

A HARD RAIN READERS' SOUNDTRACK

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(Compiled by Justine Burbank and Frye Gaillard)

My book on the **1960s**, *A Hard Rain*, tells the story of protest, tragedy and hope. But one of its important subthemes is music, which, from the moment the decade began, was a defining thread in the story, the lifeblood of identity for a whole generation. These are some of the artists I write about:

In **1960**, two young singers – one black, one white, born not very far apart in Mississippi – reminded us, even if we couldn't quite put it into words, that music touched something deeper than the sources of our division. Elvis Presley reached number one on the national charts with "It's Now or Never," the biggest hit of his career, and Sam Cooke, improbably, made us care about the men working on a Southern "Chain Gang." Roy Orbison, meanwhile, caught the spirit of young love with his soaring vocals on "Only the Lonely." In 1961, Gene Pitney sang of teenaged alienation in "Town Without Pity," a song that won a Golden Globe Award as the soundtrack of a movie by the same name. And Patsy Cline's "Crazy," a song written by Willie Nelson, crossed over from the country charts to become a major pop hit. Cline, who would die two years later in a plane crash, was already a country music legend for breaking down barriers for women performers, including her protégé, Loretta Lynn.



In **1962**, twenty-one-year-old Bob Dylan was writing some of his most memorable songs of social commentary, including "Blowin' in the Wind," and "A Hard Rain's A'Gonna Fall." (The latter, of course, inspired the title for the book.) Also from the realm of folk music commentary, Peter, Paul and Mary had their first major hit with Pete Seeger's "If I Had a Hammer." That same year, in Muscle Shoals, Alabama, a black singer-songwriter named Arthur Alexander launched a musical movement in that city, an enduring collaboration between black and white musicians, with his recording of "You Better Move On." As the years went by, Alexander earned a singular distinction, becoming the only songwriter whose compositions were recorded by the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, and Bob Dylan. (The Stones' version of "You Better Move On" is included in this soundtrack.)

In **1963**, the year that Dylan released his first album, Joan Baez came to Miles College near Birmingham, Alabama at a time of civil rights protests in that city. There, she recorded a live version of "We Shall Overcome," the greatest civil rights anthem of the decade, and in August, she sang it at the March on Washington where Martin Luther King delivered his "I Have a Dream" speech." The following year, with a voice as pure as the empathy her music embodied, Baez had an international hit with Phil Ochs' "There But for Fortune." 1964 was a watershed for music. The Beatles launched a "British invasion" of America with appearances on The Ed Sullivan Show and a series of concerts that featured such hits as "Love Me Do," and "I Want to Hold Your Hand." The sweet sounds of Motown burst upon the scene with the Four Tops' "Baby, I Need Your Lovin'" and, later, the Temptations' "My Girl." But it was also a year for social commentary. Sam Cooke's "A Change Is Gonna Come" helped sustain the spirits of civil rights workers who risked their lives during Freedom Summer in Mississippi. Nina Simone, a North Carolinian by birth, recorded "Mississippi Goddam," an angry, hard-hitting anthem that was banned in many parts of the South. Dylan wrote "The Times They Are A'Changin'," and Johnny Cash released a whole album of American Indian protest songs, one of which, "The Ballad of Ira Hayes," reached number 2 on the country music charts.

In **1965**, Odetta, a black folk singer from Birmingham, recorded Dylan's "Tomorrow Is a Long Time." The Byrds, a folk-rock group, scored a number one hit with Pete Seeger's "Turn, Turn, Turn," the lyrics borrowed from the Book of Ecclesiastes. Barry McGuire explored the depths of social despair with "The Eve of Destruction," and three Hollywood soundtracks helped stamp a musical interplay of innocence and love against a gathering backdrop of darkness and war. Critical reviews were mixed but audiences thrilled to Julie Andrews' performance in "The Sound of Music," released in the spring of 1965. In April the ominous comedy, "Dr. Strangelove," was a nominee for four Academy Awards, and we encountered again the startling irony of the final scene – a nuclear explosion (actual film of a nuclear test in the South Pacific) while Vera Lynn sang a romantic 1930s ballad, "We'll Meet Again," which became a hit during World War II. And finally in December, "Dr. Zhivago" was released to theaters, its sound track anchored by the haunting love song, "Lara's Theme."

Oddly, in **1966** the most popular song of the year was “Ballad of the Green Berets,” a pro-war anthem about Vietnam, sung by Staff Sgt. Barry Sadler. Music critics were impressed by the Beach Boys’ “Good Vibrations,” the band’s biggest hit, and by the Righteous Brothers blue-eyed “Soul and Inspiration.” In Muscle Shoals, Alabamian Percy Sledge recorded “When a Man Loves a Woman,” backed by an all-white band at a time of growing racial division. “We were like brothers,” Sledge remembered. His fellow Alabamian, Wilson Pickett, said much the same after his Muscle Shoals R&B hit, “Land of a Thousand Dances.” In **1967**, attention returned to California where a white girl from Texas, Janis Joplin, stole the show at the Monterey Pop Festival with her passionate renditions of rhythm and blues. That same year, Joplin decided to cover the Grammy-winning “Piece of My Heart,” recorded by Aretha Franklin’s older sister, Erma. Linda Ronstadt burst onto the scene as lead singer for the LA-based Stone Poneys and their country-folk hit “Different Drum,” while in Nashville the Grand Ole Opry’s George Hamilton IV introduced the nation to songwriter Joni Mitchell with a top-ten country version of her composition, “Urge for Going.” And Charley Pride emerged as the first African-American country star since DeFord Bailey in the 1920s.

In **1968** Judy Collins had a top-ten hit in the U.S. and Canada with Mitchell’s “Both Sides Now.” An Alabama songwriter named Dick Holler, responding to the assassination of Robert Kennedy, wrote “Abraham, Martin and John,” an epitaph to idealism recorded by one-time rock ‘n’ roll star Dion, who was battling through an addiction to drugs. The Beatles dominated the international scene with “Hey Jude,” written and sung by Paul McCartney, and with John Lennon’s topical B-side “Revolution.”

The decade ended with a creative burst. In the summer of **1969**, Johnny Cash launched a national television show that brought folk and country musicians together in the legendary Ryman Auditorium in Nashville. With folk music identified most often with the political left, and country music with the opposite end of the spectrum, Cash sought to bridge that gap. Music, he believed, belonged to us all. For Cash personally, one of the high points came when he recorded a duet with Bob Dylan on one of his favorite Dylan songs, “Girl from the North Country.” Merle Haggard confounded social critics with back-to-back releases of “Mama’s Hungry Eyes,” a populist, left-leaning lament about the anguish of life in the migrant labor fields of California, and “Okie from Muskogee,” his conservative ode to old-fashioned patriotism. As the war raged on in Vietnam, Creedence Clearwater’s “Bad Moon Rising,” became a favorite among the troops, and with racial tension still boiling over in the nation’s inner cities, Elvis Presley released “In the Ghetto,” a song of empathy written by country singer Mac Davis. On a lighter note, B.J. Thomas’s “Raindrops Keep Falling on My Head” anchored the soundtrack for one of the year’s most popular movies, “Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid,” a western comedy starring Paul Newman and Robert Redford. And the Rolling Stones traveled to Muscle Shoals, AL to record “Wild Horses” and two other tracks, following the lead of the Queen of Soul, Aretha Franklin, among other great artists who embraced the Muscle Shoals sound. (Rolling Stone named Franklin’s version of “Do Right Woman,” written by Dan Penn and Chips Moman, two of Muscle Shoals’ most gifted musicians, as one of the 500 greatest records ever made.)

Finally, most memorably, there was Woodstock. In August, more than 400,000 music fans descended upon Max Yaegur’s dairy farm in the Catskill Mountains for an all-star lineup of rock ‘n’ roll. Many historians have argued that the musical highpoint came on the final day of the festival with Jimi Hendrix’s electric guitar solo of “The Stars Spangled Banner.” When critics questioned the unorthodox rendition, Hendrix’s reply was simple. “I didn’t think it was unorthodox,” he said. “I thought it was beautiful.”

— Frye Gaillard