

# Where do women find themselves in rock culture-- on pedestal or under men's feet?

*The Globe and Mail (1936-Current); Apr 10, 1971; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Globe and Mail*  
pg. 19

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NEW YORK

Does the rock culture degrade women? Does it portray them and treat them as mere bedroom and kitchen servants to men?

These questions are being asked more frequently in the wake of the women's lib movement, some members of which point to the rock culture environment as a stronghold of male chauvinism.

True, and more, says Mary Travers, long-time member of the folk trio of Peter, Paul and Mary, now a solo singer.

Yes, says song writer Carol Hall, but pop music always has been like that. The difference today is that women are becoming aware of being maligned.

No, says Alice Cooper, who is a man, leader of a hard

rock group and believer in male superiority.

No, says Kip Cohen, manager of the New York rock palace Fillmore East. Women would have to be paranoid to think so.

Carol Hall, mother of two, whose best-known song is Jenny Rebecca, recorded by Barbra Streisand, calls herself "a fellow traveller of women's lib."

She mentions old songs like Tea for Two, in which the woman will awake and bake a sugar cake for the man to take for all the boys to see, and My Bill. "That's about how he treats me—ratty, but I love him."

"Those were written by men and that is what everybody thought women were supposed to be feeling."

"You can't really jump on rock. Songs always have re-

flected what women should feel and men should feel. What is different now is the ladies are becoming aware."

Rock publicist Penny Ross looks at the "new culture" which has presumably rejected the values of the middle-aged parents and broken down the status differences between the sexes with hair lengths and unisex clothes. "Ironically," she says, "the new culture has everything the old had. The men make the decisions and the women make the coffee. Music reflects things as they are."

She adds, "The musicians I know are terribly insecure. They need somebody lower so they can feel superior, and it's women."

Mary Travers, mother of four, says, "You can't look at a symptom without looking at the whole problem. There was



Joni Mitchell

a terrible cynicism that came out of the later half of the sixties. The good guys were killed and the marches didn't

change anything. Out of that came an anti-intellectualism and hopelessness. There is no reason to reason. Let it be. It doesn't really matter. There is nothing you can do about it anyway.

"Rock is supposed to go straight to the gut, very anti-intellectual."

"There's a group of young people bent on oppressing themselves with drugs. They say society is going to blow me up without any reason. I'll be the one to blow myself up before society gets a chance. That has to be insane. There's an inability to see there is an opportunity for people to rise together. A guy says to his chick, 'I can't get out of this and I'll be damned if you will. My liberty first and then we'll talk about my chick.' It's very depressing."

"It is interesting that the



Grace Slick

one lady, Janis Joplin, who made it in rock, ended up looking like a hooker, cheap and loose. She put herself

down. Women are their own worst enemies, isn't that always the case?"

Alice Cooper is the name taken by a young man from Phoenix and also used by his five-man rock group. Their name, their costuming and eye makeup worn on stage are unisex. Their music is aggressive hard rock and Cooper's views are of male superiority.

He says, "The purpose of rock music is sex. It doesn't exactly hit you in the brain. The drums, that four-four beat, is a sex feeling. Pop music used to be romantic. We're romantic in a more open, rough, sex way. We play hard rock, which is very loud sex music."

"Most of the lyrics are about 'I'd like to get that girl. I'm impressed by her beauty or personallity or she is just

plain sexy.' I don't think that puts women down. It should be a compliment to them. I think women are sex objects and I think that's why they're here."

In hard rock, the drum heat and the volume of the amplified guitars are everything. "The lyrics are frequently unintelligible."

In soft rock, which is by far more dominant at present, the lyrics are of prime importance, and most of them are gentle and introspective. Soft rock is usually performed by one person with an acoustic guitar rather than by a group.

There are comparatively few women performers and writers making it big in either of these fields. Grace Slick sings with the hard rock Jefferson Airplane. Laura Nyro writes with a certain

toughness. Gentler are song-writers Melanie and Joni Mitchell and singers Judy Collins and Joan Baez.

Why so few women? Miss Ross says, "Women have an instinct for failure. They think people will laugh if they take up the drums, so they don't try."

Miss Travers says, "The majority of record buyers are girls. They buy the fellows."

Kip Cohen of the Fillmore doesn't find rock music degrading to women. "There is hardly any song in the entire library of rock that praises great men or heroes, and there is an enormous library of songs praising women. Most of them are love songs. Anybody who thinks they're degrading is really far more paranoid on the subject of women's lib than I ever thought was possible." (AP)