

AIN'T GONNA LET NOBODY TURN ME AROUND:

JOAN BAEZ RAISES HER VOICE

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The Sixties: Take Thirteen**

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Shortly after Saigon fell on 30 August 1975 and the last American helicopter had lifted unceremoniously off the roof of the US Embassy, 100,000 people filled the Sheep Meadow in New York's Central Park for a 'War is Over' rally. Pete Seeger, Odetta and Joan Baez were among the performers. The event was organised by Phil Ochs, writer of 'There but for fortune,' perhaps the most compassionate protest song ever written. It was intended as a celebration of the end of America's controversial involvement in South-East Asia. Vietnam had galvanised American youth, had been both fuel for the protest movement and the glue that held it together. When the war 'ended', most of those who'd sung and spoken so eloquently against its injustices moved on.

One who didn't was Joan Baez. The singer had served two jail terms for 'aiding and abetting' draft resisters and had spent 12 days in Hanoi during Nixon's bombardment of the city in December 1972. Baez had accepted an invitation from the Committee for Solidarity with the American People and joined a small party that included an Episcopalian minister, a Maoist anti-war veteran and Columbia law professor, Telford Taylor, an ex-brigadier general and Nuremberg prosecutor. The Committee's aim was to maintain friendly relations with the Vietnamese people even as the United States continued to burn their villages. In addition to cameras and tape recorders and, in Baez's case, a guitar, the group of visitors also carried Christmas mail and gifts for US PoWs in Hanoi. On their third night in the city, 48 hours after the breakdown of the Paris peace talks, the first of Nixon's B52s dropped its payload. In the days that followed, an estimated 100,000 tons of bombs fell on Hanoi, according to a military official, 'the biggest aerial operation in the history of warfare'. ¹

When Baez returned to the United States – her pacifist philosophy unshaken - she spoke and wrote and sang about her experiences in North Vietnam. Unlike actress Jane Fonda, who famously posed beside North Vietnamese guns, Baez did not become a hate figure – in part because Americans were finally beginning to understand the futility of a far-away war that yielded only body bags. Perhaps surprisingly, she also undertook a good deal of work with the veterans whose lives had been torn apart by their experience in the paddy fields – 'after all, we paid for their trip over,' she pointed out, 'and they've paid for all the years in between'. ²

But, by 1979, she, too, was trying not to think about Vietnam:

Though the massacres in Cambodia were reported by the conscientious press, little protest was raised against them. The left wing was reluctant to make an issue of yet another disgrace being conducted by a 'revolutionary government'. The right wing didn't have much to say except for its usual 'I told you so'... I had not become involved... The exodus of boat people into the South China Sea had begun but was by no means at its peak. ³

Then two Vietnamese who had joined the exodus turned up at a study group at Baez's California home to give her a long description of human rights violations. 'Where, they asked, were all the Americans who cared so much about the Vietnamese people in the sixties?' ⁴ So she gathered researchers from all sides and none. Gradually, the horror stories were verified, and Baez wrote 'An Open Letter to the Socialist Republic of Vietnam'. The 81 signatories included few of the left, who turned her down, and the letter ran as a full-page ad in five major American newspapers. Fonda responded with a letter acknowledging 'some degree of repression in Vietnam' and - presumably unwittingly - gave credence to Baez's findings when she pondered, 'I don't know if we can expect the Vietnamese to turn free those millions of people overnight'. ⁵

The actress went on to say that, while she looked forward to 'sharing a dialogue' with the singer, she felt that 'such rhetoric only aligns you with the most narrow and negative elements in our country who continue to believe that Communism is worse than death'. ⁶ Fonda's friends from the left wondered aloud whether Baez was merely naïve or actually immoral, or whether she was an undercover CIA agent! Right-wing commentator William F Buckley welcomed her as 'a prodigal son' ⁷ while US presidential candidate Ronald Reagan praised her courageous stand and said how delighted he was that she'd finally seen the light. ⁸

The dispute – which crossed the Atlantic and featured on BBC TV's *Panorama* – led Baez to set up a human rights group, Humanitas International Human Rights Committee. It raised \$1.25m dollars in 10 weeks over Christmas '79 to help provide food and medicine for Cambodian refugees, whose plight was further publicised by the so-called 'March for Survival', when Baez, along with such figures as actress Liv Ullman and Tory MP Winston Churchill Junior, led a party of journalists to camps on the Thai-Cambodian border. In the meantime, her direct lobbying led President Carter to despatch the Seventh Fleet to rescue boat people from the South China Sea.

All that, of course, after the close even of Arthur Marwick's 'long' Sixties. But the episode goes to the heart of what preoccupied the world's youth during that decade and demonstrates the depth of Joan Baez's convictions and the

degree to which both those on the left – with whom her causes *coincidentally* aligned her – and those on the right, who'd condemned her as 'an outside agitator' and, of course, a Communist, misunderstood her.

Baez was no spring vacation revolutionary. Nor was she ever a rent-a-quote celebrity for this or that cause. She has never lent her name to any party political initiative, though she has at various times supported or engaged the help of like-minded elected officials who were sympathetic to whatever she happened to be working on. To understand how she came to be seen as America's Joan of Arc, carrying a guitar rather than a lance into nonviolent battle, it is necessary to look briefly at her background.

Both her grandfathers were ministers and both her parents became Quakers. Her father had briefly considered a ministry of his own but instead went off to study first maths and then physics. His PhD completed, Albert Baez resisted the blandishments of Los Alamos and took up a post as a research physicist at Cornell. Soon promoted to head up the project, he was despatched for a three-week cruise aboard the aircraft carrier *Coral Sea*. In her memoir, *And a Voice to Sing With*, Baez wrote that exactly what he was doing remains classified, but it involved fighter planes.

Discomfited, Dr Baez began to wonder whether there was any such thing as 'defence', if it wasn't all essentially 'offence'. Years later he wrote that, 'as I lay in my bunk... for the first time in my life I began pondering in earnest the effectiveness of military force in achieving peace'.⁹ His wife, Joan Senior, who had been educated by Quakers, suggested they go to a Quaker Meeting and the couple took their three daughters. Joan, the middle one and around eight years old, hated it but attended *en famille* until she moved out of the house at 18. (She returned to Meeting in her forties, during 'one of those tedious midlife crises', and has been attending irregularly ever since.)¹⁰

The Baez family had joined one of America's central traditions of dissent. Amid the weekly silences, Dr Baez became a pacifist and quit Cornell for a teaching job at the University of Redlands in California. Then, in 1951, he joined UNESCO and the family relocated again, this time to Baghdad, where Dr Baez would teach and supervise the construction of a physics lab at the city's university. Ten-year-old Joan spent much of the year at home sick but the period made a lasting impression on her:

Perhaps that was where my passion for social justice was born... I saw animals beaten to death, people rooting for food in our family garbage pails, and legless children dragging themselves along the streets on cardboard, covered with flies feasting on open sores, begging for money.¹¹

At the end of their allotted year in Iraq, the family returned to pick up the threads of their lives in Redlands and, at school, young Joan had her first lessons in racial discrimination. With her Mexican name and colouring, the 'white' kids wanted little to do with her. The Mexicans shunned her because she was unable to speak Spanish. Meanwhile, in a childlike way she had begun to express her feelings about peace and social justice and many parents warned their children not to associate with her.

Baez moved on to Palo Alto High School, where her Mexican blood was less of a problem. She made friends through the American Friends Service Committee, the social action wing of the Quakers, and joined 300 other members at a conference on world issues. In 1956, a young preacher of whom the world had yet to hear came to talk at her school.

He talked specifically about boycotting busses and walking to freedom in the South, and about organising a non-violent revolution. When he finished his speech, I was on my feet cheering and crying: [Dr Martin Luther] King was giving a shape and name to my passionate but ill-articulated beliefs.¹²

The following year, a man named Ira Sandperl came to address First Day School, which was what Quaker children attended while their parents kept silence. Baez remembers that he read to them from Tolstoy, Huxley and the Bible, and talked about someone called Mahatma Gandhi.

Like Gandhi, he felt that the most important tool of the twentieth century was nonviolence. Gandhi had taken the concept of Western pacifism, which is basically personal, and extended it into a political force, insisting that we stand up to conflict and fight against evil, but do so with weapons of nonviolence. I had heard the Quakers argue that the ends did not justify the means. Now I was hearing that the means would determine the ends. It made sense to me, huge and ultimate sense.¹³

The following year, Joan Baez refused to leave school during a 'duck and cover' exercise:

...three bells would ring in succession and we would quietly get up from our seats and calmly find our ways home... and sit in our cellars and pretend we were surviving an atomic blast... I went home and hunted through my father's physics books to confirm what I already knew – that the time it took for a missile to get from Moscow to Paly High was not enough time to call our parents and walk home. I decided to stay in school as a protest against misleading propaganda.¹⁴

Baez 's first act of civil disobedience put her on the front page of the local newspaper and caused a flood of letters warning that Palo Alto High School was harbouring Communist infiltrators.

In '58, the Baez family went back East, this time to the Boston area. Dr Baez had accepted a teaching post at MIT and his daughter enrolled – nominally – at Boston University's School of Fine Arts and Drama. By that time, Joan Baez was already playing and singing, like so many people before and since, finding the guitar a route to friendship. Harry Belafonte had been an early inspiration, and her aunt had taken her to see Pete Seeger. Seeger had risked jail rather than name names for Senator McCarthy and, blacklisted, performed where he could, mostly at liberal colleges. It was during this period, 1956-7, that – inspired by Mikhail Sholokhov's novel, *And Quiet Flows the Don* – he'd written what is perhaps his most enduring and oft-recorded song, 'Where have all the flowers gone?'

Seeger, from a patrician family with a distinguished musical pedigree, had been part of The Almanac Singers and The Weavers; both singing groups had included Woody Guthrie. High-minded, idealistic (Guthrie was a womanising drunkard), Seeger set out in the late Fifties to revive interest in American folk music 'to lead the younger generation astray'.¹⁵ Song alone couldn't overthrow a government, Seeger believed, but it could *inspire* the people to try to do so.

Folk music first dominated the airways in 1956, when The Kingston Trio had a hit with 'Tom Dooley'. As Joan and her family drove cross-country to their new home, the song could be heard on station after station. By the time Dr Baez took his family for an evening at a Harvard Square coffee house named Tulla's Coffee Grinder, folk music in its broadest sense was a campus obsession.

My father saw young minds interlocked in Socratic dialogues, expanding their horizons of knowledge and understanding, or simply reading books and playing chess. I saw the guy under the tiny orange lamp, leaning over his classical guitar... playing 'Plaisir d'amour'. I was entranced.¹⁶

Soon Baez was a regular at another watering hole, playing tentatively at Club 47 for 10 dollars a night. All thoughts of college went out the window. In 1959, she recorded an album with two other singers and went to Chicago to sing at the Gate of Horn. There she met two of the biggest names around: Bob Gibson, who invited her to perform a guest spot with him at the forthcoming Newport Folk Festival, and Odetta, whose promise to look after her there persuaded her parents that it was safe for their 18-year-old daughter to attend.

Two songs at Newport were all it took to propel Baez into musical history. Columbia Records offered her whatever she wanted to sign with them but she chose Vanguard, a small independent run by Maynard Solomon, a Beethoven scholar. Her first record was released in late 1960 and spent 140 weeks in the *Billboard* charts. By that time, she'd rejected the advances of Albert Grossman, the man who would shape the careers of Bob Dylan, Peter Paul and Mary and Janis Joplin, and had instead shaken hands with Manny Greenhill, a Marxist who worked out of Boston and looked after many of the old bluesmen. Coca-Cola offered her \$50,000 for an ad: she dismissed it, telling her new manager that she didn't even drink the stuff. When *Time* Magazine decided it could no longer postpone a feature on folk song and singers, it was Joan Baez they put on the cover.¹⁷ 'I felt like death and was depicted accurately,' she recalled years later of the portrait.¹⁸

Already, the Baez voice had been raised if not exactly in protest but in aid of a good cause. In 1960, the singer appeared alongside Seeger at a SANE rally (for once the inspiration for the Committee for a SANE Nuclear Policy had come from Britain and the Aldermaston marches). The folk consciousness of the 1930s had been all of a piece with the anti-fascist groundswell that saw young Americans supporting the fight against Franco. Almost inevitably, that meant that, like Seeger, folk music's supporters fell victim to the anti-Communist witch-hunts of the Cold War era. But as the children born during the Second World War and after came of age, folk music was discovered anew, dusted off for use in protest against all aspects of the so-called military industrial complex. Baez was frequently quoted as having said that she sang 'to troubled intellectuals with the Bomb on their minds'.¹⁹

Reflecting on her burgeoning social action years later, she said that, after SANE, 'one thing led to another, and I got involved in the civil rights movement.'²⁰ Though she rationed her live appearances, in the summer of 1962, Baez embarked on the first of three concert tours to Southern campuses. Two years before the Civil Rights Act, she insisted that audiences be racially integrated. In fact, most blacks had not yet heard of her, and local NAACP volunteers were drafted in to fill the seats. Two live albums derive from the dates and *In Concert/Part Two* includes 'We shall overcome', recorded at Miles College, Alabama on the first day of police chief Bull Connor's mass arrests in Birmingham.

'I was scared that day and, for once, I had reason to be,' Baez remembered thirty years later.²⁰ She had arrived in the city a few days earlier and stayed with Martin Luther King and his entourage at the only motel that welcomed blacks *and* whites. King's strategy was mass civil disobedience to force desegregation of public facilities, a confrontation that was likely to fill the city's

jails. On the Sunday, Baez went to a Baptist church where, following a sermon entitled 'Singing at midnight', various worshippers rose to testify and sing. Unexpectedly, the preacher introduced 'a friend of us all, come down from the North to be with us in our struggle'.²² Baez swallowed hard, feeling she had little right to sing out here, among people who daily lived the struggle, and walked to the pulpit, where she sang 'Let us break bread together,' a spiritual familiar to her from old Marian Anderson records to which she and her mother had often listened. The next day she joined black children at another church and, when it came time to leave, held hands with some teenagers whose skin was no darker than her own and walked out past ranks of billy club-swinging policemen. She headed for Miles College. Those who assembled for her concert that night were the first whites to venture on to its campus. The next day, King was arrested and spent a week in jail, much to the embarrassment of Attorney General Robert Kennedy. Bull Connor brought out the hoses and the dogs and the motel in which Baez and King had stayed was soon bombed.²³

The two *In Concert* collections, statements in themselves, comprise mostly traditional folk songs but they include two protest songs: 'What have they done to the rain?', Malvina Reynolds' deceptively gentle anti-nuclear song, and Bob Dylan's powerful and ironic 'With God on our side'. It was Baez's first of many recordings of his songs and it is no exaggeration to say that her patronage – an old-fashioned word but one which describes well her role in his early career – was a key factor in Dylan's acceptance. For not only did she sing his songs: she also invited him to share her concert platforms. His appearance was not always welcome but the exposure had a catalytic effect on the folk-protest movement.

The two appeared together at an event that was a watershed in black politics: the March on Washington on 28 August 1963.

When I went on stage to sing... my knees were knocking. I distinctly remember the sound they were making, not to mention my heart. I was so young and it was such a huge crowd, 250,000 people! When Martin Luther King Junior began speaking, he started off using notes, but then he abandoned them and took flight. That's the part everyone remembers. It was King at his best, and I had seen him talk many times. As I understand it, his 'I have a dream' speech was as spontaneous as it sounded.²⁴

Within a month, four black children were killed when a Birmingham church was bombed, an atrocity described in 'Birmingham Sunday', a chilling song of folk-like simplicity written for Baez by her brother-in-law, the late Richard Farina.²⁵

Two years later, the singer's involvement with the civil rights movement brought her back to Alabama, to the state capital Montgomery, to join the march from Selma in support of black voting rights.²⁶ The following year, 1966, she accompanied King to Grenada, Mississippi, where whites were trying to stop 160 black children from taking up their places at a newly integrated school. Klansmen lined the route and Baez was prevented from entering the school on the grounds that she was neither a parent nor a student. That evening, television news showed black children being denied their rightful education.²⁷

Increasing musical success and, therefore, profile enabled Baez to use her celebrity in areas where she thought she could do some good. In April 1962, she informed the Internal Revenue Service that she would not be 'volunteering' the 60% of her income tax which went toward military expenditure. The letter, the text of which was released to the press, stated:

We spend billions of dollars a year on weapons which scientists, politicians, military men and even presidents all agree must never be used. That is impractical. That is not security. That is stupidity. People are starving to death in some places of the world. They look to this country with all its wealth and power. They look at our national budget...²⁸

The *New York Times* noted that 'Miss Baez is one of the highest paid folk singers now performing in the country'.²⁹ Four years later, in April 1966, Baez' name was the first of 350 listed in an advertisement by the Committee for Nonviolent Action. It declared that none of the undersigned would pay that percentage of income tax which was earmarked for military purposes. In response, the IRS released a statement declaring that 'in fairness to the millions of taxpayers who do fulfil their obligations' it would make efforts to collect the taxes in other ways.³⁰

In an open letter published in August 1968 in the journal *Jazz & Pop*, Baez urged her fellow musicians to join the boycott. 'Nobody in his right mind should volunteer tax money, 82% of which goes to build weapons of death'.³¹

By this time, Baez was withholding all her income tax, having discovered, for example, that roads were formally part of the nation's defence system. However, she believed everyone was 'morally obligated' to pay toward those things which were of genuine benefit and her way of doing this, she pointed out, was to give charity concerts. In 1974, in a letter addressed to 'Dear Friends at the IRS', she recapped her position:

You've all seen the picture burning Kim, you all know of mothers here in the USA whose sons came home from the jungle in plastic bags. What may still be unclear to you is why, since 1968, I have refused to

pay *any* of my federal income tax. There are two main reasons why I feel my action is a just one.

Firstly, there is the general corruption at government levels to which I have consistently objected, and which is now only becoming obvious for the first time to everyone in the world. A more obscured and specific example: I don't feel it decent to help to finance a government which supports a military junta in Chile, recognising the new dictatorship immediately as it is executing, imprisoning, and torturing people en masse...

Secondly, I am not trying to exempt myself from responsibility to my fellow beings. For the last two and a half years, every concert I've given in the United States, with the exception of three or four, has been a benefit for groups and organisations which work for the betterment of the human condition. I feel we are morally obligated to tax ourselves in a world where there is such blatantly unfair distribution of wealth.³²

She said the IRS was welcome to come and discuss the issue over a coffee. The money was always collected eventually, but Baez made life difficult by keeping small amounts in banks scattered around the country, so the preferred method of collection was to show up at concert halls with an empty suitcase. Nevertheless, Baez made a very public point and acted in a way that was perfectly consistent with her beliefs. Civil disobedience on a grand scale.

By the mid-Sixties, youth had found its voice, and raised it most notably on the nation's campuses. The Free Speech Movement challenged the authority of the universities, and the University of California, with its links to business and the military, was perhaps more authoritarian than most. In 1964, students returning to Berkeley after the summer were told that they could not set up tables along Telegraph Avenue, one of the campus' main arteries, to promote 'off-campus' activities. Student Mario Savio, who'd spent the summer helping civil rights workers in Mississippi, recognised 'another phase of the same struggle... In Mississippi, an autocratic and powerful minority rules, through organised violence, to suppress the vast, virtually powerless minority. In California, the privileged minority manipulates the universal bureaucracy to suppress the students' political expression'.³³

Berkeley's activist tradition in fact dates back to the late 1950s, when there were vigils in protest against the death penalty and against the House Un-American Activities Committee. By 1963, civil rights had become a campus issue and, in 1964, the candidacy of Barry Goldwater and President Johnson's increasing involvement in South-East Asia further galvanised students. The university administrators' attempts to curb activism met with further protests. Names were taken and a group of protesters suspended. But the students remained undeterred and the Free Speech Movement was born.

When police were called to a rally, several hundred students simply sat down around the squad cars, so preventing arrests. The night passed in speeches and song, and Joan Baez was summoned from her home in nearby Carmel. After some thirty hours, Berkeley's regents agreed to meet the activists: the university would examine the free speech issue and not press charges. But the promise was reneged upon and the protests renewed. At their height, the students again called on Baez, who suggested they occupy Sproul Hall, Berkeley's administrative building. She told them:

We're going to go in there now and we're going to sit down and we're not going to move until they return us our rights. But when you go in there, go with love in your hearts. ³⁴

As she sang 'Blowin' in the wind', around a thousand students filed in to the Hall. There they held seminars amongst themselves, and Baez and her mentor, Ira Sandperl, talked to them about civil disobedience. The pair planned to be arrested along with the students but, after many hours, there was still no sign of the police and so, at 2.30 am, they left. At which point the police moved in and, in what is said to have been the largest mass-arrest in the US since Japanese citizens were detained following Pearl Harbour, 814 students were taken in, some of them resisting, some not.

The Free Speech Movement was midwife to the anti-war movement, which gained momentum after Johnson's election in 1964. Prior to Kennedy's death, Baez had agreed, somewhat reluctantly, to sing at a gala evening for the President. Scarcely was Kennedy cold when the singer received a telegram from the Johnson for President Committee saying that the show would go on, only now it would be for Lyndon Johnson, 'just as the late beloved President Kennedy would have wanted it to be'. ³⁵ Baez debated pulling out but decided that doing so would close too many doors and so contented herself with a refusal to join the line-up singing the national anthem. At the concert, held – ironically – at Washington's National Guard Armory, she dedicated a song to Jacqueline Kennedy,

'a bright ember of our recent past'... I started out with something diplomatic about his [Johnson's] leadership, told him that he must listen to the youth, went straight for the jugular and voiced the people's desire to stay out of a war in South-East Asia, and then sang 'The times they are a-changin'. There was tangible electricity in the room when I sang the words. There was tumultuous applause. A nerve had been struck. Perhaps it was revulsion on the part of the younger people at the cavalcade of tinsel and bad taste which had preceded me, but I got the only encore of the evening and went back to sing 'Blowin' in the wind'... ³⁶

Open to charges of naïveté and, by her own admission, still somewhat inarticulate when it came to putting in to words what she really felt, Baez knew that she now needed to do more than just sing out, that she should learn about the application of nonviolent direct action and the philosophy that underpinned it. She asked Sandperl to tutor her more formally and, out of their first discussions, came a proposal to set up a school, the Institute for the Study of Nonviolence where, for a minimal fee, people of all ages could come to learn from scholars and activists.

Baez bought a disused schoolhouse and set to work, but the school's activities were soon curtailed. Local residents claimed the Institute was 'detrimental to the peace, morals or general welfare of Monterey County' and that some of its students even wore beards! Baez' presence at the property on weekends, when neighbours wished to entertain guests, was particularly offensive. Besides, property values might plummet.³⁷

There was a court hearing and Baez won the day. The Institute resumed its programme and the singer attended regularly for the first four years, when teachers included members of the King campaign.

I read the assigned books, but most of my learning came from listening and discussing... I continued touring, advertising the Institute while on tour... I was giving only about twenty concerts a year but was not, as some people assumed, trying to conserve myself for the future. I just found that life on the road was physically and spiritually unhealthy... Most of the money I earned I gave away. Just about any request that came in, if remotely connected with nonviolence, would be honoured with a cheque... Many of the concerts I gave were benefits, for cooperative nursery schools, Quaker Meetings, peace groups. The record royalties poured in steadily, so there was not much limit on funds, and there was no limit on how much I would give away.³⁸

Thus, Baez's life became all of a piece, the music inseparable from her social concerns as she an increasingly visible symbol of dissent against the status quo at home and abroad. In May '65 she came to London to lead a march in support of demands for a break with America's policy on Vietnam³⁹ and, in August, appeared at a commemoration of the twentieth anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima. The following year, in addition to joining King in Mississippi, she lead an Easter Sunday anti-war march in West Germany, gave a benefit concert in support of Cesar Chavez and striking farm workers in California and participated in a Christmas vigil at San Quentin urging that death sentences on 64 prisoners be commuted.

Washington now took a great interest in her activities and, when she toured Japan in 1967, the CIA apparently instructed her interpreter to mistranslate

her political remarks.⁴⁰ She returned to the US to find that the Daughters of the American Revolution, outraged by her anti-war activities, had denied her permission to use their Constitution Hall in Washington DC for a concert. The first person to be banned since Marian Anderson in 1939, Baez proceeded to give a free concert at the base of the Washington Monument, which the DAR tried unsuccessfully to stop. For once, the public largely supported Baez.⁴¹

The year gave way to the organisation of anti-war demonstrations and concerts to benefit Resistance, an organisation founded to promote resistance to the draft. On the first day of Stop the Draft Week in October '67, Baez was arrested for blocking the entrance to the Armed Forces Induction Center in Oakland, California. She was sentenced to 10 days in Santa Rita Rehabilitation Center during which time she was visited by King and Andrew Young. She described the stay as 'short but informative'.⁴² In a similar act of civil disobedience at the Center in December, Baez was again arrested, along with her mother, Joan Senior. This time she was given ninety days, half of them suspended, and spent her 27th birthday in jail. The European Exchange System, the military's merchandising arm, now banned her records.⁴³

At much the same time as Baez was returning to civilian life, David Harris, was reporting to his draft board to refuse induction. Harris, 22, had resigned the presidency of the Stamford student body in order to devote himself full-time to organising against the draft. A co-founder of Resistance, he was thus one of the organisers of the protests which had led to Baez's arrests. A cutting edge-movement, the Resistance goal was to confront the government directly and promote the idea that to go to jail on a point of principle was an act of bravery. Draftees reported to the draft board but stated their refusal to serve, a move that led to trial and, inevitably, jail.

Harris was indicted by a grand jury and, awaiting trial, embarked on a campus speaking tour with Baez, raising funds for Resistance in what became a public courtship. The couple married in March 1968, in what commentators dubbed 'the political marriage of the century'. Baez and her two sisters had funded and featured in a nationwide poster campaign urging that 'girls say yes to boys who say no'. The slogan had infuriated the burgeoning women's movement but Baez practised what she preached.

Harris was finally arrested in July 1969, the day Apollo 11 blasted off en route to the moon. The sheriffs who drove up to the commune where the couple was living were offered coffee and fresh bread, which they declined, but allowed Harris to say his farewells before being handcuffed. The Feds didn't see his friends place a 'resist the draft' sticker on the squad car's back bumper. He was sentenced to three years, and spent the time inside organising hunger strikes. By that time Baez was pregnant, and still giving

concerts for Resistance. At one, thirty young men turned their draft cards in to her: she refused them, recommending the boys first talk the decision through with a counsellor. ⁴⁴

The marriage scarcely survived Harris's release from prison on parole in March 1971, though common cause still brought them together. ⁴⁵ However, a newly confident Joan Baez emerged from this period: where once she had allowed her actions to speak louder than her words, she was now an eloquent speaker able to engage in sophisticated political dialogue. Concert audiences who'd paid to hear her sing were sometimes restive in the face of endless raps. Musically, she'd recorded few overt protest songs and had moved from folk through folk rock to soft country, with two albums that were 'presents' to Harris, a country music fan.

She finally came out as a songwriter in the 1970, with two highly political albums: *Come from the Shadows* (1971), the cover of which showed an elderly couple giving the victory salute as they are bundled into a paddy wagon, included 'To Bobby', which asked Dylan to rejoin the battle, and the harrowing 'Song of Bangladesh'. *Where Are You Now, My Son?* (1973) featured a side-long, mostly spoken word tribute to the victims of Nixon's Christmas bombardment which drew heavily on the 15 hours of tape recordings Baez had brought back from Hanoi. The singer – who described the album as 'my prayer of thanks for being alive' ⁴⁶ - peered out from the cover, shell-shocked in grainy black and white. Needless to say, the record was not a commercial success, though *Where Are You Now, My Son?* is surely one of the more extraordinary artefacts from the anti-war movement.

Baez followed it with a record sung entirely in Spanish: *Gracias a la Vida!* was recorded out of solidarity with the Chilean people, following the coup of September 1973 in which Nixon and Kissinger tacitly helped General Pinochet overthrow President Allende. In essence, the album was no less political than its predecessor but the apolitical nature of much of the material, its atmospheric and upbeat sound, made it highly approachable and ensured that it was not consigned to oblivion. ⁴⁷

In addition to her work against the war effort, Baez spent much of the early 1970s working with Amnesty International, fundraising and setting up a network of West Coast groups. She also served on the organisation's National Advisory Board (and in 1986, joined the so-called Conspiracy of Hope 25th anniversary tour). ⁴⁸ In the second half of the decade, she came to Britain and Ireland at the request of the Peace People, appearing at rallies, singing at concerts. With Franco finally dead, she accepted an invitation to tour Spain and, on live television, dedicated the still-banned 'We shall not be moved' to La Pasionara. She paid a clandestine visit Andrei Sakharov and other

dissidents in the Soviet Union and dodged bombs and threats of bombs in Latin America. As Thatcher and Reagan talked breathlessly of new weapons systems, she visited Greenham Common and found a new audience among Europe's Green movement. Not surprisingly, when Bob Geldof made activism fashionable again in the mid-Eighties, she was chosen to open America's Live Aid proceedings. She came a visit to Poland and a tour of Czechoslovakia, which Vaclav Havel later claimed was one of the key events which helped shape the so-called Velvet Revolution:

Our revolution had a number of steps that were in some way preparatory states... One of these was... the Joan Baez concert in Bratislava. She invited us there and spoke from the stage about Charter 77, and we agreed with many friends that the spirit of the Sixties was somehow revived there with Joan Baez, a symbol for the nonviolent peace movement'.⁴⁹

No sooner had she announced that, in her fifties, she would concentrate for the first time on music, when she accepted an invitation to perform in war-torn Sarajevo, the first major artist to visit the besieged city.⁵⁰

Forty years have passed since Joan Baez first raised her voice. In January, she will be sixty and has thus spent two-thirds of her life in the goldfish bowl. For most of the past decade, politics – for the first time in her life – has been on the back burner, at least so far as the public is concerned. From the early Sixties on, music played second fiddle to her humanitarian concerns and, by the Eighties, the singer found herself beached, without even a record contract. In 1991, she noted that 'the last priority has always been my musical work' but that at age 48 'I suddenly realised that I wouldn't have [the voice] for ever'⁵¹ Not unnaturally, she decided she wanted to bow out not simply fade out. 'The Velvet Revolution and the Wall coming down... that was the time I decided to go full throttle into music. But the honeymoon was less than a year.'⁵² The Gulf War was 'disgusting... the epitome of the darkness of that time' but then, with Clinton installed in the White House, she could 'feel a breath of fresh air, even though I don't get involved in party politics'.⁵³ Baez seemed to feel a genuine sense of guilt that she was (to use a Sixties phrase) selling out, and she needed an excuse, for herself as much as for the fans. Her disengagement was both 'difficult' and 'an immense relief'.⁵⁴

But her activist phase had lasted longer than most. Indeed, it wasn't 'a phase' and most of her colleagues were hardly active at all: certainly not Dylan, though his songs most eloquently captured the mood of the time, youth's grievances and grieving. Charges that Baez merely jumped on the protest bandwagon simply don't stick. Her record sales, while impressive in the 1960s, were never enough to undermine her credibility. Nor did she abandon her principles as musical tastes changed. Yes, she lived well, though not in the Hollywood sense, and enjoyed many of the trappings that come with

celebrity. But she used that celebrity to promote her ideals and beliefs. That Baez was sincere is not in doubt.

Despite the long hair and frequently bare feet, despite the fey utterances of her early career, she was not a hippie, nor a flower child. Rather, she was part of 'the Movement', which was all about rethinking politics, challenging the old order. Whether or not she'd read the Port Huron Statement, Baez would surely have agreed with its precepts. The 50-page document, drafted in 1961 principally by Tom Hayden, stated that,

we are people of this generation, bred in at least modest comfort... looking uncomfortably to the world we inherit... As we grew, however, our comfort was penetrated by events too troubling to dismiss. First the permeating and victimising fact of human degradation symbolised by the Southern struggle against racial bigotry, compelled most of us from silence to activism. Second, the enclosing fact of the Cold War, symbolised by the presence of the Bomb, brought awareness that we ourselves, and our friends, and millions of abstract 'others' we know more directly because of our common peril, might die at any time'.⁵⁵

Authority, bureaucracy, the military industrial complex, consumerism: all were to be challenged as 'we the people' – not the power elite – took control of political and economic affairs.

Yet neither was Baez truly part of the New Left. Indeed, in an era of polarisation, she was consistently radical. Movements that were exclusive, such as women's liberation, or potentially violent, such as the various black power groupings, drew only a negative response. What engaged her was what we had in common, not what set us apart. Libertarian in matters of sex, she was frankly puritanical when it came to drink and drugs and generally sceptical about the whole student lifestyle.⁵⁶ At a time of indiscipline, she urged discipline and commitment, personal risk over complacency.

At the outset, when her causes naturally aligned her with the left, right wingers saw her as a troublemaker, an outside agitator, a Communist.⁵⁷ In fact, her philosophy was effectively apolitical and she has remained consistent to it:

I am neither right nor left. I am a nonviolent activist and, supposedly, my job is to speak out against injustice and violence wherever and whenever it happens... I really feel that our addictions to nation states go counter to the devotion and caring that we can show for the entire human race... If you pledge yourself to your own nation, you're pledging yourself to that turf and those borders. As soon as you have those borders, you have the army to protect those borders and, throughout history, those armies have murdered each other... I believe in people not systems... Reactionary violence or revolutionary violence, it's all the same.⁵⁸

Baez believed that ‘the most important thing – before all others – is the sanctity of each human life’.⁵⁹ She regretted that, in the 1960s, ‘all we did was head them off at the pass... We never had time to do any kind of groundwork for the nonviolent society, which doesn’t simply mean a society without violence. It means one where you outlaw murder as a way of solving your problems’.⁶⁰

It was noticeable that, as the Sixties wore on, movements which had been ‘unviolent’ – non-violent by chance rather than by design – became violent. The torch of which Kennedy had spoken in his inaugural address was no longer a metaphor. Baez was by now less of a presence at the barricades, preferring to comment from the sidelines, but she was still a potent force. Indeed, wrote Daniel J Gonczy, she was

more of a presence in the protest fervour of the Sixties than a polemicist for it... it was the emotional force of her music more than her ideology that often made an impact.... Sustaining Baez’s place in the movement, two forces, discipline and emotion, seemed always to be at work. Frequently, her control and self-containment reinforced her ability to move and to persuade listeners⁶¹

Her headline appearance at the 1969 Woodstock Festival was a case in point and it is interesting that, in the movie, Baez was represented by a performance of ‘The ballad of Joe Hill’, a song about the songwriter to the early 20th century trades union movement whose execution in 1915 on trumped-up charges made him a martyr. From Death Row, Hill wrote a letter to his supporters urging ‘don’t waste any time in mourning: organise’,⁶² an injunction that surely appealed to Baez.

No matter that youth the world over seemed to have turned on, tuned in and dropped out: Baez was still an influence. According to the *Woodstock Census*, ‘a nationwide survey of the Sixties generation’ conducted by Rex Weiner and Deanne Stillman in 1978, 44% of the 1005 respondents said they had admired and/or been influenced by Baez. That figure put her at number eight, behind (in order) the Beatles, Dylan, John Kennedy, Martin Luther King, John Lennon, Ralph Nader and Robert Kennedy and above Eugene McCarthy and Janis Joplin. Baez, like Dylan, Lennon and Joplin, was perceived as strong because she sensitive.⁶³

Not surprisingly, she was more important to women than to men – 52% to 39%. Said one: ‘Reading about Joan’s beliefs in nonviolence impressed me greatly. I admired her stand against the war. She helped influence me toward nonviolent means of protest’. Another said, ‘Baez in the Sixties became my alter ego. I wanted to *be* Joan Baez. Her continuing involvement in social

issues is still inspiring'. Less seriously, 32% of women admitted to having ironed their hair, presumably to get 'the look'.⁶⁴

Few of those who marched and sang in the Sixties have raised their voices in the years since and fewer still did more than march or sing. In 'Give peace a chance', John Lennon gave the peace movement its most memorable anthem and he certainly made some memorable gestures – the 'Bed-In' for peace, the 'War is Over' poster campaign for example. But then he embarked on a long lost weekend from which he recovered to retire to domesticity in the Dakota. Only Joan Baez appeared to see protest, in whatever form, as a vocation. When she sang at, for example, the March on Washington, she wasn't just lending her celebrity but using song to inspire the public's political consciousness. At Woodstock, she was the intellectual voice of the Movement addressing the revolution-for-the-fun-of-it hippie counterculture.⁶⁵

Yet Joan Baez did more than preside at the decade's big moments. She worked behind the scenes, dirtied her hands in the groundwork. Throughout the 1960s and in the years since, she has displayed both physical and moral courage, the courage of conviction.

Notes

- 1 Cahill, Tim, 'Joan Baez in Hanoi: 12 days under the bombs', *Rolling Stone*, 1 February 1973
- 2 Westbrook, Bruce, 'Baez doesn't wax nostalgic over the '60s', *Houston Chronicle*, 23 July 1987
- 3 Baez, Joan, *And a Voice to Sing With*, New York, Simon & Schuster, 1987, p 276
- 4 *ibid*, p274
- 5 *ibid*, p276
- 6 'Jane v Joan', *Guardian*, 17 July 1979
- 7 'The voice of Joan Baez', *Newsweek*, 13 August 1979, pp29-30
- 8 For further discussion see Bruce Grant, *The Boat People: An Age Investigation*, Harmondsworth, 1979) 158-60
- 9 Baez Joan Sr & Albert V, *A Year in Baghdad*, Santa Barbara, CA, John Daniel, 1988, p11
- 10 See *And a Voice to Sing With*, *ibid*, pp23-24. Both Baez' grandfathers were ministers and her maternal grandfather, a Scot, preached at the church of St John the Evangelist, on Princes Street, Edinburgh. An Episcopalian church, it remains visibly concerned with peace and justice and with the fate of prisoners of conscience.
- 11 *And a Voice to Sing With*, *ibid*, p25
- 12 *And a Voice to Sing With*, *ibid*, p40
- 13 *And a Voice to Sing With*, *ibid*, p41
- 14 *And a Voice to Sing With*, *ibid*, p41
- 15 Article in *Sing Out!* quoted in Dunaway, David King, *How Can I Keep from Singing: Pete Seeger*, London, Harrap, 1985, p188
- 16 *And a Voice to Sing With*, *ibid*, pp 49-50
- 17 'Sybil with guitar', *Time*, 22 November 1962, pp54-60
- 18 *And a Voice to Sing With*, *ibid*, photo caption
- 19 Brand, Oscar, *The Ballad Mongers*, US, Minerva Press, 1962, p58
- 20 Notes to the set *Rare, Live and Classic*, Vanguard, 1993
- 21 *Rare, Live and Classic*, *ibid*
- 22 *And a Voice to Sing With*, *ibid*, p104

- 23 For further detail, see Diane McWhorter, *Carry Me Home: Birmingham, Alabama - The Climactic Battle of the Civil Rights Revolution* (New York, 2001), 386-93
- 24 *Rare, Live and Classic*, *ibid*. For an excellent oral history of the event, see *Like a Mighty Storm: The March on Washington August 28, 1963* edited by Patrick Henry Mass (Philadelphia, 2002)
- 25 *Joan Baez/5*, Vanguard, 1964
- 26 Jack Newfield captures the atmosphere of the infamous last 10 miles into the capitol in *Somebody's Gotta Tell It: The Upbeat Memoir of a Working-Class Journalist* (New York, 2002), 115-16
- 27 See 'Troopers guard Grenada negroes' by Burks, Edward C, *New York Times*, 20 September 1966
- 28 Joan Baez is unfolksy toward the tax man, *New York Times*, 10 April, 1962
- 29 *ibid*
- 30 '350 balk at taxes in a war protest', *New York Times*, 15 April 1966
- 31 'Dear Fellow Musicians', *Jazz & Pop*, August 1968, pp16-18
- 32 Letter, 12 April 1974, reprinted in *Joan Baez* by Ligney, Nicole, and Grundmann, Pierre, Paris, 1981, Brea Editions, p89
- 33 Anderson, Terry H, *The Movement and the Sixties*, New York, 1995, Oxford University Press, p87
- 34 Joseph, Peter, *Good Times: An Oral History of America in the 1960s*, New York, Morrow, 1974; quoted in Fuss, Charles J, *Joan Baez: A Bio-Bibliography*, Westport, CT, Greenwood Press, 1996, pp10-11
- 35 *And a Voice to Sing With*, *ibid*, p116
- 36 *And a Voice to Sing With*, *ibid*, p117. Other performers included Mahalia Jackson, Gregory Peck and Gina Lollobrigida
- 37 See 'Just folks at a school for nonviolence by Didion, Joan, *New York Times Magazine*, 27 February 1966, pp24-42; reprinted as 'Where the kissing never stops' in *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1974, pp48-60
- 38 *And a Voice to Sing With*, *ibid*, p127
- 39 'I'm anti-kill and I'm out for a way to stop Murder – an interview with Joan Baez, *Peace News*, 28 May 1965, 1, 4)
- 40 *And a Voice to Sing With*, *ibid*, pp133-45; also 'Admits censoring singer Joan Baez', *New York Times*, 21 February 1967; and Badeaux, Ed, 'Baez vs Cooper', *Sing Out!*, April/May 1967, 1+
- 41 'Joan Baez barred from DAR's Hall, *New York Times*, 13 August 1967, 59; and Ayres Jr, B Drummond, '30,000 in Capitol at Free Concert by Joan Baez', *New York Times*, 15 August 1967, p34. Also *Time Magazine*, 25 August 1967, 24)
- 42 *And a Voice to Sing With*, *ibid*, p146
- 43 'Joan Baez arrested', *New York Times*, 20 December 1967, 12
- 44 The documentary *Carry It On* (Maron Films), released in 1970, chronicled this period of Baez's life
- 45 Harris became a journalist and later got involved in state politics. He wrote a number of books, and his *Rolling Stone* interview with Vietnam vet Ron Kovic led to the movie *Born on the Fourth of July*
- 46 *And a Voice to Sing With*, *ibid*, p225
- 47 *Where Are You Now My Son?* (A&M, 1973), probably the least commercially successful of her albums, was finally released on CD by Appleseed Recordings to mark its thirtieth anniversary. Operation Shock and Awe, unleashed in March 2003 on Baghdad, made it once more 'relevant'.
- 48 See *And a Voice to Sing With*, *ibid*, pp178-83
- 49 Interview with President Havel, *Village Voice*, 16 January 1990
- 50 See 'Foreign News'. *Daily Telegraph*, 12 April 1993; also 'Sad songs', *Time*, 26 April, 1993; and Louis Freedberg, 'A witness to suffering', *San Francisco Chronicle* 27 April 1993, B3, B5. A decade later, she was one of very few American artists to oppose any invasion of Iraq, writing an open letter to Secretary of State Colin Powell, 11 March 2003, asking that as 'a gifted, respected diplomat and a man of integrity', he resign from 'this

monstrous Administration'. See also Nicholas Wapshott 'Anti-war protest singers reclaim the limelight', *The Times*, 5 April 2003, 13; and Nigel Williamson, 'It ain't me, babe – it's Madame Zinzanni', *Guardian*, 27 August 2003, 12-13.)

- 51 Interview with Liz Thomson, unpublished, London, 19 March 1991
- 52 Interview with Liz Thomson, unpublished, London, 5 November 1992
- 53 Interview with Liz Thomson, unpublished, London, 5 November 1992
- 54 Interview with Liz Thomson, unpublished, London, 5 November 1992
- 55 For discussion of the Port Huron Statement see Marwick, Arthur, *The Sixties*, Oxford, 1998, p54
- 56 In 1967, she told Dan Wakefield: 'I'm a square. I never was really a part of the beat scene. I never took drugs or drink or any of those things. But I try to project – to understand the people who are involved in that life', *Redbook Magazine*, January 1967
- 57 In a letter dated 4 September 1969 to J Edgar Hoover, Director of the FBI, an operative asked 'is she or her Institute [for the Study of Nonviolence] subversive or Communist? Reprinted in *Joan Baez, ibid*, p5
- 58 Press conference, London, March 1980, author's notes
- 59 Quoted in 'Joan Baez: a candid conversation with the dedicated anti-war activist and folk singer' by Nat Hentoff, *Playboy*, July 1970
- 60 Press conference, *ibid*
- 61 Gonczy, Daniel J, 'The folk music of the 1960s: its rise and fall', *Popular Music and Society*, 10/1 (1985); reprinted in Thomson, Elizabeth, and Gutman, David, *The Dylan Companion*, London, Macmillan, 1990, pp4-17
- 62 Evans, Harold, *The American Century*, London, Cape/Pimlico 1998, p126
- 63 New York, Viking, 1979, p79
- 64 *ibid*, pp79, 86
- 65 Ellen, Sandor, 'Joan Baez: One day at a time', *Saturday Review*, 28 March, 1970