

Baby, Let Me Follow You Down

by Eric von Schmidt & Jim Rooney

The illustrated story of the Cambridge folk years



With

DEBBIE ANDERSEN • ERIC ANDERSEN • JOAN BAEZ • ROLF CAHN • JOE CHAMBERS
JOHN COOKE • BOB DYLAN • MIMI FARIÑA • RICHARD FARIÑA • MANNY GREENHILL
MITCH GREENHILL • CLAY JACKSON • BILL KEITH • SPIDER JOHN KOERNER • JIM KWESKIN
JACK LANDRON • TAJ MAHAL • GEOFF MULDAUR • MARIA MULDAUR • BOB NEUWIRTH
BONNIE RAITT • FRITZ RICHMOND • PAUL ROTHCHILD • PETER ROWAN • TOM RUSH
BETSY SCHMIDT • JOHN SEBASTIAN • BOB SIGGINS • ETHAN SIGNER • CHRIS SMITHER
JOE VAL • DICK WATERMAN • PETER WOLF • & MANY OTHERS

ERIC VON SCHMIDT

(Books for Children)

COME FOR TO SING

THE YOUNG MAN WHO WOULDN'T HOE CORN

THE BALLAD OF BAD BEN BILGE

MR. CHRIS AND THE INSTANT ANIMALS

JIM ROONEY

BOSSMEN: BILL MONROE AND MUDDY WATERS

Baby, Let Me Follow

The illustrated story of the Cambridge folk years

Down

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Foreword/11

Come All You Fair & Tender Maidens/12

Leavin' Home/26

Sail Away, Ladies, Sail Away/36

Black Is the Color/48

Baby, Let Me Lay It on You/60

We Shall Not Be Moved/92

Overseas Stomp/104

California to the New York Island/120

Ocean of Diamonds/132

Ain't Nobody's Business/146

Foggy Mountain Top/154

Storybook Ball/166

Fixin' to Die/188

Where Do You Come From? Where Do You Go?/202

Children of Darkness/222

It's All Over Now, Baby Blue/244

Got My Mojo Workin'/266

Wet Birds Fly at Night/278

Afterword/311

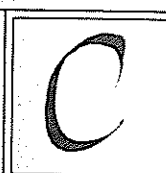
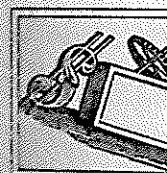
Records/312

Cover Key/314



Sail Away, Ladies, Sail Away

*If ever I get my new house done,
Sail away, ladies, sail away.
I'll give my old one to my son.
Sail away, ladies, sail away.*



Club 47 was having money problems. Progressive jazz wasn't quite the draw that Paula Kelley and Joyce

Kalina had hoped. Even the films Joyce was able to get with their new non-profit charter from the Museum of Modern Art's catalog weren't bringing in the customers. Byron Linardos up at Tulla's had been helpful: he had shown them how to make Café Viennese. But he couldn't show them how to make money. Joyce remembers this frustrating period.

We were barely breaking even. People would sit all night drinking their coffee. It was a dollar to get in. All the business was on the weekend, and maybe some on Wednesday. The rest of the week was dead.

One night this fellow named Peter Robinson came in and introduced himself and said he was a friend of this young female singer — a folk singer. We said we weren't interested, that we had jazz. And he said, "She's really very, very good, and I think you ought to listen to her. We kept saying, 'We're not interested.'" So he finally arranged to rent the place on a Monday night to show us that she could do it. He said, "She has a

following, and you'll see that it will be worth it to you."

Peter Robinson, a good friend of the Baez family, set things up, and pretty much ran the show. He had heard Joan sing with a shy and personable Harvard senior, Bill Wood.

He and Joanie shared it, because I didn't feel that it was fair to impose on her the full load of holding down an evening. I stood behind the kitchen and told each one when to go out, when to come back, and all that.

Joan's mother came, as did some family friends who had been alerted for the occasion, and Bill Wood's Harvard buddies. Even at this early stage there were a number of young people, mostly males, who were firmly under her spell. She was comfortable playing with Bill. He was the current "Balladeer" on WHRB at Harvard. If her repertoire was minuscule, her guitar playing was delicate and assured, and her voice soared as if some glorious bird was set free in the room.

Peter Robinson remembers another person in the room that night, a nightclub owner from Chicago named Al Grossman. Al was shortly to become Albert and manage just about every major performer of the period. At that time, he managed Odetta and a young singer named Bob Gibson. Grossman had the idea that Gibson and

JOAN BAEZ at the Club Mt. Auburn 47. (c.1960)
Photograph by Stephen Fenerjian.

Baez would make a hell of a duo. So after the performance he approached Robinson and said he would be interested in having Joan come to Chicago and sing with Gibson at his club, the Gate of Horn.

Robinson remembers Grossman unflatteringly.

He looked like a pelican, the way he strutted about, and I remember Joanie and I making fun to each other because of that. I don't remember if he approached me directly, but I think he did. I passed the message on to her in Bill Wood's hearing and Bill said very diffidently, "Did he say anything about my singing, about me?" And I said, "Bill, no, he didn't."

Such conversations take place quickly and are delivered and received in low and controlled tones. The audience had loved every bit of it. Paula and Joyce were delighted. Next week it

would be their turn to do the hiring, and at fifteen bucks a night it was a pretty good deal.

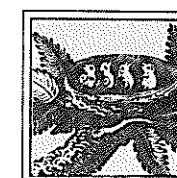
It is nothing short of incredible that this girl, just barely eighteen years old, had come so far in so short a time. Since the fall of '58 she had been devouring the songs and arrangements of the people around her. Debbie Green, Dick Zaffron, and another Cambridge singer, Ted Alevizos, found their material Baezized at an alarming rate. These singers were also becoming aware of the fact that once Joan focused her laser beam on a song, it then sounded as if she were the source not they. To their dismay they found that they were in danger of becoming pale imitations of themselves.

Alevizos was at that time Assistant Chief of Circulation and Stacks at Harvard's Widener Library. A graduate of Columbia and Marquette Universities, he had also put in some time at



Julliard as a Special Student of Voice and was one of the few people who could come close to her vocal pyrotechnics. As close as he could come musically, no one could match her relentless drive.

It is remarkable, too, that only a few months before her debut in a rented hall, Joan was just starting to perform before any kind of world at Tulla's, the Salamander, and the Cafe Yana. Soon Debbie was performing here and there, sometimes as a solo and sometimes with Dick or Joan. She remembers one early fiasco at the Cafe Yana, a coffee shop on Beacon Street in Boston. I used to get five dollars. I don't know whether there was a microphone or not. I think maybe there wasn't. Joanie and I got the giggles and laughed for an entire half hour, with no exaggeration. We were giggly, silly little girls. We had no business performing.



whether they had any business performing or not, they were. And if the show was not a musical milestone

it was purely a visual treat. Those were grey and serious days, and there, folks, for the first time on any stage: That Pan-like and diminutive devil himself, Dick Zaffron! Give 'em a rasgado Dick (applause). All right! And here ladies and gentlemen, direct from the Big Apple (with a brief detour to old Pinko Putney) that Willowy Wonder of the World of Folk, the Girl with the Botticelli Beauty and the Beeautiful Bod, Miss DEB-BIE GREEN! Hit 'em with an A minor 7th, baby. (applause) Well all right! A class act folks! And last but not least, folks, by way of Baghdad, Belmont, and Boston U! That Raven Haired Queen of the Nile, the gal with the million dollar smile, that Virginal Vamp, the kid with the STYLE! Let's hear it for little JOAN-KNEE BUY-EZZZZ! (thunderous applause)

Of course that wasn't quite the way it was. Dick wasn't quite as impressed with his own playing as were most others at the time — pitting yourself against a Segovia record is not the best way to build confidence. Debbie was only beginning to have an awareness of her svelte and photogenic beauty. She worried a lot about her teeth and a few stubborn pounds of baby fat. As far as Joan was concerned, she felt just flat-out ugly. Dark-skinned, flat-chested, nose too big, a whole catalog of teenage woe. Her hands and feet were the exception. She knew she had pretty hands and feet.



Above:
JOAN BAEZ and DEBBIE GREEN
being "silly little girls." (c.1961) Photograph
by Stephen Fenerjian.

Opposite:
"Table for Three?" ALBERT GROSSMAN
(in white jacket) discussing something or
other at the 1959 Newport Folk Festival.
Photographer unknown. Courtesy of
Festival Productions.



Those who remember her during that period remember those slender lovely feet. She had much to learn about music, about the world, about herself, but she already knew about bare feet. Any self-respecting Virginal Princess singing softly into the ear of the Unicorn while she braided its flaxen mane must herself be unshod. Her feet must lightly touch the tapestry of profane earth, the mingling of plants, flowers, and small animals. And further than that, at the risk of inciting mythological riot, letting loose the wild eroticism of primitive gods, let her have naked feet!

Joan always seemed to arrive wearing sandals or flats. But at a certain moment, the right moment, the ritual moment, she would strip them off! And so, everyone at that party or more likely, at that concert would be symbolically freed by the Virgin Princess whose wanton toes now caressed the pagan soil while her voice soared to celestial heights. Certainly a powerful undercurrent of sexuality was present from the first. And for those who chose to see her more as a dark and angularly graceful Queen of the Nile, the coal black hair, the sexy "Little Egypt" moves, with an occasional thrilling flash of white teeth framed by the pinkest of lips — well, the naked feet worked with that image too. In fact, she must have been bedeviled by images: what her devoted Quaker parents hoped and imagined she might be; what the many young men who were attracted to her like moths to a flame considered her to be; what she, herself, thought or imagined. It was a very difficult time for Joanie Baez. But if one accepts the fact that to a certain degree all performers are self-created, certainly Joan Baez built her persona from the ground up.

If Joan imagined her dark beauty to exist only in the eye of her beholders, it would not be long before these rapt beholders would have something of undeniable beauty to stick in their ears. Only eight months after those unscheduled notes in Tulla's Coffee Grinder she would be slipping off her sandals to feel the impartial carpet of her first recording studio.

Manny Greenhill had become something of a local promoter. The meeting four years before with Tony Saletan had rekindled memories of the good old folksings in New York, so why the hell not do something up here in Boston. "Just for a gas," as Manny remembers. One thing led to another: A couple of things at the Commander Hotel in Cambridge; a three-concert series at Boston's Jordan Hall that included Josh White, Seeger, and local talent led by Saletan. Soon he

had an interview show on WXHR called "Meet the Folksingers" to be followed by a program on WGBH, "The Sounds of Folk Music," using Pete Seeger's "Goofing Off Suite" as a theme song. Finally in 1958 he took another tentative step away from selling space in ethnic newspapers. He formed Folklore Productions and ran it out of his office at the Foreign Language Press. In early 1959 he received an unexpected call from a man named Lemuel Wells.

He had watched what was going on in the Club 47 and elsewhere. He had done a recording on his "Veritas" label of the minister of the Park Street Church and wanted to do a folk record. So I said, "Let's pick three people and see if they want to do it."

I originally selected Tony Saletan, Joan Baez, and Bill Wood. Because Tony was going to Asia on a government tour, we got Ted Alevizos who sang those wonderful Greek songs. Lem asked me if I'd write the notes for it, and he also wanted to use my mailing list. He did the mailing in my home. That's when my real acquaintance with Peter Robinson and Joan Baez began.

There were really only two recording studios in Boston at that time. One, Ace Recordings, was located in downtown Boston. It had a big ad in the yellow pages, a huge glass window fronting the control room, overweight men smoking cigars and red lights that flashed on when the tape was "rolling" — the stereotype of a fifties "Ya Wanna Be A Star?" mono recording studio. The other, Fassett Recordings, was located on Beacon Hill and was housed in a handsome five-story row building built in the eighteenth century. It really was a house. The studio itself was an afterthought. Steve Fassett had already made contact with some of the Cambridge folksingers. He had recorded an album with Bill Wood and his group from Harvard, the Raunchhands. They had played together as students, and realizing that graduation would be the end of their collective raunch, they all chipped in and got Fassett to record them. Then he got a call from Lem Wells.

I was contacted by Lemuel Wells. He was a black, well-trained in publicity. He had the idea of recording Dr. Theodore Parker Ferris of Trinity Church, the leading Episcopalian minister in the city of Boston. So they came here, and Wells published the record. That was my first introduction to Lem Wells. And it was he who put "Folk Singers 'Round Harvard Square" together. Peter Robinson came to all the sessions. Lem didn't. Peter, I guess, was like a father to the whole group.

Preceding page:

JOAN BAEZ and a roomful of admirers at the Club Mt. Auburn 47. Tweeds and ties are in abundance. Only one Levi jacket is to be seen. JACKIE WASHINGTON AND ZOLA are standing on the far side of the room, unable to find seats. Barely visible and standing in front of the door, protecting all and sundry from any unwanted intruders, is the unofficial bouncer at the 47, BAD BILL HENDERSON. Photograph by Stephen Fenerjian.

Below:

The cover of "Folksingers 'Round Harvard Square" was designed by Peter Robinson who let his technical illustrator's imagination run wild.



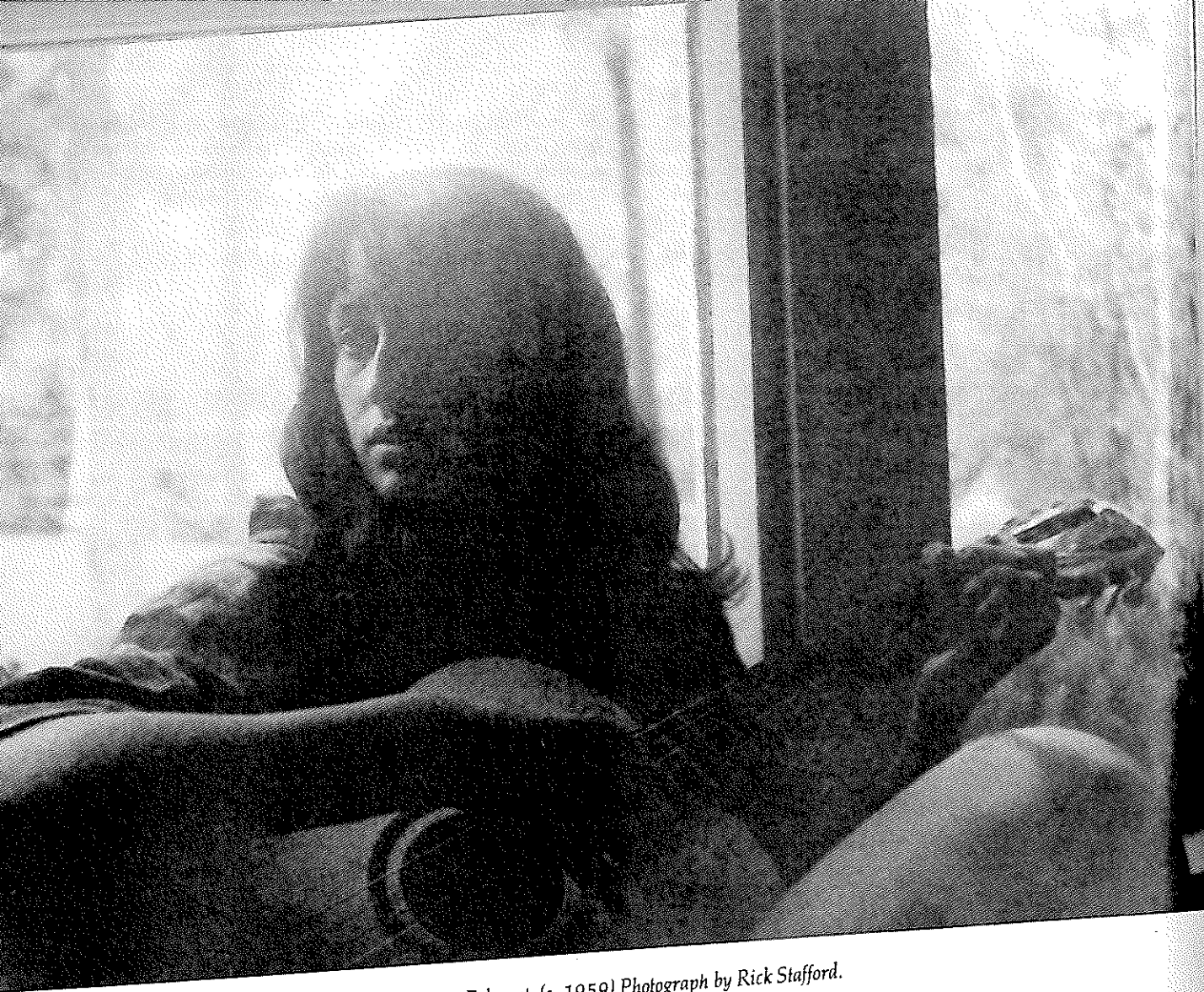
Fassett was quite right about Peter's relationship to Joan. He had not only become an instant advocate of her musical talents, but had gone so far as to suggest to her father that she leave B.U. and make singing her profession.

Robinson was in a unique position to take this stand since he was a colleague of her father and a friend of the family. Albert Baez is a physicist and had come up the academic ladder step by difficult step. Born in Mexico, he sweated hard for his Ph.D. and felt that his three girls, Pauline, Joan, and Mimi would relish as a gift the education for which he had to struggle. That was not the case. If Joan's father was blind to Joan's dislike of College, Peter certainly was not.

Peter Robinson was and is a technical illus-

trator whose real love is landscape painting. Thwarted in his own art by the need to make a living, he no doubt took a vicarious thrill in nurturing this budding young talent in its first purity and innocence. He had married a close friend of Joan's mother and knew the Baez family in California when the oldest daughter, Pauline, was just a baby. He always felt Joan to be artistic and took her on sketching trips when she was twelve.

In the fall of 1958, Peter decided to move his family east and, from October to December, was living at the Baez house in Belmont while he looked for one of his own. It was here that he first realized what Joanie's real gift was. The occasion was a small party for some of Al Baez's co-



JOAN BAEZ playing her guitar at home in Belmont. (c. 1959) Photograph by Rick Stafford.

workers — not academic types, but “a hot shot director from New York” and other members of his sound and film crew. They were all invited to Al’s, and they were all sitting around that magnificent living room drinking drinks and eating little stuff, and Joanie wandered into the room in that sort of vague, gamin, unorganized way that she had and sat down in a corner. Nobody spoke to her because she was only a kid, and all these fellows continued to brag, mutually, about their skills or whatever the hell they did, and over the course of the next fifteen minutes or so she sat and listened. She listened for a long time and started picking at her guitar vaguely and quietly. Unobtrusively and unnoticed, she started tuning it up. The way she was sitting there caught my eye. I was extremely fond of her, so when she came in I took notice of the fact that nobody noticed her.

Soon she began humming to herself, and pretty soon after that she was singing in a voice that hardly carried across the room. In fact, it really didn’t. But I noticed almost immediately that when she opened her mouth, the guy sitting next to her stopped talking and listened. And that sort of spreading listening quieted the whole room! And, by God, for the next half hour or hour, or however long it was, she sang. It was the most arresting performance, because it started with no introduction, no nothing.

You know, Al is something of a performer himself, in the way he presents himself in public. He plays the piano, and he’s always been the center of attention in every way at any sort of gathering of which he is a part. I think it really took him aback. Not that he’d not been taken aback previously, but here were all these hard-bitten, goddamned New Yorkers, and they were listening to his bloody daughter!



Above:
Rick Stafford’s photograph of JOAN BAEZ and Eric von Schmidt’s poster using the photograph to announce the summer program at the Club Mt. Auburn 47. (1959)

Following Page:
PETE SEEGER and JOAN BAEZ all alone as they wait to go on. Photograph by John Cooke.



R

ecording at Steve Fassett’s was a unique experience. Steve was burrowed mole-like in the basement with

his big Ampex, while the “studio” was located on the second floor in a sparsely furnished but elegant nineteenth century room. The sole communication between Fassett in the basement and the artist on the second floor was through the one omnidirectional mike which was being used for the recording. If one disembodied voice was not enough, another occasionally came from the Terra Incognita above the studio: Steve’s wife Agatha would inquire in the rich accents of Hungarian nobility, “Steeef, hav da cots been fed?” Steve was actually glimpsed from time to time; the well-fed cats loved to curl up in the guitar cases and were in constant view, but the majestic Agatha never appeared.

I remember Joan Baez came over one afternoon. She liked to be barefoot. It was a beautiful spring day. She had a boyfriend then. He was rather sullen. I didn’t think he added much to the occasion. When she listened down here with the other musicians and with Peter Robinson, I remember she made a note “sounds constipated.” She was very forthright about the quality of her work. She was patient. She had this soaring range. And at that time she used her full dynamic range when recording. The original tape has all that. I made a copy with eight or ten db compression done backwards, but still the radio stations complained about the levels. It was really one of the unique qualities of her style.

Shortly after the “Folksingers Round Harvard Square” album was recorded, a poster appeared on telephone poles and store windows around Harvard Square. It pictured an intense young girl in full song emerging from a background of forest-green ink. It announced to anyone who could decipher the caligraphy that the Club Mt. Auburn 47 “A private club open to summer students” was presenting “A NEW SUMMER PROGRAM/tuesdays/An Evening of Folk Music with JOAN BAEZ/thursday-saturday/PROGRESSIVE JAZZ.” The snappy drawing of the drum set that had dominated the menu when the Club had opened had been replaced by this girl picking a guitar. The tide had turned. Progressive jazz was regressing. Joan was becoming the headliner. Joan was the headliner. Paula Kelley



remembers the audiences who were starting to pack the 47 on Tuesday nights.

The audiences were worshipful of Joan. They were never worshipful of anyone else. They were not knowledgeable about folk music. Joanie just happened to be a personality with a nice voice as far as they were concerned — it had nothing to do with folk music. After a period of time there really were a lot of folk buffs around, and I think that the Club did educate them to become folk buffs.

As much as Joan may have desired the adulation she was suddenly receiving, it was extremely difficult to cope with once it arrived. Today, when teenagers and even pre-teen kids are a gigantic chunk of the record buying public, it is not uncommon to be a "Superstar" at a much earlier age. But this was 1959 and Joan at eighteen was not singing "Earth Angel." She was emerging from a self-tormented childhood directly into the unblinking spotlight of an art form still largely associated with adult values. She was a young girl singing songs of deep knowledge drawn from life's experiences, while her own life was a tangle of fears and uncertainties. She was singing songs of wisdom she could only partially comprehend.

All of this pressure was bound to take its toll.

Debbie Green:

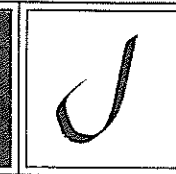
Dick Zaffron, Joanie, and I were supposed to play a dormitory on the corner of Plympton Street. I got sick and was in no shape to play, and was to be taken home, but I really wanted to see the concert. Joanie did a number. She sang all the songs — you know how you have a certain list of ones you really like to do — all my arrangements, and when she finished all the good ones, she maneuvered Zaffron into introducing me, and there I was in the audience. I remember coming up. No capo was available. It was awful . . .

Paula Kelley:

The only mankind that was acceptable was the mankind, like her, who shared her ideals and who shared her way of life. Joyce and I never knew Joan personally. She was not an easy person to know. She was not friendly.

Joyce Kalina:

Joan could be very difficult, very arrogant, rude, hysterical — she had stage-fright half the time. She used to go out in the alley and throw up, she was so scared. Her boyfriend at the time was driving her crazy. She was always running out in the back.



Joan battled her demons in the dark. The unknown fear. It could swarm in her mind at any

second and she was terrified of it. When she sang of strange metamorphoses, of anguished maidens in distress, she was singing straight from her heart.

By the age of five the fears were so solid that I had already become a genius at running away from them, and running like that is a hard habit to break. Mother nursed me through terror from that early age until I moved out of the house at nineteen. Perhaps the blows of adolescence made junior high and early high school the roughest time.

The major part of my childhood was spent in fighting off terror of things which don't exist, and I don't think my father understood that kind of fear. The overriding and most terrifying bogeyman of my life, which has been with me since my earliest memories, and remains faithfully with me, though now it seldom puts me out of commission, has been a fear of vomiting.

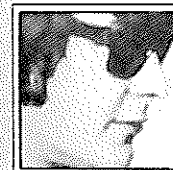
It has used up and wasted and blackened many hours of my life. But my father never had a notion of what I was talking about when I cried and shook and said, "You know . . . It's that thing again . . ." While I was in junior high school and even high school, I was still going to my parents bedroom, sometimes five nights a week, and climbing in their bed, all hot and cold and shaking, pleading for Mother to say the key sentences which would begin to send the fear away.

*Come along boys, and don't you cry.
Sail away, ladies, sail away.
You'll be an angel, by and by.
Sail away, ladies, sail away.*



Black Is the Color

*Black is the color of my true love's hair.
Her lips are something wondrous fair,
The prettiest feet and the daintiest hands,
I love the grass on where she stands.*



Boston was some serious street business going on. Going to Cambridge was like free lunch after Boston. You could get killed in Boston. There's no walking around after dark with your eyes closed in Boston. It gave rise to a slightly different cultural outlook.

Bobby Neuwirth didn't take long to find his way around when he hit Boston. Neuwirth came from Ohio to go to the Boston Museum School of Fine Arts.

Don't forget Shelly. Shelly and Norman. Shelly Cohen and Norman Kumin and this girl named Gabby had the first beatnik coffee shop in the Boston University area — the Cafe Yana, right next to the railroad tracks on Beacon Street. When it first started off, the Cafe Yana was really a hot place. It was the other axis from Cambridge. Everybody who came from the other side of the river used to play there..

When I first got there I only knew artists, and, through them, the South End street people — Walter and "Doc" and "Blinky" — all guys that bet the pooches. They were pals with a guy named Ronnie Vial. Ronnie had an apartment right next to the Cafe Yana with a bunch of Irish

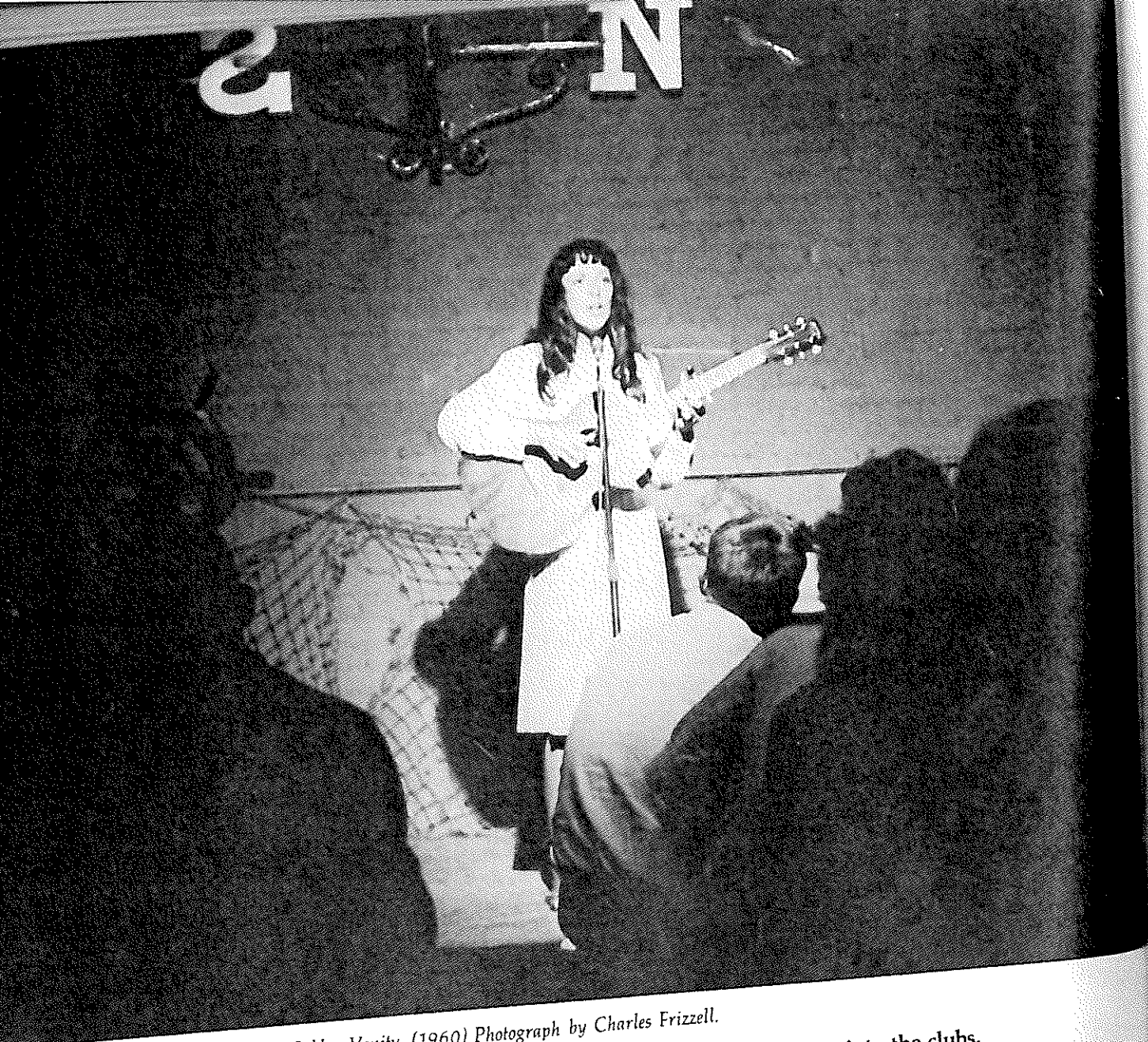
guys who worked as attendants in the cuckoo house. So I started hanging out over there. It was a little more straight than Cambridge. Cambridge was a little academic, sort of Europeanish. We were a little closer to the Boston streets. It was an art and painter crowd. There were Boston University chicks and B.U., Mass School of Art, and Museum School painters all hanging out.

At first the kind of music that was around was very academic, folksy, Elizabethan ballads. Fred Basler was connected with the Mass. School of Art, and he'd come to the Yana to sing that stuff. That's how the painters got involved. Debbie Green was sort of tentatively strumming away on a little, brown-faced Martin guitar. She and Betsy Minot were very tight. They were both theater majors at B.U. and used to wear little checked, gingham shirts. They were fairly attractive, young, long-haired Bohemian girls. Looked like easy touches, you know.

Neuwirth liked action. If there wasn't any he'd make it or find it. The Yana had it all. Some music, some pretty girls, and whatever was going on next door.

For other, more innocent souls, it was the music that brought them in the door. For them finding a place in Boston where you could sing and play and listen to folk songs was like a dream come true.

Portrait of The Artist as a Young NEUWIRTH. Photograph by John Cooke.



JOAN BAEZ at the Golden Vanity. (1960) Photograph by Charles Frizzell.

together here at this new club that had just opened in town. This girl walked in with long, black hair — sort of stringy, black hair — no shoes, and got up on the stage. I'm saying to myself, "Jesus! Fuckin' beatniks!"

Then she started singing, and it just blew me away. Really knocked me out. Elaine said something to me about something in the middle of one of Joan's songs, and I turned to her and said, "Can't you be quiet until she finishes?" That was the beginning of the end of us. Elaine and I separated soon after that. It happened sort of slowly, with me calling up and saying, "I won't be able to come over," because I'd read in the paper that this Joan Baez was appearing at the Golden Vanity or the Club Mt. Auburn 47. So I started

taking nights and going into the clubs.

Neuwirth told me that he remembers that I used to come in wearing a freshly laundered sweatshirt. I had three sweatshirts. I really wanted to let myself start breaking down, but my whole upbringing and the Marine Corps pulled the other way.

Donald Macsorley was another who, like Billy, had stumbled into this scene by accident. I was from South Boston and had never heard of folk music. I met this girl while I was pumping gas, and she brought me into the Golden Vanity one night. Suddenly I became aware that there was this world that I knew nothing about. All the girls seemed mysterious. And you knew that something else was happening upstairs or

downstairs or wherever. What was there for the paying audience wasn't the whole thing. The people on the inside were a scene in themselves. They sort of tolerated the audience, but they really thought they were fools — because they paid to get in. Nobody who was anybody paid to get in. But the music struck a chord — especially when I heard Joan Baez do something like *Mary Hamilton*. The Irish-English traditional music began to really appeal to me. All of it just sucked me in. It was handy to B.U., where I was going to school, so I started to go over there a lot. I wound up washing dishes a couple of nights a week, and that was my ticket into that world.

The way you learned to play the guitar was to start on the fringes at a party and gradually work your way into the center as your confidence increased. Eventually you would be accepted as one of the group. That was the nice thing about the folk scene: Once you were in it, the musical exchange with other people was an education, and it was also fun. Being involved with this scene helped me break out of the parochial world I grew up in in South Boston. It made me aware that something else was out there.

Jill Henderson grew up far from the streets of Boston in nearby Belmont.

Growing up I really didn't know anybody who wasn't white, Anglo-Saxon Episcopal until I went to college. During the Depression, my family was not depressed. My grandfather had done very well in law in Boston, so my mother was in Paris at a time when a lot of people here were in soup kitchens. Maybe that had a lot to do with why I later got interested in the music of people like Woody Guthrie. I just didn't know about that side of life. While she was in Paris, my mother used to frequent a club called "Bricktop's," where Josephine Baker played, and she became close friends with Bricktop, which was pretty daring for a girl with her background. So I had an interest in Black music from her.

All of this was in the back of my mind when I came back from college in 1958. I was starting to become fascinated by people from different parts of the country, different backgrounds, and different religions. Through my brother I began to discover the folk clubs. We were sharing an apartment on Beacon Hill and we first went to the Turk's Head which was the only coffee house on Charles Street at the time. Then we discovered the Cafe Yana. I walked in one night and someone was playing "Twelve Gates to the City" on a twelve-string guitar. I had never heard

one and just fell in love with the sound. I knew the words to the song — don't ask me how or why — and I started to sing along. As a result, people started to talk to me, and so I began going there regularly and got to know everyone. When there was too much else going on over there besides music, I shifted over to the Golden Vanity and then to the Club 47.

It was like being caught up in a wave. The minute I heard that twelve-string guitar I just wanted to know everything I could about everyone's music. And I could see it happen to other people. In the daytime I was working as a secretary at the M.I.T. Instrumentation Lab. The people I knew at work were straight, but they liked music too. I'd tell them about the Vanity of the 47 and three months later they'd suddenly be wearing dungarees, reading books, and buying records. I knew it was tumbling.

However it was happening, folk music was bringing people together in more ways than one. Robert L. Jones celebrated Valentine's Day 1960 by going into the army, but others were observing the holiday in the more traditional manner. Soon songs like "Kisses Sweeter Than Wine," "Careless Love," and ultimately, "What'll We Do With The Baby-O" began to take on new meaning to many of the pickers and singers around the Vanity. Peter Lenz's affair with another man's wife led to such dramatic scenes that Peter had to relinquish his role in the club to a no less randy but more discreet Carl Bowers. Don Macsorley was distracted from his dishwashing chores by the beautiful Alice Foreman, who had left her post at the luncheonette to become a waitress at the Vanity. Eric von Schmidt showed up even when he was not playing to discuss current events with Helen Jones. Betsy Minot went across the river a lot to listen to Uncle Dave Macon records with Bob Siggins. Even the jaded Neuwirth couldn't resist one of Cupid's little darts:

When I lived at the Golden Vanity, Mimi Baez and a friend of hers from high school used to come over and clean my pad and sometimes do my ironing! They were only fourteen and were so cute! I took Mimi on her first date to a gallery opening. It was a trip just to do that. They had just done my laundry and cleaned my pad and were waiting for Joan, who was downstairs negotiating for a job. They heard Brice Marden and me talking about going to a gallery opening and obviously wanted to go, so we took them. It was so innocent I loved it.

in and have a cup of coffee and talk to her about their new club.

As it happened, the Vanity wasn't the only new folk club getting ready to open. Across town Manny Greenhill had plans of his own. George Wein had run Storyville as an excellent jazz club and had the idea for a folk club. He and Albert Grossman had already done the first Newport Folk Festival which was a success, and I had been involved with him on that. We were talking about the Festival one day and he said, "I've got this room downstairs where Mahogany Hall used to be. Why don't we do something with it?" I said that I didn't know anything about running a club, but he had a woman in mind to run it named Terri Turner. I came up with the name "The Ballad Room" and got Eric von Schmidt to do the logo — a banjo and guitar — and I used some paintings of his in the room. I found out later that George had never made any money with Storyville, but I thought it was a good idea. It lasted less than one season. Terri was running it Storyville style — bartenders in red jackets, a maitre d', cover, minimum — just the wrong kind of thing for the college kids who didn't care for the nightclub atmosphere. They were starting to go to the coffeehouses. Of course, it didn't help that the Golden Vanity opened at about the same time. Peter Lenz would come in and make his negotiations with the same artists I was having as soon as they got off the stage! It's great to be naive! You can get away with a lot.

A lot, perhaps, but not everything. Peter wanted to have Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee for his opening night, which was a Sunday. They were to play a concert for Manny at Jordan Hall the night before. Reluctantly, Manny agreed. Then Peter changed his mind and wanted to open with them on Friday night, before they were to play the concert. Manny pointed out to Peter that their contract forbade that, so Peter called Eric von Schmidt and asked him if he would play with Sonny.

Would I play with Sonny? Does God make honky-tonk angels? Was Leadbelly the King of the twelve-string guitar players of the world?

So at last all was in readiness for the maiden voyage of the Golden Vanity with music by Sonny and von Schmidt. Eric couldn't help but be impressed by the decor when he arrived.

The place was rigged up like a nightmare catered by Herman Melville. The tables were huge barrels. Nets were hung all over the place. A

ship's wheel was hung behind the stage and some sort of phony weathervane was overhead. You expected the guy at the door to be wearing a yellow slicker.

Eric went upstairs, unpacked his guitar and two bottles of gin and introduced himself to Sonny. It was a great thrill for me. Sonny was one of my musical heroes. It just blew my mind that I was actually going to play with someone who I'd never seen, but had heard for years on records.

Soon it was time to go on. Downstairs the place was packed. Eric was starting to work on the gin to calm himself down. Freddy and Peter came up to get them. Sonny asked for his money. They said that they had a check. Sonny said that he needed money — M-O-N-E-Y. Cash. Before he went on. Freddy and Peter went back downstairs and in a few minutes they were back. They counted it out to Eric who, in turn, placed each bill in Sonny's hand telling him what it was. When they got to one hundred Sonny said, "Let's go."

The Vanity was a coffeehouse, but you never would have known it that night. By the middle of the evening Eric and Sonny were feeling no pain. Back in the kitchen Neuwirth and Jones were starting to get behind on the dishes.

Neuwirth and I were getting slowly juiced. The place was pretty well stocked and had a lot of dishes. We couldn't get any hot water, so we decided, "Fuck this. Let's sit down and get juiced and enjoy the music and when all the dishes come we'll get a huge stack and do them all at once," which is what we did. Unfortunately, the dishes got stacked up a little more than we thought, and we had had a little bit too much to drink, so when we finally got started we didn't know what we were doing and were dropping things all over the place.

Upstairs Eric had just tossed an empty gin bottle out the window onto the street below, narrowly missing some of the patrons who were still trying to get in to catch the third set. It was a toss-up as to whether Eric was going to lead Sonny or Sonny was going to lead Eric back down to cap off the evening. When it was all over Neuwirth and Jones got ten bucks cash for their efforts. Eric got a twenty dollar check for his weeks later, it bounced. It didn't matter though. He'd played with Sonny Terry, and the Golden Vanity had been launched.

The Vanity brought to five the number of places with folk music in Boston. The others were



ERIC VON SCHMIDT and SONNY TERRY "one night only" at the opening of the Golden Vanity. (1959) Photographer unknown.

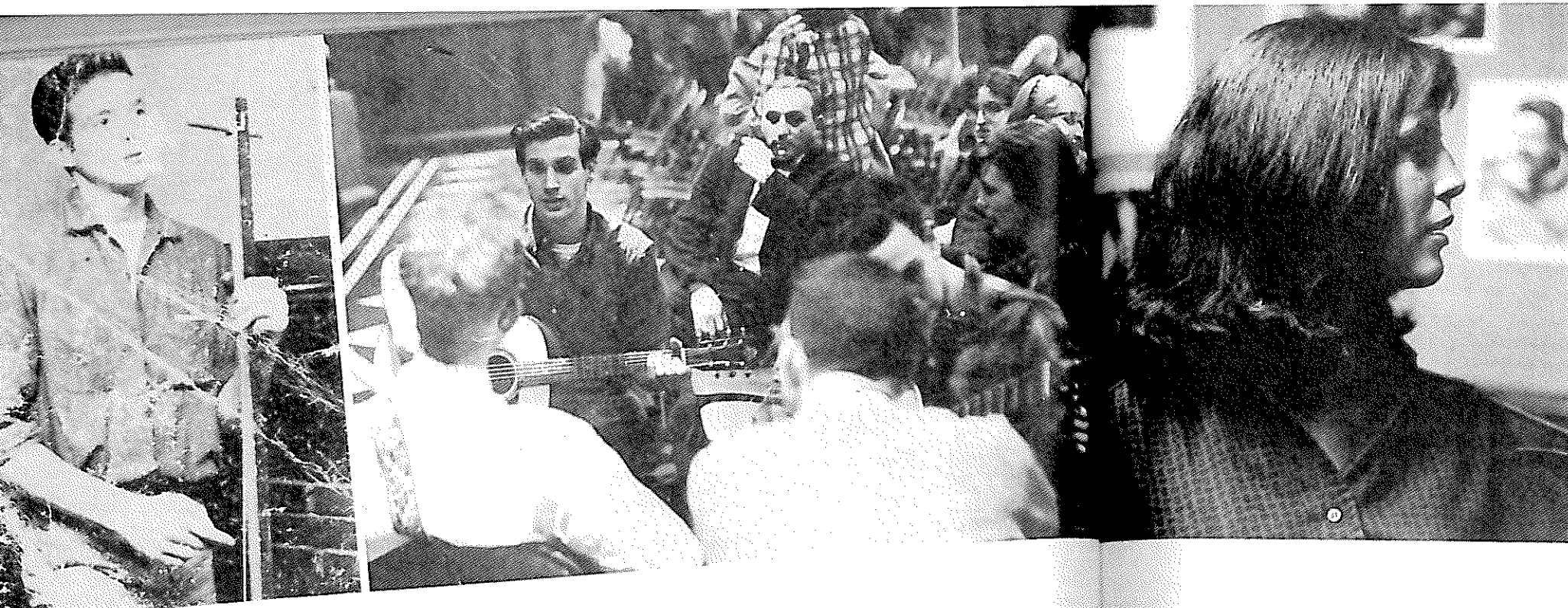
the Turk's Head over on Charles Street, where Paul Nagy and David Gurness were starting to play; The Salamander on Huntington where Dick Zaffron, Joan Baez, and now Tom Rush occasionally appeared; the Cafe Yana, which still had many of the old crew — Buzz Marten, Robert L. Jones, and the rapidly improving Jim Kweskin; and the Ballad Room, which was bringing "name" artists like Oscar Brand, The Tarriers, and Brother John Sellers. Occasionally the Ballad Room would have some of the younger, local artists like Eric von Schmidt and Joan Baez. As a result of the proliferation of clubs, the audience began to grow. Many people who had never heard of folk music before found themselves listening to it for the first time, often more by accident than by design — but by the second or

third time they found themselves being drawn into what was becoming the "folk world."



illy Burke was still working at WHDH-TV as a film editor, and he was making time with a girl named Elaine.

This girl was a hairdresser and really beautiful. Together we really looked like the Coca-Cola kids. One night we were going out to this new club that had opened called the Ballad Room. We were going to see Oscar Brand, and this girl, Joan Baez, was the opening act. So I went in with this girl, and we sat down, and we're sitting there having our drinks, really feeling very slick and



Like some kind of erratic Northeast storm, the Yana scene went through many changes over the next months. Betsy and Debbie moved out of their dorm and into an apartment on Beacon Hill. John Nagy moved in until his parents decided that it was time for John to enlist.

It was decided that if I were to get into the army it would help to straighten me out. It put an end to what would have been a natural development. It would have only been a matter of time before I would have played out all the copying and really have started to develop. I did commute a lot from Fort Devens. Buzzy got better. Jim Kweskin was blowing a comb with tissue paper and learning how to fingerpick. Fritz had to go into the army too. Eventually he went to Korea and I went to Europe. I was gone for a year and a half, and in that time the whole scene had exploded. Joan Baez could barely play when I left. She was already a star when I came back. Kweskin was on his own. Tom Rush was coming on. And I was still playing Pete Seeger music.

When John moved out, Neuwirth didn't waste any time, and soon his boots were under Betsy's bed. Geno Foreman started to come over. He knew Debbie from Putney and was really living the life, running between Boston and Cambridge and New York, jazzing, jiving, scoring, picking, grinning. He and Neuwirth became good buddies. Betsy was fighting an uphill battle.

Debbie was into sleeping all day and staying up all night. A lot. Finally she got mono and had to go home. By the summer it was clear that neither

Debbie nor Joan Baez were going back to B.U. I switched to the Museum School because Neuwirth thought it would be a good idea. I got an apartment alone with him on Beacon Street near the Yana. Sandy Bull lived downstairs. There were always a whole lot of weirdos around. I was into wearing black then. I think a "black outfit" was on my freshman clothing list. It was a real serious time. We hadn't graduated to cowboy boots yet.

A little further on down the street, Buzzy had moved in with Kweskin and Teddy Bernstein. He was doing his best to stay ahead of his students. I latched onto a Chet Atkins record and a Merle Travis record, and those were the two guys who really did it for me. By that time I was so tired of the Weavers' music that I never could listen to it again, but it did get us going and playing which was the main thing.

Jim Kweskin's life had changed considerably as a result of starting to play.

It was so exciting, going to coffeehouses every night, hearing a new song for the first time, copying down the words, learning a new chord progression, figuring out a blues lick. My whole life was filled with discovery. I discovered there was another way to live. I got turned on to marijuana. Soon I was playing English and Appalachian ballads at the small time Boston coffeehouses.

Above the Yana, Robert L. Jones was quietly learning a lot of ballads from David Gurness and Woody Guthrie songs from records. He and his

sister Helen and Gurness discovered another coffeehouse over on Huntington Avenue called The Salamander. They heard Dick Zaffron there, and one night he brought up Joan Baez who sang some Odetta songs. They also got into going over to the YMCA on Huntington Avenue for concerts put on by the Folksong Society of Greater Boston. They were meeting more and more people who shared their enthusiasm for folk music. The circle was widening.



By the fall of 1959 the scene at the Yana had changed. Brawls and street business were starting to find their way into the Cafe. So when Freddy Basler and Peter Lenz heard of a space on the other side of the tracks on a street behind B.U. they decided to investigate. It turned out to be available, and they decided to open a place of their own, called "The Golden Vanity" after one of Fred's favorite ballads. The Vanity would not only feature local performers, but would also bring in many of the artists who had become prominent in the folk movement which had built up around Pete Seeger — people like Guy Carawan, Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee, Oscar Brand, and Theo Bikel. It was a big step forward for the Boston folk community. Freddy and Peter enlisted the help of just about everyone who had been involved at the Yana.

Neuwirth came over and took one look at all

the space upstairs and saw what any artist would see — a loft. Freddy understood and let him have it. Soon the place was echoing to the sound of hammers and saws. From her vantage point at the luncheonette next door Alice Foreman watched them come and go, bringing in lumber and wallboard and barrels which were going to be used for tables and chairs. On breaks they'd come

(far left) FRITZ RICHMOND playing his very first washtub bass. John Nagy carried this picture in his wallet all the time he was in the army to give him strength. (c. 1958)

(center left) MARCEL KISTIN, organizer of the Folksong Society of Greater Boston, thoughtfully puffs his pipe as he listens to Paul Nagy (with guitar) and others play and sing. Decor is by the YMCA. Betsy Minot is the girl on the right who is all ears. (c.1959). Photographer unknown. Courtesy of Manny Greenhill.

(center right) BETSY MINOT displaying her famous profile to advantage. Taken at the Golden Vanity. (c.1960) Photograph by Alan Klein.

(far right) FRED BASLER testing out the acoustics of his new club, The Golden Vanity. (1959) Photographer unknown.



ohn Nagy had just discovered Pete Seeger. He had actually met him while visiting his brother Paul out

at Oberlin College in Ohio. John's father was a violinist with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, and John had been studying cello for thirteen years, but when he got back to Newton he had a banjo, not a cello, on his knee.

I came home and desperately tried to find a banjo. I got one from a kid in school. It had a short neck. I took it over to Fritz Richmond's, who went to high school with me, and we felt that we could lengthen the neck. So we did it. It wasn't really a success, but it got us started. The nature of the five-string banjo fascinated me. I'd never heard one before or seen one. I tried to figure out how he got that sound — the basic strum (up with the finger, brush over with the thumb). It sounded like he was hitting one string with a finger and then taking four fingers very fast and ending with the thumb.

John had another friend from high school who knew something about music and how to play the guitar. His name was John Marten, but everyone called him Buzz.

I had an uncle who played guitar. He came through one time, and my father bought a little twelve dollar guitar for him to play on. Before he left he showed me the three chords to the key of D. I played everything in "D" for about two years. Eventually I branched out to the other keys. I never liked rock and roll that much. Growing up in Newton I either listened to classical music or country music whenever I could find it. I listened to WWVA at night. Bluegrass almost made me wet my pants the first time I heard it.

Buzz was obviously ready to be Seegerized, and the occasion was not long in coming. Pete Seeger came to Jordan Hall and Buzzy and I went in. We sat down front and watched every move his fingers made. We were off and running. I got on the banjo. He got on the guitar. I finally found a good banjo. Buzzy's father lent me the twenty-five dollars to buy it. My own folks had nothing to do with it. I went into my room for days to practice with my Pete Seeger records and his instruction book.

There was no question about it. This Seeger stuff was a force to be reckoned with. There was almost a sense of inevitability about it once it got started.

Within two weeks I went into the Cafe Yana. It was almost magic the way it happened. I was walking across the street from my house with my banjo. A car pulled up. It was another freak who played the banjo. He knew about the Cafe Yana. He told me about it, and I couldn't believe it — a place in Boston that had this folk music! That night I got my banjo and put it in a paper bag and went in there. Fred Basler was playing guitar. I asked if I could play, and they said, "sure." I did the songs I had just learned. About nine songs. And the people liked it. Here I was playing on a stage for these people on an instrument with which I was very unfamiliar and in an environment which was completely new to me. I was a very conservative, laid-back, shy cellist. I really didn't know how to respond to it but I was thrilled with it. And they offered me a job a couple of nights a week.

John raced home and got hold of Buzz. They immediately started to learn some more songs off their Weavers records. John got hold of a Stella six-string guitar and took it over to Fritz's basement to convert it into a twelve-string. Both Buzz and John wanted Fritz to get in on the act for which they even had a name — "The Hoppers." (Fritz's name was John, too. Three Johns. A little attempt at humor.)

Buzzy did songs, I did songs, and we did some together. Fritz didn't play anything, and we had to get him in somehow. He is one of the most innovative people I've ever known. He came up with the washtub. We got one at Sears. He experimented with different tubs, different string, and cable. He really made a science out of it.

Our playing together was the beginning of Fritz starting to come out of himself. He had been very shy and socially uninvolved until then. He really went out there once he got going.

Fritz was definitely not alone. Lots of other people were starting to get going, too. The Yana soon became the center of a swarm. John's brother Paul and his friend David Gurness started to play. They took an apartment upstairs with another friend of theirs who was just getting into Seeger and Woody Guthrie, Robert L. Jones. Jones had grown up in nearby West Roxbury and was in his second year at B.U. Soon his sister Helen arrived from Iowa where she had been going to school and moved in. Betsy Minot started waitressing and going out with John. Her friend, Debbie Green, started singing there. Of course, John, Buzz, and Fritz were playing, too, and they started attracting other budding young



pickers from B.U. Jim Kweskin and his friend Teddy Bernstein started coming in. They'd sit right down front the way Buzzy and John had for Pete Seeger and watch their fingers and write down the words to the songs. It was the blind leading the blind. Nobody knew that much, but they were willing to share what they did know. Through it all Fred Basler kept up his ballads and singalongs. Soon they were all joined by a refugee from Antioch College who had also fallen under Pete Seeger's spell. His name was Peter Lenz. If Pete Seeger himself had walked through the door he might have wondered if he was needed any more. One more "Wimoweh" might have been one too many.

Above:
JIM KWESKIN and BUZZ
MARTEN playing and singing their
hearts out. (c. 1961) Photograph by
Stephen Fenerjian.



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f everyone else had but one admirer, Joan Baez had hundreds. As the year progressed, her follow-

ing was swelling on both sides of the river. Led by Geno Foreman, she had acquired a band of would-be bikers who would show up at the 47 or the Vanity whenever she played. There was David Barry, Cy Koch, Todd Stuart, David Piper, Tom Goodwin, and John Cooke. Some went to Harvard, some just hung around. They were all pretty well off and were heavy into blues, jazz, movies, and machines. Not your ordinary machines, but Vincents and Shadows and Super Rockets. It became a thing to ride a bike into the Vanity or the 47 while Joan was singing and let her rev the bike up, being real cool about it all. Eat your hearts out, all your Baez-crazed college boys! She was the Rebel Queen and wouldn't look at you.

When it came time for the Newport Folk Festival that year, it was decided they would bring Joan down in style. The year before she had been Bob Gibson's guest, and she was almost totally unknown to the audience. This year she had been invited as a featured performer, and her appearance was going to be a triumph. John Stein was a friend of Tom Goodwin from Yale who had been coming up regularly to see Joan perform. John didn't have a bike, he was a bit too elegant for that. He had a hearse. What could be better than to bring Joan to Newport in a hearse complete with motorcycle escort! And so it happened. Buoyed by the loyalty of her friends and secure in the knowledge that she already had many fans out in the audience, Joan went on stage.

Her performance that night was the highlight of the evening whether you knew her or not. There was

something about her voice as it floated out on the night air, singing these beautiful strange songs that left you speechless. She was so young and looked so vulnerable in a simple dress and her bare feet, but her voice had power in it to chill you to the bone. There was no denying that she was a star. She was riding the crest of a new wave of folk music that was building in Cambridge and Boston that was growing larger by the day. Bob Neuwirth came to Boston looking for action, and he'd found it. For life.

I watched it go from the living room to ten dollars a night paid engagements, which consisted of sitting around with a cup of espresso watching somebody in a workshirt sing a folksong. I watched it move to a stage, watching little Joan Baez get up in her pinafore and sing a folksong, watching her make ten dollars a night. Once she made fifteen dollars and thought it was immoral, which it was. It went from there to larger places like the Golden Vanity, where Peter Lenz and Freddy Basler booked people in for fifty dollars a night. Sometimes you had to make reservations on the weekends to sit around barrels and drink swill. Then it went from clubs to real showbusiness.

Cambridge and Boston was a great melting pot of cultural things. Because it was an academic center it brought people from so many different places who had all sorts of interests. Some people were interested in mountain music, some people were interested in blues, some people were interested in bluegrass, and a lot of people became interested in it all. All of this became the source of Joan's material. The fact that Joan came out of all these and became the best known was important because she went on to influence a generation.

*I love my love and well she knows.
I love the grass whereon she goes,
And if my love no more I see,
My life will quickly fade away.*

