



Music in My Parents' House, 1963

Thinking about Stuart Stotts' song Music in my Mother's House, I asked my siblings about their musical memories of the years leading up to about 1963. My sister Susannah responded an hour later with a 2500 word essay. I've boiled it down here with her permission. Names: Russ and Jane were our parents; Jeff was 17 in '63; I was 15; Mary, 13, and Susannah, my guest author, was 7.

Susannah says:

The first albums I ever got were the Broadway production of Annie Get Your Gun and Judy Collins Maid of Constant Sorrow. Soon after that was Joan Baez, the album with El Preso Numero Nueve on it. You gave me a Jean Ritchie album I loved with The L&N Don't Stop Here Anymore. We had those great Little Golden Records that featured such gems as "It's tickety time to tell time..." I loved the music from Peter Pan when it came on TV. The Broadway album of The King and I was a fave, especially Whenever I Feel Afraid (which I usually did). Jane played Swan Lake when she was sad. Mary played Maria from West Side Story so much that one time when Riff sang, "I'll never stop saying Maria," I stomped out of the house in full tantrum and said, "I KNOW!" and rode my bike around the block until she stopped playing it. (My own tendency to melody addiction didn't hit till later.) From Pete Seeger's Children's Concert at Town Hall album, I especially loved Malaika and the song with "Mother be quick I've got to be sick and lay me down to die." I shared your enjoyment of Johnny Horton Makes History and the Dave Brubeck album with Take Five on it. Around the piano, we sang from the Rodgers and Hammerstein Songbook and the Fireside Book of Folksongs. I was partial to Lily Marlene, which Russ tried to teach me to sing in Italian. Joe Hill was confusing. At the holidays, my favorite was Away in a Manger, with Un Flambeau, Jeanette, Isabella as a close second. We had a piano book

with selections from Brigadoon and I loved all of those, though I stared forever at the song title, There But For You Go I and couldn't imagine what it might mean. In school, my favorites were Turn the Glasses Over ("Better watch out when the boat begins to rock, or you'll lose your girl in the ocean") and Go Tell Aunt Rhody which made me cry. Shenandoah was a favorite then, as now. Of course Peter Paul and Mary: Puff the Magic Dragon, Polly Von, If I Had a Hammer, etc. Jane used to play Sinatra when Russ wasn't home. Pete Seeger's Barbara Allen is the first ballad I ever learned, from the album with Bells of Rhymney (always loved that, the way the low notes vibrated my chest and my lost, dark-night spot). We used to sing along with that Burl Ives Australia album, although in Waltzing Mathilda I had to mumble the colloquialisms.

I LOVED singing Streets of Laredo with the descant they taught us in second grade. That one also made me cry, as did Blue Bells of Scotland and Loch Lomond. What Shall We Do With the Drunken Sailor? was fun, and I didn't quite get Haul Away, Joe, but I knew it was cool. I loved Down in the Valley, Clementine, She'll Be Comin' Round the Mountain, and--how could I not?--Oh Susannah. Another favorite was Widdecombe Fair, because of that slew of specific names at the end of each verse. Ramblin' Boy and Bottle of Wine were two of my earliest folk addictions. Loved Man on the Flying Trapeze and Ivan Skavinsky Skavar. Loved it when Russ sang I Had a Hat When I Came In.

Jeanie with the Light Brown Hair gave me the weepies with "I see her tripping where the bright streams play." Somewhere in there we got that Kingston Trio album with The Man Who Never Returned. Did I ever tell you about my friend Elizabeth and I discussing the lack of logic in that song? At exactly the same moment, I said, "Why didn't his wife just hand him a nickel through the window?" and she said, "Why didn't his wife just put a nickel in the sandwich?" My favorite classical album of Jane's was Scheherazade (pronounced by one of Mary's classmates as "Switzerzaid") and my favorite classical piece she played on the piano was a Bach two-part invention. I was intrigued

whenever Russ launched into The Road to Mandalay. He was practically transported when he sang, "Glory be, she worshipped idols when I kissed her where she stood." While mostly I wanted to break Mary's Harry Belafonte album because it just came on too darn much, I couldn't resist Kingston Town. Was Marianne on that album too? LOVED that.

Jane played a bunch of Rodgers and Hammerstein albums. When we sang those songs around the piano, I loved Some Enchanted Evening, partly because I got to stare at the full-page, super-saturated color illustration that went right to the edge of the page and had this huge sweep of deep pink azalea bushes with two people standing in front of it looking wildly in love, and the whole thing was lit in electric blue moonlight. I thought it was the most romantic thing I'd ever seen. I loved it when Jane played Toot-Toot-Tootsie on the piano and we all sang, and Russ played his banjo. I can still smell the inside of the case. I loved Somewhere Over the Rainbow but it was too hard to sing, so I had to content myself with watching Judy Garland do it once a year on TV.

My sister Mary adds, "I found Odetta (and Miriam Makeba) via Harry Belafonte Returns to Carnegie Hall which was released in 1960... I recall most of the stuff Susannah mentions, though her identification with Mom and Dad's favorites is clearly stronger than mine. Memory is so odd." Mary has voluminous folk music memories and also watched more American Bandstand than the rest of us.

I don't think the Beatles or Dylan had hit our house by '63. We watched corny TV music shows like Sing Along with Mitch and Tennessee Ernie Ford. I don't think any of us were much into Rock or Country yet, though we were aware of Elvis and The Wayward Wind was the first song I ever learned on purpose. My own faves were oddities like Jimmie Driftwood's stuff and Stan Freberg Presents the United States of America. We were square children, but not any more. Now we're square grownups. HUGE thanks to Susannah Berryman for this column, and to Mary Berryman Agard for her input.