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Barbara Dane: The Forgotten Activist

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BARBARA DANE
THE FORGOTTEN ACTIVIST

by

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A THESIS

Submitted to the graduate faculty of The University of Alabama at Birmingham,
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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2024

BARBARA DANE: THE FORGOTTEN ACTIVIST

JACOB L. KENNEDY

HISTORY

ABSTRACT

Barbara Dane is best understood as an unsung hero of the New Left and Folk Revival because since her graduation from high school in 1945, she has used every resource at her disposal to support and grow various movements. She has picketed for the labor movement, canvassed for the Progressive party, traveled to Mississippi to perform for the civil rights movement and SNCC, marched for peace as part of the anti-war movement, and performed and advocated for the Feminist movement throughout her lifetime. Dane has traveled the globe from war-torn Prague in 1947, Cuba in 1966, and Northern Vietnam in 1974, all in support of the global New Left and progressive movements of the 20th century. The life of Barbara Dane tells the story of the rise of various movements across the United States. Dane was also a contributor to the folk genre as she participated in sparking the genre in the Mid-West, West Coast, and in Cuba with her performances alongside some of the greats American performers, such as Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger, Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, Louis Armstrong, and Jane Fonda. She did this all in the name of bringing the folk genre to mainstream America and to garner support for her various movements. The life of Barbara Dane is the life of regular protest that tells the story of the various movements and musical revivals of the 20th century.

Keywords: protest music, New Left, folk revival, anti-war, civil rights

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | <i>Page</i> |
|---|-------------|
| ABSTRACT..... | iii |
| INTRODUCTION..... | 1 |
| CHAPTER 1: BARBARA DANE’S EARLY LIFE IN ACTIVISM..... | 11 |
| CHAPTER 2: DANE’S RISE TO MUSICAL STARDOM..... | 24 |
| CHAPTER 3: DANE’S ROLE IN MANY NEW LEFT MOVEMENT..... | 47 |
| CONCLUSION..... | 74 |
| LIST OF REFERENCES..... | 76 |

INTRODUCTION

The New Left activism in the late twentieth century can best be summed up through the title of the Bob Dylan Song “The Times They Are a-Changin.” During the 1960s, the United States entered a period of ideological conflict as some members of the nation’s youth protested racial injustice, embraced a new image of equality, and fought to end Cold War interventionists policies that caused the United States to take part in proxy wars as part of its ideological conflict between the Soviet Union and China. Dylan and other prominent folk singers became the voice of this politicized generation, folk music became largely synonymous with the New Left, and its songs and lyrics became the rallying cry for revolution. Although Dylan became the most prominent figure in this politically embroiled generation, there is a long list of lesser-known folk singers who have been left out of the historiography of the period. They were far more politically active in the rising youth revolution and the growing New Left. One such singer is Barbara Dane, a Jazz and Folk Singer who lived a life of constant activism and used her voice to spread the ideals of the Communist Party USA and the New Left across both the United States and the globe. Dane was part of every facet of the movement, pushing the ideological framework of the activists through her songs, leading protests from the 1940s through the present day, and regularly pushing for revolutionary change, while also creating a new pathway for the folk genre through the creation of her record label, Paredon Records.

Dane lived a life of constant political activism, using her voice to ignite the revolutionary ideals of equality and advocate for communism within the United States. But she is barely mentioned within the historiography of the New Left and the role of folk music within it. This thesis looks to address this oversight by showing Dane's long history of political activism that her participation in many major left-wing movement in the second half of the 20th century. She took part in the labor movements of the 1940s, the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, the Anti-War Movement of the 1960s and 1970s, and her commitment to justice and equality has endured into the present day. Dane's long-standing political commitments are represented in a plethora of primary sources that were produced as she sang at protests, fundraisers, and anti-war shows across the United States and the world. She toured prominent Communist nations of the period such as North Vietnam, and Cuba. She also participated in tours across Europe, where she sang against injustices occurring in America and across the globe. She was unrelenting in her beliefs, a fact that caused her to be blacklisted and excluded from tours or concerts. Her dual commitment to racial equality and communist ideology made her a target of blacklisting. However, Dane remained steadfast in her beliefs during a period in which to openly oppose segregation could be gravely dangerous.

Reconstructing the history of Dane's life as both a singer and activist required consulting the written records of groups and organizations that Dane was part of. I have also relied upon Richard A. Reuss and JoAnne C. Reuss' *American Folk Music and Left-Wing Politics, 1927-1957*, Ronald D. Cohen's *Rainbow Quest: The Folk Music Revival and American Society, 1940-1970*, Howard Zinn's book *SNCC: The New Abolitionists*, R. Serge Denisoff's "Protest Movements: Class Consciousness and The Propaganda Song,"

in *The Sociological Quarterly*, and finally Sarah King's "The FTA Show: Jane Fonda, the GI Movement, and Celebrity Activism in the Late Vietnam War." Another crucial source is Dane's autobiography, *This Bell Still Rings: My Life of Defiance and Song*, along with a long list of primary sources that show her activism within organizations such as the People's Song Bulletin, SNCC, SDS, and the FTA Show with Jane Fonda. This thesis uses these primary and secondary sources to show where Dane's story fits within the period's historiography. As I have already suggested, historians have often overlooked her in favor of more prominent names.¹ This thesis argues that the reason behind Dane being forgotten by most of the New Left Historiography and within Folk History is due to the complex nature of the sixties with her being both an active communist causing for her to be blacklisted by the federal government and subsequently her being an expelled communist causing for her to be blacklisted by other well-respected folk musicians causing for Dane to persevere on her own with her musical prowess. Additionally, to this thesis argues that Dane's life of defiance tells the story of white celebrity activism within the New Left and its important to the growth of the movements. The historiographies of both the New Left and the Folk Revival movement often take a male-centered view and leave little room for influential female singers or activists who were committed to ideals of social justice and left-wing policies. This thesis argues that Dane was a significant contributor to New Left movements as she organized protests, concerts, and tours to spread the rhetoric of the New Left and its movements both within the United States and abroad.

¹ Text such as *Who Spoke Up?* by Zaroulis and Sullivan has no mention of Dane's career alongside Fonda or any other prominent folk singer of the Folk Revival, nor does it mention Dane's role within the FTA Show as a charter member or her role within the 1968 democratic convention.

To understand the charged political lyrics of Dane's songs, one needs to know the history of the propaganda song. In "Protest Movements: Class Consciousness and the Propaganda Song," sociologist R. Serge Denisoff's article analyzes the role of the propaganda song within the New Left of the 1960s. Denisoff writes that the "primary usage of the propaganda song is to create political or social consciousness favorable to the position of the movement or individual using the propaganda song."² Dane was a contributor to the People's Song Bulletin and the Vietnam Songbook, providing politically charged lyrics to both texts, which were mass-produced and used within both the labor movement and the anti-war movement of the 1960s. As Denisoff suggests, Dane placed her political commitments above her musical career, as Dane used her lyrics and her music as a means to spread movement ideals. She wrote what Denisoff calls "Songs of Persuasion," which he further categorized into two primary functions, the Rhetorical Song and the Magnetic Song.³ Dane's career grew because of the two functions of the songs of persuasion as she became famous for using them in every movement she joined. Dane's use of such songs is what pushed her to become a top performer within protest music and leave a lasting legacy within many movements. Denisoff describes the two primary functions of songs of persuasion that were used by Folk Singers such as Dane as "The magnetic propaganda song is defined as a song written by a 'folk entrepreneur' which appeals to the listener and attracts him to a specific movement or ideology within the ranks of adherents by creating solidarity in terms of the goals expressed in the propaganda song...the rhetorical song defined as a song written by a folk entrepreneur

² R. Serge Denisoff, "Class Consciousness and the Propaganda Song," *The Sociological Quarterly* 9, no. 2 (Spring, 1968): 228.

³ *Ibid*, 229-230.

and is designed to point to some condition and describe the condition, but offers no ideological or organizational solution such as affiliating with a social movement.”⁴ Dane used both forms of persuasion in many movements from WWII to the present as a contributing organizer and performer. She joined some of the largest organizations of the period in an attempt to revolutionize American culture.

The organizations that Dane partnered with were politically significant. In *American Folk Music & Left-Wing Politics, 1927-1957*, Richard and Joann Reuss argue that both the growth of the Folk Revival of the 1950s and the politics of the musicians and listeners were directly connected to both the politics of the Old Left and the Communist movement of the 1930s and 1940s. They also point to biases within the historiography, noting that “academic folklorists have mostly ignored or rejected consideration of the folk-styled songs composed by radicals, labor organizers, and “citybillies” of the 1930s as politically suspect and beyond their scholarly purview.”⁵ In noting the biases of folk historiography, the Reusses show how the political activism of the Folk Genre was shaped by the Communist Party and influential singers like Woody Guthrie and Peter Seeger. It was these singers who pushed the ideologies of the New Left and fueled their growing visibility, a visibility that coincided with the Folk Music Revival. Dane’s life-long activism unfolded alongside more prominent male singers like Guthrie and Seeger, who inspired Dane to use the propaganda song in the service of revolution. During the early parts of her career, Dane became a supporting member of People Songs Inc., an organization that enabled her to kick start her singing career while

⁴ R. Serge Dinsoff, “Class Conciseness and the Propaganda Song,” 230.

⁵ Richard Reuss and JoAnne C. Reuss, *American Folk Music and Left-Wing Politics, 1927-1957* (London, UK: The Scarecrow Press, Inc, 2000), 5-9.

maintaining her commitments to radical racial and labor politics. These commitments were combined with Dane's joining of the Communist Party at the beginning of the Cold War.

Folk music enabled social movements—from the Civil rights movement to the anti-war movement—to attract a broader appeal through propaganda songs. The movements drew on folk music, and folk music drew on the movements. For example, as Howard Zinn describes in his book *SNCC: The New Abolitionists*, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee pushed to overturn Jim Crow segregation in the South through peaceful, non-violent protests.⁶ New Left rhetoric became encrusted in Dane's songs which, during the sixties, were rooted in SNCC's activism and the broader civil right movements as a whole. Dane participated in sponsored concerts within the South.

Gradually, Dane's earlier attention to racial equality through her use of Anti-Slavery Ballads, The Songs of the Freedom Riders, the integration of her band, and her work within concerts to push integration within the South was joined by a condemnation of US imperialism and Cold War militarism. As historians like Howard Zinn have shown, activists who in the early 1960s were focused on civil rights began turning against the Vietnam War by the end of the decade.⁷ This political evolution within the New Left from racial policy to foreign policy was reflected in Dane's trajectory as well, as her initial push for racial equality was joined by a growing critique of US imperialism in Vietnam. Zinn's history focuses on the feelings of everyday people rather than politicians, military leaders, or movement leaders, which us to gain a better understanding of how Dane

⁶ Howard Zinn, *SNCC: The New Abolitionists* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1965) 1-2.

⁷ Howard Zinn, *Peoples History of the United States* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2015) 469-501.

connected with her fans. Dane's own account of the period show how her beliefs merged with those of activists in groups like SNCC and the Students for Democratic Society (SDS).

Another movement explored by Zinn that is important to Dane's story is the GI Movement during this period. The GI movement, an anti-war movement spawned out of the dissent of Soldiers within the United States military calling for peace in Vietnam, which is often overlooked in historical writing, was a crucial aspect of Dane's activism, as her activism with Fonda and the FTA Show came from the empowerment of the dissident soldiers within the GI Movement. Zinn traces the quick imprisonment of the dissenting soldier and their subsequent court-martial from the military bases. The growth of "GI Coffeehouses" was supported by Dane. In their article "The Not So Silent Minority: Louisville's Antiwar Movement, 1966-1975," John Ernst and Yvonne Baldwin argue that GI coffeehouses were one of the driving forces of the Anti-War movement during the period. They also single out Dane as a supporter and singer at the coffeehouses, not only within Louisville but also other coffeehouses across the United States.⁸ Dane even tried to advance the cause through establishing a nationwide coffeehouse concert. Their history is one of the few histories that highlight Dane as a contributing member of the anti-war effort.

While much of Dane's story has been overlooked within the New Left Historiography alongside other celebrity activists of the time, one woman who does receive attention is Jane Fonda, who was one of Dane's closest compatriots and allies. In their book *Who Spoke Up?: American Protest Against The War in Vietnam 1963-1975*,

⁸ John Ernst and Yvonne Baldwin "The Not so Silent Minority: Louisville's Antiwar Movement, 1966-1975," *The Journal of Southern History* 73, No. 1 (February, 2007): 105-108.

Nancy Zaroulis and Gerald Sullivan examine Fonda's involvement with the FTA Show. The FTA Show stood for "Free the Army" and was a comedic and musical group that traveled the United States performing for the growing dissident troops that came disheartened with the Vietnam War. Performing sketches and performing music to garner support for the anti-war movement and a growing GI movement, the FTA show served as a way for servicemen to gain support to go against the army's status quo and policies of war and for them to gain news from the growing GI movement. In the show, Dane both performed and managed events for the traveling group of musicians and comedians.⁹

Dane's leadership within the New Left movement is often over looked by more controversial and prominent celebrity activists leaving within the footnotes in the histories of her allies. For example, in her article "The FTA Show: Jane Fonda, the GI Movement, and Celebrity Activism in the Late Vietnam War," Sarah King explores the FTA show performed by Jane Fonda.¹⁰ Although Dane was a prominent contributing member of the movement and a founding member of the FTA, she emerges only within the footnotes or as a background character for Fonda within the history of the show. The historiography for the FTA shows, like that of the New Left and Folk Revival, shows distinct favoritism of some historical figures over others. King's text lacks a thorough look into Dane's support within the FTA as she leaves out mentions of Dane tour within Japan and the Philippines for the FTA nor does it mention her being part of its origins as a founding member of the organization alongside Fonda.

⁹ Nancy Zaroulis and Gerald Sullivan, *Who Spoke Up?: American Protest Against The War In Vietnam 1963-1975* (New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1984), 365-366.

¹⁰ Sarah King, "The FTA Show: Jane Fonda, the GI Movement, and Celebrity Activism in the Late Vietnam War," *Peace and Change*. No. 46 (2021): 119.

This thesis looks to place Dane among her place within the historiography of the New Left alongside her allies. The thesis begins by tracing her early activism in the labor movement and American Youth for Democracy, her joining of the Communist Party, and her membership and contributions to the People's Song Bulletin alongside Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger, and Irwin Silber. During her early activism, Dane partnered with figures like Guthrie and Seeger, partnerships that connected her to both the New Left and the Folk Revival movement. After joining the CPUSA and launching the Peoples Song Bulletin, she pursued her musical career, all while maintaining support for the Civil Rights movement and fighting for the inclusion of Black Musicians within her concerts along the West Coast. She won support from prominent black musicians like Louis Armstrong and was praised in *Ebony* magazine for her unwavering support for Civil Rights and Racial Equality. She also created a Jazz club in San Francisco to bring Jazz into mainstream American culture and to uplift African American musicians who had been overlooked in the popular culture of the time. This will be explored in the second section. The third part of this thesis will focus on Danes's role in the Anti-War movement and her relationships with its most prominent members. As an antiwar activist, she participated in the FTA Show, protested in both Washington and the 1968 Democratic convention in Chicago, planned protests and coffeehouse concerts for the GI Movement, and finally established Paredon records as a way to push Folk Music into mainstream musical culture. The final part of the thesis focuses on Dane's activism during and after the Vietnam War, focusing on her relationship with Irwin Silber and their creation and implementation of the New Communist Movement with the United States and her activism within the Women's Movement. It will also focus on her career in music outside

the United States and within prominent communist countries like Cuba and the USSR, where she worked alongside prominent musicians and communists within the nations themselves. Dane has lived a long, strenuous life of regular political activism that has melded with her music, offering an example of a forgotten artist-activist whose music is not rooted in musical popularity but within her own social and political beliefs. She sang for social justice rather than for fame and money. With a musical and activist career spanning over 70 years, Dane carried the torch of activism and artistry throughout her life.

CHAPTER 1

BARBARA DANE'S EARLY LIFE IN ACTIVISM

Barbara Dane was born in 1927 in Detroit, Michigan to Gil and Dorothy Spillman. Her parents had moved to Detroit from Jonesboro, Arkansas. Dane grew up in a lower middle-class family that barely had enough to support her. She was left to sleep in a box in the corner of the room covered with Kotex Sanitary Napkins. Growing up in poverty, Dane was pushed to work at the family owned pharmacy at a very young age which during her early life was on the verge of going bankrupt. While growing up she noticed the poor conditions of Detroit during the time and the hardships she had to go through just to survive the Depression. She also had to deal with the political ideologies of her parents that ended up causing a split between her and them for many years as soon as Dane began to notice the racist beliefs of her father.¹¹ The first hint of Dane's unwavering commitments to social justice and basic fairness appeared early in her life. In her autobiography *This Bell Still Rings: My Life of Defiance and Song*, she recalls working at nine years old in her father's pharmacy. While working, she witnessed the racism of American culture firsthand. She remembers her father kicking out an African American man who had entered the shop to buy a drink after working as a part of FDR's Works Projects Administration (WPA). After attempting to serve the man, her father blamed her for trying to ruin his business. Witnessing the racism of her own father caused

¹¹ Barbara Dane, *This Bell Still Rings*, 3-4.

a die to be cast, pushing her into a lifelong fight for fairness and justice in society, participating in anything she could as a means to create a better world as a corrective to her father's racism.¹² The values that Dane adopted at nine years old shaped her activism and future musical career. Dane joined the civil rights movement, where she pushed for racial integration both within her own life and the wider society. In 1937, Dane combined her civil rights activism with a commitment to radical leftism and Communism. At age 12 Dane, while talking to a few friends who made up what they called the Socratic Society of Three, she agreed that socialism or communism provided a more just alternative to the current capitalist system.¹³ Her embrace of Communism and her commitment to racial equality inspired her musical career and were sprinkled across all of her songs and concerts. Dane's idealism came out of her everyday experiences and drove her through her life as an artist and activist. During the Great Depression, Dane established her political beliefs while pursuing her musical aspirations on the Folk Stage.

Dane's political ideals were put into motion with the outbreak of the Second World War. During the war, Dane joined up with the particular group of progressive politics of the time, which called for peaceful coexistence among nations and an end to wartime aggression. Dane was part of the Labor and anti-war movements of the 1940s and became a member of the American Youth for Democracy (AYD), an offshoot of the Communist Party USA. Dane gained membership in the AYD through Phil and Gert Schatz, members of the New York City branch of the Communist Party who came to Michigan to strengthen the AYD.¹⁴ For Dane, the AYD was especially important, because

¹²Barbara Dane, *This Bell Still Rings*, 8-9.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 30.

it gave her a connection to many of the left-wing musicians who would become part of the Folk Revival movement of the coming decade. Dane soon became part of the AYD's Leadership, serving first as teenage director of Michigan's AYD and, later as its cultural director. While director, she organized political events in Detroit to get teenagers interested in the progressive movement.¹⁵ Dane's leadership role in the AYD helped pave the way for her future activism. It also made her a national icon of teenage radical rebellion, a role that made her a target of the Red Scare. Dane became the subject of a probe launched by Michigan State University President, John A. Hannah. The probe investigated the rise of radical organizations within high schools and colleges during the period with the goal of proving that the group was a hotbed of communist organizing.¹⁶ The probe became a national news story, one that highlighted Danes's activism within the communist movement and the AYD. This investigation made Dane more prominent within the organization and the progressive movement. It also gave her a certain degree of notoriety.

During the same period, Dane was gaining popularity as a musician among both Detroit audiences and prominent folk musicians. Danes's first taste of musical stardom came when she appeared in several ads for the AYD's "Hootenanny" within the Michigan-based newspaper *Detroit Free Press*. Appearing in the paper's September 13, 1946 issue, Dane (who at the time was still going by her married name of Barbara Cahn), was planning her musical debut at an AYD sponsored Folk Concert scheduled for September 20 and 21, where she would appear alongside prominent folk singers and

¹⁵ Barbara Dane, *This Bell Still Rings*, 31.

¹⁶ "Communist Probe Opened in Michigan," *Nashville Banner*, February 1, 1947.

activists, including Peter Seeger, Tom Glazer, and Charlotte Anthony.¹⁷ This concert established Dane as a hometown hero in the folk scene. It allowed her to create an essential connection within the Folk genre by becoming friends and comrades with figures like Pete Seeger and Tom Glazer, who formed the Peoples Song Inc. through their involvement with the AYD. According to Richard and JoAnne Reuss, Peoples Song Inc. came out of the Folksay faction of the AYD. The concept of the group emerged out of the belief that progressive politics needed to be combined with folk music, and that the genre of folk music could help the movement to grow and expand its reach.¹⁸ The People's Song Inc. in order to providing music to the growing labor protest around the country and help to support the progressive movement in America. Producing bulletins and songbooks to provide musical literature to the strikers as they in solidarity against the capitalist system. This group was formative in the early period of Dane's career as both an activist and musician.

According to Dane, Seeger asked her to create a Detroit chapter of People's Song Inc. Seeger tasked Dane with representing the group on the UAW picket lines, where she sang politically charged folk songs, handed out leaflets for progressive causes, and raised money for both the People's Song Inc. and the AYD. She was soon in high demand.¹⁹ Her membership within the People's Song Inc. soon led her to growing recognition among Folk singers and progressive folk fans across the country. Dane became an influential member of People's Songs Inc, providing news about the Detroit labor movement, answering correspondence from across the United States, and making lyrical changes to a

¹⁷ "Folk Singer," *Detroit Free Press* September 13, 1946.

¹⁸ Ronald and JoAnne C. Reuss, *American Folk Music & Left-Wing Politics*, 184-185.

¹⁹ Barbara Dane, *This Bell Still Sings*, 34.

labor lullaby used by striking auto workers within the city during the time.²⁰ Dane participated in the labor movement while collecting movement songs and noting the lyrical changes for each particular labor strike and adding them to the extensive collection of the Peoples Song Bulletin's Folk repertoire. She began gaining new levels of recognition in the progressive Folk Scene as she began to outshine other artists during their performances. According to Ronald D. Cohen in *Rainbow Quest: The Folk Music Revival and American Society, 1940-1970*, Dane rose to stardom within the Detroit people's song chapter because she appeared constantly alongside prominent folk singers such as Pete Seeger and Woody Guthrie. Singing alongside those figures gave her growing prominence on the national stage. As a national bulletin of Peoples Songs Inc. described a recent show in Detroit: "The Hit for the night was Barbara Kahn [Cahn] of Detroit... who sings with a sweet and Mellow Voice."²¹ At the age of only nineteen, Dane was recognized as an avid supporter of the progressive movement and a prominent member of the People song Bulletin. This was long before her music career took on the West Coast.

During this early phase of her career, Dane's contact with prominent folk singers like Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger provided inspiration. Scholar Ronald Rodash argues that between the 1930s and 1960s, Guthrie and Seeger carried the torch for young folk musicians. Both were middle class leftists who felt intense solidarity with those progressive movements that sought to uplift the poor and oppressed, including

²⁰ Irwin Silber, *Reprints from the People's Songs Bulletin 1946-1949* (New York: Oak Publications inc., 1961) 55.

²¹ Ronald D. Cohen, *Rainbow Quest: The Folk Music Revival And American Society, 1940-1970*, (Boston, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002), 50.

immigrants, African Americans in the Jim Crow South and poor factory workers.²²

Dane's friendships with Guthrie and Seeger helped her build connections with these movements and the young Americans who participated in them. Dane took inspiration from Seeger and Guthrie and looked to carry the torch of their activism through her songs. All three were members of the Peoples Song INC., and as a member, Dane was able to learn at an early age what each song meant within the progressive movement. The political ideals she developed during this period created the structure of her music, pushing her to adopt the Folk genres methods of persuasion. She grasped that folk songs could promote left-wing ideals, an insight that became the cornerstone of her political and musical career.

The music of Peoples Song Inc. supported the labor movement through the propaganda song, a lyrical composition that became the basis of Dane's song writing. R. Serge Denisoff describes the propaganda song as composed to do the following: solicit support or sympathy for a social movement, reinforce the value system of an individual in the movement, promote movement cohesion, recruit new members, invoke social phenomena or direct attention to the problems of society at hand in a current political conflict.²³ These songs became the foundation of her musical career. She used them in every fundraiser or strike she participated in and later included them in her stage performances and shows. Dane began to garner more support within the United Auto Workers organization by participating actively in their strikes and picket lines.

²² Ronald Rodash, "The Communist Party's Role in the Folk Revival from Woody Guthrie to Bob Dylan," *American Communist History* 14, No. 1 (2015): 3.

²³ R. Serge Denisoff, "Protest Movements: Class Consciousness and the Propaganda Song, *The Sociological Quarterly* 9, no.2 (Spring, 1968): 229.

Dane's growing visibility made her a target of government surveillance in the context of the Red Scare. She became a target of FBI surveillance, especially after she joined the Communist Party in 1946. According to Dane, the FBI was hot on her trail, investigating both her party membership and her marriage in 1946 to her first husband, Rolf Cahn. The FBI also noted her leadership within American Youth for Democracy.²⁴ The FBI surveillance of Dane came from her connection and growth within People's Songs Inc and the Communist Party. It also was due to her husband's leadership within the Communist Party of Detroit and their participation in a growing number of radical protests. Observing her growing popularity as a movement musician, the Bureau kept tabs on the singer's career both within the United States and abroad. According to Cohen, the FBI had a presence at every People's Song's Inc. workshop and hootenanny.²⁵ During the height of the Red Scare, the FBI investigated anyone with a connection to the Communist Party USA, and that made both Dane and her husband, Rolf Cahn prime targets of the Bureau. Dane claimed that she knew of the FBI surveillance and the risk it posed to her career and her family. But she continued to gain prominence in Detroit's folk scene and political movements.

In the late 1940s, Dane had the chance to take her art and activism to the international stage when she participated in the World Youth Festival, held in Prague in 1947.²⁶ The Festival represented a significant stepping stone in her career, one that allowed her to meet like-minded youth who were frightened by the prospects of the escalating Cold War and who wanted to challenge the capitalistic and imperial regimes

²⁴ Barbara Dane, *This Bell Still Rings*, 38.

²⁵ Ronald Cohen, *Rainbow Quest*, 55.

²⁶ Barbara Dane, *This Bell Still Rings*, 48

that had caused the past two world wars. Progressives in Detroit cheered at the prospect of Dane representing their city and state. On July 6, 1947, the *Detroit Free Press* wrote, "Barbara Cahn 20...will represent the Michigan Chapter of People's Song at a World Youth Festival...The Festival is sponsored by the World Federation of Democratic Youth. Mrs. Cahn, the only Michigan representative, will present Folk Songs."²⁷ Threatened by the leftism of the festival, the State Department pulled all support mechanisms and began to demonize those who were attempting to participate, withdrawing support for travel funds for the delegation, reducing the number of American youths traveling to Prague from three-to-five thousand to only two hundred.²⁸ In the context of the Cold War, the State Department wanted no part in funding a trip in which American youth would go to a communist-controlled nation to take part in a left-wing festival. Dane, however, was determined to attend the festival and relied heavily on the support systems she had found through her progressive activism. She called upon CP leaders like Phil Schatz and leaders of the Peoples Songs Inc. to arrange housing and travel to Prague.²⁹ Dane's determination to get to the festival showed her resistance to the Cold War rhetoric of the time. In the days leading up to the trip, she continued participating in the labor movement, attending picket lines and strikes within New York before boarding the boat to Europe, singing folk songs along the way.

During the journey to the festival, Dane's commitment to racial and social justice remained ever vigilant. Dane came face to face with European segregation on the British ship that was taking her to Le Havre, France. The Indian and Pakistani workers worked

²⁷ "Going To Prague," *The Detroit Free Press*, July 6, 1947.

²⁸ Barbara Dane, *This Bell Still Rings*, 49-50.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 51.

below the deck of the ship and were barred from interacting with the American youth and the British above deck. Joining with the other activists on board, Dane protested the segregation, demanding the integration of the workers below deck and insisting that they be allowed to enjoy the sunshine of the open sea.³⁰ This story about Dane shows that she brought her activism into every moment of her life, as well as her commitment to join with other young people who were trying to carry forward ideals of social and racial equality. Dane later described the youth of the festival as "an exuberant, curious, dedicated, hope-filled new generation." We "pledged ourselves to do all we could to stop the wars like those we had just lived through, wars that could destroy a horrific eighty million lives in a few short years. That could never happen again!"³¹ The spirit of the World Youth Festival deepened Dane's political resolve and would go on to shape her future in music and political advocacy. Upon her return from Prague, Dane returned with new music to implement into her repertoire. She introduced music from across the globe into her set lists and published them within People Song bulletins.

Dane's return from the World Youth Festival was celebrated within the *Detroit Free Press*. In an article entitled "Songstress Home," the Press wrote: "After singing her way through Europe for three months, Mrs. Barbara Cahn, 20, of 11361 Lauder, is back in Detroit....She said she brought back a large collection of folk-song material from France, Czechoslovakia, Austria, and Italy."³² By the age of only twenty, Dane had become a celebrated member of the growing folk revival. She was still only performing at small benefit concerts or at strikes and protests around Detroit. Shortly after her return

³⁰ Barbara Dane, *This Bell Still Rings* 52-53.

³¹ *Ibid*, 54.

³² "Songstress Home," *Detroit Free Press*, October 14, 1947.

from the World Youth Festival in Europe, Dane was billed to perform at the Peoples Song convention in Chicago. The convention played an important role in the Folk revival as it gave the future folk stars a taste of the cultural and historical significance of the music and its essential connection to the progressive movements of the time.³³

The headliners of the convention represented regional difference within the folk music genre, creating a melting pot of folk ideology and progressive ideals. The concert featured Seeger, Guthrie, Big Bill Broonzy, Earl Robinson, Betty Sanders, Hally Wood, Alan Lomaz, Win Stacker, Bernie Asbel, Ernie Lieberman, Goodson & Vale, and Dane. They all performed at the concert, but also participated in panel discussions on the needs of movement musicians and other aspects of progressive politics.³⁴ Progressive newspapers and Folk journals applauded the convention and the performances of the biggest names in folk music at the time. As the *Chicago Star* reflected a week after the convention, the Peoples Song concert “featured many of the country’s outstanding folk singers, composers, and folklorists—Pete Seeger, Earl Robinson, Alan Lomax...and two representatives from the international youth conference, who created a sensation with their really magnificent singing of Yugoslavia and Czech Folk Songs.”³⁵ Dane was one of the two representatives from the World Youth Festival. She performed a Czech song that was an old anti-war folk song from the Austro-Hungarian Empire that she had learned from the festival in Prague.³⁶ Dane believed her role within the concert was largely symbolic, as she was a young female from lower middle class Detroit. But she was still able to perform alongside prominent musicians of the time. Long before musicians like

³³ Ronald Cohen, *Rainbow Quest*, 55.

³⁴ Barbara Dane, *This Bell Still Rings*, 59.

³⁵ “People’s Songs Shows Vitality,” *The Chicago Star*, October 18, 1947.

³⁶ Barbara Dane, *This Bell Still Rings*, 59

Bob Dylan and Joan Baez became stars within the folk genre, Dane was contributing to the folk revival and showing her value to the movement.

While Dane gained an international reputation as a musician, she also began to represent the Peoples Song Inc. and American progressive politics in Canada. Dane represented the United States at the National Federation of Labor Youth at Patterson College in Windsor, Ontario, where she performed only four days after her performance at the Peoples Song Convention. *The Windsor Star* described Dane as “A well-known singer from Detroit. Who has been heard in recitals in many parts of the United States, Miss Barbara Cahn will sing at the Youth Rally, which is being held tonight at Patterson Collegiate Auditorium, under the sponsorship of the National Federation of Labor Youth.”³⁷ The article describes Dane's participation in the rebuilding of war-torn Europe, both as part of the American delegation cultural program but also describing how she "swung a pickaxe for several weeks to help rebuild the city of Litvinov, Czechoslovakia.”³⁸ Dane's political activism traveled across national boundaries. She was willing to participate in the betterment of any society afflicted by the horrors of war and social inequalities of labor and race. Dane appeared at several other events in Windsor, joining with other festival delegates to promote global peace. A photo in *The Windsor Star* appeared a day after the events of the Youth Rally where she is pictured along other World Youth delegates, including Charles Ujfalussy of the Hungarian Democratic Youth, Al Blugerman of the Toronto National Federation of Labor Youth, Edith Goodman the Chairman of the organization. Dane was shown passing out copies of the Peoples Song

³⁷ “Detrioter At Youth Rally This Evening,” *The Windsor Star*, October 14, 1947.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

Bulletins among the delegates and other meeting participants.³⁹ Dane was active in spreading the Peoples Song Bulletin across national boundaries, helping to popularize the Folk Movement across Europe and Canada, showing her contributions to the movement internationally. As a relatively young artist and activist, she showed the ability of the younger generation to grow with the movement and contribute to its politics rather than just being casual listeners of the songs. Meanwhile, Dane and the Peoples Song Inc. were essential features of the movement's growth within the Midwest. Dane and the People's Song Inc. "temporally sparked the local Folk Scene."⁴⁰

Her growing visibility continued to put her in the crosshairs of anti-communist programs in the late 1940s. During her last few years of involvement in the Communist Party and the Peoples Song Inc. Detroit chapter, Dane did her best to support the growth of the Communist Party USA even as it collapsed under the pressure of Cold War politics. During early 1948, the party was on its last legs of legality. With the upcoming presidential election, the party decided in a last ditch effort to survive the Red Scare to add a third party nominee to the state ballot for Michigan. The party and Dane began canvassing the state, a struggle for survival for the party and its politics.⁴¹ Dane believed it was her responsibility as a party member to attempt to stimulate its growth within the U.S. The effort by the Communist party to appear on the Michigan State ballot proved fruitless, so Dane and other members had to switch their focus and back former Vice President Henry Wallace and the Progressive Party instead. Dane continued her support of the party during this period, performing at rallies held in Detroit, using folk songs to

³⁹ "Reds Make No Converts: Labor Youth Delegates Tell of Trip," *The Windsor Star*, October 15, 1947.

⁴⁰ Ronald Cohen, *Rainbow Quest*, 50.

⁴¹ Barbara Dane, *This Bell Still Rings*, 63.

garner support for Henry Wallace, all the while pregnant with her first child. The Party supported Wallace as the third-party candidate because of his commitment to racial equality. He supported granting full voting rights to African Americans and an end to the segregation. He also heavily favored dialogue with the Soviet Union and an end to Cold War aggression and greater tolerance of CP members within the United States.⁴² Dane's politics aligned closely with the Wallace campaign, compelling her to support his presidential bid. When that bid failed, Dane and her husband Rolf felt it was time to move on from the progressive scene within Detroit. They prepared to move to California in search of new opportunities. By this time, her home state of Michigan could provide neither a job nor a clear political direction in the wake of the recent defeat of Wallace in the presidential election. They took the advice of her in laws and moved west to find a new place of belonging within the Golden State.⁴³ This trip out west would prove to be a significant steppingstone in Dane's life as it changed her life from being a minor figure within the folk revival into a major contributor to its growth within the western United States. Once there, Dane joined the growing civil rights movement within the state.

⁴² Barbara Dane, *This Bell Still Rings*, 66.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 67.

CHAPTER 2

DANE'S RISE TO MUSICAL STARDOM

Dane's journey to California required her permission from the Communist Party. Dane recalled that before lining up travel and housing in California, she needed the Party's permission to transfer from the Detroit chapter of the CPUSA to the branch in Los Angeles.⁴⁴ The CPUSA's structure during this period was highly democratic in function and required all Party members to represent their location appropriately. If an activist moved from one Collective to another, it could disrupt the political process within the organization and the strength of the state collective. Dane's steadfast allegiance to the Party and her ideals were apparent. Without the permission of the Party, she and her husband would have remained in Michigan rather than immigrating to the West Coast. Dane believed in the power of the collective and the power of activism, and she adhered to the rules of the Party, even if it got in the way of her own life goals as a prominent musician. Her loyalty to the Party also took priority over family. Her relationship with her father deteriorated over her years within the CPUSA, and she and her father did not speak for several years due to their political differences. She stood firm in her defiance of her father due to his views on race, unions, and socialism.⁴⁵ Dane remained strictly committed to her communist ideals, even if it meant cutting off all contact with her father due to his beliefs. This break reflected a historic generational divide. Like other young

⁴⁴ Barbara Dane, *This Bell Still Rings*, 68.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

people, Dane's commitment to progress broke with her father's commitment to the traditional racism of older Americans.

Dane's commitment to her ideals and her activist and musical connections enabled her to establish herself within the Golden State. Dane relied heavily on the West Coast Chapter of Peoples Song Inc.. This was especially important after the birth of her son Nicholas, as she had cut off almost all connection to her family back in Detroit and had barely seen her husband Rolf, as he had become the breadwinner for the communist family.⁴⁶ Dane began to view the Peoples Song Inc. and the Communist Party as her new family, one that she relied on to find her way through the life of a young mother in the Golden State. She did maintain a connection to her biological parents in that she still relied heavily on her mother for financial help in the direst situations; however, she only turned to her mother when she had run out of avenues within her activist family. Dane's relationship with her mother was stronger than her relationship with her father. For example, Dane's mother encouraged her, Rolf, and Nicholas to move to San Francisco to join her and her new husband.

This move to San Francisco completely changed the trajectory of Dane's career as both artist and activist. Dane and Rolf both became essential figures within the Communist Party of the Bay Area. Rolf became an executive member of the San Francisco Labor Youth board and was elected cultural director. He and Dane also established the Hunters Point branch of the Communist Party.⁴⁷ Committed to spreading communism and growing the progressive movement among the youth of California, they carried out much of the same activities they had organized in Detroit. They organized

⁴⁶ Barbara Dane, *This Bell Still Rings*, 73.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 77.

events modeled after the AYD's Hootenanny that had set them apart in Detroit's activist scene. An article entitled "Old Fashion Barn Dance Will Aid California Labor School" in *California Eagle* noted that "Barbara and Rolf Cahn are well-known folk singers, whose repertoire includes over a thousand songs in Ten Different languages." The article continued: "Mrs. Cahn is a Member of the National Board of People's Songs and was People's Songs representative to the World Youth Festival in Prague in 1947."⁴⁸ The two were also involved in the California Labor School, an essential feature in the San Francisco art world. The school represented the values of Dane and her husband as they attempted to pursue their activism. In his book *American Labor and The Cold War: Grassroot Politics and Postwar Political Culture* historian Marvin Gettleman notes that the California Labor School "was also a kind of beaux-arts academy, and many of its finest teachers were in the arts, dance and theater departments."⁴⁹ Dane and Cahn were part of this growth within the Labor School, representing the musical wing of the academy and being part of its comprehensive list of communist instructors. This work within both the Labor School and the state's Communist Party expanded Dane's fame as she became recognized as a prominent singer. The *California Eagle* described her as a "famous folk singer" and an "internationally known vocalist." She and Rolf sponsored events for the California Labor school to gain funds for its programs and curriculum.⁵⁰ Dane's reputation grew in California as she was slowly given more and more opportunities to sing on the stage, either in concert or on the radio. She also began to

⁴⁸ "Old Fashioned Barn Dance Will Aid California Labor School," *California Eagle*, March 31, 1949.

⁴⁹ Marvin Gettleman, "The Lost World of the United States Labor Education: Curricula at East and West Coast Communist Schools, 1944-1957," in *American Labor And The Cold War: Grassroot Politics and Postwar Political Culture*, ed. Robert Cherny, William Issel, Kieran Walsh Taylor (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 207.

⁵⁰ "May Day Event Sponsored by Labor School," *California Eagle*, April 21, 1949.

make multiple appearances on the late-night radio show, the *Light and Mellow* music show, appearing on the show in August and September of 1949. The shows were covered in *The Berkeley Gazette*.⁵¹

Dane was building up a resume within the California music scene, while simultaneously continuing to focus on her political activism. In the early 1950s, Dane participated in the Stockholm Appeal, an international effort calling for the total ban of nuclear weapons and a de-escalation of the growing thermonuclear threat of the Cold War. Dane participated in a petition drive in San Francisco's Hunter's Point, urging residents to sign for the end of the international nuclear arsenal.⁵² Dane was steadfast in staying true to the ideals she had adopted in her youth. However, Dane's commitment to these ideals would soon be tested. In the early 1950s, she and her husband were expelled from the Communist Party, leaving them to fight for their ideals without the backing of an established political identity. According to Dane the charges listed against her were "Barbara Took Money from the club (That one Dollar per meeting the members had offered to cover the babysitters fees)...Barbara was a white chauvinist (without any story to illustrate the allegation); and other such unmemorable items."⁵³

Dane's expulsion from the CPUSA was life-shattering for her. It disrupted any future plans she had established and any new connections she had found in California. Dane recalled that the CPUSA had become a way of life to her now, and she saw it as "The life you have chosen, often at the expense of family ties and the loss of old friends and even jobs or schooling. These comrades are the people to whom you have declared

⁵¹ "Over the Air Tonight," *The Berkely Gazette*, August 9, 1949.

⁵² Barbara Dane, *This Bell Still Rings*, 79.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 82.

your intention to fight side by side for a set of values, a series of goals that one assumed were shared by all. Without them, you have no family and no community of shared interests. No ideological home.”⁵⁴ Dane’s expulsion altered her activist and musical path and pushed her to pursue new goals. Although she had lost connections, Dane remained influential within San Francisco’s folk music scene. She vowed that although she had been expelled from the party, she would continue to carry on its ideals of a socially just world. But moving forward, she could no longer rely on the comradeship that she had found within the party and would need to rely on her strength to revolutionize the world alone through her music.⁵⁵ She remained a sound believer in the communism and socialism that remained, and those beliefs remained apparent within her music and helped set the stage for her importance to the New Left. Her expulsion from the CPUSA was accompanied by the end of her marriage to Rolf Cahn. Dane suspected that Cahn had been the reason behind her being pursued and surveilled by the FBI, and perhaps the reason behind her expulsion from the Party as well. According to Dane, the FBI had designated Rolf as “Informant T-1.” He had supplied the Bureau with her party card and other personal details of her whereabouts and familial ties from 1950 to 1952. Dane suspected that her expulsion was rooted in the Red Scare politics of disruption, in which bureau agents infiltrated the party branch and weakened the ties within it. As part of the infiltration, Dane and her husband became targets.⁵⁶ The FBI saw both Dane and Cahn as easy targets and sources of information due to their recent admission into the CP of California and their relatively young age. Due to these factors, the FBI could easily target

⁵⁴ Barbara Dane, *This Bell Still Rings* 81.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 86.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*.

them for being new members within the party and the least amount of personal connection with California branch members.⁵⁷ Dane's strengths as both an activist and musician made her a threat in the eyes of the FBI, as she had already gained international recognition. Getting her expelled from the Party would be a way to quell her growing political and artistic power in California.

After being expelled from the Communist Party and being sold out by her ex-husband to the FBI, Dane joined up with the San Francisco Labor School to produce music for the masses and push the folk genre forward and mold it around the songs of persuasion founded in Peoples Song. The School provided Dane with a new place of belonging, where she could join with students and activists who were looking for ways to put their music to the service of progressive causes. The School had its own newspaper, and students combined songs with educational skits that were designed to address the issues of the day.⁵⁸ Barred from any contact with the Communist Party, Dane needed to find a new group that allowed her to carry on her activist spirit and valued the use of song as a means of revolution. The San Francisco Labor School met her needs. It was a crucial cultural icon in the Bay Area left during this period and was led by famous future folk singers who helped to ignite the Folk Revival. First established in 1942, it attracted AFL and CIO union activists. Prominent members of the California chapter of People's Song Inc. were affiliated with the school, including Lou Gottlieb and Jerry Walter, who would later form the famous folk group the Gateway Singers.⁵⁹ Dane's involvement with the School helped her establish connections with Gottlieb and Walter and become part of the

⁵⁷ Barbara Dane, *This Bell Still Rings*, 86.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 92.

⁵⁹ Ronald Cohen, *Rainbow Quest*, 49.

growing Folk Revival Movement on the West Coast, just as she had done in Detroit. In *Rainbow Quest*, Cohen describes Gottlieb, Walter, and Dane as the leaders of this Folk Revival in San Francisco, writing that, "Walter, Gottlieb, and Barbara Spillman Cahn at decade's end, the small Bay Area radical folk scene served as a vital spawning ground for the developing folk revival."⁶⁰ Because she was already an international star, Dane became a leader within the Bay Area folk scene. She also brought it to new forms of media by becoming a host of a folk music-focused television show. This opportunity came when Dane won a pageant called Miss US Television sponsored by KGO-TV. The reward for winning the pageant was a sixteen-week television series that ran from October 1951 to February 1952. Dane titled her new series *Folksville, USA*, and cited it as one of the first "folk music" shows to appear on television.⁶¹ Dane's show allowed her to garner an audience, gain more popularity within the folk genre, and gain attention among other musical stars of the period, including Louis Armstrong. Dane's show was advertised in the *Oakland Tribune* in a "Show Time" article by Bob Franklin. It was here that her stage name, Barbara Dane, appeared for the first time. The article praises the structure of the show. Franklin describes the show as "easy-on-the-ears-and-eyes" and that Dane's face and voice will be a warm reception. The show celebrated folk singers and folk dancing groups who were famous at the time.⁶² Dane's show gave airtime to some of the best up-and-coming folk singers and introduced a new audience to the folk genre, moving it beyond the progressive movement by airing its artists on a state-wide

⁶⁰Ronald Cohen, *Rainbow Quest*, 49.

⁶¹ Barbara Dane, *This Bell Still Rings*, 94.

⁶² Bob Franklin, "Show Time," *Oakland Tribune*, September 6, 1951.

television station. Dane's show pushed her in a new direction in her life, as she helped extend the reach of the folk movement over the course of the 1950s.

Dane's most significant contribution was her role in helping to create the Gateway Singers folk group with Lou Gottlieb. The inspiration for the Gateway singers came from Dane's producer on *Folksville*. The producer formed a quartet using the same repertoire of folk songs as the Greenwich Village-based group the Weavers, led and founded by Pete Seeger and Lee Hayes.⁶³ During the 1940s, the Weavers were foundational in establishing the Folk revival. Dane had performed alongside the group during her youth in Detroit. The Gateway Singers was formed in 1953 with Dane, Lou Gottlieb, and Jerry Walter, who all came out of the California Labor School. They began to take the music of the group's repertoire, borrowed many of the same arrangements as the Weavers, and began playing at labor unions and house parties for left-wing socialites of the day—basically, anywhere, they could find an audience for the growing group.⁶⁴ Dane and the Gateway singers kept up with the progressive ideals that had inspired them in People Songs and used much of the music and songs provided by its bulletins. Dane also relied on the repertoire of folk music she had mastered while attending the World Youth festival and while performing in Detroit. Although the Gateway Singers would rise to great success in the coming years (much like the Weavers before them), Dane would not be a part of the group by the time their success came to fruition.⁶⁵ Both lead singers Gottlieb and Walter were members of the Communist Party, and they were told that they had to boot Dane from the group even though it was part of her creation and inspiration.

⁶³ Barbara Dane, *This Bell Still Rings*, 104.

⁶⁴ Ronald Cohen, *Rainbow Quest*, 94.

⁶⁵ Ed Orloff, "Folk Music Idea Pays off for Quarter," *The San Francisco Examiner*, October 16, 1955.

According to Cohen, “One day Gottlieb and Walter, both communist party members, met with Dane to tell her that the party ordered them to replace her because Cahn had earlier been expelled.”⁶⁶ Dane's expulsion from the group meant she would be excluded from its commercial success and forgotten from its history as part of the folk revival of the fifties. However, before she left the group, she pushed for it to be integrated racially and began to help the group to find an African American female singer to replace her. She signed up the young African American singer Elmerlee Thomas, a singer that Dane had long admired and had close contact with. Under Dane's suggestion, the Gateway Singers would become one of the first American folk groups to racially integrate, inspiring the later generation of folk musicians in the coming years.⁶⁷ Although Dane could have been bitter about being forced to leave the group, she still had a resounding effect on it as she inspired them to continue integrating the genre and battling the racism that had left mainstream music segregated.

Although Dane would miss the commercial success of the Gateway singers, her solo career remained strong throughout the fifties and gained momentum leading up to the civil rights movement and the birth of the New Left in the sixties. Dane participated in concerts all over California and promoted the spread of the folk revival without a quartet. One such concert was established by the Folk Music Club in Berkeley, where Dane sang alongside Giacomo Patri, another California Labor School alumni who had lost his place within the school due to the growing McCarthyism of the period. Dane and Patri performed folk songs from abroad, with Dane singing Czech, French, and Italian-based songs she had learned during the World Youth Festival and Patri performing the

⁶⁶ Ronald Cohen, *Rainbow Quest*, 94.

⁶⁷ Barbara Dane, *This Bell Still Rings*, 106.

songs from his homeland of Italy.⁶⁸ The early fifties saw Dane attempting to establish a presence within the folk scene in California by performing everything she could that was both folk-related and connected to the labor movement or the Communist Party. Dane was spreading the folk genre through every avenue she could, taking part in concerts, establishing the folk music television show, and hosting her own half-hour music radio show on California's KFPA radio station. The radio show was called *People on The Move* and was billed as a "folk music" program. It was the first of its kind to appear on the West Coast. Hosted by Dane, the songs focused on the travels of everyday people as they went about their day.⁶⁹ Dane was bringing new audiences to folk music during this period by using television and radio to bring the genre in people's living rooms and cars. During this period, Dane also adopted and promoted the blues, another dying genre that she combined with folk in both her television and radio shows.

It was Dane's adoption of the blues she landed her first professional gig: she toured with Louis Armstrong and eventually appeared as the first white woman to be previewed and written about in *Ebony*, a leading African American magazine. Dane performed as a professional classic blues singer in 1956 at the Tin Angel in San Francisco, where she performed classic blues songs by Bessie Smith, Ida Cox, and Ma Rainey.⁷⁰ Dane attempted to push forward the two forms of music together, melding them into her performances. Both genres inspired Dane's activism. Both genres dealt with the theme of injustice in American society, allowing both artists and audiences to better understand poverty and racism. Dane began to participate in jazz concerts as well,

⁶⁸ "Folk Song Concert Set Here," *The Berkely Gazette*, November 5, 1953.

⁶⁹ Barbara Dane, *This Bell Still Rings*, 111.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 119.

performing alongside musicians such as Dick Oxotot, historically known as the father of traditional jazz in San Francisco. During this time, Dane was pushing the traditional music of America into a new modern setting, revolutionizing the genres from the past and incorporating them into modern musical tastes.⁷¹ At the same time, Dane's political views were also evolving. She shifted her activist attention to the rising civil rights movement in the South and sought to spread its message globally. She hoped to travel to India as part of a State Department-sponsored event to create an image of American racial harmony. The department sponsored African American jazz musicians Brownie McGhee and Sonny Terry, who would perform abroad as an attempt to promote a positive image of American race politics to counter the outbreaks of violence that were occurring during the civil rights era. Dane was initially billed to go along with the two musicians. However, due to her connections to the CPUSA and her outspoken politics, she was barred from the trip and missed the opportunity to travel abroad and perform with the musicians.⁷² However, Dane began to sponsor other groups in their attempts to revolutionize the policies of the United States. One such group was The National Council of Arts, Sciences, and Professions (or the NCASP), which was sponsored by W. E. B. Du Bois and other famous anti-racists, anti-war organizers, and socialists. Dane participated in the group by fundraising on behalf of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, a couple accused of engaging in espionage against the United States by the State Department. This period also saw her continuing to be in the crosshairs of the FBI as they constantly surveyed her and questioned her about her activities.⁷³ Even if it came at a cost to her commercial and

⁷¹ "Folk Songs in Jazz Concert," *The Berkley Gazette*, May 18, 1956.

⁷² Barbara Dane, *This Bell Still Rings*, 127.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

musical successes, she constantly supported the movement for a better American society. Dane showed her solidarity with the growing civil rights movement by participating in picket lines and protests across California. During this period, her children participated in many of the same marches. She and her children marched for the integration of Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, performing chants and songs and painting signs for the demonstration.⁷⁴ Dane was inspiring her children to carry on the same activism she had participated in throughout her life, inspiring them with the same commitment to social justice that she had carried with her.

While Dane was expanding her political focus from the labor movement to the civil rights movement, her musical career evolved as she released albums and pushed her way into mainstream musical culture. While performing at Jack's Waterfront Hangout, Dane was approached by record producer Al Leavitt, the owner of San Francisco Record. She would produce her first album under the company. Dane signed with Leavitt and began working on her debut album, *Trouble in Mind*, alongside classic jazz greats such as P.T. Stanton, Bob Mielke, Darnell Howard, Pops Foster, and Don Ewell, who made up the band. At the same time, she sang the vocals, mixing her folk style with classical blues and jazz.⁷⁵ The LP rocketed Dane's career into a new level of musical fame. Her reputation also grew within the blues community, as she broke racial barriers. According to Dane, Pops Foster praised Dane for her ability to honor the blues and be respectful of its role in African American culture. He believed that her representation within the genre was helping to break through racial barriers.⁷⁶ As a musician, Dane was taking steps to

⁷⁴ Barbara Dane, *This Bell Still Rings*, 129.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 131-132.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

push American culture forward and to stop the segregation that shaped everything, including the creation of musical audiences. Dane become a representative of the mixing of musical culture for her audiences. Dane took on new opportunities to spread her beliefs and music. Writing in *The Berkeley Gazette*, Ed Salzman announced that Dane was “making a series of Television films featuring traditional jazz music.”⁷⁷ Dane saw folk and jazz as the two musical genres that best represented the American people.

Dane’s appreciation of Jazz and blues as art forms drew praise from some of the most notable figures in African American cultural life. One such figure was the writer and poet, Langston Hughes. Dane met Hughes after moving to Los Angeles to work in the Cosmo Alley Coffeeshop. Hughes thanked Dane for reviving the songs of Bessie Smith and Ma Rainey and for helping to champion jazz and the blues, genres he feared were in danger of being forgotten. He also praised Dane's recent record, *Trouble in Mind*. Hughes befriended Dane, frequenting her concerts until his death, often sending new copies of his books and postcards to the singer, and wishing her luck on her opening nights.⁷⁸ Hughes and Pops Fosters were the first of a long list of African American artists to praise Dane for her contributions to reviving jazz and the blues. Dane was also praised by Ella Fitzgerald, whom she met after a show in Chicago. Fitzgerald noted, "Thank You for sharing the spirit of the 'old blues' with Chicago. Your singing style is refreshingly different, and I am confident you will reach the Zenith of success quickly."⁷⁹ Dane was helping to push the songs of Fitzgerald, Smith, and Rainey forward to a new generation of youth that were coming to appreciate both the Blues and the Folk genres of the period.

⁷⁷ Ed Salzman, “Thrush Barbara Dane Shows Notable Talent,” *The Berkley Gazette*, August 17, 1957.

⁷⁸ Barbara Dane, *This Bell Still Rings*, 142

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 153.

By this stage, Dane was gaining national attention and was performing daily across California and the United States. Her performance schedule could be chaotic. After the release of her album, *Trouble in Mind*, she performed three nights per week at Cosmo Alley, and then appeared on the Jim Baker TV show, in Hollywood's *Stars In Jazz*, a jazz show at Stanford and Santa Clara, and then at a show at the Mardi Gras Ball for the Oakland Museum all in one week.⁸⁰ Dane had gone from being a hero of the folk genre to a high-demand jazz and blues performer who was being asked to perform at colleges and clubs across the United States.

In addition to being recognized by Hughes and Fitzgerald, she also began to appear alongside lifetime greats of music that were still at the height of their popularity. One such appearance came in *Time* magazine. An article notes that Dane "stood on the brink of the big time, one of the few white blues singers who ever belonged there" and also notes her background in folk music: "She had mastered a few folk songs, and because 'nobody else in town knew them,' she soon found herself strumming and humming to the glory of organized labor." The magazine also compares Dane to Bessie Smith, which Langston Hughes had also done: "Barbara's throaty roar has often made critics mention her name in the same breath as Bessie Smith." The article also called attention to a growing interest in Dane by one of the greatest blues singers of the era, Louis Armstrong, who said, "Did you get that chick? She is a gasser."⁸¹ Dane became a household name during this period. Although her career skyrocketed with her turn to jazz and blues, she still was credited by *Time* as an essential figure to the organized labor movements and folk revivals, showing the multiplicity of Danes' career and her

⁸⁰ C. H. Garrigues, "The Difference a Record Makes," *The San Francisco Examiner*, February 2, 1958.

⁸¹ "A Gasser," *Time*, November 24, 1958, 70-72.

importance to the rebirth of both genres. The growing recognition and the support from *Time* magazine hinted at a coming era in Dane's life when she would partner with the jazz great Louis Armstrong, who had helped spawn the traditional jazz genre and would perform alongside Dane in the coming years. In December of 1958, Armstrong's manager, Joe Glaser invited Dane to join Armstrong on his upcoming State Department-sponsored tour of Europe, asking if she would appear as a new singer for his band.⁸² Much like the trip of Brownie McGhee and Sunny Terry in 1957, this trip was another attempt by the US State Department to quell bad publicity it was garnering around racial issues and to attempt to showcase America as a land of racial equality. Under Glaser's guidance, Dane appeared alongside Armstrong in concerts and TV shows and began to perform shows that were meant to build up her image and reputation around the country. Appearing alongside Armstrong, Dane made a splash within the national scene. According to the *San Francisco Examiner*, Dane's recent rise to stardom "really hit the big-time: a Nationwide TV appearance with Louis Armstrong on the Timex show set for last Wednesday, then a four-month European Tour with the Armstrong All Stars beginning January 17; meanwhile, a new dot record date set for tomorrow night."⁸³ Dane was a national star during this period, one who was paired with the all-time greats of blues and jazz music.

However, Dane still had to deal with her past and her commitment to her ideals. Those ideals caused her to be excluded from international exposure, such as when she was excluded from the first State Department trip with Brown McGhee and Sonny Terry. She was barred from representing America yet again when the manager of Louis

⁸² Barbara Dane, *This Bell Still Rings*, 159.

⁸³ "An Anniversary and a Jazz Festival," *The San Francisco Examiner*; January 11, 1959.

Armstrong called her in January 1959 to tell her she was off the tour. She said that, "The State Department had probably determined that it would never do to have a loudmouth blonde girl doing interviews all across Europe with Ambassador Satch on the subject of race in America, especially in 1959 when our country's racial strife was inflaming TV screens all over the world, with pictures of lynching's on front pages everywhere."⁸⁴ Yet again, there were attempts to marginalize her career by blocking her from international travel and exposure. By this time, Dane was quite famous, but her activism outweighed her musical stardom in the eyes of the State Department and the FBI, who repeatedly blocked her from being part of any US-sponsored tours across the seas.

But soon, Dane took to the stage as part of one of the defining moments of the Folk revival of the 1950s with the 1959 Newport Folk Festival. The festival, much like the Peoples Song Convention in 1947, was a way for the folk revival to garner interest within the folk movement and to shine a light on up-and-coming folk singers. It also was a way to revive the progressive songs of persuasion that had lost their place in the culture during the Red Scare of the 1950s. Cohen writes that the creators of the Newport Folk Festival in 1959 were attempting to merge the various folk genres into one concert with performances from musicians like Dane, Seeger, Odetta, Memphis Slim, Brownie Mcghee, Sonny Terry, and many other famous folk and blues singers from across the country. He points out that the Festival would represent "Pretty much something for everyone—city billy and hillbilly, traditional and popular, gospel, white and black blues, bluegrass, traditional and revivalists," folk music.⁸⁵ The Festival hoped to introduce the audience to the multiplicity of the folk genre, allowing them an ear buffet of folk music

⁸⁴ Barbara Dane, *This Bell Still Rings*, 164.

⁸⁵ Ronald Cohen, *Rainbow Quest*, 145.

that allowed famous and up-and-coming musicians the chance to perform together and grow their repertoires in front of a broad group of listeners. At the Festival, Dane performed alongside blues greats with whom she had created close friendships. She got long-time friend Pete Seeger to help fly out Memphis Slim and Willie Dixon to perform on stage with Dane. Frank Hamilton and Bill Lee, “the people’s bass man,” performed with her in her folk numbers during her performance.⁸⁶ Dane represented both traditional folk and jazz movements. Her performance at the festival received critical acclaim. After her performance, Sidney Finkelstein, a jazz critic and author of *Jazz: A Peoples Music*, wrote that Dane had been the only performer to sing folk music at the Festival.⁸⁷ The Festival brought new attention to her and the genre. While the Festival was not a commercial success (it had lost upwards of ten thousand dollars), it was already billed to return to Newport in the coming years and sparked a new interest in the folk genre across the United States. As a 1959 article observed: “There’s too much public interest in folk music for it to falter. Even seemingly isolated as the Newport Folk Festival are attracting more attention.”⁸⁸ Dane was at ground zero of the folk revival, as the genre became a national and even an international phenomenon among young college students.

Dane’s popularity grew after Newport. It was at this point that she was featured in *Ebony* magazine, appearing there as a white representative of the blues and folk music of the time. The article on Dane, entitled “White Blues Singer: Blonde Keeps Blues Alive,” praises Dane as a savior of the genre, stating, “Through this pale-faced young lady, a lot of dark-skinned people hope to keep the blues alive and the royalties flowing.” The

⁸⁶ Barbara Dane, *This Bell Still Rings*, 178.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ Harold Stern, “Record Magnate Sees Folk Boom,” *The Morning Call*, July 23, 1959.

article portrayed Dane favorably as providing a path forward for the blues, giving the genre new life, and allowing the genre's heroes to continue to receive both compensation and recognition.⁸⁹ Dane was a significant contributor to keeping the blues alive throughout the fifties, and it shows in the reception she received from both *Ebony* magazine and other famous black musicians of the craft. Dane was also using her art form to carry on her tradition of calling out the politics of the day. According to *Ebony*, Dane used the blues as a means to teach lessons on racial history and political history at her concerts: "At another point in her program, she may discuss the blues as a blending of the old European chordal structure or formal music and the rhythms of Africa, ending her brief discourse with the observation: "So you see, music has been integrated longer than people.""⁹⁰ Much as she had used folk music to call attention to the Labor movement, Dane used her blues career to call attention to the Civil Rights movement in the South and the need for an end to segregation. According to *Ebony*, Dane's political commitments had cost her career opportunities: "She also lost a chance to break in big in Las Vegas with her complete outfit because she wanted to use some Negro musicians, whom she felt were better suited to backing her in the sort of work she does. Barbara did not compromise and did not get the job."⁹¹ Dane was willing to lose commercial success in order to use her musical career to push for American integration. In the article in *Ebony*, Dane described using the blues and folk music to bring humanity into harmony, stating, "But if you can also, in some way, send your audience out feeling closer to each other as human beings, then you have done something. Then you can sleep at night. You

⁸⁹ "White Blues Singer: Blonde Keeps Blues Alive," *Ebony*, November, 1959, 149.

⁹⁰ "Blonde Belter Slips Wry Philosophy in with the blues," *Ebony*, November 1959.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

can say, 'I am a positive member of society.'"⁹² Dane saw folk and blues music as a way to persuade the masses to be better human beings and end the senseless racism that she had first seen in her father during her childhood. Dane attempted to contribute to the ideas of the civil rights movement through her songs, allowing people to understand the plight of African Americans within a racist society. Dane saw the integration of her band as a means of confronting and resisting the ugliness of racial segregation. Every time she said no to a show due to the apparent racism of the booker or "music merchants," it deepened her political commitment.⁹³

While Dane's commitment to her ideals did cost her some opportunities, she still won praise and recognition from some of the biggest names in American culture. Dane landed an appearance on the late-night TV show *Playboy's Penthouse* with Hugh Hefner, where she participated in comedic numbers with Hefner, including one in which he got on his knees and beat the big bass drum. After that appearance, Dane was nominated in *Playboy* magazine's All-Star Jazz poll as one of the Outstanding Jazz Artists of the Year in 1960.⁹⁴ Although Dane had alienated some potential fans due to her left-wing political ideology, she was still popular among leftist personalities in American culture, becoming close with the major players within left-wing media culture. In the coming years, Dane would take part in a comedy tour with Bob Newhart throughout the West Coast and Canada, ending in California. During this tour, Dane sung Ida Cox's "Last Mile Blues," which called attention to California's use of capital punishment and the likelihood of the execution of innocent African American men due to racism within the criminal justice

⁹² "Barbara Feel Sincerity Brings Negro Acceptance," *Ebony*, November, 1959.

⁹³ Barbara Dane, *This Bell Still Rings*, 181.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 182.

system. At one point, Newhart broke down and begged her to stop playing the song. During this time, Dane integrated her band thoroughly, again proving the power of her songs to push for racial justice.⁹⁵ After touring with Newhart, Dane used the proceeds from the tour to create her own club, which would serve as a place for the blues and folk music to continue to grow within San Francisco. Dane's new club, Sugar Hill, provided a place for the old and new faces of the blues to have a home in Main Street, San Francisco, to perform and grow. Dane's club was integrated, allowed the free mixing of folk and blues genres, and introduced the new age audience to the older greats. Dane kept her politically-charged music going at Sugar Hill. As one article in *The San Francisco Examiner* described it, "Singer Barbara Dane threw in a bit of current history at her Sugar Hill opening with an impromptu song about the Freedom Riders. The audience cheered."⁹⁶ As she had done before, Dane used the stage to raise awareness of social problems as well as the strength of social movements. Dane also performed at movement fundraisers alongside other notable black musicians. According to the *Oakland Tribune*, Dane performed alongside groups such as the Cannonball Adderley Quintet and the Montgomery Brothers Quartet in folk and blues concerts to provide funding to the University of California branch of the NAACP.⁹⁷ Dane continued to support organizations that embraced her politics and that followed the same avenues of social justice as she had carried throughout her music career.

By the early sixties, Dane was in the limelight of her career, participating in countless concerts and TV shows airing during the time. Appearing on *Alfred Hitchcock*

⁹⁵ Barbara Dane, *This Bell Still Rings*, 189-192.

⁹⁶ John Bryan, "A Tuba, Maybe," *The San Francisco Examiner*, June 4, 1961.

⁹⁷ "Jazz Concert," *Oakland Tribune*, October 29, 1961.

Presents, Checkmate, and The Tonight Show with Johnny Carson, she also kept up with the growth of the folk revival with a two-part appearance on Westinghouse TV miniseries with *They Call It Folk Music* and *Folk Songs and More Folk Songs*.⁹⁸ By this point, Dane was participating as a star of the folk genre as it reached new heights of popularity. This period saw the rise of commercial folk music marked by the mass production of the folk genre as it used multimedia conglomerates.

The rise of ABC-TV's new folk music show, *Hootenanny* marked this shift. *Hootenanny* represented a significant stepping-stone during the Folk Revival, granting maximum commercial potential and allowance for multiple musicians to meet a mass national audience that had been unimaginable up to this period. But it was also marked by a strict blacklisting of Pete Seeger, one of the originators of the Folk Revival in the first place.⁹⁹ The blacklisting of Seeger originated with the Red Scare, in which anyone with a direct or indirect connection to the Communist Party could be barred from appearing on national television or radio, no matter how important they may have been to the genre. Dane was outraged alongside many other folk musicians over the blacklisting of Seeger and decided to boycott the show. This boycott of the *Hootenanny* was supported by some of the biggest names within the music world of the time, including Bob Dylan. In his poem, *A Letter from Bob Dylan*, Dylan called out the blacklisting of Seeger and voiced his support for the individuals participating in the boycott. The poem reads: "The heroes of this battle are not me nor Joan and the Kingston Trio nor Peter Paul and Mary for none of us need to go on that show none of us really need that kind of dumbness, but there's

⁹⁸ Barbara Dane, *This Bell Still Rings*, 225-230.

⁹⁹ Ronald Cohen, *Rainbow Quest*, 195.

some that could use it for they could use the money I mean people like Tom Paxton, Barbara Dane, a Johnny Herald... they are the heroes if such a word has to be used here they are the ones that lose materialistically ah yes but in their own minds they don't and that is much more important it means much more we need more kind a people like that people that can't go against their conscience no matter what they might gain."¹⁰⁰ Dane was praised for having stuck to her conscience over the need to make money in the music field. Dane pointed out that although the show may have blacklisted Seeger and other members, the folk genre was not harmed for its political nature. She recalled, "Despite the mainstream media's attempts to co-opt folk music, this was a time in our nation's history when songs were particularly instrumental to social change." An article described "Barbara Dane, a blond folk artist of national reputation," leading the crowd of thousands—of blacks and whites together as they sang the "Marching song of the Southern Negroes."¹⁰¹

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, Dane promoted the social change that she believed in, showing that Dylan was correct in celebrating her. Dane was moving towards a period of her life when she participated in three different movements, the Civil Rights, Anti-War, and early antinuclear movements. Throughout, she placed her beliefs first and her career second. Soon, Dane became a contributing member to the cultural wing of the Students Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, helped create the anthem of the antinuclear and environmental protection movement, and finally, in the closing years of

¹⁰⁰ "Revisit a Sprawling Letter from Bob Dylan about Money, Fame and Love from 1964 - Far Out Magazine," June 6, 2020, <https://faroutmagazine.co.uk/bob-dylan-letter-to-broadside-rotolo-money-fame-love/>. Accessed, February 27, 2024.

¹⁰¹ Barbara Dane, *This Bell Still Rings*, 239-240.

the sixties and onto the seventies, took part in the FTA Show with Actress Jane Fonda.

The sixties proved a period of Dane's life where she contributed the most to the power of percussion songs and took part in shaping American leftist culture for the coming decades.

CHAPTER 3

DANE'S ROLE IN MANY NEW LEFT MOVEMENT

By the mid-1960s, Dane was taking part in both the civil rights movement and the emerging antiwar movement. Dane had raised funds for the civil rights movement since the early fifties. However, in the summer of 1964, Dane changed course and joined up with the foot soldiers of the movement and participated in the Mississippi Freedom Summer. Dane was answering the call described by Howard Zinn in *A People's History of the United States*: “As the summer of 1964 approached, SNCC and other Civil Rights groups working together in Mississippi, and facing increasing violence, decided to call upon young people from other parts of the country for help.”¹⁰² Upon hearing reports of widespread violence throughout the South, Dane looked for ways to support the movement. Speaking to peers and other leftist singers of the time, she and other musicians planned to travel to Mississippi for the upcoming Freedom Summer in 1964.

With the folk revival at its height, movement activists formulated a plan to bring famous folk singers to Mississippi to show support for the freedom schools. The call for support came out of the recent disappearance and murder of James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner activists within the Civil Rights movement and

¹⁰² Howard Zinn, *A People's History of The United States* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2015), 455.

members of SNCC whose disappearance prompted Dane and other folk singers to travel to Mississippi Dane wrote that, "The idea was that this might bring national press attention, which would call on the authorities to move faster with their search and investigation."¹⁰³ Dane became part of a small collective of Folk singers who aligned themselves with the Mississippi Freedom Project, each representing the backbone of the folk revival. Dane was among more than twenty artists who traveled to Mississippi as part of what came to be called the Mississippi Caravan of Music, which included Len Chandler, Judy Collins, Peter La Farge, Gil Turner, Pete Seeger, Phil Ochs, Alix Dobkin, and Bob Cohen. All were prominent folk performers who sought to use their stardom to draw attention to the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)'s efforts.¹⁰⁴

The caravan's members believed that their songs of persuasion could have an impact. As Chris Goetzen writes, "the civil rights movement could not have succeeded without the songs." Cordell Reagon, SNCC organizer and song leader recalled: "The music is what held the Movement together."¹⁰⁵ Dane was well versed in using freedom songs to move the masses to fight injustice. To participate in Freedom Summer, Dane uprooted her life and sold off her belongings to gain the funds to live in Mississippi for the entire summer. Dane rented out her home, sent her kids to stay with her friends and her ex-husband, and sold off anything that would simplify her move to the south. She opened up an in-home thrift shop that brought in crowds of people who would fund the trip, thus helping her to "overcome the sickness of racism in America."¹⁰⁶ By joining the

¹⁰³ Barbara Dane, *This Bell Still Rings*, 257.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, 262.

¹⁰⁵ Chris Goetzen, "Freedom songs: Helping Black Activists, black Residents, and White Volunteers Work Together in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, During the Summer of 1964," *Black Music Research Journal* 36, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 59.

¹⁰⁶ Barbara Dane, *This Bell Still Rings*, 257.

caravan, Dane became part of a group of musicians who were willing to risk their lives to fight the injustice and use their stardom to bring national press attention to the violence occurring across the south. The Caravan was sponsored by the Council of Federated Organizations, SNCC, CORE, NAACP, and the SLCL. An article in the *Santa Barbara News Press* quoted Dane: "Performances will be integrated and before non-segregated audiences, sometimes in churches or freedom schools, sometimes in the fields of rural Mississippi."¹⁰⁷ Additionally, Dane helped SNCC by leading songwriting and song-leading workshops with an emphasis on helping with black voter registration.¹⁰⁸ In addition to her participation with the caravan, Dane was also part of an interracial theater group called Freedom Theater, made up of eleven youth actors from San Francisco. Five of the actors were black and six were white, and they hoped to tour the deep South with shows in Jackson, Memphis, and Birmingham. An article in the *San Francisco Examiner* described the mission of the group as "simply to put Negro and white actors on the same stage, at the same time in places where its never been done before." The article described Dane as the only well-known name of the traveling troupe and praised her and the young actors for facing the dangers of the South as they brought their integrated show to the region.¹⁰⁹ During this period, Dane gained popularity within the movement as someone willing to risk everything to get the voices of SNCC heard and to push for racial equality.

When she arrived in Mississippi, Dane was met by Civil Rights Leader Bob Moses, who warned the singers of the dangers of working within Mississippi. Dane

¹⁰⁷ Bert Willard, "Civil Rights Hit Music Field, Too," *Santa Barbara New-Press*, July 12, 1964.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ Stanley Eichelbaum, "Advice for Freedom Theater before it Tours the South," *The San Francisco Examiner*, June 7, 1964.

recalled that if any of the singers felt immune to the violence because of their white skin, they needed to realize that powerful white Southerners saw the singers as race traitors, outsiders, agitators, and commies and despised the singers for their sense of entitlement.¹¹⁰ Dane and her peers faced real danger when traveling within the South, but the trip allowed them to meet some of the most influential members of the movement. Dane had the opportunity to meet and perform with Fannie Lou Hamer, who she described as "for me like meeting one of the legendary women of the past, women like Harriet Tubman or Sojourner Truth." Dane performed alongside Hamer for an integrated crowd in a church basement in Ruleville, Mississippi, Hamer's hometown.¹¹¹ Dane stood alongside figures such as Hamer and Moses as they attempted to register voters.

At the same time, she taught songs of freedom and persuasion at SNCC's freedom schools. The Folk Caravan taught younger African Americans the songs of the world that could help them fight in their regional struggle against racism. According to Howard Zinn, one unnamed folk singer brought students from a nearby freedom school out and taught them an Israeli dance chant imploring the heavens to create rain, stating, "The Young ones seemed to understand; they were beginning for the first time in their lives, to reach beyond their street, beyond their state, to join in some universal plea."¹¹² The Folk Singers brought their international repertoire to the South, giving the movement songs of freedom from all over the world that could be applied to the struggle against American racism. The Freedom Songs of Dane and the other Folk singers eased tensions among activists and inspired them as they fought against systematic racism in the South.

¹¹⁰ Barbara Dane, *This Bell Still Rings*, 262.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 264.

¹¹² Howard Zinn, *SNCC: The New Abolitionists* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965), 248-249.

According to Goertzen, "Singing freedom songs minimized tensions that arose between populations who shared an urgent cause but who dramatically different backgrounds...Sharing the singing of freedom songs eased every task, including the most basic jobs of activists--getting along with each other."¹¹³ Dane helped to create unity among racially and economically diverse activists. Dane received praise for her role in SNCC. As one participant recalled, "We were safe because we were right, we were together, we were signing, and the songs made us strong."¹¹⁴ Dane helped calm the movement, especially in the wake of the murders of three activists and the escalating violence against movement activists. Dane provided songs of strength that allowed activists to deepen their resolve to fight even in the midst of backlash.

At the end of the summer, Dane returned to California. Soon, her lyrical expertise and leadership would be called upon by another social movement. Dane received a phone call from Peter Franck, a young lawyer who asked Dane to come to the UC Berkeley campus for a mass free-speech protest. The protest was organized after the arrest of Jack Weinberg, a member of the campus chapter of the CORE (Congress on Racial Equality). Dane dropped everything and headed to the protest, where she led the crowd in singing songs from the Civil Rights Movement, even as it was surrounded by Alameda County Sheriffs. Her performance was broadcast by KPFA radio, the Bay Area's local public radio station.¹¹⁵ Over only a few months, Dane participated in the Anti-War, Free Speech,

¹¹³ Chris Goertzen, "Freedom Songs," 60.

¹¹⁴ Barbara Dane, *This Bell Still Rings*, 266.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*, 272.

and civil rights movements. She dedicated her resources to funding her activism while still contributing to the era's long-running folk revival.

In 1965, Dane moved to New York to start a new relationship with Irwin Silber, an editor of *Sing Out!* and *People's Songs Bulletin*. Upon moving to New York, Dane began writing again for the *Sing Out!* magazine, much as she had done before with the *People's Song Bulletin*. Dane wrote articles about other performer activists whom she admired for their commitment to using Freedom Songs for social justice. Her writings profiled folk performers such as Jesse Fuller and the Chambers Brothers and highlighted the aspiring folk singers participating in the genre's growth.¹¹⁶ During this period, Dane also performed in New York's local folk scenes and concerts. Dane performed at Huddy Ledbetter's (Lead Belly) seventy-fifth birthday (he had inspired both Dane and countless other folk singers), as well as at Gerdes Folk City, where alongside Bob Dylan, she sung the blues and songs written by Woody Guthrie.¹¹⁷ While performing alongside Dylan, Dane's popularity in New York grew, and she soon returned to her roots as a radio host for the folk revival. Chris Albertson, program director of WBAI-FM, asked Dane if she would be interested in hosting a radio show that drew on her connections with the country's leading folk magazine. Dane created a radio show named *Sing Out!*. The show was cohosted with Silber, and it played music that ranged from the blues to bluegrass and beyond. It also hosted old blues musicians and friends of Danes, Brownie McGhee and Sonny Terry.¹¹⁸ In New York, Dane continued to support the Folk Revival, much like she

¹¹⁶ Barbara Dane, *This Bell Still Rings*, 273.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid*, 274.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid*, 275.

had done in California. Very soon, however, she would dedicate herself entirely to the growing anti-war movement.

By 1965, the US military was escalating its fight against the Viet Cong. The escalation of the war led to anti-war protests across the country. One protester was Alice Herz, an eighty-two-year-old widower and Holocaust survivor who had been involved in both the civil rights and anti-war movements. On Tuesday, March 16, 1965, she poured cleaning fluid on herself and set herself on fire on a Detroit street corner. According to an article in the *Detroit Free Press*, Herz “[t]hought the sight of a Buddhist-like sacrifice, on the corner of Oakman Blvd. and Grand River might make people think.”¹¹⁹ Herz’s sacrifice was followed by other acts of self-immolation to protest the escalating war in Vietnam. Herz’s self-immolation hit Dane hard, as she had known Herz during her early years as an activist. Dane recalled, “As a teenager, I had known her as we took part in the same demonstrations, and she had encouraged my youthful unrest by assuring me that everything would be all right someday.”¹²⁰ Herz’s sacrifice pushed Dane into hard-line anti-war activism. After Herz’s immolation, the Students for Democratic Society launched one of the first nationwide demonstrations on April 17. During spring break, SDS launched their own March on Washington, the first nationwide demonstration against the war. The march was a resounding success with more than twenty thousand students and adults participating.¹²¹ Dane joined up and performed at this nationwide demonstration. It was a lifetime thrill for Dane to perform in front of twenty-five

¹¹⁹ Jean Sharley, “Pacifism Sparked Her Fiery Sacrifice,” *Detroit Free Press*, March 18, 1965.

¹²⁰ Barbara Dane, *This Bell Still Rings*, 281.

¹²¹ Nancy Zaroulis and Gerald Sullivan, *Who Spoke Up?: American Protest Against The War in Vietnam 1963-1975*, 38.

thousand activists who hoped to end US imperialistic policies in Vietnam.¹²² This protest was the first of many anti-war performances for Dane as she began to focus her energies on the movement.

A month after the SDS march, Dane returned to the West Coast to attend another protest at U.C. Berkeley, her old stomping ground. Dane was invited by Jerry Rubin, Abby Hoffman, and other friends to attend and perform for a Vietnam Day protest on May 21-22. When Rubin asked Dane if she would be willing to fly out from New York to participate in the protest, Dane replied, "Nothing could have stopped me."¹²³ Somewhere between ten and thirty thousand activists attended Vietnam Day, and Berkeley's Vietnam Day Committee was established. The committee was responsible for both the major anti-war actions carried out on the West Coast and for building support for a nationwide anti-war coalition.¹²⁴ Dane traveled all over the country as part of the Anti-War movement, participating in some of its largest protests. In addition to performing, Dane organized concerts and fundraisers while attempting to build bridges between the civil rights and anti-war movements by bringing some civil rights movement leaders to her anti-war concerts. Dane and Silber organized the Sing-In for Peace concert, inviting singers such as Seeger, Joan Baez, Phil Ochs, and Alan Lomax and including figures in the Civil Rights movement Fannie Lou Hamer, Bernice Reagon, and the Freedom Singers. The goal of the concert—which was held at Carnegie Hall on September 24, 1965, was not only to end the war, but to bring together the fight against war and the fight for racial

¹²² Barbara Dane, *This Bell Still Rings*, 282.

¹²³ *Ibid*, 283.

¹²⁴ Nancy Zaroulis and Gerald Sullivan, *Who Spoke Up?*, 43.

equality.¹²⁵ Dane coordinated and organized the concert, in which an audience of five thousand filled the Hall. The concert lasted from 8 pm on September 24 until 4 am the following morning. Many of the singers, including Hamer, used the concert to speak out against American foreign and domestic policy, with Hamer announcing to the crowd, "Until we straighten out the mess in this country, we should stop messing around in other places."¹²⁶ Dane's concert allowed singers to merge the two movements and speak out against all the injustices in American society.

During the same time that she created the Sing In, Dane joined up with the Southern Folk Cultural Revival, which toured the South with an integrated cast of blues and folk singers. Dane was asked by Dr. Bernice Reagon and Anne Romaine, both folklorists, singers, and civil rights activists, to come on tour with them, teaching southern history through song and showing the mixture of the region's Black and White musical cultures. Supported and funded by the SSOC (Southern Students Organizing Committee) and SNCC, the group performed in folk clubs, campus groups, church groups, and human relations councils, traveling through all the major cities and states of the South.¹²⁷ According to the article "Folk Festival Here Friday" in *The Daily Progress*, the singers conducted Freedom Song workshops and concerts. They worked with students on the history and relevancy of their music. The music ranged from gospel songs, bluegrass, Appalachian ballads, slave songs, spirituals, and many other forms within the folk genre, each representing a different movement and era within Southern history.¹²⁸

¹²⁵ Barbara Dane, *This Bell Still Ring*, 288-289.

¹²⁶ Ronald D. Cohen, *Rainbow Quest*, 245.

¹²⁷ Barbara Dane, *This Bell Still Rings*, 294

¹²⁸ "Folk concert Here Friday," *The Daily Progress*, March 30, 1966.

Dane was helping to spread the Folk Revival across the South while working alongside SNCC to show the long history of the melding of Black and white cultures.

After touring with the Southern Folk Cultural Revival, Dane took part in another international trip that shocked the nation: she traveled to Cuba. Estla Bravo, a programmer for Radio Havana and future award-winning documentary filmmaker, asked Dane to tour Cuba. Bravo asked Dane because she was known as a singer who was willing to travel anywhere to perform for the folk revival and on behalf of her political commitments. In addition to Bravo asking for Dane to tour the communist nation, President Osvaldo Dorticos Torrado sent Dane a handwritten letter asking her to bring American Folk Culture to Cuba.¹²⁹ Dane broke another social barrier, becoming the first American to return to Cuba since the communist revolution. According to an article in *The Baltimore Sun*, Dane traveled to Cuba "to find out about a country whose popular music does not have to be luxuriously packaged to be sold," and in order to expand her repertoire and learn the folk songs of Cuba, which she could then bring back to the United States.¹³⁰ Much like her earlier trip to Prague, Dane used the trip to Cuba to grow as a transnational performer and unite with people in other places who shared her political ideals. She took these steps without the support of the State Department and as a representative of the American left.

Those actions placed Dane under the watchful eyes of spies and informants during her travels. According to Dane, the CIA warned her that she was barred from returning to the United States through Mexico without proper approval by the State Department. In a

¹²⁹ Barbara Dane, *This Bell Still Rings*, 296-297.

¹³⁰ "Folk Singer in Cuba Seeking New Songs," *The Baltimore Sun*, August 3, 1966.

FOIA request filed in 2015, she learned that throughout the Cuba trip, she had been under government surveillance.

While being vilified by the US government, both she and Silber were celebrated in Cuba, where they "were blinded by the spotlights of a crew filming us for one of renowned film director Santiago Alvarez's weekly newsreels. Next, we were warmly embraced by a welcoming band of officials and their assistants, eager reporters...and at last, the familiar face of Estela Bravo."¹³¹ She became famous among Cuban citizens as she toured the nation and met with officials. An article in the *Miami Herald* contrasted Dane's different receptions in the United States and Cuba. Dane had violated U.S. restrictions on the travel of their citizens to Communist countries, risking governmental persecution on her return to the States. Meanwhile the Cuban People were celebrating her: "Miss Dane has been featured prominently by Cuban News media. She Was interviewed by the Cuba Communist Party newspaper Granma, appeared on a Cuban television program, "Music and Stars," and has been heard on Havana Radio broadcasts in Miami."¹³² Dane was a star within Cuba while being targeted by the United States government. While in Cuba, Dane kept up her tradition of using the stage to speak out against American policies and provide social commentary on the lives of the American people. For her Cuban audience, Dane sang a mixture of folk, blues, and union songs sprinkled with social commentary about the ongoing social movements in the United States.¹³³

¹³¹ Barbara Dane, *This Bell Still Rings*, 298.

¹³² Don Bohning, "Cuban Trip Sounds Bad For Singer," *The Miami Herald*, August 6, 1966.

¹³³ Barbara Dane, *This Bell Still Rings*, 300-301.

While performing in Cuba, she also met with the country's cultural and political leaders to discuss the politics of the day. She even met with Prime Minister of Cuba Fidel Castro days before returning to America. The two discussed various movements and the efforts of the American people to fight against the Cold War policies of the U.S. government. Dane called attention to the suppression of the anti-war and civil rights movements by the U.S. Castro asked Dane for advice on an upcoming Organization of Latin American Solidarity Conference, asking her to provide references for a prominent African American leader to come and speak at the conference. Dane suggested that Castro invite SNCC leader Stokely Carmichael to Cuba.¹³⁴ Dane's tour thus provided a gateway for the future travels of figures such as Carmichael.

Along with other prominent SNCC leaders, Carmichael did eventually travel to Cuba at Castro's invitation. Alongside representatives from Latin American nations, Carmichael discussed revolutionary causes and discussed SNCC's political vision.¹³⁵ Through her Cuba tour, Dane had helped to create an international platform for SNCC, one that enabled its leaders to speak out against the hypocrisy of a Cold War narrative that championed freedom and democracy while suppressing the votes of African Americans. While in Cuba, Dane protested against American intervention in Vietnam. According to Paul Kidd a journalists for *The Ottawa Citizen*, Dane participated in order to show support for the North Vietnamese against the American intervention. Speakers at the protest vowed to dispatch Cuban soldiers to Vietnam to fight alongside the Viet Cong, and Dane performed. Kidd writes: "The Rally Ended to the lyrics of a Detroit – born, 39

¹³⁴ Barbara Dane, *This Bell Still Rings*, 308-309.

¹³⁵ Julius Lester, "Black Revolution Is Real": Stokely in Cuba," *The Movement* 3, No.9 (September, 1967): 1.

– year old self – styled ‘protest singer’ named Barbara Dane who strummed a guitar, and protested. Later in an interview, Miss Dane declared that Cuba and North Vietnam both faced the same threat from a common force... the U.S. Military machine."¹³⁶

Dane used her trip to Cuba to show solidarity with the Cubans and empathy with their anger against the US government. The trip was not just a one-off occurrence. Throughout the 1960s, she appeared at protests, rallies, and conferences sponsored by the Cuban government to promote their ideals and to protest against U.S. policies. In July 1967, Haydée Santamaía enlisted Dane to help contact potential U.S. attendees for the Encuentro de La Canción Protesta, which was attempting to build links with like-minded artists, writers, and other cultural figures throughout Latin America and the Caribbean to develop an international awareness of the value of Latin American culture. The group was also attempting to place Cuba at the center of Latin American cultural renaissance.¹³⁷ Dane was given the role of a cultural ambassador and recruiter for tours and concerts within Cuba, attempting to bring American leftist culture to the island. A year later, Dane was invited back to Cuba to attend the Cultural Congress of Havana, which brought together intellectuals from every field, representing seventy countries worldwide, in order to bring together the revolutionary art forms of the period.¹³⁸ Dane became a cultural representative of Cuba while trying to bring elements of American culture back to Cuba at a time of Cold War tension. Dane was reshaping and establishing cultural friendships

¹³⁶ Paul Kidd, "Havana, Hanoi Close," *The Ottawa Citizen*, September 21, 1966.

¹³⁷ Barbara Dane, *This Bell Still Rings*, 319.

¹³⁸ *Ibid*, 329.

between Cuba and the United States and attempting to connect the left movements in the two countries.

While traveling back and forth between Cuba and the United States, Dane was still actively participating in the Anti-War movement. In 1968, Anti-War and civil rights activists Rennie Davis and Tom Hayden established an anti-war organization called Support Our Soldiers. The new organization established coffeehouses near military installments as a means to provide a platform for resistance within the G.I. Movement. Alongside Jane Fonda, Howard Levy, Mark Lane, Florynce Kennedy, and Donald Duncan, Dane was asked to perform at the coffeehouses.¹³⁹ Dane again provided the songs to a growing movement that was trying to disrupt the status quo. However, unlike her earlier performances, her music now would be heard by the troops who were risking their lives in support of American imperialism. According to Donald Janson, Dane's performances of anti-war songs such as the "Ballad of Richard Campos" and Bob Dylan's "Masters of War" drew large applause at the UFO coffeehouse in Columbia, South Carolina. The success of such coffeehouses and the performances of folksingers like Dane, prompted investigations by both the Army and the FBI. Due to the Coffeehouse being independently owned and operated, it could provide a space of resistance to the G.I.'s without governmental interference.¹⁴⁰ Dane's coffeehouse performances was promoted through an extensive network of New Left student magazines and journals. These publications provided dates for her concerts and other protests being organized by groups like the Students for a Democratic Society and The Mobilization Committee to

¹³⁹ Barbara Dane, *This Bell Still Rings*, 337.

¹⁴⁰ Donald Janson, "Coffeehouses Open Near Bases to Quicken Dissent," *San Antonio Express*, August 12, 1968.

End the War in Vietnam. During this same period, Dane was also organizing alongside the Youth International Party (Yippies) leaders who were preparing a mass protest at the 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago. According to a transcript from the political trial of the Chicago Seven, Dane was present at a meeting alongside Abbie Hoffman, Jerry Rubin, Ed Benson and Irwin Silber to discuss the planning of their proposed Yippie! Convention in Chicago. The convention was imagined as a way to counterbalance the perceived evil and fascist nature of the Democratic convention, to protest the Vietnam war and to use free love and other peaceful attributes to oppose the warlike policies of both political parties.¹⁴¹ Dane dialogued with activists, discussing future protests and strategies of resistance.

As she helped to organize Anti-War protests, Dane began writing for the many student papers of the period. Her topics ranged from U.S.-Cuban relations to the need for youth activism. Dane employed her stories from Cuba to inspire activists working for change in the US, writing that "The Revolution itself has no end... That Daily Joy of Struggle is the real culture of Cuba today."¹⁴² Dane viewed Cuban culture as a source of inspiration for the anti-war movement within the United States. In her writing, Dane warned that American society's capitalistic values were a pitfall for activism and that the youth needed to give up the comforts of affluence in order to help move revolutionary movements forward.

¹⁴¹ Mike Gold, "Exclusive: Conspiracy Trial What Really Happened," *O.Z.* 26, (February/March, 1970): 41.

¹⁴² Barbara Dane, "We Want a Nation of Poets," (*SDS*) *Caw!*, no. 4 (January, 1969): 4.

During this period, Dane also began to write the *Vietnam Songbook* alongside her partner, Irwin Silber. The intention of the book, in Danes's words, "is designed as an act of solidarity, a testament of friendship, between men and women of the United States of America who oppose and work against the criminal policies of their government and their comrades of Vietnam both north and south."¹⁴³ The songbook compiled protest songs from all over the world, including from the United States, Cuba, Italy, Japan, and songs from both North and South Vietnam, attempting to show the transnational dimensions of the anti-war movement and the global call for the United States to pull out of Vietnam. In compiling the songbook, Dane translated international protest songs, providing the reader with both the untranslated and translated versions. In addition, she wrote the musical composition of each song, providing the notes and instruments needed for the songs to be performed at American protests. The book openly challenged U.S. war policies. It included songs by Phil Ochs, Tom Paxton, Nina Simone, active-duty G.I.'s, and six songs from North Vietnam. The songbook would eventually sell fifteen thousand copies worldwide.¹⁴⁴ Dane and Silber saw it as a way to give activists a voice and to provide solid source material to anti-war protestors across the globe. The inclusion of songs by both Northern Vietnamese and active-duty G.I.'s was meant to highlight those members of the movement who were often overlooked by the undrafted youth who were protesting on college campuses. Dane was able to get *The Vietnam Songbook* into the hands of the Vietnamese representatives. The cultural leaders of Northern Vietnam celebrated Dane's contribution to the movement, and Pham Tuyen wrote a song in response to the book

¹⁴³ Barbara Dane, and Irwin Silber, *The Vietnam Songbook* (New York: The Guardian, 1969), 7.

¹⁴⁴ Ronald D. Cohen, *Rainbow Quest*, 267

titled "Play Your Guitars in Washington, American Friends."¹⁴⁵ Dane's book became an international source for the Anti-war movement.

While working together on the songbook, Dane and Silber formulated their next attempt to give a voice to the unheard activists and folk singers of the period. They created a record label called Paredon Records that would be devoted to circulating revolutionary music from across the globe, including songs written by Anti-war soldiers and songs about other international causes.¹⁴⁶ News of the company's introduction was sent to folk singers and activists across the globe, establishing the company as a means for such singers to be heard within mainstream musical culture. In their description of the label, Dane and Silber wrote, "Paredon Records exists because people's movements all around the world need to communicate and to define themselves free of the cultural manipulation and economic control of the system's media."¹⁴⁷ The company took a leftist approach to music production, allowing for a free-flowing stream of progressive music within the movement and recognizing musicians who could not gain a foothold in creating a record due to their party affiliations and revolutionary ties. In a letter sent to Anne Romaine, a folksinger, civil rights activist, and co-founder of the Southern Folk Culture Revival Project, Dane asked her to contribute the first two projects of the company, the first being a women's album that would reflect the recent rise of the feminist movement, and the second an album devoted to the folk songs of Appalachia focusing on the problems of mountain life ranging from poverty, racism, and lack of

¹⁴⁵ Barbara Dane, *This Bell Still Rings*, 341.

¹⁴⁶ Ronald D. Cohen, *Rainbow Quest*, 288.

¹⁴⁷ Barbara Dane "Paredon Records Exist Because," May 5, 1971. Flier.

educational resources within the region.¹⁴⁸ Both projects would draw awareness to social movements occurring around the United States and the second would address the plight of American citizens stricken with generational poverty in the Appalachian trail area. The two very different projects show the multiplicity of Dane's political commitments.

As Dane was creating Paredon records, she started to reestablish her connection with the Communist Party. The Communist Party of Italy (PCI) invited Dane to their Festa Dell'Unità (Festival of Unity), which specialized in drawing performers from all around the globe, including high-profile artists giving musical expression to political issues. The festival dubbed Dane the 'La voce dell'altra America' (the voice of the other America). The title reflected Dane's role as a representative of the "other America," due to her fervent support for global movements and her performances at protests. In 1970, Dane toured Spain, which had been under dictatorial rule since before the Second World War. The invitation came from the Worker's Commission, an anti-Franco oppositional group who carried out protests and public dissent against the Dictatorship of Francisco Franco. The group hoped Dane could deliver moral support and information to the freedom fighters of the country. While there, Dane toured and performed throughout Madrid, Barcelona, and País Vasco and joined up with antiwar demonstrations, where she performed protest songs.¹⁴⁹

After returning from Spain, Dane helped to create the FTA! show, another group whose purpose was to end the war and bring attention to social justice issues. Dane joined the FTA! Show after a meeting with Jane Fonda and Lou Wolf to help create a G.I.

¹⁴⁸ Barbara Dane, *Barbara Dane to Anne Romaine, May 5, 1971*. Letter.

¹⁴⁹ Barbara Dane, *This Bell Still Rings*, 350-351.

movement in the Philippines. Wolf asked Dane and Fonda to provide support to the United States military bases in the Philippines in order to foster the growing G.I. movement among soldiers stationed there. The project was funded by the U.S. Servicemen's Fund that had been launching Antiwar organizations within the military.¹⁵⁰ After Dane, Fonda, and Wolf met, Fonda began to use her connections within Hollywood to garner support for the new project.

The first task of the FTA! Show was to raise funding for the Winter Soldier Investigation. The goal of the investigation was to call attention to the war crimes committed by the United States military and the CIA while in Vietnam. The fundraiser, called Acting in Concert for Peace, included Dick Gregory, Donald Sutherland, Jane Fonda, David Crosby, and Graham Nash, as well as Phil Ochs, all singing and performing in front of audiences in an attempt to fund the investigation.¹⁵¹ This first concert was the pilot of the FTA! Show as it established the structure of the performances and acts that would be performed for the troops. According to *The New Journal*, a newspaper based in Wilmington, Delaware, the FTA! Show intended to cut into Bob Hope's market and present the soldiers with shows that they wanted to see: "The time has come for entertainers who take a different view on the war to reach the soldiers." The USSF would be making the Army fund the transportation, lodging and any other expenses for the performers during their tour of the bases and that show would include actors, comedians, cartoonists, and Folk singer Barbara Dane.¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ Barbara Dane, *This Bell Still Rings*, 356-357.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid*, 358.

¹⁵² "Jane Fonda Plans Hope-Less Tour of G.I. Bases," *The News Journal*, February 17, 1971.

Dane and The FTA! Show hoped to overtake the USO show to bring to the troops entertainers who opposed the war in part to convenience soldiers to join the ranks of the growing G.I. movement. Sarah King outlines the structure of the FTA: "The FTA show, the most extensive effort among entertainers to support antiwar G.I.'s, challenged the decades-long tradition of government-sanctioned, pro-war military entertainment embodied by the United Service Organizations (USO) and its most famous headliner, comedian Bob Hope. Both FTA's mission—to bring antiwar entertainment to active-duty G.I.'s—and the scope of its political critique magnified the impact of oppositional celebrity activism by entering the theater of military operations."¹⁵³ The show attempted to bring the movement to the front lines of the military machine by bringing support to the dissenters and activists who had been unfortunately drafted into the war and were then force-fed the pro-war comedy of the USO. Dane was the show's opening act, performing the FTA show theme song and providing music throughout the show's debut soundtracks and musical numbers.¹⁵⁴

But due to her commitment to direct action overseas, she was soon sidelined and given another task by the USSF. The USSF leadership agreed to send Dane to the Far East, sponsored by the Japanese peace organization Beheirin and in the Philippines by the Kabataang Makabayan.¹⁵⁵ Dane used her USSF trips to bring news and music to bases across Japan, giving soldiers news about the movement and its spread across military bases worldwide. According to an article titled "I am a GI Rebel" by "Jim" an alias used

¹⁵³ Sarah King, "The FTA Show: Jane Fonda, the G.I. Movement, Celebrity Activism in The Late Vietnam War," *Peace and Change* 46, no. 2 (2021): 120.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 125

¹⁵⁵ Barbara Dane, *This Bell Still Rings*, 359.

by a writer at the *Semper Fi* magazine to escape army persecution for his writing, Dane performed alongside her son Pablo Menendez in rented out labor halls near the military bases, performing songs of protests like 'I am a GI Rebel,' 'Insubordination' and 'Resistance Hymn.' After performing for two hours, Dane played recordings of dissident soldiers at the Alameda Naval Base who successfully stopped their ship from beginning another tour in Vietnam. The article concludes with Jim praising Dane: "Barbara is really a fantastic person and turned us on to a lot of the new ideas for movement progression...I feel all the G.I.'s who came in contact with her are able to see a little clearer how large a monster the military-industrial machine has become and how much it should be destroyed."¹⁵⁶ Dane was a celebrated figure within the G.I. movement as she persuaded some soldiers of the United States Army to take up their fight against the military machine.

Dane also toured Japanese bases, helping both Japanese and American activists kick off the country's anti-war movement. While in Okinawa, Dane joined local Quaker American activists in organizing a concert at a local high school to help build the movement among disaffected G.I.s. Dane performed at the concert, where she sang "Michael, Row Your Boat Ashore," creating a sense of solidarity among the students and the invited G.I.'s. After the concert, Dane met with audience members and discussed the antiwar activism underway at other military bases.¹⁵⁷ Dane created a sense of unity among the troops stationed in Japan, showing them the progress that other bases had made to disrupt the military machine and how they could help bring an end to the

¹⁵⁶ Jim, "I am A GI Rebel," *Semper Fi* 2, no. 16 (November 1971): 2-3.

¹⁵⁷ Barbara Dane, *This Bell Still Rings*, 365.

Vietnam War and the senseless destruction. Traveling from city to city and performing for the troops, Dane provided them with a support system as more GI's spoke out against the powers that had sent them to lose their lives on the front lines of the U.S. military intervention. Although the USSF sponsored Dane's trip, it did not mean troops remained unpunished for their dissident behavior. According to Doug, another writer for *Semper Fi* using an alias to hide stated that the United States military ramped up its response to the growing dissent within the U.S. bases where Dane and the FTA show had appeared. He wrote that a "G.I. was charged with giving a talk at the November 4 Barbara Dane Folk Festival," and discontent among the troops was reaching a point where the government felt compelled to intervene on bases where Dane performed.¹⁵⁸ Dane was igniting the movement, showing the power of the protest song, and pushing the troops to speak up.

Dane was recognized as an essential figure, and her contributions to the protest song genre grew in recognition as opposition to the war grew. In his 1971 article "Barbara Dane Revives Art of Protest Singing," journalist Michael Ross describes Dane as a true soul to the art of protest songs, stating, "You can't separate her vision from her music or hold her message at arms lengths. Many artists flirt with ideas, but Barbara Dane has passionate affairs with them...Miss Dane is a woman who sings about subjects that move her, a storyteller whose best stories are about people." He also points out the diversity of Dane's repertoire and how she draws on songs from the Labor, civil rights, and anti-war movements. Her commitment to singing songs to support people who have no voice never wavers.¹⁵⁹ Dane kept the art of the protest song alive for three decades, performing

¹⁵⁸ Doug, "Four G.I.'s Rushed back to States," *Semper Fi* 2, no. 17 (December 1971): 2.

¹⁵⁹ Michael Ross, "Barbara Dane Revives Art of Protest Singing," *The Los Angeles Times*, October 15, 1971.

her love for the people and her left-wing political ideology, and seen as a champion of society's underdogs. Her use of the protest songs unified the bases that Dane visited and pushed soldiers to speak out against the American war machine and join alongside her and the youth of American society to fight for an end to the war.

Dane carried out these ideals even at risks to her own safety. According to Dane, when she and her son Pablo arrived in the Philippines, they were "invited" by the immigration office to answer some questions on their business in the Philippines. According to some peers who were part of the Kabataang Makabayan, the invitation had been "A one-way helicopter trip over the China Sea." according to the Kabataang Makabayan meat, she was to be killed and dumped over the South Chinese Sea if she and Pablo accepted the invitation. Even though Dane recognized the danger, she remained committed to the tour, stating, "We had come for a specific purpose: to lend cultural support to the G.I.'s opposing the war and any allies who cared to work with them."¹⁶⁰ Dane's commitment to her activism meant that, at any moment, she was willing to give her life in support of the movement. This commitment pushed her as she took part in activism in Mississippi, Cuba, Spain, and now Asia.

Once Dane's tour with the USSF and the FTA! Show was over, she returned to America briefly and then immediately set off to Paris to perform at the Vietnamese Tet celebration as part of the Paris Peace Conference in the Mutualité Theatre. The event was attended by high-level Vietnamese officials, refugees, and ex-patriots as well as by French antiwar activists and other dissident vets from the American military. The

¹⁶⁰ Barbara Dane, *This Bell Still Rings*, 366-367.

conference was organized to condemn the U.S. intervention in Vietnam and show support towards the Viet Minh and the National Liberation Front who were struggling to end the war.¹⁶¹ After attending the Paris Peace Conference, Dane remained in Europe, where she performed at other left-leaning festivals and conferences. After performing at the Mutualite Theater, she attended the World Assembly for Peace and Independence of the Peoples of Indochina at the Palace of Versailles. Then she traveled to East Berlin to perform in the East Berlin Political Song Festival, performing the Folk and Blues Protest songs of the American Antiwar movement to the German Democratic Republic's Head of State Erich Honecker and several other Vietnamese dignitaries. However, Dane's European Protest Song tour was cut short as she contracted pneumonia and had to cancel her impending work and return to the United States for treatment.¹⁶² Dane had traveled to both the Far East and Europe with little rest, and poor living conditions while abroad had left her susceptible to contracting the disease. Dane had been willing to live in rugged environments in order to provide cultural and financial support to the foot soldiers of the antiwar movement. This was a risk she had been willing to take throughout her life as she placed her beliefs over her own health. Although this bout of pneumonia benched Dane from her European tour, she soon recovered and resumed her work in the United States, performing at a concert organized by the United Hellenic Front in New York's Manhattan Center that protested the brutal CIA-backed military regime in Greece. The event was attended by the future president of Greece Andreas Papandreu and its future culture minister Melina Mercouri.¹⁶³ The risks of sickness or possible death never held Dane

¹⁶¹ Barbara Dane, *This Bell Still Rings*, 371.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 372-373.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

back from her activism, as she always kept pushing through any pain to continue her revolutionary mission.

While continuing to perform on behalf of the antiwar movement, Dane also began working alongside the growing Feminist Movement. That movement gained momentum in the 1970s and the first National Women's Music Festival was held in 1974. Dane had been invited to perform in the Festival by Kristin Lems, who gathered some of the most famous women musicians to perform in feminist solidarity. At the festival, Dane created a set list around some of the prominent women songwriters of the time, performing songs from Puerto Rico, Italy, Vietnam, and America, including a song beloved by Fannie Lou Hamer, "Go Tell It on the Mountain." Each song represented a political belief of Dane and a memory of each of the movements she had participated in over her lifetime.¹⁶⁴ Dane's musical repertoire represented an international mix, as well, demonstrating her commitment to building solidarity between left and communist movements across nations. The festival, held from May 28 to June 2, combined performances with workshops led by singers, designed to teaching students how to create feminist protest songs. Dane led her concerts and workshops under the sponsorship of Sing Out magazines, teaching the students the inner workings of music production and the production of songbooks and song journals. In attendance were singers Margi Adams and Ella Jenkins and billed performances from Yoko Ono, Janis Ian, Roberta Flack, and Isis, who could not attend the concert due to scheduling conflicts and poor management by their promotor.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁴Barbara Dane, *This Bell Still Rings*, 378.

¹⁶⁵ "Women's Music Festival: No More 'Canaries'" *Fifth Estate* 9, no. 5 (Summer 1974): 12.

After performing at the National Women's Music Festival, Dane soon traveled to Northern Vietnam to begin her tour of the war-torn country. However, unlike many other Americans who had toured Vietnam in recent years, Dane was going to perform songs of solidarity and peace for the coming end of the Vietnam War. When arriving in Hanoi, Dane was received with open arms by the Vietnamese public as she toured the country with local singer-songwriters. Additionally, Dane used her tour as a way to confront the realities of the war and the bloodshed caused by the U.S. invasion, seeing the mini air raid shelters littered along the streets, and the blown-out hospitals. In Dane's words, "A doctor pled with us to let the world know about their many medical needs." Dane's tour began in Hanoi and traveled south on Highway 1 on her way to Quang Tri, the first liberated province of the war, stopping along the way at villages to sing and perform for people and to gather notes on the horrors of the war. Once she arrived in Quang Tri, Dane witnessed the atrocities that America carried out during the Vietnam War. She writes: "A Nurse guided me to the room where a young man of about twenty had just been brought in, his body burning up from the inside from a U.S. phosphorus mine he had hit while sweeping the area for the safety of others."¹⁶⁶ Dane had been one of the first U.S. citizens to return to Vietnam after the Americans had pulled out their troops the year before, touring the nation and perceiving the horror of the many war crimes that the U.S. military had launched on the nation in order to prevent the spread of Communism. This visit to Northern Vietnam was part of a long tradition of Dane's of visiting the many nations that opposed the Cold War policies of the United States. Along the way, she represented an American Left that stood against the militaristic war machine of its politicians.

¹⁶⁶ Barbara Dane, *This Bell Still Rings*, 379-381.

Saigon fell and the Northern Vietnamese declared victory on April 30, 1975. Two weeks later, Dane, alongside many other musicians, took to the streets and celebrated the end of the Vietnam War. Fifty-thousand people, including many veterans of the ten-year war, filled Sheep Meadow in New York's Central Park. The celebration hosted speeches and performances by Dane, Ossie Davies, Tom Paxton, Dave Dellinger, Richie Havens, Paul Simon, Odetta, the American Indian Movement Drummers, Harry Belafonte, the Deadly Nightshade, Phil Ochs, Pete Seeger, and Joan Baez. It also included representatives of veteran and labor groups, and Vietnamese and Cambodian Residents who were displaced during the war and immigrated to the United States to escape the war.¹⁶⁷ This celebration was a triumphant victory for Dane and other protest singers of the period as they saw the fruits of their labor. Their protest songs had helped bring an end to the war. This also marked the end of Dane's career as a daily political activist. She soon stepped away from politics and began to focus on herself and the needs of her family, moving past the activism of her youth and settling into a role of building Paredon records.

¹⁶⁷ Paul L. Montgomery, "End-of-War Rally Brings Out 50,000," *The New York Times*, May 12, 1975.

CONCLUSION

Although Dane's commitment to daily activism ended with the Vietnam War, her career left a resounding impact on the overlapping histories of the Folk Revival and the New Left. Dane embodied the activist life as she remained a part of many significant movements throughout the twentieth century and helped to contribute to the rebirth of the Folk and Blues genres, genres that were in danger of being lost as commercial music became dominant. Dane participated in the labor, civil rights, antiwar, feminist, and New Communism Movements of the twentieth century, taking part in those movements within the United States, but also bringing her message to Europe, Asia, and South America as she performed concerts, workshops, and speeches to garner support for the left. Along the way, she met a stream of famous people, from Bob Dylan, Fidel Castro, Fannie Lou Hamer, Langston Hughes, and countless other activists, actors, politicians, and folk singers who became her close comrades. Dane used her music to bring attention to social injustice. Dane is a forgotten voice of an embattled generation as she sang out against the American status quo and the Cold War politics of the day. Dane's unrelenting support for her beliefs serves as a model for future activists and musicians who like her, are unwilling to forgo their conscience for the commercial success of mainstream musical stardom. Her story shows that she was a cornerstone to both the New Left and the Folk Revival. Barbara Dane is “the other voice of America.”¹⁶⁸ She is the hero described by

¹⁶⁸ Barbara Dane, *This Bell Still Rings*, 350.

Bob Dylan and should not be forgotten from history for her contributions as a musician-activist.

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