's a better life and you think about it don't you / It's a rich man's game no matter what they call it / And you spend your life putting money in his wallet).

Musically, the arrangement of “9 to 5” emulates the frenzied rush to get to work, the stress to get things done while at work, and the unremitting struggle of navigating life when one is being overwhelmed by one’s job. In the verses, the deep, pounding piano, the insistent plucking of the guitar, and the quick, frantic tapping of the rhythm propel the song forward and reflect the urgency of the sentiment that is conveyed by the lead vocal. During the choruses, the arrangement fills out in order to represent the busyness and the constant pressure found in the workplace, adding horns, louder and more sophisticated percussion, background vocals, more varied guitar, and bass. The lead vocal is sung in an assertive and lively manner, remaining slightly more reserved in the verses as the story and opinions of the working woman are told but ultimately soaring in the chorus as the lead vocal calls out the frustrations and struggles of women in the workplace. The background vocals, which are sung by female voices, support and emphasize the points made by the lead vocal by singing harmonies on every other line in the choruses. The lead vocal and background vocals come together and indicate solidarity between women in the workplace—many women go through the struggles described by the lead vocal,

and it is integral that they support and uplift each other so they can all succeed as the lyrics describe.

Singer-Songwriter/Folk – “You’ve Got a Friend” by Carole King

I. Background

Carole King is one of the most esteemed American songwriters of the 20th century, having written hits for artists and musical acts across several different genres. In the late 1960s, King started focusing more on her solo artistry after splitting up with her husband and longtime songwriting partner Gerry Goffin. In 1971, King released her album *Tapestry*, which achieved tremendous commercial and critical success. One of the songs on *Tapestry*, “You’ve Got a Friend,” is considered to be one of the most renowned and cherished songs about platonic friendship. At the time when “You’ve Got a Friend” was written and released, there were very few popular or successful songs about pure friendship, let alone songs that discussed friendship in a gender-neutral manner. What made the song “You’ve Got a Friend” so groundbreaking was that it so beautifully depicted platonic affection (as opposed to romantic affection) without ever explicitly gendering the singer or the subject matter. Historically, songs from the male perspective often discuss women in a romantic context, and many songs from the female perspective often discuss men in a romantic context. These stereotypes are still largely applicable in contemporary songwriting, although today there is now greater acceptance for songs that depict romance in gender-neutral terms or songs that feature LGBTQ+ romance. Although writing love songs is typical and natural, it is more challenging and nuanced to write successful songs about platonic affection and friendship. The fact that King was effectively able to do this by writing “You’ve Got a Friend” is a testament to her skills as a songwriter. The appeal and universality of “You’ve Got a Friend” prompted James

Taylor, a fellow musician and friend of King, to record his own successful version of the song without making a single lyrical change. Taylor's version of "You've Got a Friend" became a number one hit on the Billboard Hot 100, eventually winning Taylor a Grammy for Best Male Pop Vocal Performance and winning Carole King a Grammy for Song of the Year.

II. Link to Recording:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1LdeEhWl6A4q2CQ_ZrMVWuttXXGBSOyyM?usp=sharing

III. Lyrics

“You’ve Got a Friend” – Written by Carole King

[Verse 1]

When you're down and troubled
And you need some loving care
And nothing, nothing is going right
Close your eyes and think of me
And soon I will be there
To brighten up even your darkest night

[Chorus]

You just call out my name
And you know wherever I am
I'll come running
To see you again
Winter, spring, summer or fall
All you have to do is call
And I'll be there
You've got a friend

[Bridge]

Now ain't it good to know that you've got a friend

When people can be so cold

They'll hurt you, yes, and desert you

And take your soul if you let them

Oh, but don't you let them

[Chorus]

You just call out my name

And you know wherever I am

I'll come running, a-running, yeah, yeah-eah

To see you again

Winter, spring, summer or fall

All you have to do is call

And I'll be there, yes I will (oh, yes I will)

[Outro]

You've got a friend

You've got a friend

Ain't it good to know

You've got a friend

Ain't it good to know

Ain't it good to know

Ain't it good to know

You've got a friend

Oh, yeah now

You've got a friend

Yeah baby

You've got a friend

Oh, yeah

You've got a friend

IV. Analysis

(Lyrics denoted in blue font)

The lyrics of “You’ve Got a Friend” depict a friendship in which the singer is providing support and reassurance to a friend. The singer opens the song by discussing how negative emotions and circumstances can drag people down and make them feel hopeless and alone (*When you're down and troubled / And you need some loving care / And nothing, nothing is going right*). The singer offers their own support and presence as a way to counteract their friend’s frustrations, promising to be there for them and to help them through their struggles (*Close your eyes and think of me / And soon I will be there / To brighten up even your darkest night*). In the chorus, the singer tells their friend that they will always be there to offer their devotion and care (*You just call out my name / And you know wherever I am / I'll come running / To see you again*). The singer continues to emphasize their commitment by listing that their friend can call upon them during all seasons of the year, revealing the perpetual nature of their friendship despite changing circumstances and the passage of time. (*Winter, spring, summer or fall / All you have to do is call / And I'll be there, yes I will / You've got a friend*).

The mentioning of night (*even your darkest night*) and of the seasons (*Winter, spring, summer or fall*) in the lyrics allude to the passage of time and the transitional nature of life—conditions may change, but friends can remain steadfast. The lyrics in the bridge discuss the benefits of friendship, indicating that having affection and support in an often cruel world makes life easier (*Now ain't it good to know that you've got a friend / When people can be so cold*). The singer mentions some of the darker aspects of human behavior by discussing how people choose to hurt, neglect, and use one another (*They'll*

hurt you, yes, and desert you / And take your soul if you let them) and asserts that their friend should not let these negative people drag them down (Oh, but don't you let them). The bridge then leads into final chorus, which restates the same lyrics as the first chorus. After the final chorus, the song's outro vamps on the following lyrics (Ain't it good to know / You've got a friend) which continue to underscore the devotion the singer has for their friend and ultimately bring the song to its conclusion.

The soothing, gentle delivery of the lead vocal throughout "You've Got a Friend" conveys the reassuring sentiment found in the song's lyrics. The lead vocal is soft, comforting, and honest, increasing slightly in volume during the first chorus and even more by the final chorus in order to emphasize the song's message. The background vocals, which only occur during the choruses, are subtle but effective in how they place emphasis on the important lyrics in the chorus and fill out the song's musical arrangement.

The overall musical arrangement of "You've Got a Friend" is warm, mellow, and minimalistic. During the intro and the verse, the song features only a grand piano and a gently plucked guitar, and the verse itself features mostly minor chords. Minor chords are typically associated with sounding "dark" and "sad," whereas major chords, in contrast, are typically associated with sounding "bright" and "happy." The darkness and uncertainty expressed in verse's lyrics are therefore reflected in the verse's minor chords. When the song reaches its first chorus, however, there is an uplifting transition to major chords that emulates the positive nature of the chorus's lyrics. In the first chorus, background vocals and simple percussion enter alongside the guitar and piano, filling out the arrangement and supporting the lead vocal's sentiment. The bridge is similar to the

chorus in how the emotional tone set by the chords the bridge leaves the listener feeling uplifted and reassured in order to match the emotion of the lead vocal. The bridge only features the solo lead vocal, while in the final chorus the background vocals reenter more strongly featured than they were in the first chorus to match the increased intensity of the lead vocal. The final chorus also features strings, the addition of which allows the song to reach a musical climax before gently winding down into its outro, which returns to the piano and guitar combination featured during the intro and first verse.

Rock – “Barracuda” by Heart

I. Background

“Barracuda” is one of the best known songs by the American rock band Heart. Among the earliest female-centered American rock bands, Heart prominently featured Ann Wilson, the band’s lead singer, and Ann’s younger sister Nancy, one of the band’s guitarists. Although the sisters were American, Heart actually had significant early success in Canada before gaining popularity in the United States and around the world.

Despite their success of their music, the Wilson sisters perpetually battled bias, objectification, and misogyny in the music industry. One particular incident they were subjected to disturbed the sisters so much that they were inspired to pen the song “Barracuda.” The song was written as a rebuke of disgusting, sexist actions taken by the band’s record label—the label, Mushroom Records, had published an ad in trade publications that insinuated that Ann and Nancy were secretly lesbians and having an affair with each other. The sisters became aware of this ad and the false rumor it encouraged after one of their gigs, when a record promoter came up to Ann and made an offhanded comment about Ann’s “lover.” When Ann realized the promoter was not referring to her current boyfriend (fellow band-member Michael Fisher), but was actually referring to her sister Nancy, Ann was enraged. She channeled her disgust and frustration into the song “Barracuda,” writing the lyrics for the song back at her hotel shortly after the incident. Nancy later added music to her sister’s biting, heated lyrics and one of the most iconic American rock songs was born.

Fed up with the sleazy antics of their record label, Heart left Mushroom Records shortly after the ad incident and went on to have a top 40 hit with “Barracuda,” which was released in 1977. The song stayed on the Billboard Hot 100 chart for 20 weeks and peaked at #11. Since rock music has historically been a male-dominated genre (a trend that has largely continued to this day), the fact that Ann and Nancy Wilson took a stand against being slandered and objectified by men by writing “Barracuda” was truly poetic justice. “Barracuda” has become one of the most famous rock songs of all time and exemplifies how women are capable of thriving in spaces where they were not initially welcome. Musical genres should never exclude anyone on the basis of gender, and rock music was forever changed for the better thanks to the impact of Ann and Nancy Wilson.

II. Link to Recording:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1LdeEhWl6A4q2CQ_ZrMVWuttXXGBSOyyM?usp=sharing

III. Lyrics

“Barracuda” – Written by Nancy Wilson, Ann Wilson, Michael Derosier, and Roger Fisher

[Verse 1]

So, this ain't the end, I saw you again today

I had to turn my heart away

Smile like the sun, kisses for everyone

And tales, it never fails!

[Chorus]

You lying so low into the weeds

I bet you gonna ambush me

You'd have me down, down, down, down on my knees

Now won't you, Barracuda?

[Verse 2]

Back over time, we were all trying for free

You met the porpoise and me

No right, no wrong, you're selling a song, a name

Whisper game

[Chorus]

And if the real thing don't do the trick

You better make up something quick

You gonna burn, burn, burn, burn, burn to the wick

Ooh, Barracuda

[Bridge]

"Sell me sell you" the porpoise said

Dive down deep to save my head

I think that you got the blues, too

All that night and all the next

Swam without looking back

Made for the western pools, silly, silly fools!

[Chorus]

If the real thing don't do the trick, no

You better make up something quick

You gonna burn, burn, burn, burn, burn it to the wick

Oh, Bara-Barracuda

IV. Analysis

(Lyrics denoted in blue font)

The lyrics of the song “Barracuda” depict a situation in which a predator - symbolized as a “barracuda” - attempts to take advantage of the singer and someone dear to the singer, who the singer symbolizes as a “porpoise.” Given the circumstances that inspired the song, the “porpoise” clearly represents of Ann Wilson’s sister Nancy, since “porpoise” was a nickname Ann had given to Nancy that happened to effectively tie into the oceanic symbolism used in the song.

The opening lines of “Barracuda” describe how the singer is trapped in a toxic cycle with the predator (*So, this ain't the end, I saw you again today*) and how the singer has finally mustered the strength to remove herself from the predator’s grasp (*I had to turn my heart away*). The predator tries to entice and deceive victims like the singer with affection, charm, and grand promises (*Smile like the sun, kisses for everyone / And tales, it never fails!*) to disguise the sinister intentions the predator actually has. In the first chorus, the singer declares that she sees through the predator’s pleasant facade (*You lying so low into the weeds / I bet you gonna ambush me*) and suspects that the predator is trying to take advantage of her (*You'd have me down, down, down, down on my knees / Now won't you, Barracuda?*).

In the second verse, the singer discusses how she had spent time working hard to achieve something but didn’t get anywhere, or get anything, despite all of the effort (*Back over time, we were all trying for free*). This represents the period that the band Heart spent undiscovered and unsigned, hoping to get a record deal and achieve mainstream success. An opportunity finally comes along when the band is discovered and

signed by their first label (*You met the porpoise and me*). The record label (the predator) ultimately turns to immoral and sleazy behavior to try and get ahead in the music industry (*No right, no wrong, you're selling a song, a name*). The predator has no morals and no shame, only looking out for their own interests as they carelessly lie, objectify, and spread rumors. (*Whisper game*). In the second chorus, the singer emphasizes how quickly and willingly the predator deceives others (*And if the real thing don't do the trick / You better make up something quick*) and how the consequences of such corrupt behavior will eventually catch up to the predator (*You gonna burn, burn, burn, burn, burn to the wick / Ooh, Barracuda*).

The lyrics in the bridge reveal how the singer and the “porpoise” (Ann and Nancy) realized that they were being used by the predator (their record label) and that they had to remove themselves from the situation (*"Sell me sell you" the porpoise said / Dive down deep to save my head / I think that you got the blues, too*). Without hesitation or regret, the singer and the “porpoise” escape the predatory “barracuda” (*All that night and all the next / Swam without looking back*) and move on to new, better things (*Made for the western pools, silly, silly fools!*). The lyric “silly, silly fools!” explicitly chastises the predator for believing that their own bad behavior would never have any repercussions.

The lyrics in the third chorus are identical to lyrics back in the second chorus, reiterating the shifty, sleazy tactics used by the predator (*And if the real thing don't do the trick / You better make up something quick*) and warning how such indefensible, toxic behavior will eventually lead to the predator’s downfall (*You gonna burn, burn, burn, burn, burn to the wick / Oh, Bara-Barracuda*).

The musical arrangement of “Barracuda” masterfully reflects the intensity, anger, and deliberation that went into writing the song’s lyrics. The song’s intro begins with a lone, strummed guitar riff that sounds both powerful and ominous. The guitar tone⁴ conveys the dark, twisted nature of the predator “barracuda,” but simultaneously reclaims power because the song’s female lead vocal is deliberately juxtaposed with the low, dark guitar tone—the female vocal matches the intensity of the guitar and never seems overpowered or misplaced, allowing the lead singer to assert herself as she conveys the heated sentiment of the lyrics. The song’s drums enter alongside the guitar in the intro, driving the song forward into the verse where the lead vocal finally enters. The soaring lead vocal delivers the lyrics with passion and precision, sharply declaring each line of the song with power, assertiveness, and skill. Stylistically, the lead vocal is sung in a manner characteristic to seventies rock music, but at the time the song was written and released, most songs in this dynamic, hard-rock style were released by male bands with male lead singers.

The fact that a woman had sung such a bold, impressive lead vocal in a genre and style mostly dominated by men is one of the many reasons the song “Barracuda” is so distinguishable and excellent. Throughout the song, strategic breaks in the song’s heavy lead guitar part allow the words of the lead vocal to rise above and beyond the thick, dark guitar tone, providing clarity and emphasis on the lyrics being delivered by the lead vocal. An acoustic guitar is also audible in the arrangement, with deliberately placed strums during the portions of the song where the lead guitar has dropped out. The acoustic guitar supports the lead vocal in these moments and provides contrast to the

⁴ A musical or vocal sound with reference to its pitch, quality, and strength.

thickness of the lead guitar. In the choruses, the lead vocal and lead guitar seemingly dance around each other, representing the confrontation between the singer and the predator through how the parts move around one another. The song is devoid of background vocals until it reaches the bridge, when an upper harmony part joins in with the lead vocal. The inclusion of the background vocal symbolizes how the singer and the “porpoise” she refers to have joined together to condemn and escape the predator “barracuda.” Overall, the song consists entirely of major chords, providing it with a signature rock sound with the powerful fifths⁵ that are emphasized from each major chord. The song ends much like it begins, with the song’s signature guitar riff and the drums playing out until they abruptly cut off—an ending that reflects the biting nature of the lyrics and the song’s overall sentiment.

⁵ In music theory, a perfect fifth is the musical interval corresponding to a pair of pitches with a frequency ratio of 3:2, or very nearly so. In classical music from Western culture, a fifth is the interval from the first to the last of five consecutive notes in a diatonic scale.

Recording Process

To record my cover versions of “Respect,” “9 to 5,” “You’ve Got a Friend,” and “Barracuda,” I worked virtually with a Nashville-based producer and multi-instrumentalist named Jim Frazier. I chose to work with Jim because I knew he would have a great appreciation for the content of my creative project based on his own background and musical sensibilities. I wrote out musical and structural arrangements for each song and provided Jim with this information, including the song’s structure (intros, verses, choruses, instrumental breaks, bridges, outros, etc.) and the song’s musical arrangement (the key, chords, tempo, and what instruments were used in the arrangement on the record).

Due to safety concerns regarding the Covid-19 pandemic, Jim and I were unable to meet in person or hire additional musicians to contribute to the project. As a result, many of the instruments used in my cover versions of the four songs are digital instruments (commonly referred to as MIDI) instead of acoustic instruments. This is a notable difference between my recording process and the recording processes of the four original songs, since the four songs had all been recorded entirely with real instruments and acoustic instruments in analog. Since recording in analog is obsolete in the 21st Century, Jim and I worked entirely in a digital production environment to record the four songs. Based on my structural and musical arrangements, Jim created guitar tracks, bass tracks, and drum tracks as the foundational rhythm sections of the songs. Then, he added any additional instruments that were in the arrangement using MIDI, such as horn sections and string sections. As a keyboard player, I provided piano and keyboard tracks in my home studio that Jim later recreated in his professional studio with better digital

sounds. Once the instrumental aspect of each song was completed, we moved on to recording the lead vocals and any additional background vocals for the songs.

Recording the vocal tracks proved to be the most stimulating and intricate aspect of the recording process. Because each song was from a different genre, all four of the lead vocal parts were sung in significantly different styles. I had to significantly modify my voice to stay true to the way each original singer performed the song. It was an opportunity for musical growth as well as a challenge and allowed me to delve into how each of the original singers had chosen to perform the songs. The way each singer performed her lead vocal was a reflection her artistry—the choices she made in her vocal delivery conveyed her perspective and her story.

Impact

As a female songwriter and musician, I have directly benefited from the pioneering work done by the women featured in the project. Their collective presence in the music industry made it more progressive and diverse, setting the precedent that female artists and songwriters were valuable assets to the industry that deserved respect and equal treatment. Because of this, female songwriters and musicians today indisputably owe a great deal to female songwriters and musicians of the 1960s and 1970s. They wrote music that was passionate, meaningful, and timeless, inspiring generations of women to follow suit and become musical artists. They also pushed the boundaries of what the music industry knew and accepted at the time, breaking down barriers and creating opportunities for future female artists that would not have existed otherwise.

Conclusion

The 1960s and 1970s fostered some of the most groundbreaking music ever made by American musical artists. The events, movements, and social trends of the 1960s and 1970s are inseparable from the music that came to be during these decades, when Americans began to unapologetically discuss topics such as race, gender, sexuality, injustice, and experimentation in mainstream music. It was in these decades that female songwriters and performers—such as Aretha Franklin, Dolly Parton, Carole King, Ann and Nancy Wilson, and many others—boldly chose to use their voices and carve out careers in a music industry full of sexism and prejudice. Many of the songs written during the 1960s and 1970s, including the four songs selected and rerecorded for this project, transcend the eras in which they were written due to their timeless appeal and the continuing relevance of their messages.

These songs, and the incredible women who wrote them, remain significant today due to their lasting influence on American music and culture. American popular music would look, and sound, far less diverse than it is today without the musical contributions made by these female artists. Through their artistry, these women proved that they were worthy, capable musicians, commanding the respect that their talent deserved through their hard work, commercial success, and artistic acclaim. The long-lasting popularity of their work prove that their voices and words were too excellent to ever be silenced. Ultimately, American music is forever better and more inclusive due to the work of pioneering female songwriters and musicians.

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