A Long-Awaited *Diamond Day*: Examining the Reception History of Freak Folk

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Abstract(s)

Music journalist Jude Rogers observed that at the dawn of the twenty first century "eccentric folk music of the late 1960s became covetable again" (2008). Rogers explains that the resurgence of interest in this "eccentric folk music" is due in part to the re-release of Vashti Bunyan's *Just Another Diamond Day*, originally released in 1970, and re-released in 2000. The "psychedelic," "eccentric," or "freak" folk—as Bunyan's music is now labelled—of the late 1960s and early 1970s in North America and Western Europe has recently become celebrated despite its lack of commercial success in the 1960s/70s. Freak folk has thus gone from a genre that was virtually ignored at the time of its emergence to one that has attracted a niche market. I examine the reception of freak folk in order to understand its resurgence within and relevance to the contemporary popular music landscape. Moreover, given that freak folk artists have been predominantly female, I will attend to the ways in which the gender identity of these artists shaped freak folk's reception history.

Following the trajectory of Bunyan's reception, I postulate that there is more ideological room in popular music *now* for the progressive aesthetics of female freak folk musicians, than was the case in the 1960s/70s. I hold that this in part accounts for the contemporary resurgence in freak folk. To come to this conclusion, I analyze twentieth-century press coverage of women musicians in early freak folk and contrast these to critical reports of other female musicians in the folk milieu, and to predominantly male psychedelic folk ensembles. I hold that the discourse surrounding women in folk/psychedelic folk reveals the workings of gendered aesthetic language. In contrast to the coverage of male artists—who may have displayed similar musical experimentation—I suggest that female artists in 1960s/70s Britain and North America were held up against heightened standards of respectability, and received far less encouragement to push

against musical convention. Later in the 2000s, Bunyan' work (like that of other female freak folk musicians in her field) re-emerged to attract critical appraisal and a niche audience. In all, I examine various factors contributing to this disjointed reception history, centering my analysis on gender, the press, and shifting attitudes toward women in experimental folk.

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Le journaliste musical Jude Rogers a observé qu'à l'aube du vingt-et-unième siècle, la musique folk excentrique de la fin des années 1960 était de nouveau convoitée (2008). Rogers explique que l'intérêt renouvelé pour cette « musique folk excentrique » est dû en partie à la réédition de *Just Another Diamond Day* de Vashti Bunyan, initialement sorti en 1970 et ensuite resorti en 2000. Le « psychédélique », « le folk excentrique », ou « freak » - comme la musique de Bunyan est maintenant étiquetée - de la fin des années 60 et du début des années 70 en Amérique du Nord et en Europe occidentale a récemment été célébré malgré son manque de succès commercial dans les années 60/70. Freak folk est ainsi passé d'un genre pratiquement ignoré au moment de son émergence à un genre qui a attiré un marché de niche. J'examine la réception du folk excentrique afin de mieux comprendre sa résurgence et sa pertinence pour le paysage musical populaire contemporain. En outre, considérant que les artistes folkloriques ont été à prédominance féminine, je vais considérer la manière dont l'identité de genre de ces artistes a façonné l'histoire de la réception ce cette musique.

Suivant la trajectoire de la réception de Bunyan, je postule qu'il y a une augmentation de réception idéologique dans la musique populaire pour l'esthétique progressive des musiciens féminins que durant les années 60/70. Je soutiens que cela explique en partie la résurgence contemporaine de folk excentrique. Pour en arriver à cette conclusion, j'analyse la couverture médiatique de femmes musiciennes au début du vingtième siècle et les compares aux critiques d'autres musiciennes du milieu populaire et aux ensembles folkloriques à prédominance masculine. Je considère que le discours sur les femmes dans le folk / psychédélisme révèle le fonctionnement du langage esthétique sexué. Contrairement à la couverture des artistes masculins, qui ont peut-être fait preuve d'une expérimentation musicale similaire, les femmes britanniques et nord-américaines des années 60/70 ont été confrontées à des normes élevées de

respectabilité et ont reçu beaucoup moins d’encouragements contre les conventions musicales. Plus tard dans les années 2000, le travail de Bunyan, comme celui d’autres musiciens folkloriques dans son domaine, a refait surface pour attirer une évaluation critique et un public de niche. En résumé, j'examine divers facteurs contribuant à cette histoire de réception désarticulée, centrant mon analyse sur le genre, la presse et les attitudes changeantes à l'égard des femmes dans le monde expérimental.

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Firstly, I must give thanks to Vashti Bunyan. Her music has marked this chapter in my life so profoundly, and I am evermore inspired by her creativity. I hope this thesis continues to shed light on her immensely powerful work. To my supervisor and professor Dr. David Brackett I offer my sincere gratitude. You have encouraged me to pursue my work in popular music, and thus contribute to a field you and I both believe deserves much greater representation in academia. I must thank you for your insights, your recommendations, and your enviable ability to turn overcomplicated ideas into manageable study. This degree on the whole has been enlightening, challenging, and exceedingly rewarding. I also give many thanks to Dr. Lisa Barg who has exposed me to valuable critical work on the intersections of gender, race, and nation in the context of music performance. Your teaching has provided a bridge between musicology and communications, and I thank you for all you do. The Marvin Duchow Music Library has been a valuable resource for my work and I would like to specifically thank librarians Cynthia Leive and David Curtis for their research advice. Many thanks to the British Library as well, and to the British Newspaper Archive. I am very grateful for the advice of scholar Rob Young and for his unparalleled historical treatise on the British psychedelic folk movement. The documentary *Vashti Bunyan: From Here to Before* (2006) was provided on special request by director Kieran Evans. Thank you for allowing me access to this footage—it has contributed markedly to my understanding of Bunyan's personal philosophy. Lastly, I must thank my colleagues and friends who have supported my work and offered me useful feedback: Tom Adamson; Michael Turabian; Jennifer Messelink; and Genny Plumptre. Thanks also to Simone Truemner-Caron for the translation of the abstract. Finally, I offer gratitude for the unwavering support and reinforcement from my father, musician and songwriter Brooke Blackburn.

Part 1: Introductory Material

1.1 Introduction to Vashti Bunyan

In 2003 Vashti Bunyan, a British freak folk artist and forebear of an emerging alternative folk tradition, was approached by a young artist. [1] As Rob Young recounts in his comprehensive overview of the British psychedelic folk movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s entitled *Electric Eden: Unearthing Britain's Visionary Music* (2010), [2]

> Vashti received a letter and hand-drawn artwork from Devendra Banhart, a young singer-songwriter based in San Francisco. The letter professed undying admiration for [Vashti Bunyan's first studio LP, *Just Another Diamond Day*, released originally in 1970], but Banhart himself claimed to be unsure of the worth of his own music and asked Vashti directly for advice on whether he should carry on. She sent an encouraging note back, and Banhart ended up persuading his friend Gary Held to license a U.S. release for *Diamond Day* on his label DiChristina, while Vashti contributed vocals to Banhart's 2004 album *Rejoicing in the Hands.* The poignancy of Vashti's story and the gentle but determined nature worship audible in her songs struck a deep chord with Banhart and his West Coast circle ... all mostly younger than Vashti's own children.[3]

In Bunyan, Banhart found the very artistic validation and emotional reinforcement that was so lacking when Bunyan herself first sought commercial success with her seven-inch singles (released in 1965 and 1966) and later with her debut studio LP released in 1970. As Kitty Empire explains in an article for *The Guardian* entitled "Flash Forward: Folk Legend Vashti Bunyan Lost Her Way at the End of a Hippie Dream" (2005), Bunyan encouraged Banhart that his "strange, unclassifiable songs were worth pursuing" and expressed admiration for the endeavours of Banhart and his West Coast contemporaries like Faun Fables, Vetiver, Joanna Newsom, and Brightback Morning Light.[4] On this, Bunyan longingly remarks,

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[1] Bunyan has been labeled by the music press as "The Godmother of Freak Folk." This moniker first appeared in a music feature for *The New York Press* entitled "Hippie Chick: Godmother of Freak Folk, Vashti Bunyan, Hits the Road" dated September 20, 2006.
[2] Rob Young is an author and Editor-at-Large for Britain's *The Wire* magazine. He specializes in British psychedelic folk history, national identity, and cultural history.
[3] Rob Young, *Electric Eden: Unearthing Britain's Visionary Music* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 2010), 43.
[4] Kitty Empire, "Flash Forward: Folk Legend Vashti Bunyan Lost Her Way at the End of a Hippie Dream," *The Guardian*, September 18, 2005, www.theguardian.com/music/2005/sep/18/popandrock1.

> I just wish they had been around back then… My contemporaries didn't think I was authentic because I didn't want to be a traditional folk singer. That's what I love about this whole breed of people. Music like I made with… *Diamond Day* is being made in this time and isn't being ridiculed and I love that there is such an acceptance of [those] ideas.[5]

Bunyan's musing here reveals a profound internal struggle that has accompanied her from her earliest encounters with the popular music industry in London's mid-1960s folk revival heyday, to her newfound recognition as a preeminent forebear of one delicate branch of Britain's psychedelic folk movement. Regarded now as a central figure in freak folk's musical and intellectual her/history, Bunyan has only in the last two decades known commercial success, as her previous attempts at musical credibility and popular recognition in the 1960s and 1970s resulted in stark criticism at worst, and at best, unwavering public apathy. Precisely thirty years after the initial release of *Just Another Diamond Day* in 1970 on Phillips Records (which only generated sales in the hundreds) the album was re-released on Spinney Records due to high demand among vinyl collectors for the original pressing. [6] The 2000 re-issue continues to attract a significant niche market, receiving critical appraisal from *Pitchfork* magazine, *The Guardian*, *New Musical Express (NME), The Washington Post*, *The Wire*, *The New York Times* and other beacons of influential aesthetic opinion.

Describing Bunyan's twentieth-century musical corpus with the kind of rhetoric often used to describe lost sacred texts, Jude Rogers for *The Guardian* in 2008 writes that,

> Something peculiar happened at the dawn of the twenty first century: eccentric folk music of the late 1960s became covetable again. The catalyst was the 2000 reissue of Vashti Bunyan's 1970 album, *Just Another Diamond Day*—a strange, gossamer-soft record that not only inspired a new generation of folk experimentalists including

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[5] Ibid.

[6] Matthew Murphy for *Pitchfork* Magazine explains that "*Just Another Diamond Day* has long been considered a holy grail for Brit-folk record collectors, with original copies of the album fetching over $1,000 at auction" (Matthew Murphy, "Vashti Bunyan: *Just Another Diamond Day*," Review of *Just Another Diamond Day* by Vashti Bunyan, *Pitchfork*, October 20, 2004, https://pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/1135-just-another-diamond-day).

> Devendra Banhart and Adem, but prompted record collectors to hunt for the other neglected female folk musicians.[7]

Like Rogers, Richard Harrington for *The Washington Post* in 2007 describes *Just Another Diamond Day* as "a pastoral gem, psychedelic folk somehow sweetly innocent and un-self-conscious, full of lily ponds, glowworms, laughing streams and rainbow rivers… Bunyan's soft strum wrapped in feather-light arrangements, her whispered vocals at the edge of evanescence."[8] For *Pitchfork* in 2004, Matthew Murphy maintains that *Just Another Diamond Day* is "in its own humble way, a thing of perfection."[9] Beyond the unprecedented critical and public appraisal for *Diamond Day* emerging out of the early years of the twenty-first century, Bunyan's works have also received newfound appreciation through their various appearances on historical compilations. The compilation entitled *Gather in the Mushrooms: The British Acid-Folk Underground 1968-1974* (2004) presents Bunyan's "Winter is Blue," a track recorded as a demo in 1966 and only officially released in the 2000 re-pressing of *Diamond Day.* Another, called *Circus Days: UK Psychedelic Obscurities 1966-70 Vol. 1* (1990) includes her track "I'd Like to Walk Around in Your Mind" which was demoed in 1966, and pre-emptively obtained before its official re-release on *Diamond Day* in 2000. Similarly, *The Enlightened Family: A Collection of Lost Songs* (2005) includes "Song of a Wishwanderer" (also entitled "Wishwanderer"), an unreleased demo from 1966. Record collectors, critics, and a growing audience have thus begun to celebrate the otherwise unheard whispers of Bunyan's 1960s and 1970s recordings, when only three decades prior, both Bunyan and her various producers were convinced their efforts were for naught.

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[7] Jude Rogers, "Lie Back and Think of Ukuleles," *The Guardian*, January 2, 2008, www.theguardian.com/music/2008/jan/02/folk.features11.
[8] Richard Harrington, "Vashti Bunyan's 'Day' Has Come Again," *The Washington Post*, February 9, 2007, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/02/08/AR2007020800500.html.
[9] Murphy, "Vashti Bunyan."

The freak folk of Bunyan, and that of her contemporaries discussed below, has thus become the target of a niche market despite the fact that it was virtually ignored at the time of its emergence. In light of this resurgence, the current investigation seeks to account for the disjointed reception history of Bunyan, and by extension, other female freak folk artists who also began their careers in the mid-twentieth century. Importantly, any interrogation into reception history must be executed with caution and intellectual modesty—one cannot discern why a certain artist was successful or poorly received at any given time with any certainty. With this in mind, I wonder if Bunyan's reception history might be influenced by gender. In analyzing this particular factor in reception history, I suggest that wider gendered patterns in freak/psychedelic folk history exist. I intend to evaluate Bunyan's musical career, comparing her reception to those of other female freak folk performers who began their work in the 1960s and 1970s (like Linda Perhacs, Sybille Baier, Wendy Flower, and Susan Christie). These women were all but ignored in their time, and yet, in the twenty-first century, they have been showered with critical appraisal, extensive record re-pressings, record deals for new releases, and greater public acceptance. In this quiet branch of psychedelic folk—wherein artists diverge from common folk revival aesthetics in terms of vocal timbre, harmonic patterning, tonality, song structure, vocal pitch precision, metrical organization, and dissonance—the majority of practitioners who initially escaped the horizon of public view were solo self-accompanied women. In general, I thus examine the reception of freak folk in order to understand its resurgence within and relevance to the contemporary popular music landscape. More specifically, given that resurgent freak folk artists have been predominantly female, I attend to the ways in which the gender identity of these artists shaped freak folk's reception history. I hold that the contemporary resurgence in female freak folk represents an increased acceptance of women in experimental folk branches.

1.2 Freak Folk

This study traces a history of the term "freak folk," with a particular focus on Bunyan who, after her failed commercial attempts, relocated to rural anti-urban spheres, and only later began to record again once interest in her re-emerged.[10] What I will refer to here (and have been referring to) as freak folk—otherwise labelled "acid folk," "free folk," and "avant-folk"—is understood as an offshoot of the 1960s/70s psychedelic folk movement, and is a label that critics, musicians, and fans have retroactively applied to a wide range of artists who were understood as "folk," "folk-rock," or "rock" artists at the time. The twentieth-century psychedelic folk foundation laid by artists like The Incredible String Band, T-Rex, Steeleye Span, John Fahey, Fairport Convention, Nick Drake, and The Strawbs forms the fertile ground from which freak folk stems. Importantly, "Psychedelic" and "freak" folk varieties are akin in their divergence from common folk revival practices: these musics take folk's acoustic instrumentation and nostalgic ideological framework and inject it with psychedelic influences. Psychedelic and freak folk compositions often integrate folk revivalist aesthetics with experimental lyrical procedures, non-Western and archaic instrumentation, harmonic maneuvers divergent from common practice, stark dissonances, and unconventional rhythmic organization. Freak folk, therefore, adapts the folk revival's general aesthetic, while injecting it with elements of psychedelia, pastoralism, and rural retreat. Further, it often insinuates an ethereal displacement of reality, and is characteristically devoid of any commitment to sonic purity or flawlessness.[11] Anthony Carew explains in "Genre Profile: Freak Folk" that in this music,

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[10] After her commercial failures in the 1960s, Bunyan notoriously forsook the urban existence of London and retreated by horse and caravan with her partner to the Scottish Highlands. They sought to live completely off the land without any reliance on twentieth-century inventions. For more information on rural retreat, anti-modernity, and displacement as it relates to Bunyan see Keith Halfacree, "'Glow Worms Show the Path We Have to Tread:' The Counterurbanisation of Vashti Bunyan," *Social & Cultural Geography* 10, no.7 (2009): 771-789.

[11] Rob Young, "British Psychedelic Folk," *The Wire*, August 2007, 39.

> Acoustic sounds are a must, and stringed instruments always work best if finger-picked. Lyrically, evoking the mythical and the pastoral is stock-in-trade. And that romanticism for the land picks up on the hippy spirit, and what might be the genre's most defining quality: sounding out of time.[12]

As a genre term, "freak folk" emerges out of contemporary popular music categorization. It functions as a label for current artists (like Joanna Newsom, Devendra Banhart, Grizzly Bear, Animal Collective, and Akron Family) who find their inspiration from the dominant 1960s/70s psychedelic folk canon as well as the peripheral psychedelic folk musics. Carew explains that,

> Like so many musical genres, the parameters of "freak folk" are ill-defined. But the ties that bind don't always seem to have a lot to do with music. Largely about reviving '60s ideology—as enshrined on LPs like Vashti Bunyan's glorious *Just Another Diamond Day*, which was reviled in its time for its hippyish daydreaming—the freak-folkers were sold on the imagined mythology of the hippies.[13]

The category of "freak folk" likely began in the reissue culture of the late 1990s, finding its full articulation in 2004 with the launch of Banhart's *The Golden Apples of the Moon.*[14] That same year witnessed the release of Newsom's debut album, as well as Animal Collective's *Sung Tongs* EP, both staples of the freak folk canon. The birth of the exact phrase "freak folk" may have been here in 2004, but the timeline is uncertain. A historical background, however, provides some context. The term "psychedelic rock" likely materialized in 1966, with music press outlets describing the connection between "psychedelia" and music performance with pieces like "Psychedelic Music: Is it Next?".[15] The mind-expanding, drug-associated, hippy-centered realm of psychedelia makes its first connection to folk somewhat later, in the early 1970s. Rick

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[12] Anthony Carew, "Genre Profile: Freak-Folk," *ThoughtCo.*, March 8, 2017, https://www.thoughtco.com/genre-profile-freak-folk-94019.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Rochelle Read, "Psychedelic Music: Is it Next?," *KRLA Beat*, September 1966. Another notable article by Arnold Shaw for *Variety* entitled "Freak Out / Psychedelic / Folk Rock: Supersedes Sex / Vex / Wrecks" reveals an early linkage of the terms "psychedelic" and "rock" (Arnold Shaw, "Freak Out / Psychedelic / Folk Rock, Supersede Sex / Vex / Wrecks," *Variety*, January 1967, 172).

McGrath for *The Georgia Straight* in 1971 presents one of the first uses of the category when he calls Donovan the "Humble Minstrel of psychedelic folk."[16]

In contemporary music criticism, the term "psychedelic folk" retroactively signifies an entire alternative folk scene in the 1960s/70s, even if the term appears rather inconsistently in the historical record. "Freak folk" seems to follow in similar form. David Brackett in *Categorizing Sound* (2016) discusses this procedure. "Emphasis in these situations," he explains, "tends to rely more on retroactive grouping based on what is already known or assumed to be the contents of a genre rather than on the emergence of a category during a particular historical period."[17] "Freak folk," in particular, is used as a retroactive signifier *as well* as a contemporary generic category. Artists who have strayed from the psychedelic folk current in the 1960s/70s, and have inspired the contemporary work of artists like Devendra Banhart, Joanna Newsom, and Grizzly Bear, are given the same "freak folk" label as their twenty-first-century counterparts. The music of Vashti Bunyan, Sibylle Baier, Linda Perhacs, and other artists in their milieu, is thus retroactively categorized as "freak folk," particularly because their music was hidden from view in the twentieth century and was only reestablished in the early 2000s. "Freak folk" as a generic category thus encapsulates new music, *and* the work of such lost artists whose disjointed reception history has led to their inclusion in this emergent twenty-first century category.[18] Finally, "When a text or group of texts is retroactively figured as the origin of a genre"—like

[16] Rick McGrath, "Donovan: Hurdy Gurdy Man Rolls into Town," *Georgia Straight*, October 1971.
[17] David Brackett, *Categorizing Sound* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016), 4.
[18] Musician Adem Ilhan (a British bassist and performer in Vashti Bunyan's 2006 Barbican concert) explains this phenomenon in a documentary by Kieran Evans. "I think a reason why [*Just Another Diamond Day*] has done so well now," he says, "is because of its failure to launch back in the day… It doesn't sound like—it sounds like an old record—but it sounds completely modern because back in the day, it wasn't played… It's not part of the sound of the 1960s/70s so it feels like new music."

when the works of Bunyan et. al. are positioned as the "origin" of contemporary freak folk—"it is thus figured on the basis of its citation as the origin in the present."[19]

To clarify, the distinction between psychedelic and freak folk musics can be understood in temporal terms: "psychedelic" folk often denotes avant-garde folk music from the 1960s/70s that constitutes a canon in alternative folk practice. "Freak" folk, on the other hand, denotes contemporary (from the early 2000s onward) alternative folk music that has been largely inspired by its 1960s "psychedelic" folk predecessors. Finally, in a retroactive move, "freak" folk also signifies alternative folk music from the 1960s that initially escaped public attention, and has only begun to achieve commercial success in the twenty first century.

For further contextualization, the term "freak," while not attaching to "folk" until the late 1990s/early 2000s, does figure prominently in press for psychedelic rock in the 1960s/70s. "Freak Outs"—a multi-media, psychedelic experience where young radicals would congregate to experience music, light shows, and psychedelic art—figure prominently in 1960s/70s counterculture. Indeed, the Mothers of Invention (of which Frank Zappa was band leader) released a record in 1966 entitled *Freak Out!* With the band's press coverage and album reviews, the term "freak" grew in popularity with the press. To be "freak" is to be off-center, off-kilter, and against the mainstream. The term denotes "otherness" within the scheme of categorization, but it slowly undergoes institutionalization as it evolves into a staple generic category in the early twenty-first century. In the end, one must keep in mind that generic titles are characteristically plastic and moveable. At times, "psychedelic" and "freak" synonymously denote alternative folk styles, and the distinction often muddles. Further, "acid folk," "fairy folk," and "new folk" can occupy the same space as "freak folk."

[19] Brackett, *Categorizing Sound*, 13.

Throughout this analysis, I speculate about how the countercultural political environment of 1960s/70s North America and Western Europe—with its circulating ideas about freak folk, and its discursive themes of pastoralism, femininity, and gender normativity—might connect to specific musical procedures which are often viewed as "eccentric" or "freak." I thus situate the musical gestures of Bunyan within the wider field of popular and folk musical discourse in order to understand how these gestures might signify in relation to mainstream musical conventions. Following the trend of Bunyan's reception history, I postulate that there is more ideological room in popular music *now* for the musically autonomous and progressive aesthetics of female freak folk musicians, than was the case in the 1960s/70s. I hold that this in part accounts for the contemporary resurgence in freak folk.[20]

1.3 Re-Issue Culture

Still, it is crucial to keep in mind that other factors, beyond gender and socialization, likely contributed to Bunyan's disjointed reception history. The twenty-first-century upswing of LP re-pressings of otherwise unheard records from the twentieth century likely contributed to the particular reissue culture surrounding Bunyan and her freak folk contemporaries. In an article for Mixmag Magazine entitled "Eight Reissue Labels You Need to Know About: Essential Blasts from the Past" (2016), Louis Anderson-Rich documents the re-issue activity of the early 2000s. He explains that, "Rare records are all over Discogs and eBay for four-figure prices, with the vinyl revival at a 28-year high."[21] Further, he writes that this "environment has helped breed the re-issue game to what it is today; a world of ultimate record nerds who want to share hidden

[20] When I speak of gender in this piece, I am concerned with the cis-gendered female-identified women, and the cis-gendered male-identified men involved in this particular musical period. In general, I do not mean to distill all matter of gender identifications into any binary demarcation. However, to evaluate the functions of gender in the reception history of freak folk, I do parse apart the differences between male and female experiences. None of the personnel in question identify as trans or gender non-binary.

[21] Louis Anderson-Rich, "Eight Reissue Labels You Need to Know About: Essential Blasts from the Past," *Mixmag*, September 23, 2016, https://mixmag.net/feature/8-reissue-labels-you-need-to-know-about.

gems with a new generation." In particular, Anderson-Rich stresses that contemporary re-issue culture prioritizes the recovery of otherwise unheralded albums from the past. "With these labels we're not talking about the majors that re-release Bon Jovi," he writes, instead, alternative labels breathe "new life into long sought rarities." Re-issue labels like Sundazed Records (U.S.), Finders Keepers Records (U.K.), the Wild Places (U.S.), Music from Memory (The Netherlands), Flash Forward (Italy), and many others evolved out of this culture and continue to resurrect forgotten albums for an enthusiastic public. The re-release of material like *Diamond Day*, therefore, is but one instance of a well-established revival practice.

Bunyan's 1970 record became a fetish of discovery in the twenty first century, with re-releases sprouting from many labels (beyond Spinney) including Mystic Diva Records, M2U Records, DiCristina Stair Builders, Strange Days Records, and Branch Music. More and more re-issue labels have taken records like *Diamond Day* out of obscurity and repositioned them into the popular music arena. To contextualize this culture of musical resurrection with a theoretical approach, I employ Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of the inversely proportional relationship between economic and symbolic capital. In his essay entitled "The Field of Cultural Production" (1993), the French philosopher and sociologist explains that texts (whether they be visual art, literature, or otherwise) can occupy various locations within a field stretching from *high symbolic capital* to *low symbolic capital*.[22] In the former sphere, a work may receive high regard from a particularized audience, but gain little attention from the masses. This results in a weakening of economic capital, causing the work to remain in obscurity *but* to possess an inherent wealth of non-monetary value. On the opposite end of the field are works that achieve exceptional commercial success but fail to attain any meaningful symbolic capital. These works

[22] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 49.

are popular, but lack approval from highbrow critics, other prestigious artists in their field, or academic institutions.

Re-issue labels seem to operate as a mobilizing force. First, they target albums from the past that languished in economic failure while containing high symbolic capital (or, maybe that capital emerges only as a consequence of their contemporary resurrection). Then, through the revival process, they carry these albums out of obscurity, placing them into another region of Bourdieu's field wherein they achieve both commercial success (read: economic capital) and maintain, or perhaps heighten, their symbolic capital. Re-issue labels of this sort are usually small—and some humorously address that fact by calling themselves names like BBE (Barely Breaking Even)—but their efforts result in a niche form of economic and symbolic balance. The re-issue labels effectively rearticulate a privation of economic capital into a heightened sense of symbolic capital, and their albums sell. Old, *forgotten* records become profoundly attractive to contemporary audiences that seek some sense of mystery in a world increasingly accessible through their fingertips.

Alongside re-issue culture, current trends in investigative music journalism may have also contributed to the newfound attention given to women of the freak folk genre, and this probably has more to do with historical examination than any righteous unveiling of women's alternative folk. In the end, re-issue culture and journalistic trends such as these likely contributed to freak folk's peculiar reception history. Lastly, Bunyan's debut LP in particular could have failed in 1970 for many more reasons than any simple formulation can contain—perhaps internal conflicts within the label (Phillips Records) led to the mismanagement of the LP's marketing and distribution. Phillips' decision to delay the release of the album by a year could have caused any initial interest in Bunyan to quickly dissipate. Correspondingly, the album

may have been difficult to market due to its generic indeterminacy, and the initial pressing may have been far too limited to ignite a decent commercial push. These factors and others will be examined in tandem with my sociological hypothesis that Bunyan's music (and music like hers also made by women) was rejected in the 1960s/70s and reclaimed in the early 2000s due to shifting attitudes toward women in progressive folk branches.

Structures of power exist within the porous walls of the record industry, with gender hierarchies and discriminatory practices from society writ large seeping into realms once considered highly "progressive." With this investigation, I identify gender-based biases within folk and the counterculture to better understand the reception history of freak folk. By extension, I speculate about the place of gender in a network of dominant forces in the record industry.

1.4 Thesis Organization

This thesis is organized in the following way. Above, I provided a contextual framework centered around a genealogy of freak folk and a detailed examination of re-issue culture. I have also introduced Vashti Bunyan and hinted at her disjointed reception history. Following this introductory section is a brief literary review and discussion of methodology. The thesis then turns to an evaluation of Bunyan's contemporaries in twentieth-century freak folk. I provide a sketch of Bunyan's career trajectory to compare her work to that of Linda Perhacs, Sibylle Baier, Wendy Flower, and Susan Christie. Each of these solo female artists in the freak folk milieu follow a comparable path of initial commercial failure and delayed resurgence.

In tandem with my analyses of the forgotten freak folk of the 1960s/70s, I make reference to contemporary freak folk or the affectionately-labeled "New Weird America" (spawning largely from the efforts of Banhart and his Bay Area contemporaries). [23] My long form analysis

[23] The title "New Weird America" (which designates contemporary avant-garde/freak folk music derived from 1960s/70s psychedelic folk) likely stems from the phrase "old weird America" coined by Greil Marcus in his 1997

of Bunyan's career unfolds in five parts. The first section (3.1) concerns her early musical endeavours, particularly her recordings with Andrew Loog Oldham in 1965. In this section I discuss Bunyan's failure to fulfill the requirements of a 1960s pop singer, especially one following in the footsteps of Marianne Faithfull. The second section (3.2) covers Bunyan's work with Peter Snell. Here Snell attempts to market Bunyan as a folk artist, but the generic association fails to turn her sound into a commercial success. After Bunyan detaches from Oldham and Snell, she retreats to the Scottish Highlands into an anti-urban sphere of isolation, and this departure is discussed in the third section (3.3). Finally, the next two sections concern Bunyan's work with Joe Boyd on her debut album, *Just Another Diamond Day.* I discuss the recording of the album, its reception, and the personnel involved. As this thesis attempts to analyze Bunyan's history through a network of mitigating factors, I address certain issues that contributed to the failure of *Diamond Day* including problems in distribution, marketing, and production.

After this evaluation, the discussion turns to the issue of gender in the reception history of early freak folk. It will focus primarily on how the aesthetic language often applied to female musicians in record reviews, concert reviews, artist features, and other press might be inflected by gender. It becomes clear that within this period, only a very narrow space was allotted for female musical expression, and patronizing misogyny existed firmly in the counterculture. These factors reinforce the notion that Bunyan rejected the London pop/folk scene to travel northward

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text, *Invisible Republic: Bob Dylan's Basement Tapes* (later retitled *The Old, Weird America: The World of Bob Dylan's Basement Tapes* in 2011). The phrase encapsulates how Marcus perceived some of the darker and uncanny excerpts of Harry Smith's *Anthology of American Folk Music* (1952). The title "New Weird America" likely first emerged on the cover of the August 2003 edition of *The Wire* which reads "Welcome to the New Weird America: Sunburned Hand of the Man and the Free Folk Explosion," referencing the issue's feature article entitled "The Fire Down Below" by David Keenan.

and escape an unfavorable environment. Furthermore, these historical realities reveal that women creating progressive music at this time were often not taken seriously.

The analysis continues into a comparative investigation of Bunyan's work as it relates to other, more successful freak/psychedelic folk artists from her period of emergence (these artists include The Incredible String Band, The Pentangle, and Fairport Convention). A focused treatment of vocal timbre and range is then provided with a comparative analysis of Bunyan and Joni Mitchell. This comparison seeks to reveal how the mechanisms of public acceptance in mid-twentieth-century folk revival audiences have been entangled with expectations of female vocal performance. Here the timbrally clear and dexterous vocal performances by women received critical and public appraisal more so than timbrally hoarse, weak, and narrow-ranged vocal performances. My analysis asks why the vocal aesthetics of women in this period have been so painstakingly scrutinized, while male artists who display vocal aesthetics similar to those of Bunyan (or her contemporaries like Sibylle Baier and Susan Christie) like Nick Drake, have achieved both commercial success and critical appraisal. Finally, I question what role gender plays in the expectations of vocal performance (particularly in the folk genres), and how female freak folk may have suffered in the 1960s/70s because its practitioners defied such expectations.

On the whole, I stress that Bunyan's reception history reveals shifting tastes and attitudes toward the acceptability of women in folk's more progressive branches. Further, I suggest in the ultimate section (5) that generic issues concerning "addressivity" and "legibility" contributed to Bunyan's initial commercial failure and subsequent revival.

1.5 Methodology & Literary Review

Secondary source material concerning the psychedelic folk/freak folk tradition provides the conceptual framework for this investigation. The primary texts grounding my understanding of the psychedelic folk movement in North America and Britain, and of the specific individuals discussed here, are Rob Young's formal musicological treatise *Electric Eden* (2010), as well as his periodical writings for *The Wire* magazine (a monthly entertainment publication focusing on Britain's avant-garde and alternative music scenes). Young provides extensive coverage of Bunyan's career and personal philosophy. Moreover, he situates her work in the wider tradition of British folk revival history and examines her indebtedness to British pastoralism. His work is primarily historical, however, and does not include a sociological analysis of freak folk reception, nor does it engage with issues of gender bias. I lay the foundation of my thesis with this historical work and offer further contribution by questioning the role of gender in Bunyan's reception history.

I also gather historical and sociological context from Jeanette Leech's *Seasons They Change: The Story of Acid and Psychedelic Folk* (2010), Michael Brocken's *The British Folk Revival* (2017), and Filene Benjamin's *Romancing the Folk* (2000). These latter works, alongside the historical treatises of Tom Gruning's *Millennium Folk* (2006),[24] and Robert Cantwell's *When We Were Good* (1996) form the contextual background that situates Bunyan's folk music with wider folk revival traditions.[25]

Alongside this secondary source material on psychedelic folk and folk revival culture writ large, I employ further scholarship on genre. I suggest that Bunyan's work found its

[24] Tom Gruning, *Millenium Folk: American Folk Music Since the Sixties* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006).
[25] Cantwell, Robert, *When We Were Good: The Folk Revival* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996).

audience in the early 2000s in part because of the assemblage of the "freak folk" genre. As part of my generic analysis, I sketched a genealogy of "freak folk" employing the concept of "retroactive identification." Later, I consider Bunyan's generic alignments within the concepts of addressivity and commensurability. For these investigations, I engage with David Brackett's *Categorizing Sound* (2016), Pierre Bourdieu's *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* (1993), and Mikhail Bakhtin's *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (1981).

In tandem with these secondary source materials, I consult contemporary music publications (in the form of record reviews, artist profiles, and performance reviews) to better understand how Bunyan and other female freak folk artists are covered in the twenty-first-century popular music landscape. I consult Jude Rogers and Kitty Empire for *The Guardian*, as well as Jayson Greene and Matthew Murphy for *Pitchfork*, among others. For further context, I gather contemporary album reviews, performance reviews, and press coverage concerning freak folk from other notable periodicals including *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*.

My primary source research consists of archival materials from Bunyan's initial period of emergence. These include record reviews, artist profiles, interviews, single releases, as well as recordings. I consult press coverage from periodical publications such as *Billboard* magazine, London's *Daily Mirror*, *Variety*, *The Chicago Tribune*, the *Newcastle Evening Chronicle*, *Melody Maker*, *Rave* and others to examine the ways in which Bunyan and her contemporaries were covered by the press. For this archival investigation, I analyze how gendered aesthetic language effected the coverage of women in popular music.[26] I identify the ways in which women artists were scrutinized in terms of their vocal aesthetics and musical experimentation. In contrast to the coverage of male artists—who may have displayed unconventional vocal

[26] By "gendered aesthetic language" I mean the ways in which aesthetic judgements in the rhetoric of music criticism reveal gender stereotypes and presuppositions.

stylization or musical experimentation in terms of harmony, rhythm, and metre—I hold that female artists in 1960s Britain and North America were held up against heightened standards of respectability, and received far less encouragement to push against musical convention.

I collect this archival material to question the gendered aesthetic language colouring the rhetorical field of popular music criticism. I scrutinize the critical treatment of individual artists and bands to discern traces of inherent gender bias, and question how these procedures may have contributed to the reception of women in freak folk. To aid in this discussion, I consult Sheila Whiteley's *Women and Popular Music: Sexuality, Identity, and Subjectivity* (2000). This text in particular reveals the latent gender inequality in music press, recording, and performance. Simon Reynolds' *The Sex Revolts: Gender, Rebellion, and Rock 'n' Roll* (1995) also contributes to my understanding.[27] These texts, however, focus primarily on rock. I therefore extend their socio-cultural evaluations into the field of psychedelic folk. As I engage with gender bias in music criticism and performance practice, I examine the concept of instrumental "virtuosity" and its relationship to gender. Here Zarko Cvejic's *The Virtuoso as Subject* (2016) and Maiko Kawabata's "Virtuoso Codes of Violin Performance" provide context. Both Cvejic and Kawabata examine the relationship between masculinity and instrumental virtuosity in eighteenth and nineteenth-century European music criticism. These treatises contribute to my understanding of music criticism and gender as I attempt to synthesize their assessments into a particularized discussion of freak and psychedelic folk history. In addition, I include feminist theory from Diane Tietjens Meyers' *Gender in the Mirror: Cultural Imagery and Women's Agency* (2002) to reinforce my analyses of gender inequality in the music industry.

[27] Simon Reynolds, *The Sex Revolts: Gender, Rebellion, and Rock 'n' Roll* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995).

Comparative analyses of primary source press materials and musical matter form the last part of the thesis. I compare media coverage and formal musical attributes of pieces by Joni Mitchel, Nick Drake, the Incredible String Band, and Fairport Convention against the freak folk work of Bunyan and her contemporaries. I also provide internal comparisons of musical characteristics between Bunyan and other freak folk artists in her milieu (like Sibylle Baier) to better understand the commonalities in freak folk musical expression. My musical study in general is conducted through an analysis of harmony, vocal timbre, vocal pitch precision and range, metrical organization, rhythm, technological manipulation, and lyrical procedures. Above all, my thesis contributes a gender-based analysis to the field of psychedelic folk scholarship. The reception history of freak folk has yet to be evaluated through the lens of gender and socialization.

Part 2: Bunyan's Contemporaries: "The Lost Ladies of Folk"

Before discussing the particularities of Bunyan's unique musical trajectory, I will here showcase the very *unremarkable* nature of a musical autobiography such as this—one which includes the overshadowing and public disregard for a female freak/psychedelic folk performer emerging out of the 1960s/70s. In 2007, alternative/experimental electronica performer Jane Weaver with her husband Andy Votel released a compilation album entitled *Bearded Ladies: 15 Homegrown Selections of Forlorn and Freakish Female Songsmithery from the Past Four Decades* on Weaver's own label, Bird.[28] Included in this collection of forgotten progressive folk music written and performed by women is Susan Christie's "Rainy Day" (originally recorded in 1969), and Wendy Flower's (listed under Wendy & Bonnie) "The Paisley Window Pane" (released in 1969) among many others. Jude Rogers in *The Guardian* piece cited above recounts the motivations behind Weaver's sonic resurrections:

> My first experience with music [fronting Britpop band Kill Laura], was all, "You're not blonde enough, you're not thin enough." … And this goes through all female music, even in the so-called liberated times of the late 60s. I wanted [with *Bearded Ladies*] to show the unusual music that women are making, both now and then. At the risk of sounding old fashioned, it's all about sisterhood.[29]

With this compilation, Weaver partakes in what Rogers describes as the "hunt for… neglected female folk musicians," tapping into the twenty-first century tendency in Britain and North America to give recognition to an historically undervalued musical tradition. Weaver stresses that her compilation embraces the principle of "sisterhood" and seeks to compensate for the systemic pressures set against female composers who push musical convention against the grain.

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[28] Weaver's husband, Andy Votel is an English DJ, producer, and co-founder of the Manchester-based label Twisted Nerve Records and the London-based label Finders Keepers Records (specializing in re-releases of obscure psychedelic, folk, avant-garde, and jazz albums).

[29] Rogers, "Lie Back."

In the same spirit of sisterhood and resurrection, I here introduce several female freak folk musicians who align with Bunyan in her peculiar reception history.

Reserving the nuances of Bunyan's autobiography for later discussion, the central path of her musical career is provided as a comparative model. Bunyan's career begins with her debut single "Some Things Just Stick in Your Mind" backed with ("b/w") "I Want to Be Alone" produced by Andrew Loog Oldham (manager and producer of the Rolling Stones) in London and released on Decca in 1965. With Oldham's industry connections and an A-side written by current British pop stars, Mick Jagger and Keith Richards (of the Rolling Stones), Bunyan was expected to follow in the aesthetic footsteps of Marianne Faithfull.[30] In an issue of London-based newspaper *Daily Mirror* dated May 4, 1965, reporter Don Short states that "Britain has found a new Bob Dylan" in Bunyan (who at that time went by only "Vashti") and that she "could be top of the folk pops by the end of the year."[31] Further, in a segment for the *Daily Mirror* dated May 20, 1965 a portrait of dark-haired and introspective Bunyan is framed by the sub-title "A Girl Like Marianne." The blurb reads, "Enter Vashti, 20, a new girl from Dover starting out with a song… [entitled] 'Some Things Just Stick in Your Mind' (Decca). And the thing that sticks in my mind is that Vashti sounds much like Marianne Faithfull."[32] Even with this early press, the single failed commercially, notwithstanding its attractive associations. Another seven-inch attempt at stardom was launched under the production of Canadian Peter Snell, but this also

[30] In 1964, Oldham discovered and launched artist Marianne Faithfull with a single entitled "As Tears Go By" written by himself, Mick Jagger, and Keith Richards on Decca. He tried to accomplish a similar feat with Bunyan a year later by framing her as the new Faithfull. Notably, at this time Oldham also attempted to recreate the success of Faithfull by recording Nico's "I'm Not Sayin'" (1965), written by Gordon Lightfoot. The track was produced by the Rolling Stones and featured Jimmy Page on guitar. Similar to Bunyan's work with Oldham, Nico's single failed to achieve commercial success.
[31] Don Short, "Vashti's in on the Folk Act," *Daily Mirror*, May 4, 1965.
[32] Patrick Doncaster, "It's National Hurry Week," *Daily Mirror*, May 20, 1965.

failed to chart or sell copies beyond the hundreds. Bunyan then retreated from London's folk/pop scene and entered into a decidedly rural sphere by way of horse and caravan for three years.

During this time, American producer Joe Boyd—who had worked with Nick Drake, the Incredible String Band, and Fairport Convention—asked Bunyan to record a studio album on Phillips. With Boyd, she recorded *Just Another Diamond Day* in 1969, releasing it in 1970. The album was lavishly produced, with string arrangements from Nick Drake's own arranger, Robert Kirby, and instrumental appearances by members of the Incredible String Band and Fairport Convention. Upon its release, however, *Diamond Day* was met by critical disavowal and public apathy. After this latest failure, Bunyan retreated further into the Scottish Highlands with then-partner Robert Lewis, leaving her music career behind in the dusty hoof tracks of her horse-drawn caravan. As has previously been discussed, it was only in the early 2000s that Bunyan's music "became covetable again," to quote Rogers, which encouraged Bunyan to create two new studio records, feature on various collaboration albums, and tour extensively. *Just Another Diamond Day*, re-released in 2000, was followed by Bunyan's solo albums entitled *Lookaftering* (released in 2005 on FatCat, a Brighton-based alternative label) and *Heartleap* (released in 2014 also on FatCat).

2.1 Sibylle Baier

Bunyan was far from alone in how she was received. Indeed, her shared experiences with female freak folk musicians such as Sibylle Baier, Linda Perhacs, Wendy Flower, and Susan Christie reveal the underlying characteristics uniting Bunyan with these performers. The common threads between them are their gender, their genre, and their experimental compositions and performance practices. German actress and musician Sibylle Baier was an active performer in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In 1973, she appeared as a singer on Wim Wenders' film *Alice*

in the Cities. By the time of the film's release, Baier had already completed her debut album, *Colour Green.* As Robert Forster explains in "Lost Women Found: The Discovery of Vashti Bunyan, Sibylle Baier, and 'Connie' Converse" (2009),

> [Baier] had recorded a collection of her own songs, sung in English and backed by her acoustic guitar, on a reel-to-reel machine in her living room. She gave [Wim] Wenders, and probably other friends too, a cassette copy. And that's the end of the story, except that thirty-five years later Wenders, while standing in front of Reckless Records in Chicago, sees a familiar face, a young face, on a record cover in the shop window. It's Sibylle Baier. He rushed into the shop to buy a copy of the music he's been carrying around on a battered cassette since the 70s.[33]

Figure 1: Album Cover of *Colour Green* (2006)

Baier's self-recorded album, which had only existed in the hands of several friends, was all but hidden from view until her son, Robby, decided to revive the project. He "compiled a CD of her unreleased songs and gave a copy to J. Mascis from Dinosaur Jr., who forwarded them to the Orange Twin label, which released the album to insider acclaim" in February 2006.[34] In the mid-

[33] Robert Forster, "Lost Women Found: The Discovery of Vashti Bunyan, Sibylle Baier, and 'Connie' Converse," *The Monthly*, June 2009, https://www.themonthly.com.au/issue/2009/june/1274511577/robert-forster/lost-women-found.
[34] Ibid.

70s, Baier left her career in music and film to rear her young family in America. Despite her initial efforts to succeed as an actress and songwriter, she received recognition only decades after recording. Upon its 2006 release, Mike Wolf, writing for *Time Out New York*, states of *Colour Green* that "there may not be a more persistently bewitching release this year" and that the record "seems to have nestled into a breathy space between the suffocating melancholy [Baier] had been feeling and the restrained optimism that Europeans do well."[35]

Baier's story differs from Bunyan's reception history slightly. *Colour Green* was never commercially released, and it therefore did not receive the kind of critical and public disdain that marked *Diamond Day.* Indeed, Baier's initial lack of success in film and musical performance was met by apathy as she decided to relocate to America and leave the performing arts behind. She decided against pushing *Colour Green* in the 1970s and, instead, quietly stepped away from performance. Bunyan, however, was emotionally distraught after her commercial failures for, she "wanted *desperately* to be a pop singer."[36] Even so, the experiences of these two musicians display fundamental commonalities. Both Baier and Bunyan received little to no public or critical recognition for their efforts in the mid-1960s or early 1970s. Moreover, the musical aesthetics displayed in *Colour Green* and *Just Another Diamond Day* (as well as Bunyan's 1965 and 1966 single releases) bear strikingly similarities. As will be discussed further in a comparative analysis, the timbral structures of both Bunyan and Baier's vocals exhibit weakness in power, a lack in vocal clarity and virtuosity, profoundly airy and faltering delivery, hoarseness, and pitch imprecision.[37] Moreover, both artists are self-accompanied by acoustic guitar wherein they both display harmonic unconventionality, metrical irregularity, and

[35] Mike Wolf, "Sibylle Baier: *Colour Green*," Review of *Colour Green* by Sibylle Baier, *Time Out New York*, February 23, 2006, https://www.timeout.com/newyork/music/sibylle-baier.
[36] Harrington, "Vashti Bunyan's 'Day.'"
[37] Vocal "pitch imprecision" denotes the faltering of a vocal tone into dissonance, either by flattening or sharpening.

alternative tuning practice. Both Bunyan and Baier, therefore, created folk music that failed to conform to the aesthetic norms of North American and Western European 1960s/70s folk vocal and instrumental performance.[38] Further, they were both self-accompanied women who performed not as part of a band made up of male instrumentalists. Finally, what aligns Baier and Bunyan's reception trajectory above all else is the positive contemporary reception they both share. It is only now, in the first decades of the twenty-first century that audiences pay significant attention to both women, and only now that critics recognize their musical value. This proves to be the case for many other women composers and performers in the freak folk milieu.

2.2 Linda Perhacs

Linda Perhacs, a Californian psychedelic/freak folk musician active in the late 1960s and early 1970s, released an experimental album entitled *Parallelograms* on Kapp Records the same year as Bunyan's *Diamond Day*, 1970. [39] Working as a dental hygienist, she had given a tape of her demos to a patient, film composer Leonard Rosenmann, who produced her debut studio album. The record received little to no critical appraisal, public favour, or radio play. A search through the archives of North American entertainment industry magazines reveals only two reviews of *Parallelograms* from the time of its release. On December 5, 1970 *Billboard* magazine called Perhacs' album a collection of "fragile songs" that are "pleasing to the ear."[40] Earlier, on November 25, 1970, *Variety* prints a review which praises Perhacs' "fine songwriting

[38] The "norms" of folk revival performance practice differ in terms of gender. I explain in section 4.4 that, for women in folk, critics expect the norm of timbrally clear and wide-ranged vocals. To a lesser extent, folk revival music also presents the norms of tonality, metrical regularity, and harmonic conventionality. However, notable folk revival pieces do experiment with metrical irregularity and modal harmony. For more on this, see Michael Brocken's discussion of tonality in folk music (Michael Brocken, *The British Folk Revival: 1944-2002* (Milton: Taylor and Francis, 2017), 13) and Kip Lornell's analysis of Woody Guthrie's "Do Re Mi" and The Harvesters' "This Land is Your Land" (Kip Lornell, *Exploring Folk Music: Ethnic, Grassroots, and Regional Traditions in the United States* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2012), 254, 261).
[39] Thom Jurek, "Linda Perhacs: Biography," All Music, accessed August 3, 2018. https://www.allmusic.com/artist/linda-perhacs-mn0000296815/biography.
[40] "*Billboard* Album Reviews," Review of *Parallelograms* by Linda Perhacs, *Billboard*, December 5, 1970, 64.

talent."[41] While these two reviews present favourable critical attention, *Parallelograms* on the whole received little consideration and this may have contributed to its commercial failure. Moreover, the minimal press Perhacs did receive exhibits an acute gendering of her record, with reviews relegating it to spheres of feminine "fragility." I discuss the ramifications of such rhetorical moves in section 4.2.

Figure 2: Album Cover of *Parallelograms* (1970)

Perhacs' records sold poorly and soon after the release of *Parallelograms* she returned to dentistry. Virtually unheard, her music remained in relative obscurity until Michael Piper—"whose label the Wild Places reissued obscure psychedelic records"—decided to look for her in the 1990s.[42] Piper initially failed to make contact with Perhacs and decided to re-release the version of *Parallelograms* that had been in circulation in the 1970s. This initial pressing was reportedly reviled by Perhacs because of Kapp's decision to "delete all the highs and lows on the

[41] "Record Reviews," Review of *Parallelograms* by Linda Perhacs, *Variety*, November 25, 1970, 42.
[42] Jurek, "Linda Perhacs."

record, trying to create songs that would be friendly to AM radio."[43] Once Piper finally came into contact with Perhacs, together they re-released *Parallelograms* in 2003 with the original unaltered masters, and included demos from other recording sessions. While this reissue on the Wild Places was the first official repress ordained by Perhacs, Jayson Greene for *Pitchfork* explains that several bootleg editions circulated in the decades following *Parallelograms*' 1970 launch. Akin to the enthusiastic hunt for original pressings for Bunyan's *Just Another Diamond Day* in the late twentieth century, record collectors found ways to acquire Perhacs' debut. As Greene explains,

> That album, 1970's *Parallelograms*, has persisted over decades, even as Perhacs herself moved on with her life after the record failed and copies of it slowly disappeared from print. The people who heard it, though, did not move on. They made their own editions and passed the album to those they deemed worthy. One of these people was the leader of the prog-metal band Opeth, who did as much as anyone to keep copies of *Parallelograms* circulating. A legend built.[44]

Officially, the record was re-issued several times after Piper's pressing, and as soon as attention began to stir for this artist who had been all but forgotten for thirty years, Devendra Banhart solicited Perhacs' vocal performance for a track entitled "Freely" off his record *Smokey Rolls Down Thunder Canyon* (2007). With this guest appearance on Banhart's recording, Perhacs (like Bunyan) was willingly added to the arsenal of freak folk forebears so celebrated by Banhart, Joanna Newsom, and their New Weird America contemporaries. Since working with Banhart, Perhacs signed with Asthmatic Kitty Records, the label of contemporary indie folk artist Sufjan Stevens. Like Bunyan, after the re-release of her music from the 1970s, and after collaborating with contemporary artists indebted to her creativity, Perhacs returned to the studio and launched

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[43] Ibid.
[44] Jayson Greene, "Linda Perhacs: *The Soul of All Natural Things*," Review of *The Soul of All Natural Things* by Linda Perhacs, *Pitchfork*, March 7, 2014, https://pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/19066-linda-perhacs-the-soul-of-all-natural-things/.

two LPs: *The Soul of All Natural Things* (released in 2014 on Asthmatic Kitty) and *I'm a Harmony* (released in 2017 on Omnivore Recordings). Perhacs has now found musical community and extensive public and critical appraisal. Greene for *Pitchfork* magazine commends her work, stating that *The Soul of All Natural Things* is "gorgeously recorded, with strings and nylon-string guitar filtering through the mix like the sunlight through the trees in her Topanga Canyon home."

Greene also celebrates Perhacs' musical unconventionality and experimentalism when he writes, "The best moments are when the song forms fracture a little, and Perhacs' multi-tracked voice is allowed to spiral free."[45] It becomes clear that cultural attitudes have shifted when progressive sonic aesthetics in freak folk by women are celebrated in the early 2000s, but were virtually ignored in the 1970s. While *The Soul of All Natural Things* receives contemporary praise for its formal experimentation, *Parallelograms* received no such critical or public acceptance when it initially presented highly progressive musical procedures. The title track, "Parallelograms," too can be characterized as a vocal tapestry of multi-track harmonic layering.[46] Its formal structure also fissures markedly after the first verse. As a whole, the track is composed of three sections; the first verse (A), a breakdown (B), and a repetition of the first verse (A). The breakdown section arrives abruptly, signaled by an abrasive descending motif on pitched percussion. It is an arrhythmic section consisting of atonal experimental injections of chimes, drones, horns, and vocables all framed by an oscillating vocal pattern that shifts between semitones on the lyric "parallelograms." The first verse and returning section, however, is tonal (in the key of C major) and resembles conventional folk aesthetics with its predictable (both metrically and harmonically) acoustic guitar motifs and consonant vocal overlaying. The track is

[45] Ibid.
[46] See Discography.

thus formally segmented and unpredictable in both its harmonic and rhythmic structures. "Parallelograms" is an illuminating example of the kind of avant-garde procedures driving the musical landscapes of Perhacs and her contemporaries. The fact that this kind of experimentation is celebrated now in Perhacs' 2014 release, and not in her previous recordings, could reveal changes in the public acceptance of women composers in the freak folk milieu.

Perhaps an upsurge in alternative music press outlets like *Pitchfork*, *The Wire*, *Magnet*, and *Mixmag* magazine has also impacted the increasing acceptance of this mode of musical experimentation. Moreover, in 1970 Perhacs was framed by Kapp as a Californian "folk-pop" songstress, but maybe it is only in recent years that a new musical milieu—the new generic category of "freak folk"—opened up to allow her a proper platform. With the increased segmentation of North American popular music, it seems as though more and more voices have found their corresponding audiences, despite what may have been the case decades earlier. In the end, as Forster says, the early freak folk women creating their works in the popular music landscape of the 1960s/70s were strikingly brave and his observations ring true:

> This is confrontational music that's soft, melodic and tender, and the truths these women are putting over have a power that many an artist screaming and growling over noise would be afraid to go near. So ultimately it's brave; brave to have done it in the first place and braver still to go on, knowing that the songs weren't probably ever going to reach the audience they so richly deserved.[47]

2.3 Wendy Flower

Fellow Californian folk artist Wendy Flower has a similar reception history. Just one year before the release of *Parallelograms*, Wendy Flower with sister Bonnie Flower released *Genesis* on Skye Records; a label founded by jazz vibraharpist Cal Tjader in 1968 with Gabor Szabo,

[47] Forster, "Lost Women Found."

Gary McFarland, and Norman Schwartz.[48] Wendy and Bonnie (which is the artist name under which *Genesis* is categorized) were teenagers when they took to the composition and recording of *Genesis*, a musically sophisticated record entangled in the strains of psychedelic folk, jazz, and bossa nova. Tracks like "I Realized You" and "It's What's Really Happening" display profound musical experimentation within the framework of layered vocals, jazz-inflected percussion, and electric guitar accompaniment.[49] Rhythmically inconsistent, parts shift between metres while vocals, sung largely in unison, cascade over the mix often in dissonant fashion. While the record received some press upon its initial release, it soon drifted away from public attention largely due to the bankruptcy of Skye Records in 1970. Very little press for *Genesis* appears in the archive; however, one *Billboard* review dated May 31, 1969 foretells the record's promise. "Wendy and Bonnie know how to express themselves," the reviewer writes, "They've got things to say about the generation gap and about their own identity, and they say it in terms that the young audience… can understand."[50]

With the record lost to the public, Wendy Flower continued to perform, leading the Bay Area rock band Crystal Fountain, but ultimately turned to a career in children's musical education. It was Sundazed Records (an independent New York label specializing in rare recordings from this period) that brought *Genesis* back into the public eye through a re-release in 2001, more than thirty years after its debut. The Sundazed press blurb for *Genesis* explains that it is "one of the most remarkable unheard albums of 1969" and that it has now "emerged as an acclaimed pop-psych touchstone."[51] Further, it states that *Genesis* "has grown over the years in

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[48] "Wendy Flower: Biography," Wendy Flower Official Website, accessed August 3, 2018. http://wendyflower.com/13801.html.
[49] See Discography.
[50] "Album Reviews: Special Merit Pics," Review of *Genesis* by Wendy and Bonnie, *Billboard*, May 31, 1969, 56.
[51] "Wendy & Bonnie: *Genesis* LP," *Sundazed Records*, accessed August 3, 2018, https://sundazed.com/p/1323-Wendy-Bonnie-Genesis-LP.aspx.

importance, and has influenced a generation of psychedelic pioneers from Broadcast to Stereolab to Welsh rockers Super Furry Animals (who sampled the duo on their hit 'Hello Sunshine')." Wendy and Bonnie Flower's psych/folk/jazz magnum opus failed to receive significant press or public attention upon its release and ultimately escaped reception due to the breakdown of Skye Records. Its spirited re-release some thirty years after this commercial failure aligns Wendy Flower's reception history with that of Bunyan who similarly found musical community and critical appraisal only decades after her 1970 release.

What is most important here is that Wendy and Bonnie's music was both sonically progressive and commercially disregarded in the twentieth century. Moreover, it was met by far greater public attention in the early 2000s. In 2007, "The Paisley Window Pane" (off of *Genesis*) was included in Weaver's *Bearded Ladies* compilation. Indeed, the fateful re-release of *Genesis* on Sundazed records in 2001 stimulated this resurgent activity in Wendy Flower (more so than Bonnie Flower who discontinued her career in music much earlier than her elder sister). Weaver collected "The Paisley Window Pane" from Sundazed's re-release, and it was also from this pressing that Super Furry Animals sampled "By the Sea." During this time, interest in Flower grew and the otherwise forgotten artist reconnected with the music industry. In 2007, she performed her original works alongside Weaver as part of the Lost Ladies of Folk segment of London's Meltdown Festival. Flower has thus continued to garner public and critical appraisal for *Genesis* as well as her contemporary performances, and her latest releases: the psychedelic folk tapestry *New* (released in 2012 on Rompytown Records) and a children's record *Flower Power* (released 2005 on the same label). A niche market has formed around the works of resurgent psychedelic/freak folk artists such as Linda Perhacs, Sibylle Baier, Wendy Flower, and

Vashti Bunyan, and their revivalist reception histories form a notable pattern of initial dissent and delayed recognition.

With this section, I have sought to display the commonalities between Bunyan and other psychedelic/freak folk women performers who have followed similarly disjointed career paths, with their thwarted debuts in the 1960s/70s and their early twenty-first century resurgences. Throughout this analysis, I intend to explain how Bunyan's particular reception history intertwines with a wider historical phenomenon. Such a phenomenon can be understood as the reception trend I have described: namely, how alternative folk music by women has found marked positive reception only outside of the era in which it was originally released. This movement as a whole, of which Bunyan is an essential part, therefore deserves consideration.

2.4 Susan Christie

The last figure of importance in this comparative framework is Philadelphia-born Susan Christie, another freak/acid folk forebear active in the 1960s and 70s. As Jeanette Leech writes in a predominant evaluation of the 1960s/70s psychedelic folk era of Western Europe and North America entitled *Seasons They Change: The Story of Acid and Psychedelic Folk* (2010),[52] "Christie made an album in the late 60s that was radically different to her previous recorded output. Known until then for her pop records, she now created one of the heaviest and most haunting acid-folk albums to date."[53] Her record entitled *Paint a Lady* (released in limited edition circa 1970) represents, as Leech remarks, "one of the most intense of all acid-folk records. In a genre that often leaned toward the gossamer, this was full, hearty music." Tracks

[52] "Acid" folk appears often in tandem with the genre identifiers "psychedelic" and "freak." It was employed alongside (and interchangeable with) "psychedelic" in the mid-twentieth century and appears minimally in contemporary music categorization. It is the preferred term of scholar Jeanette Leech when discussing these musical events.

[53] Jeanette Leech, *Seasons They Change: The Story of Acid and Psychedelic Folk* (London: Jawbone Press, 2010), 81.

included in this manifesto appear as psychedelic adaptations of country and folk stylings. "Yesterday, Where's My Mind" is an illuminating example of Christie's progressive folk aesthetics as it is formally erratic, and includes sections of spoken-word, as well as forceful interjections of hoarse cries.[54]

Christie began her career, alongside partner John Hill, producing commercial pop songs with adaptable lyrics for television advertisements. Her most famous track from this initial period was "I Love Onions," released in 1966 on Columbia. A functional gimmick, the track showcases a comically breathy vocal style put on by Christie, which was a trait she soon after sought to disavow. With John Hill, Christie recorded *Paint a Lady* after shopping around several singles to various uninterested labels. Christie, at this point shorn of her breathy voice and advertising incentives, created *Paint a Lady* to embody a more authentic musical intentions and uncompromisingly progressive folk performance practice. "I was very tired of that style," Christie expresses, denoting her "I Love Onions" piece, "and then this wonderful opportunity came for us to do things the way we would like to do them."[55] That opportunity was a record deal offered by ABC-Paramount in the late 1960s to fund Christie's progressive folk LP, *Paint a Lady*. Unfortunately, after hearing the initial tracks in their completed form, ABC-Paramount pulled out. *Paint a Lady* was after all, as Leech maintains, "at the extreme end not only of psychedelic folk but also of music's outlying districts in general, and was hardly something that would appeal to the same audience who had bought 'I Love Onions.'" Notably, this commercial failure could have also been caused by factors beyond the unconventionality of the record. It could have been as simple as ABC-Paramount's decision to mitigate the shortcomings of a dying trend. As Leech writes, the album's rejection may "have been a sign that the era of US major

[54] See Discography.
[55] Leech, *Seasons They Change*, 82.

labels taking on the new tripped-out directions in folk music had already passed." Nevertheless, ABC-Paramount rejected their initial offer after hearing Christie's tracks, and this may have had something to do with the fact that this "tripped-out" music was coming from the wrong gender.

Like in the case of Bunyan, it was only thirty years later that Christie's record made its way into the public arena after having lost its label backing. Initially, Christie had only been able to press a markedly limited edition of her debut LP in the 1960s, and after her commercial failures, she left her music career behind to raise a family. However, in the early 2000s, she was approached by Keith D'Arcy who specialized in the reissuing of obscure records. Together, Christie and D'Arcy released *Paint a Lady* in 2006 on Finders Keepers Records (a label co-founded by Andy Votel, husband of Jane Weaver). Since its re-pressing, *Paint a Lady* has garnered extensive scholarly attention and critical appraisal, which starkly resonates with the story of Bunyan's 2000 re-release. Christie has since appeared in various performance settings, including shows played alongside Wendy Flower at Weaver's Lost Ladies of Folk showcases in England.[56]

[56] Notably, these early women of freak folk all had significant label backing, aside from Sibylle Baier. They were not independents trying to attract attention by playing shows at cafés and distributing hand-drawn flyers. Indeed, Columbia released Susan Christie's early records, and before ABC-Paramount decided to go another way, *Paint a Lady* was set to be a major label project. Skye Records, a rather successful label before 1970, released Wendy and Bonnie's *Genesis*. Lastly, an established film composer produced Linda Perhacs' debut, releasing it on Kapp Records (a subgroup of MCA). These artists, therefore, had real chances at commercial success, but their music went unheard. If they did not have significant label backing, their failures may have been more expected.

Part 3: Bunyan from Oldham to Boyd

3.1 Oldham Recordings

This comparative discussion aims to consolidate Bunyan's story as one part of a wider network of reception history in the field of alternative folk. The analysis now returns to Bunyan for a more thorough retelling of her involvement in Britain's mid-twentieth century folk/pop landscape. Born in 1945 in Newcastle upon Tyne, England Vashti Bunyan began a distinctive life that would one day be endlessly retold as legend. Like the tale presented in *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678) by celebrated author John Bunyan—a figure with whom Vashti Bunyan claims kinship—Vashti's status as a folk legend is due in part to her traversal of time and space. From London to the Scottish Highlands she travelled by horse and caravan in an effort to reject the modernity of twentieth-century London and, in folk revivalist fashion, reconnect with an authentic past. In a 2008 documentary entitled *Vashti Bunyan: From Here to Before* (2006) directed by Kieran Evans, Bunyan states of her journey that,

> Everything that we had was what I considered to be natural. What I was looking for all the time were people all around me who could tell me what it used to be like when there were just horses on the road, when people had to make due with what was [at] hand. And just to get back to something.[57]

In this romantic effort of flight, Bunyan rejected a cosmopolitan landscape that had no space for her creativity. Her connection to the popular music network of London was short-lived, disheartening, and filled with relentless misunderstanding. Her story begins when she enrolled in university at the Ruskin School of Drawing and Fine Art in Oxford. Initially interested in fine arts, Bunyan channelled her artistic impulses further away from visual creation, and more toward songwriting on an acoustic guitar named Benji.

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[57] *Vashti Bunyan: From Here to Before*, directed by Kieran Evans (2008; London: CC-Films).

Bunyan was an avid consumer of popular music. She had grown up "with a receptivity to pop music that had wrapped its roots around her heart by the time she was a teenager."[58] She was particularly inspired by the compositional styles of The Everly Brothers, Ricky Nelson, and Cliff Richards, describing them as creators of "those incredibly neat pop songs that said everything that needed to be said."[59] At Ruskin, Bunyan found communion in a fellow student who was just as consumed by popular music: her flatmate Jennifer Lewis, to whom Benji belonged. With Lewis, Bunyan began to practice playing guitar and singing as her course grades progressively fell. Unmoved by her academic failures, the young artist put all of her time and energy into perfecting her deceptively simplistic and balanced songwriting style with a group newly formed between herself, Lewis, and Angela Strange (a childhood friend of Bunyan's), called The Three of Us.[60] The group played select local shows and composed nascent material that would soon end up on Bunyan's later seven-inch single releases and on the *Just Another Diamond Day* re-press (which includes various unreleased demos from the 1960s). Inspired, motivated, and confident in her skills as a songwriter, Bunyan left Ruskin with an unfinished degree and set out on her own to approach potential labels in New York's Tin Pan Alley and London's folk/pop scene. Her experiences in those often-unforgiving commercial environments proved to be far removed from her positive expectations.

Bunyan received little interest after knocking on the doors of agents, labels, and managers. She recalls being heavily judged by her appearance, which seemed contrary to the acceptable image of a female popular music singer in the 1960s. "Whenever I knocked on doors," she remembers, "they were looking for people in sequins and ball gowns, not a skinny art

[58] Leech, *Seasons They Change*, 46.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid., 47.

student with an old jumper with holes in it and a guitar slung over her shoulder."[61] Bunyan also identified as a songwriter; as Young notes, "she was a female singer with her own songbook, which, [Bunyan] recalls, was unusual." She was an enterprising young woman trying to assert her authorial voice in an ostensibly progressive musical environment, but was quickly disheartened by the recurrent rejection she received. Circumstances neglected to change for Bunyan until she was spotted singing at a party by a friend of producer and manager of the Rolling Stones, Andrew Loog Oldham. Oldham's friend arranged for Bunyan to have a meeting with the acclaimed industry mogul and it was in this fateful audition (at which time Bunyan was singing with a cold) that the young singer's career truly launched.

At the hands of Oldham, Bunyan was initiated into London's 1960s popular music scene with a seven-inch, 45-rpm, single release fronted with "Some Things Just Stick in Your Mind" and backed with "I Want to Be Alone" (1965), both produced by Oldham. The story of this initial single release is often framed by the rhetoric of "discovery," as if Oldham had peered through night clubs, folk clubs, and showcases to find the replacement for his prior success, Marianne Faithfull. In reality, it was Bunyan who had done the seeking. As Bunyan states in Evans' documentary, "it wasn't that Andrew had found this little girl with her little songs and tried to make her a big pop star. This little girl wanted to be a big pop star."[62] Oldham did frame Bunyan's public image though, attempting to replicate the public acceptance of Marianne Faithfull's 1964 hit "As Tears Go By" with the similarly soft vocal stylings of Bunyan's "Some Things Just Stick in Your Mind." Oldham saw in Bunyan what he had so successfully marketed in Faithfull, an artist he personally launched in 1964. As Forster explains, "Vashti Bunyan was supposed to be the new Marianne Faithfull. She had the beauty, the ethereal, wispy voice, and

[61] Young, *Electric Eden*, 16.
[62] *From Here to Before*, directed by Evans.

she had a ballad written by Jagger and Richards. All of which had been enough for Faithfull to have a hit with 'As Tears Go By.'"[63] Bunyan was far removed from a character like Faithfull, however. "Unlike Faithfull," Forster maintains, "Vashti was a songwriter, a purveyor of fine melancholic acoustic folk more akin to the continental pop of French star Francoise Hardy."

Bunyan lamented the constant comparisons between her work and that of Faithfull. She recalls, "I had become represented as [Oldham's] replacement for Marianne Faithfull and I didn't think I was anything like her at all. Everything I read was 'Marianne Faithfull, Marianne Faithfull.' It really got to me in the end."[64] Despite this uncomfortable alignment with another artist, Bunyan placed all her energy into the publicity for "Some Things Just Stick in Your Mind." With Oldham, she promoted the single extensively. She did press features for the *Daily Mirror*, the Newcastle Evening Chronicle, Cosmopolitan Magazine, and showcased both A and B-side tracks on the television show *Shindig!* Bunyan recalls this press boom, and its resulting public apathy in the Evans documentary:

> "Some things just stick in your mind" was a great song, and I had the best time recording it, and the best time promoting it as well. I had a great about six weeks of doing TV and radio all over the place. But I soon found out that I wasn't what they were looking for. They were looking for people who'd look good in a ball gown. I obviously wasn't going to. My songs were very quiet and to find the right sort of people to listen to them was not easy.[65]

The seven-inch press with Oldham failed dramatically and Bunyan felt wholly refused by London's popular music machine.

Bunyan was convinced that her songwriting had value, but she quickly realized that the incommensurability of her sound would lead to her commercial downfall. As Leech explains,

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[63] Forster, "Lost Women Found."
[64] *From Here to Before,* directed by Evans.
[65] Ibid.

"the brief interest that the media had taken in her around the release of her first single evaporated… [so she] grew apart from the London scene."[66] Bunyan recalled that "There were networks, but they were very insular… What I was doing was neither folk nor pop, and I found it very difficult to find my way at all."[67] This illegibility proves to be a crucial element of Bunyan's lack of success: she had desperately wanted to be a pop singer, but pop music could not contort its boundaries to allow for the quiet, subtle, introspective, and psychedelic-leanings of Bunyan's sonic aesthetic.[68] "Some Things Just Stick in Your Mind" was a pop song, written by British pop giants; its formal structure follows a predictable verse-chorus pattern, it is in the key of D major, and its melodic framework follows a descending stepwise pattern like that of the lyrics "sky turn grey" or "rain fall down."[69] However, Bunyan's vocal technique on that track is far removed from the kind of dexterity, clarity, and wide-ranged fluidity of other popular female singers at the time like Marianne Faithfull, Joni Mitchell, and Joan Baez. The B-side entitled "I Want to Be Alone" was an original by Bunyan and is entirely distinct from "Some Things Just Stick in Your Mind." Both tracks, however, equally plummeted.[70]

Bunyan disdained the fact that Oldham insisted she record "Some Things." "I was appalled… I wrote better songs!" she says.[71] With "Some Things," Bunyan knew her entire compositional and performance style was being distilled into a marketable image like that of Faithfull. She knew the single failed because she was unable to align with Faithfull's image or

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[66] Leech, *Seasons They Change*, 48.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Bunyan's generic incommensurability is discussed further in later sections.
[69] See Discography.
[70] Oldham and Bunyan had other attempts at success, but many of these recordings remained unreleased until the recovery activity of the early 2000s. One of these demos, "Winter is Blue," went unreleased until it appeared on the compilation re-issue, *Some Things Just Stick in Your Mind (Singles and Demos 1964-1967)* (2007). Footage from the recording session for this demo features in Peter Whitehead's 1967 documentary, *Tonite Let's All Make Love in London.* Oldham also had Bunyan record a duet entitled "Coldest Night of the Year" in early 1966 with the London-based duo Twice as Much. The track was only released years later in 1982 on the duo's album, *That's All.*
[71] Leech, *Seasons They Change*, 47.

the vocal trends of 1960s British pop. In retrospect, Oldham too understands this mistake; speaking in Evans' documentary he states,

> Because ["Some Things"] was from me, and because of the nuance of the area of the voice or the type of music, and the fact that it was a Mick Jagger and Keith Richards song, as had partially been with "Tears Go By" with Marianne, the record was like cattle branded already… And actually now looking back… the B side was better.[72]

Bunyan's original B-side track, "I Want to Be Alone" resembles her later recordings with Joe Boyd and her contemporary releases much more than "Some Things" ever could. It is a modal track (Mixolydian), with verses punctuated by two bridges that function as modal shifts from D minor to B flat major.[73] The vocal melodies are far more melismatic and unpredictable than the mathematical lines of "Some Things." Moreover, the cadences of "I Want to Be Alone" are far subtler in their iv-i pattern than the repetitive verse pattern of I-flat VII-IV-V-I and driving cadential motion of flat VII-I of "Some Things." On both tracks, however, Bunyan's vocal performance is uniquely her own; a quiet, hushed, reserved, and unclear murmur.

Importantly, the lyrics of the B-side differ profoundly from "Some Things." The narrative of the latter is situated decidedly outside of the authorial subject. The lyrics are observations about the environment ("Why does the rain fall down on the earth?") or about external subjects ("Why when the children grow up and leave / Still remember their nursery rhymes?").[74] "I Want to Be Alone," by contrast, is the personal confession of a subject to their beloved. In the context of Bunyan's autobiography, the lyrical narrative may evoke her discontent with London's popular music industry, and anticipates her later disavowal and relocation. Perhaps it too exhibits Bunyan's conflicted relationship with popular music; displaying her longing to engage with the field, and her disappointment in its inability to accept her. The lyrics read,

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[72] *From Here to Before*, directed by Evans.
[73] See Discography.
[74] Ibid.

I don't know why it is but I sometimes feel
That I have to get away, yet I know I love you
But sometimes I want to be alone
Somewhere on my own

Don't make me stay to walk aimlessly
Hand in hand
Just today set me free
Let me be alone[75]

3.2 Snell Recordings

In 1966, Bunyan met Canadian producer Peter Snell. Snell offered to buy her out of Oldham's contract and sign her to Columbia Records for another seven-inch single release. Bunyan accepted his offer, and set out to achieve with this release what she failed to do so with Oldham. "I thought, I've done it all wrong," she recalls, "I don't need Andrew Oldham and his huge orchestra and his huge this and his huge that. I need to do just what I set out to do, to try to bring some kind of acoustic music into mainstream pop."[76] Bunyan was therefore aware of her illegibility; she knew that the popular music landscape around her was unwilling to accommodate her sonic expression. She knew she had to try and force its walls open to allow room for her softer sound, inflected with the trappings of alternative folk. Alas, her efforts to address her own otherness proved unsuccessful. With Snell, Bunyan released "Train Song" b/w "Love Song" in 1966. "Train Song" was a reincarnation of a track written back at Ruskin in 1963 by Bunyan and Jenny Lewis entitled "17 Pink Sugar Elephants." An unreleased home demo of the latter original track was recorded in 1966 and can be heard in a re-issue album entitled *Some Things Just Stick in Your Mind (Singles and Demos 1964 to 1967)* (2007). "Train Song" carries the same vocal melodic pattern of "17 Pink Sugar Elephants," and is identical in the guitar accompaniment. The lyrics of the track produced by Snell, however, are re-written by "bona fide

[75] Ibid.
[76] Leech, *Seasons They Change*, 47-48.

folkie, Alastair Clayre" and, as Leech maintains, this production decision sets into motion Bunyan's ensuing classification as folk.

The lyrics of "17 Pink Sugar Elephants" paint a psychedelic scene wherein a speaker attempts to communicate with sugary treats shaped like elephants, each with "two eyes" and "four legs."[77] Being "factory-made pink sugar elephant[s] / Given to children for treats after tea," the elephants are irreparably static, and so the speaker sits in sadness, unable to converse with them.[78] The song is comical, filled with "magic everywhere," and is steeped in the innocent and child-like imaginative expression so central to psychedelic folk. As Michael Brocken explicates in *The British Folk Revival: 1944-2002* (2007),

> … the work of Donovan, the Incredible String Band and Tyrannosaurus Rex all reflected an acoustic Tolkienesque blend of mystery, English folklore and children's fairytales… [I]nnocence was elevated as an important marker (hence the renaissance in popularity of William Blake). Innocence marked the point before one grew up and became serious—very much part of the hippie aesthetic.[79]

The particular concept of "pink elephants" too reveals a psychedelic bent. The phrase "seeing pink elephants" has often been employed euphemistically to denote alcohol-induced hallucinations. Whether it was conscious or subconscious, "17 Pink Sugar Elephants" presents a mode of psychedelic-inflected complexity that dwarfs the conventional narrative brought to the track by poet Clayre.

Almost unrecognizable to its original form, "Train Song" (in classic country/folk fashion) depicts the traversal of space by train as a speaker longs to reunite with a lost lover. This narrative trope of train travel coupled with mental distress or longing is quintessential to country and folk ballad traditions. Woodie Guthrie's performance of the traditional song, "Danville Girl"

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[77] See Discography.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Brocken, *The British Folk Revival*, 95.

recorded in the early 1940s depicts this trope, as does the Carter Family's "Lonesome Pine Special," and "(I Heard That) Lonesome Whistle" (1951) by Hank Williams and Jimmie Davis. Later incarnations in country and folk like Joni Mitchell's "Just Like This Train" (1974), Joan Baez's rendition of "500 Miles" (1965),[80] or Bob Dylan's recording of the same track (under its alternative title, "I Was Young When I Left Home" (1961)), showcase the lingering rhetorical power of this narrative in the country/folk milieu. In this fashion, Clayre's "Train Song" reads,

> Traveling north, traveling north to find you
> Train wheels beating, the wind in my eyes
> Don't even know what I'll find when I get to you
> Call out your name love, don't be surprised…
>
> But suddenly now, I know where I belong
> It's many hundred miles and it won't be long[81]

Bunyan's original lyrical experimentation and inventiveness is extinguished and replaced here by an oft told tale of a female speaker longing to be reunited by a romantic companion.[82] In much the same way as Bunyan was shaped to conform to a predisposed image of Marianne Faithfull, under the direction of Snell she is likewise contained by a new image, that of the traditional folkie. Of course, the branding and re-branding of artists by production companies is an undeniable fact of the music industry, and Bunyan's experiences follow a path carved by many artists (particularly female artists) laid before her. It is important, however, to elucidate how Bunyan felt unable to voice her own autonomous musical vision. She found herself constantly misunderstood by her audiences because she was denied the opportunity to voice her authentic creative expression. Perhaps Bunyan was repeatedly fashioned into discernible generic categories—whether they be "pop" like that of Faithfull, or "folk/country" like that of Clayre—

[80] Baez did not release "500 Miles" as part of a studio album, but debuted her rendition in 1965 at a concert held at the BBC Theatre in Shepherd's Bush, London.
[81] See Discography.
[82] The lyrical sentiment of Patsy Cline's country classic "Walking After Midnight" (1957) is comparable here.

because her musical style was inevitably incommensurable with the expectations of popular music culture. As will become clear, the emergence of the genre of freak folk in the early 2000s encompassed Bunyan and her contemporaries, allowing them space when decades before, no such space was found.

In the end, "Train Song" b/w "Love Song" failed to generate any commercial attention. Despite her branding as a traditional folkie, Bunyan's originality and unconventional vocal timbre penetrated through the façade, and audiences were disinterested. While Snell attempted to market Bunyan as a folkie, his marketing attempt was largely unsuccessful because Bunyan's sound and personality could not be easily distilled into that characterization. As Joe Boyd remarks,

> I think Vashti herself, even though there's a rustic quality about her songs, she was not to my knowledge, much of a folkie. She didn't know old Child Ballads or know who The Watersons were particularly… that wasn't her scene. She just was, in a way like Nick Drake, somebody who came from a background where you valued a good melody, and good poetic words, and her life experience happened to be this caravan and this return to nature.[83]

Boyd's intuition about Bunyan was sound, since Bunyan makes a similar point in her 2005 interview with Kitty Empire. "My contemporaries didn't think I was authentic," she says "because I didn't want to be a traditional folk singer."[84] By 1967 Columbia had dropped Bunyan when her single did so poorly. At his time, "Bunyan was without a record deal and without a clue what to do next."[85] It was then that her brother set up an audition for her in front of British folk revival legends Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger. "So I took my little guitar and my little songs," Bunyan recalls (not a stranger to litotes), "and I went over there… And I sang my songs,

[83] *From Here to Before*, directed by Evans.
[84] Empire, "Flash Forward: Folk Legend."
[85] Leech, *Seasons They Change*, 117.

and they were both very solemn."[86] Bunyan remembers further that, "It became obvious that I was going to have to go, and as I got up, Peggy Seeger said: 'All I can say is beware the ephemeral.' I didn't have the faintest idea of what she meant. I looked it up when I got home. Oh. That's exactly what I *want*."[87]

3.3 Traveling to the Highlands

"Then suddenly it just went nothing, completely nothing. And I was left spinning. I didn't know what was happening to me," Bunyan recalls as she walks through a dense wood speaking to an interviewer in Evans' documentary.[88] For the film, Bunyan retraced her monumental journey which began after her last ditch attempts at commercial success with Peter Snell, and her disheartening audition for Seeger and MacColl. Feeling an intense depression sink down upon her, Bunyan knew the only escape she could find was in the woods, the dusty backroads, and everything else far removed from London's modernity.[89] Bunyan had met her then partner Robert Lewis when she picked him up hitchhiking. Knowing he had been living in the Kentish woods near his art school, she sought him out and decided to live alongside him. "This was the only thing I could have done," she remembers, "and I thought, well, you can make your own world, in a wood. You can make your own furniture, make your own fire, you can find your own food."[90] Bunyan lived with Lewis, completely self-sufficiently (surviving mostly off of boiled nettles and wild berries) for as long as they could, until an agent of the Bank of England ordered

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[86] Ibid.
[87] Ibid.
[88] *From Here to Before*, directed by Evans.
[89] Devendra Banhart meditates on Bunyan's exodus, showing how much he can relate to Bunyan's need to escape a world that continued to reject her. He states, "The worst the world gets and the uglier it gets, the more people want to retreat into a world that they've created, a world that they dream about daily. And listening to Vashti's music takes you to that place where you've already tried to be part of something, but it doesn't really want anything to do with you, or it just kind of kicks you in the face, that you just want to retreat and do your own thing within it" (*From Here to Before*, directed by Evans).
[90] *From Here to Before*, directed by Evans.

them both to leave. The young couple had been squatting illegally and had to find refuge somewhere else. They decided to travel northward to Skye, Scotland to settle in an artist colony they had heard about from a friend and fellow musician, Donovan. Having completely disavowed any and all twenty-first-century technology, Bunyan and Lewis decided to purchase a caravan and horse with funds loaned to them by Donovan (and Bunyan has yet to reimburse him).

The track entitled "Timothy Grub" off of *Just Another Diamond Day* immortalizes these fateful events with the lyrics,

> Maurice Snail and Timothy Grub
> Swanney and Blue and Emily Grub
> Decided one day to go into the wood
> And build them a house and live there if they could
> And they stayed there a while in the trees and the rain
> 'Till one day two blue men said, "You're all insane"
> And to please not to come here again
>
> And suddenly see through a gap in the bush
> A real caravan just like the one in their dreams
> The gypsy doesn't want it for nowadays it seems[91]

Along with their companion, pianist John James, the group set out on their travels to Scotland, parking the caravan and spending the night in the lawns of hospitable strangers.

John James remembers their long journey northward stating that,

> Donovan had the whole idea of going to Scotland and escaping the big city… but I think it was an idea that lots of people had… getting away from it all. Not that we really had anything to run away from. It was all pretty happy where we were but, you know, it was the general idea of "back to the country."[92]

The impulse behind Bunyan's rural retreat was thus shared between her and many other artists and radical thinkers of 1960s/70s England. Rob Young describes the phenomenon of "back to

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[91] See Discography.
[92] *From Here to Before,* directed by Evans.

the land" culture as a "profoundly British tale: the yearning for a vanished past, the desire to get closer to nature and to immerse oneself in an almost medieval existence to escape the depredations of urban life."[93] With this in mind, we follow Bunyan, Lewis, and James to Skye. The journey was grueling, and despite having written pleasant songs about their adventures which would later appear on her 1970 studio album, Bunyan was struggling to maintain her own mental health. She recalls, "I don't think [*Just Another Diamond Day* is] necessarily representative of me at the time, although it looks it from here. It looks like the story; it looks like the hills… But for me, at the time, I wasn't living in the hills and the beautiful sea. I was living in my head."[94]

When Bunyan and her fellow travellers finally approached Skye, they were given word that Donovan's artist community was crowded, and already quite developed. The commune would be unable to host Bunyan and Lewis, so the couple continued travelling through the Scottish Highlands with no particular destination in mind. [95] Soon after re-routing from Skye, they made contact with a Dutch couple who suggested that Bunyan play her songs on a small tour through Holland. Through the couple's connections, and due to Bunyan's desperate need for funds, a tour was arranged and Bunyan began to sing again. While she did not garner newfound fame in Holland on her tour, what *was* gained during these brief performances in small venues was encouragement. Here Bunyan's self-confidence and creative credibility was becoming gradually reinforced. Travelling back to England at the end of the tour, Bunyan stayed with a friend in London, and that friend knew American producer Joe Boyd. Through her friend's connection, Bunyan sat down with Boyd and the two decided to record a studio album that

[93] Rob Young, "Vashti Bunyan: Rob Young Meets the Forgotten 60s Pop Star," *The Wire.* December 2005, 26.
[94] *From Here to Before*, directed by Evans.
[95] Pianist John James would remain with Bunyan and Lewis only for certain segments of the journey.

would document her travels through the United Kingdom. Boyd recalls that he had attempted to work with Bunyan before her contract with Oldham was solidified, but now in 1969 he finally had the opportunity to work with an artist he greatly admired. He remembers,

> Thirty-something years ago, I first saw a very young singer called Vashti Bunyan, and I tried to sign her in 1966. But she escaped into the clutches of Andrew Loog Oldham who wanted her to be the next Marianne Faithfull. Three years later she was in a caravan heading north, and I visited and heard the songs, and made a record.[96]

3.4 Boyd Recordings

In 1969, Bunyan set out to record *Just Another Diamond Day* in London with a batch of songs each embodying distinct scenes from her travels. John James ventured in to play, as did Dave Swarbick and Simon Nicol of Fairport Convention, and Robin Williamson of the Incredible String Band. Robert Kirby, the string arranger for Nick Drake's records, provided his artistic direction as well. The first night of recording "comprised an improvisational exploration of the songs," and in the following days, the group's raw ideas slowly developed into more concrete arrangements by Robert Kirby.[97] For the most part, Bunyan appreciated Kirby's contributions: "the way he had written the arrangements," she states, "was kind of what I had in mind for this album."[98] However, she was far from completely satisfied with the final product. The album had been produced in much the same style as Boyd's other records—like those of Nick Drake, the Incredible String Band, and Fairport Convention—with its mystical arrangements of fiddle, banjo, Celtic harp, dulcitone, recorder, mandolin, and guitar. Boyd had attempted to capture the Hebridean scenery of Bunyan's travels, but the traveller herself felt that the record embodied a folky, mythic ideal that was far removed from her genuine experience. As Bunyan recalls,

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[96] *From Here to Before*, directed by Evans.
[97] Leech, *Seasons They Change*, 120.
[98] Ibid.

> *Diamond Day* wasn't meant to be a folk record. And, probably left to my own devices it would have been a much more melancholy record than it turned out. I think now it's a wonderful picture of the time it was made in, and all the musicians that were working at that time, and also it's representative of Joe [Boyd] at the time. I don't think it's necessarily representative of me at the time, although it looks it from here.[99]

When she received the acetate pressing shortly after the recording sessions, she thought, "there were lots of things in there that I couldn't bear, and the whole folksy nature of it: I felt like it had been recorded round a campfire. Which was obviously what Joe [Boyd] had the idea of, but I didn't."[100] Bunyan had once again been channeled into a generic form that thwarted her creative expression. She had felt unwelcome by MacColl and Seeger's brand of folk, just as she failed to find her place with Boyd's. The producer's brand of psychedelic folk seemed accessible to Nick Drake, Fairport, and the others, but it failed to embrace Bunyan's slight, melancholic compositions.

The record was released on Phillips a year after the London sessions. Its single, "Diamond Day" opens the track-list with jaunty pan flute and quiet humming by Bunyan. The album's overall aesthetic is profoundly delicate, with thin textures, rough guitar tracks, and vocals produced without harmonic overdubs. Bunyan's vocals are weak, thin, and timbrally airy. Her tones twist and turn, faltering at times in their attempted highs and lows. Her vocal pitch, in particular, is often imprecise: quieter notes break down into dissonant fragments as her diaphragmatic power wanes. The songs all describe Bunyan's travels and companions. "Window Over the Bay" begins as an acapella ballad, recounting her desire to live in a rural space, untainted by twentieth-century modernity. "Jog Along Bess" recounts the moment Bunyan and Lewis began their journeys by horse and caravan. The tracks continue on to depict natural scenes of rainbow rivers, glow worms, black horses, and blue winters. In terms of vocal conventionality,

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[99] *From Here to Before*, directed by Evans.
[100] Leech, *Seasons They Change*, 121.

Bunyan's performance contests long-held ideals of vocal clarity and dexterity in the folk music milieu.[101] Her work also pushes against metrical convention with arrhythmic pieces like "Hebridean Sun" and "Rainbow River," and experiments with disjunct melodies in "Twalerman's Song." With this album, Bunyan seems to at least come close to her desired ephemerality and wanders into the wood of psychedelia, for better or for worse.

When Boyd laid eyes on the finished pressing, he foresaw its commercial failure. He recalls,

> When I heard the record at the end, when we finished mixing the record, and then when John James came up with the cover, and I saw the cover, and Vashti loved the cover… And I heard the whole thing, the nature and the subject matter of the songs, the cover… Even from my distant position in California, I might have made a lot of phone calls and banged on the table and tried to get people to really promote something, if I thought the result would be that it would sell a lot. But I think that I looked at this project and I thought, "It's a beautiful record, I love Vashti, I'm glad we did it, I'm not ashamed of anything in this record," … but I can't go bang on somebody's table and say, "spend a lot of money marketing this record." Because, I can't see who's going to buy it, frankly.[102]

Perhaps if Boyd did bang on more tables, and if the label made more of an effort to locate a niche audience for Bunyan's brand of folk, then *Just Another Diamond Day* would have achieved success. However, without a significant publicity push, it was destined to fall victim to the fate of albums like Wendy and Bonnie's *Genesis*, and Linda Perhacs' *Parallelograms.* Bunyan's songs were delicate, her vocals subtle and unclear, and whatever psychedelic modes of experimentation that may have come through on the record—like the metrical dissonance of "Hebridean Sun," the references to medieval flute practice on "Rainbow River," or the lack of vocal clarity and pitch imprecision of "Swallow Song"—were rendered invalid by an apathetic

[101] More on this in later sections.
[102] *From Here to Before*, directed by Evans.

press. As Forster explains, "the album received that most dispiriting of response: indifference mixed with the sting of critical hostility."[103]

3.5 *Diamond Day*: Label Issues & Production Decisions

Several determining factors regarding Phillips Records and the initial distribution of *Just Another Diamond Day* contributed to the album's downfall, and these are discussed here. In 1969, Phillips (a Dutch sub-group of Universal) licensed *Diamond Day* through Boyd. However, as Young explains, the label "took a whole year to manufacture and distribute the album. It eventually trickled into shops at the tail end of 1970."[104] Any public interest that may have sparked while Bunyan worked with Boyd, or with the band members from Fairport Convention and the Incredible String Band, likely dissipated due to the year-long hiatus incurred by Phillips' mismanagement. The delay in pressing also reveals Phillips' overall lack of investment in the *Diamond Day* project. For reasons pertaining to the fiscal cycle, or the financial state of the label at this time, only a few hundred records were pressed. Retail outlets only sold about 100 copies in total. Moreover, neither Boyd nor Phillips had any real incentive to advance record sales. Boyd foresaw the album's marketing issues and refused to promote it, and Phillips invested only minimal funds for the release. In the end, *Diamond Day*'s failure evolved out of a network of influencing factors, with Phillips playing a major role.

In terms of advertising, the label failed to create any viable publicity, and Bunyan's personal situation denied her the opportunity to promote the record properly. She had a newborn baby, and was unable to tour or spend weeks in London featuring on radio shows, magazines, or television, even if the chances arose. Bunyan was also incredibly insular. She knew the String Band, some members of Fairport, and of course Donovan, but these connections were largely

[103] Forster, "Lost Women Found."
[104] Young, *Electric Eden*, 41.

superficial. Perhaps if Bunyan collaborated with other artists in her field, or if she toured alongside them as an opening act, public attention may have sparked.[105] However, she was determined to work on her own, creating her own music and traveling her own path. In 1970, Boyd even attempted to unite Bunyan with Nick Drake, but the relationship dissolved. As Young explains, he "tried to turn [Bunyan and] his even more reclusive and diffident artist, Nick Drake, into a songwriting team. ('It wasn't a very productive afternoon,' [Bunyan] says of her attempts to goad the unworldly, cripplingly shy Drake into action.)"[106] With few connections to other performers in her milieu, and with a new child to care for, Bunyan had little opportunity to promote her debut album with the vigour required. Therefore, for reasons both personal and commercial—with Bunyan's insularity only contributing further to Phillips' poor marketing decisions—*Diamond Day* fell by the wayside.

Boyd also had very particular ideas for the direction of the record, and there may have been a consequential dissonance between Bunyan's own creative vision and Boyd's production framework. In Evans' documentary, Boyd remembers that, from the very first moment he heard Bunyan's music, he imagined specific production decisions for her record. He also remembers that Bunyan's style may have been incongruous with the aesthetic he had generated with Fairport, the String Band, and Nick Drake. He states,

> If I go back in my mind to that first time, [that] first moment in Dover street, when I heard Vashti… I had a real sort of image in my head for what could be done with this artist. I just thought, she's great, and I want to do this, that, and the other thing. And the record was made in a way as a response to an incomplete feeling I had about that. But when I finished the record, I still felt incomplete.[107]

[105] Under Oldham's direction, Bunyan did put out a single with the pop duo Twice as Much, but the track went unreleased and the collaboration was short lived (see section 3.1).
[106] Young, *Electric Eden*, 41.
[107] *From Here to Before*, directed by Evans.

Perhaps, upon feeling a sense of "incompleteness," Boyd knew that his aesthetic model failed to encapsulate Bunyan's creative expression. When recording had ceased, he may have felt that his own creative vision functioned more as an imposing framework than a liberating foundation. However, in the scheme of producers and musicians at this time, Boyd and his team of psychedelic folk players were probably the best possible fit for Bunyan's sound. If anyone could harness her vocal delicacy and intricate melodies at this particular juncture, it would have been the same team who developed artists like Nick Drake. In the end, whether Boyd made appropriate production decisions for *Diamond Day*, or went against Bunyan's creative intentions (and caused an aura of "incompleteness"), the record did find an audience three decades later. Indeed, Boyd could have made appropriate production decisions, just, for the wrong era.

Bunyan has gradually come to embrace the sounds of *Just Another Diamond Day* after its re-release in 2000. Even so, her creative intentions contradicted those of Boyd and she repeatedly associates the album with that failure to execute her own vision. Her twenty-first-century recordings, by contrast, reveal her most unmediated creative decisions, and they seem to have found a niche audience without delay. Indeed, these recordings (which were largely directed by Bunyan herself) present a much more melancholic and avant-garde aesthetic than the kind of psychedelic folk Boyd envisioned for *Diamond Day.*

Her 2005 collaboration with Maryland-based experimental folk/pop band Animal Collective entitled *Prospect Hummer* (EP) strays markedly from the folky atmosphere of her 1970 debut. The fiddle, recorder, and harp sounds of *Diamond Day* are replaced with guitar, piano, and synthesized samples. Songs like "Prospect Hummer" and "It's You" display rhythmic inconstancy with local and sectional time shifts. They also include dissonant drones, noise, and free-form vocal phrasing. "It's You," in particular, follows no particular form and its metre

constantly fluctuates. Vocal lines, drifting in and out of dissonance, cascade freely over the sporadic accompaniment of plucked strings and piano keys. The record on the whole is highly experimental and unbound, especially in terms of vocal performance. When recording the EP, Bunyan was able to actualize her musical intention, and this remedied her earlier experiences of creative suppression. "My daughter can hear me smiling on the title track," she recalls of "Prospect Hummer," "and I was. I loved having the freedom to sing as I wanted. I was still finding my voice after burying it for years."[108]

Additionally, Bunyan's solo recordings released in the early 2000s showcase highly experimental musical maneuvers that she felt unable to create on *Diamond Day*. "Here Before" off of *Lookaftering* (2005) employs technological mediation in the form of tack looping, reverse pedals, and synthetic filtration.[109] It also includes vast layers of overdubs that allow vocal textures to melt into unintelligible soundscapes. In the instrumental interlude proceeding the first verse, a melody played on glockenspiel is punctuated by isolated notes filtered through a reverse effect. These sounds create an eerie, suspended atmosphere. As the track unfolds, airy vocal patterns cascade behind Bunyan's main vocal track, creating a web of vocables and consonant sounds, each piece functioning as a mere lyrical fragment. Disintegrated sonic material from the lyrics "smiling," "sunshine," "before," and "child" continue to nestle into the background throughout the entire track.[110]

Of course, the tools available in a twenty-first-century recording studio greatly surpass those of the 1960s in terms of efficiency, accessibility, and variety. Even with absolute creative control, Bunyan would not have been able to create a track like "Here Before" in Boyd's studio.

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[108] Simon Reynolds, "Faun Fables," *The Wire*, July 2005, 30.
[109] See Discography.
[110] Ibid.

However, "Here Before," and other songs from her later recordings, showcase the kind of creative direction Bunyan wanted to pursue three decades prior, if she had the opportunity. Bunyan recalls that "what Robert Kirby [(the arranger)] did," back in the *Diamond Day* sessions, "was far more what I had in mind, more classical associations than folk. If ever I suggested any overdubs, Joe [Boyd] wouldn't have it—he wouldn't do anything that couldn't be reproduced live, whereas I was fascinated by all that could be done in a modern recording studio."[111] Bunyan and Boyd, therefore, had very different visions for *Diamond Day*, and Boyd's production decisions could have contributed to the record's failure since they strayed from Bunyan's overarching vision. Or, perhaps, they were just the wrong decisions for Bunyan's sound.

If *Diamond Day* suffered because of inappropriate production, it would not be the first, nor the last album to meet such a fate. Singer-songwriter James Taylor's first album, a self-titled LP released in 1968 on the Beatles' Apple label, displays similar production issues. Peter Asher (the A&R head for Apple) produced *James Taylor* at Trident Studios in London during the same time the Beatles were recording *The Beatles* (1968) (also known as *The White Album*). Being in such close proximity, Asher brought to the record the very branded influence of the Beatles' aesthetic framework. Indeed, Paul McCartney himself contributed to the production by soliciting the work of arranger Richard Hewson.[112] At the end of the recording sessions, the album stood as an unlikely pairing of Taylor's folk/singer-songwriter compositions with Hewson's lush string orchestrations and disconcerting horn passages. Highly experimental interludes also appear throughout the tracks, like the bars of dissonant vocal interjections in "Kickin' Round the Zoo" or the sparse and eerie plucking of harp in the introduction to "Takin' It In."[113] The album failed

[111] Young, "Vashti Bunyan: Rob Young."
[112] Hewson worked with the Beatles on tracks including "Across the Universe," "I Me Mine," and "The Long and Winding Road."
[113] See Discography.

to achieve any significant commercial gains, and only reached #62 on American charts. It received mixed responses in the press, with marked criticism for Asher's production decisions. Writing in 1969, Jon Landau for *Rolling Stone* explains that,

> … some of the production is superfluous. There are a few string arrangements that serve no real function. The horn arrangements sound a bit too British. And on some cuts, James' voice is not as 'up front' as it should have been.[114]

Taylor would go on, however, to record a second album that would vastly outshine his earlier work with Apple.

Sweet Baby James, also produced by Asher, was released on Warner Brothers in 1970. With its gospel, blues, folk, and country inflections, the record steps away from the cerebral orchestrations of the 1968 release. Indeed, it more accurately predicts the career Taylor would have in the folk/singer-songwriting vein. Instead of shrouding Taylor's compositions in psychedelic arrangements, *Sweet Baby James* rearticulates his performance practice as one rooted in North American folk traditions. Perhaps Asher followed Landau's recommendations because, on the Warner release, the vocals are raised, the production is less invasive, and the interludes are gone. *Sweet Baby James* received a Grammy nomination, and reached number three on both the *Billboard Hot 100* and *Billboard Album Charts.*[115]

This tangential discussion of Taylor's early career has aimed to reveal the exceptional impact production decisions can have on artist reception. *Diamond Day*, like *James Taylor*,

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[114] Jon Landau, "James Taylor," Review of *James Taylor* by James Taylor, *Rolling Stone*, April 19, 1969.

[115] The reception history of Simon and Garfunkel's "Sound of Silence" follows a similar pattern. The track originally appeared on the duo's debut LP, *Wednesday Morning, 3 AM* (1964, Columbia) as "The Sounds of Silence." It was an entirely acoustic performance, with minimal production. Upon its release, *Wednesday Morning* failed to chart or attract any significant attention. "The Sounds of Silence," however, gradually grew in popularity with sporadic increases in radio play. In order to capitalize on this, producer Tom Wilson decided to go against his original intention to keep the track acoustic, and added electric guitar and drums. His production decision would end up causing the reformed track to climb the charts, peaking at number one on the Billboard Hot 100 in 1965. The change in production, perhaps speaking to the growing trend in amplified folk-rock, allowed "Sound of Silence" to succeed when otherwise, it would have stunted Simon and Garfunkel's progress from the start.

embodies the creative vision of its producer, and this may have been at odds with Bunyan's original intentions. Boyd's framing of Bunyan as the most recent iteration of his psychedelic folk dynasty could have placed Bunyan's quiet songs into a sealed generic category, curtailing their potential. In the end, Bunyan found a way to make the right production decisions for her work. Her later records like *Lookaftering* and *Heartleap* achieved marked critical appraisal and commercial success upon their release. Taylor, in like form, continued on to create an unparalleled career in the singer-songwriter field. This thesis as a whole seeks to engage with Bunyan's reception history, looking at sociological, institutional, generic, and financial reasons for her disjointed trajectory. As part of a relational analysis of her reception, this particular section has sought to showcase the label issues, production miscalculations, and personal conditions that have contributed to her story.

Part 4: Gender in Music Press and Performance Practice

4.1 Music Press: Gendered Aesthetic Language

As has been stated, the very specific brand of psychedelic folk Boyd created seemed an unlikely fit for Bunyan's work. Others had succeeded where Bunyan failed, and this may also have to do with the optics of ensemble. Fairport Convention (another project of Boyd's) was a band composed of mostly male instrumentalists with some lead and supporting female performers. The Incredible String Band too was an experimental trio made up of Clive Palmer, Robin Williamson, and Mike Heron, who brought on female members periodically as vocalists and players. Finally, Nick Drake was a solo male artist, and he received sporadic critical recognition as a somber troubadour with psychedelic leanings. Now, just as Oldham had attempted to recreate his success of Marianne Faithfull with Bunyan in 1965, Boyd placed Bunyan within this lineage of psychedelic folk, trying to repeat earlier results. However, once the *Diamond Day* project was completed and the cover art assembled, Boyd knew it would be incompatible with his model. Bunyan figured as a solo female artist, and her cover art painted by John James showcased this plainly. James combined a photograph of Bunyan standing in the door of a thatch-roof cottage (dressed in an apron and head scarf) with paintings of farm animals (see Fig. 3).

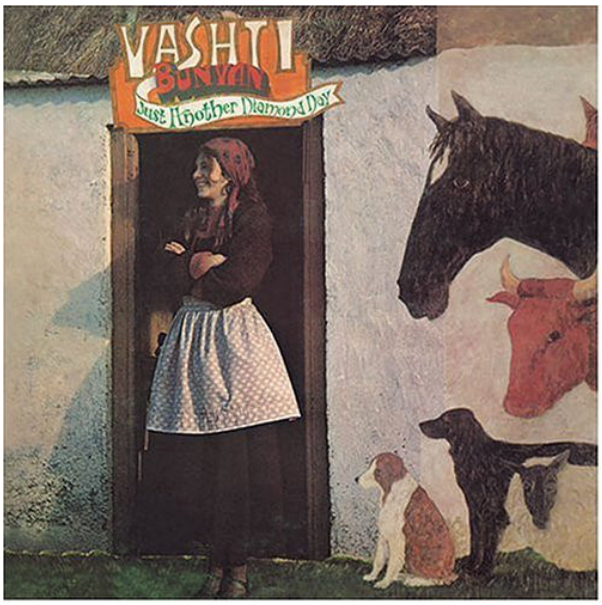

Figure 3: Album Cover of *Just Another Diamond Day* (1970)

His artwork made it very clear that Bunyan was a solo female artist, and not a member of a larger band, unlike Boyd's other projects. Could Boyd have made a fundamental marketing error by funneling Bunyan into a generic category that would deny her critical and public appreciation? Perhaps this particular brand of psychedelic folk was accessible to the public only in certain forms. Could Bunyan's identity as a solo, female, melancholic songstress deny her public recognition as a valid psychedelic folkie, like Boyd's other artists? Moreover, was psychedelic folk experimentation better received when the act was branded as a predominately male band?

I will here examine press coverage of The Incredible String Band, Fairport Convention, and another psychedelic-folk/folk-rock group, The Pentangle, for comparison.[116] The String Band receive significant praise and commendation for their "virtuosity" in a *Variety* concert review dated April 30, 1969. Notably, while Williamson and Heron figure as knowledgeable, experimental players, their female counterparts receive only token appraisal. Pine writes,

[116] Boyd produced The Incredible String Band and Fairport Convention, but not The Pentangle, who were signed to Transatlantic Records.

"Britain's Incredible String Band gave a rare American performance Sunday (27) at Fillmore East, N.Y. Band Members Robin Williamson and Mike Heron were joined on stage by singers Rose and Licorice,[117] who *smiled a lot* and *occasionally* sang and played" (my emphasis). [118] Here Rose and Licorice, both women performers, figure as appendages to the musical environment, only contributing peripheral (read: "occasion[al]") sonic material and visual stimuli (read: "smil[ing]"). The reviewer goes on to describe Rose and Licorice's instrumental work as "*charming* percussion on tambourine, triangle and tablas" (my emphasis), relegating more professional praise to their male counterparts. While the women in the band merely provide "charming percussion," Heron and Williamson are capable virtuosos: "The String Band presents a joyful sound with mystical lyrics and fascinating rhythmic structure… Heron and Williamson are *virtuosos* with exceptionally unique styles" (my emphasis).

The String Band in general acquired significant press attention during their period of activity in the 1960s/70s. In his review of their sophomore album, *The 5000 Spirits or the Layers of the Onion* (1967), Karl Dallas for *Melody Maker* celebrates the band's musical experimentation, commending it as an example of profound instrumental proficiency. "Sometimes a song will swerve abruptly from one style to another," he explains, "as in Robin Williamson's 'The Mad Hatter's Song,' which starts out with verses sung very freely against a simple but brilliantly played repetitive phrase on the sitar."[119] Here Dallas intellectualizes a marked break in the song's stylistic framework as a sophisticated, proficient maneuver. He continues on to evaluate the record as a whole, calling it "superb" and a "fantastic development

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[117] Notably, here both Williamson and Heron are listed under their full names, but "Rose and Licorice" appear without surnames. This may connote a certain lack of professionalism for the latter pair.
[118] Pine, "Concert Reviews: Incredible String Band," *Variety*, April 1969, 59.
[119] Karl Dallas, "The Incredible String Band: *The 5000 Spirits or The Layers of the Onion (Electra EUK 257)*," Review of *The 5000 Spirits or The Layers of the Onion* by The Incredible String Band, *Melody Maker*, September 2, 1967.

in [the band's] work between the two records." The String Band created highly original, psychedelic musical material, uncontained by conventions of harmonic, rhythmic, or melodic decorum. They employed archaic instrumentation, drawing heavily from Renaissance and Medieval music traditions. Importantly, far from being ignored or questioned for their experimentalism, they received encouragement from acclaimed press sources, and financial success from record sales. However, other experimental artists that happened to be (often solo) women, who made similar decisions in composition and timbre (like Linda Perhacs, Wendy & Bonnie, and Susan Christie) received no such appraisal and sold far fewer records. This was the case even with Bunyan, who shared the same producer (and a lot of the same personnel) with artists like the String Band and Fairport Convention. The women in larger psychedelic folk ensembles such as the String Band seem to be marginalized as well, which strengthens the notion that, in this particular genre, women were less likely to obtain critical appraisal.

The relationship between ensemble, gender, and reception history functions as one element in a sea of mitigating factors dictating the commercial market. I do not intend to claim that because Bunyan, Linda Perhacs, Susan Christie (and others in their scene) were solo female artists, their work in psychedelic folk escaped critical attention. As has been stated, various other factors likely contributed to the removal of these artists from public view, such as the breakdown of label relationships, the lack of necessary marketing, or the failure (on the part labels) to generate enough copies of an original pressing. I do suggest, however, that gender likely played a role in the critical reception and subsequent commercial success of these artists. Press responses to predominantly male ensembles in 1960s/70s psychedelic folk celebrate their virtuosity, experimentalism, and progressive aesthetics. While, on the other hand, press features for solo female artists in the 1960s/70s folk milieu often focused on how well a performer conformed to a

set of ideals, I will now turn to a discussion of the "gendered aesthetics of language" in the music press. I aim to draw attention to the ways in which male performers may have had more license to create progressive folk, while the same privileges were often not extended to women.[120]

Sheila Whiteley in *Women and Popular Music* (2000) examines the position of women in mid-twentieth-century North American counterculture. She holds that within this ostensibly progressive environment—where individuals "challenged the traditional concepts of career, family, education and morality" and prioritized "personal freedom"—misogynist attitudes continued to pervade the ideological terrain.[121] Indeed, she holds that "the counter culture of the 1960s had done little to extend its freedoms to women, especially in terms of musical equality."[122] In a social environment where "women performers were largely viewed as ineffectual" and as "entertainment," their contributions to popular music are "equalled only by their personal struggle against the inherently sexist attitudes that underpin the 'material world' of the music industry." Whiteley's comments resonate with the paucity of press attention for the progressive sonic aesthetics of Bunyan and her contemporaries, especially when she claims, "there is little to suggest, that, in terms of musical experience, the counter culture gave serious thought to the individuality or, indeed, the diversity of women."[123] Press outlets—providing the necessary album reviews, promotion, artist features, and performance reviews to launch new artists—reflect the social trends of the counterculture. During this period, magazines like *Billboard*, *Variety*, *Rave*, and *Melody Maker* (alongside other media outlets in radio and

[120] I am suggesting here that without positive critical responses to their work, (solo) women in freak/psychedelic folk likely had a harder time achieving commercial success. It is important to note, however, that while the press has significant power of determination, some artists achieve commercial success even with a bounty of negative press. Some succeed as underground artists, escaping mainstream press attention entirely. With this in mind, I interrogate rhetorical patterns within press reviews, viewing them as *one part* of a complex reception process.
[121] Sheila Whiteley, *Women and Popular Music: Sexuality, Identity, and Subjectivity* (London: Routledge, 2000), 22.
[122] Ibid., 1.
[123] Ibid., 40.

television) controlled the ebbs and flows of public attention. While acting as industry infrastructure, the views of these magazines reaffirmed and connected with those of their avid readership. The symptoms of misogyny and inequality described by Whiteley, therefore, contaminate the counterculture's many facets, including the performance sphere, the record label industry, *and* the press.

With Whiteley's comments in mind, I turn to another project of Boyd's, Fairport Convention. This particular band was a folk-rock, folk-psychedelic group made up of core members Simon Nicol, Dave Pegg, Ric Sanders, Chris Leslie, and Gerry Conway. The group has undergone many personnel changes but initially began as the brain project of Simon Nicol and bassist Ashley (Tiger) Hutchings. Various women singers have contributed to the bands' discography including Sandy Denny and Judy Dyble. Hailing from North London, the team of young musicians "evolved out of numerous blues, skiffle, and jug bands but found most inspiration in psychedelic groups and American folk-rock."[124] They created an upbeat, metrically organized, and harmonically consonant brand of psychedelic folk. While producing a highly marketable specimen of folk-rock, Fairport was nevertheless profoundly indebted to traditional musics (including medieval songs of Britain, and the Child Ballads) just like the Incredible String Band and other British psychedelic folk bands, such as The Pentangle. Leech explains that Fairport's musical alterity—their employment of traditional musical forms, and their psychedelic or "acidic" leanings—only strengthened their critical appraisal. "Released in June 1968 on Polydor, *Fairport Convention* was a solid debut of US-inspired folk-rock with some *very* acidic touches," she writes, "most notably on the strange, semi-improvised track, 'The Lobster,' and Dyble's and Thompsons' highlight, 'One Sure Thing.'"[125] Their debut album garnered marked

[124] Leech, *Seasons They Change*, 54.
[125] Ibid., 55.

critical appraisal and public approval. As Hutchings recalls, "We found a lot of love from early on… including from John Peel, and it was great to have him on our side."[126] Peel continues to be one of the most important popular music DJs in BBC history. Another DJ, Tommy Vance, "dubbed Fairport 'The English Jefferson Airplane,'" and so the band was carried by critical acclaim from their debut release onward to a lucrative career.[127]

In a performance review dated October 18, 1969, Karl Dallas for *Melody Maker* commends the instrumental proficiency of Dave Mattacks and Simon Nicol. "New drummer Dave Mattacks," he explains, "has settled very well and is laying down a very relaxed but at the same time highly complex percussive backing to the front-liners."[128] Simon Nicol "backs up the rest so well that I almost didn't miss more opportunities to hear him playing solo—which he can do excellently." Notably, Ashley (Tyger) Hutchings earns Dallas' praises as well. He describes her as "one of the most up-front bass guitarists [he has ever] heard." Dallas also mentions that Sandy Denny "has matured into an incredibly compelling singer and a really lovely personality." These linguistic gestures are subtle, but a gendered phenomenon presents itself when more often than not, media writers describe male instrumentalists within psychedelic folk as progressively-minded, instrumentally proficient radicals, and endow female performers (if they receive any mention at all) with trivial commendation. To Dallas, the above male players present stylistic "complex[ity]" in their performance practice. While, when describing Denny's work, Dallas patronizingly insinuates that she needed to "mature" into her current musical ability, and that part of that growth process involved the necessary development of a "lovely personality" (which is a decidedly extra-musical trait). Reviewing these linguistic practices causes one to wonder

[126] Ibid.
[127] Ibid.
[128] Karl Dallas, "Fairport Convention: Fairfield Hall, Crydon," *Melody Maker*, October 1969.

who, in this period, had the right to push against musical convention? Who was taken seriously, and who was ignored?

Notably, the practice of designating virtuosity and instrumental proficiency into the sphere of maleness has historical precedent. Zarko Cvejic in *The Virtuoso as Subject: The Reception of Instrumental Virtuosity, c. 1815 – c. 1850* (2016) focuses on the particular issue of gender and reception in European classical music with his fourth chapter entitled "Gender and the Critical Reception of Virtuosity." "'Since the masculine, in short, is just as much a spectacle as the feminine,'" he writes, "the ideal of virtuosic (hyper-) masculinity extolled in most criticism [contrasts] … the ideals of 'feminine charms' and the like."[129] Cvejic surveys the critical reception of classical musicians in the nineteenth century in order to isolate the gendered aesthetic language connecting instrumental virtuosity to the male gender. He comes to the conclusion that, "the virtuose" was "treated quite differently from other virtuosi, not so much because their virtuosity was essentially different, but rather due to their critics' reception of their gender identities." Maleness, according to Cvejic, has functioned as the vessel of "extreme individuality" in nineteenth-century European ideological currents. It follows that "only male virtuosi were seen as 'literal embodiment[s] of extreme individuality' because … to refer to Hegel … individuality and subjectivity were gendered male." Cvejic also cites Maiko Kawabata's article, "Virtuoso Codes of Violin Performance: Power, Military Heroism, and Gender (1789-1830)" to stress this gendered phenomenon in music criticism. In post-Napoleonic Europe, according to Kawabata, violin virtuosity was associated strictly with male-identified military heroism.[130] Now, the album reviews and performance reports printed in the 1960s/70s

[129] Zarko Cvejic, *The Virtuoso as Subject: The Reception of Instrumental Virtuosity, c. 1815 – c. 1850* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016), 222.
[130] Ibid., 223.

are far removed from the periods discussed by Cvejic and Maiko in terms of the musical genre, geography, and era. However, the phenomenon of gendered linguistic aesthetics forms a central part of the literary tradition of Western music criticism, and these historical continuities must be kept in mind.

To put it plainly, psychedelic folk bands that displayed technical proficiency in this era seemed to garner press attention, and predominantly male ensembles received these valuations. Press for The Pentangle, a psychedelic-folk/folk-rock/jazz band from London, follows in this fashion. "Although they didn't have a premeditated plan to form a group, Bert Jansch, John Renbourn, Jacqui McShee, Terry Cox, and Danny Thompson" of the later-formed Pentangle, "began playing together in 1967 with a series of ramshackle and largely improvisational performances at… the Horseshoe Hotel on London's Tottenham Court Road."[131] From the start, the band was incredibly innovative, combining psychedelic influences and jazz with folk-rock and early music. Songs like "Let No Man Steal Your Thyme" (1968) places Jacqui McShee's Renaissance-inspired vocal melody over a swinging rhythm section.[132] After two sung verses, the track devolves into a jazz-inflected breakdown with plucked bass, chimes, improvised guitar, and intricate snare hits. Their music involves marked generic cross-pollination, and "Let No Man" is but one example. "The group found commercial success with their first three albums—*The Pentangle*, *Sweet Child* (both 1968), and *Basket of Light* (1970)—which culminated in the use of their hit single 'Light Fight' as the theme to the BBC drama *Take Three Girls.*"[133] In their defiance of the generic boundaries of folk, jazz, and any other style emanating from their diverse

[131] Leech, *Seasons They Change*, 87.
[132] See Discography.
[133] Leech, *Seasons They Change*, 87.

discography, The Pentangle were heralded by the press. Reviews commended their experimental outlook, instead of casting criticism or disavowal.

In a 1968 review of *Sweet Child* printed in *Melody Maker*, The Pentangle are commended for their "tremendous ability, fine musicianship and remarkable flexibility."[134] Indeed, the reviewer identifies the band's generic cross-over as a mark of sophistication and capability. "With the fusion and diffusion of their individual talents," they write, the band members all "present an array of music covering jazz, folk, blues, and classical styles." In this review, lead singer Jacqui McShee receives no mention beyond the formal listing of her name as a band member. The reviewer, however, honours Bert Jansch and John Renbourn for their instrumental talents. "Bert and John," they write, "using amplified guitars throughout, combine superbly with their folk-jazz fusion guitar work on such things as 'Goodbye Pork-Pie Hat,' 'Three Part Thing,' and 'No Exit.'" Correspondingly, they write that "John *solos impeccably* with 14th and 16th century classical pieces in 'Three Dances'" (my emphasis). The reviewer concludes their piece by stating that The Pentangle execute their innovative album with "taste, skill and feeling."

Male members of The Pentangle, Fairport Convention, and The Incredible String Band are repeatedly described in terms of musical virtuosity and technical ability. In general, this seems to legitimize their musical experimentation within the psychedelic folk vein, and allows them to proceed through the popular music industry. What happens when solo female artists try to accomplish the same feat? By what standards are women folk performers measured? How do these differ to those of men? To better understand the early reception of freak folk, I aim to address these questions. Reception history is not determined by inherent musical value; records that perform poorly in one decade may resurge in popularity in another. If an artist achieves

[134] "Pentangle: *Sweet Child* (Transatlantic TRA 178)," Review of *Sweet Child* by The Pentangle, *Melody Maker*, November 16, 1968.

commercial success in their native era, they may not be any more capable or creative than other artists ignored by the public. Instead, the nuances of reception seem to result from a series of accidents—like having a networking connection, or putting out a record that corresponds well with an emerging sonic trend—*and* from the particularities of socialization. With the following sections, I argue that women performers in the 1960s/70s counterculture (and beyond) were subject to a host of sonic ideals and regimens. If they attempted any kind of sonic or behavioural transgression, it could jeopardize their public and critical acceptance. Understanding the role played by gender in the critical evaluation of performance reveals structures of power embedded in the music industry. More specifically, it allows us to read reception histories like those of Bunyan and her contemporaries as not a random occurrence, but as determined in part by gender bias. In all, interrogations such as these ultimately reveal the social determinacy of musical value.

4.2 Music Press: Descriptions of Women in Performance

The female players in larger psychedelic folk bands like the ones messaged above received predominantly trivial appraisal for their creative contributions.[135] In similar form, women who decided to release solo records in the experimental/psychedelic/acid folk realms seemed far less likely to earn critical appraisal for their "virtuosic" efforts, and may have therefore escaped legitimization. This contrasts the press for their male counterparts in larger ensembles or solo projects. Nick Drake, a solo artist remembered for his somber acoustic songs and conversational vocals, achieved intermittent commercial success before his passing in

[135] In this section, some author names from entertainment industry magazines appear in their full form (with given names and surnames) and some appear only as surnames. This has to do with editorial printing decisions. Album reviews in magazines like *Billboard* or *Variety* usually appear with a truncated byline, displaying only surnames.

1974.[136] In one review for *International Times*, Mark Williams commends his compositional proficiency. He writes, "Nick Drake's songs are not of quite the same construction as folk tunes, they have subtlety and originality that make this album a series of arrangements of just bloody brilliant songs."[137] While Williams does not discuss Drake's *instrumental* virtuosity, he praises his compositional "brilliance" and "originality," and this aligns with the rhetorical trends discussed heretofore. The common thread here is musical proficiency and capability, whether that may be in terms of performance or composition.

Solo female artists in psychedelic folk seem to evade such characterisations. In my earlier discussion of Linda Perhacs' *Parallelograms*, I cited an album review published December 5, 1970 for *Billboard* magazine.[138] In it, the reviewer describes Perhacs' debut as a collection of "fragile songs" that are "pleasing to the ear."[139] This characterization contrasts the kind of rhetoric applied to Drake's songs. Originality and creativity in the former contrast "fragility" and "pleas[antness]" in the latter. Indeed, the term "fragility" often appears in album and performance reviews about women in this era, and the word carries a host of gender-based stereotypes. Importantly, these rhetorical overtones hearken back to Cvejic's dichotomy between "feminine charms" and "virtuosic masculinity" in nineteenth-century music criticism.

Music critics writing in 1960s/70s North America and Britain applied the descriptive term of "fragility" to many independent female acts, across various genres. A *Variety*

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[136] Nick Drake did not achieve vast commercial success by any means. He likely sold about 5,000 copies of his debut album. However, he did attract positive critical attention and his success (while minimal) did outshine that of the solo women artists discussed here.
[137] Mark Williams, "Nick Drake: *Five Leaves Left* (Island)," Review of *Five Leaves Left* by Nick Drake, *International Times*, July 18, 1969.
[138] *Billboard* and *Variety* follow distinct rhetorical traditions. *Billboard* tends to be highly superficial and rarely presents long-form, nuanced record reviews. *Variety*, on the other hand, has a reputation for being slightly more sophisticated in its criticism. The linguistic trends presented in this section, therefore, must be read with this distinction in mind. *Billboard* reviews may have been less curated and more trivial, and the linguistic conventions here may exemplify superficiality, not just a set of gendered assumptions.
[139] "*Billboard* Album Reviews," 64.

performance review of Joni Mitchell dated February 25, 1976, suggests that "Mitchell can handle a fragile lyric but her Civic Center appearance was disappointing."[140] Country-folk singer Mary MacGregor receives praise in *Billboard* for her "pretty, fragile vocal approach" which puts her "in there with the best of the small-voiced artists."[141] In the jazz/bossa-nova vein, singer Astrud Gilberto earns the description of "a singer with an ultra-fragile style" in a 1965 *Variety* album review.[142] Finally, in a 1977 concert review, author Lee describes the physical appearance of Jane Olivor (a French-style cabaret pop singer) in similar form. "Her fragile, waifish looks," he writes, "belied a big voice with a distinctive sound that spelled superstar in the making."[143]

Without sinking too deeply into a well of rhetorical insinuation, it seems here that Olivor's physical "fragility" stands in opposition to her musical capability (her "big voice" and "distinctive sound"). In this sense, "fragility" (a term associated almost invariably with femaleness) is decidedly outside the sphere of musical proficiency, and performative strength. To stress the relationship between "fragility" and femaleness, I here contextualize the matter with a feminist theoretical approach. Diane Tietjens Meyers' *Gender in the Mirror: Cultural Imagery and Women's Agency* (2002) discusses the corporeal embodiment of female oppression in her first chapter. She references Sandra Lee Bartky's 1990 publication to display the interconnectedness between physical frailty/fragility and idealized conceptions of femininity. "Bartky analyzes the feminine body as an instance of internalized oppression," she writes.[144]

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[140] Mike, "Joni Mitchell (Providence Civic Center)," *Variety*, February 1976, 64.
[141] "Top Single Picks: First Time Around," *Billboard*, November 1976, 74.
[142] "Record Reviews," Review of *The Astrud Gilberto Album* by Astrud Gilberto, *Variety*, February 24, 1965, 56. Another review of Gilberto reveals the highly gendered manner in which her music is discussed. For *Down Beat* in 1966, M.Z. writes, "Mrs. Gilberto sounds like I wish all girls did—innocent, charming, sexy. She is like the sun coming up in the morning over a tropical beach. She just knocks me out." Here the nuances of her musical contribution distill into an appealing combination of "innocence," "charm," and "sex" appeal (M.Z., "Record Reviews," Review of *Look to the Window*, by Astrud Gilberto, *Down Beat*, June 30, 1966, 30).
[143] Lee, "Jane Olivor: Michael Franks (Carnegie Hall, N.Y.)," *Variety*, October 1977, 80.
[144] Diane Tietjens Meyers, *Gender in the Mirror: Cultural Imagery and Women's Agency* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 9.

"The attractive woman is 'object and prey' for men, for feminine beauty plays up fragility, weakness, and immaturity." By applying the term "fragility" to critical evaluations of female performers, critics of this period partake in a rhetorical tradition oriented by patriarchal ideology.

Even though Lee, in his 1977 review, suggests that Olivor has the qualities of musical adeptness, the opposition he constructs between fragility and ability reveals the prominence of this gendered linguistic approach. As he distinguishes between two gendered categories, his wording makes clear the existence of a rhetorical divide. With fragility and weakness attached to femaleness, and musical efficacy and strength situated in opposition, a gender line forms through the linguistic framework. Mack, in a 1974 performance review of Joni Mitchell at Los Angeles' Universal Amphitheatre, follows the same logic. He writes,

> Mitchell's frail appearance is belied by the strength of her voice, which seems to be getting more supple and resonant with time. Despite exceptionally chilly weather … [she] sang for more than two hours without showing any adverse effects.[145]

Here Mitchell's "frailty" is held up against "the strength of her voice" and her performative stamina. If critics repeatedly associate female performers with the gendered concepts of fragility and weakness, then whenever a woman appears to counteract that characterization through a show of professionalism or competence, they often react with patronizing incredulity.

Indeed, highly gendered and often patronizing reviews of women pervade the press spectrum of this historical juncture. To begin, reviews of emerging female artists almost invariably include physical descriptions of beauty. Introductory profiles seem to begin with physical details about the performer in question, thereby prioritizing the female body over artistic qualification. In a 1966 *Variety* "New Acts" review, Adil writes that "Miss Mitchell, with high cheek bones, flaxon-colour hair and a crystal clear voice, is bound for bigger things."[146] For

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[145] Mack, "Concert Reviews: Joni Mitchell (Universal Aphi. L.A.)," *Variety*, August 1974, 46.
[146] Adil, "Night Club Reviews: New Acts – Joni Mitchell," *Variety*, September 1966, 61.

DISC magazine in 1964, Penny Valentine introduces Marianne Faithfull by stating, "She is blonde and beautiful and 17 and is still at a convent school. She made a record—which started out as a joke—called 'As Tears Go By.'"[147] Similarly, in one of only two television appearances, Vashti Bunyan appears on the stage of *Shindig!* in 1965 with an announcer reading, "Here's a pretty girl discovered by the Rolling Stones' manager Mr. Andrew Oldham. And when it comes to talent, he should know. So here she is, Vashti!"[148]

Physical descriptions appear prevalently in this particular press moment. Male performers also have their "long hair" or tailored suits scrutinized. Indeed, critics repeatedly remarked about the unkemptness of artists like Frank Zappa of the Mothers of Invention, viewing it as a kind of imminent threat to aesthetic propriety. Moreover, the Rolling Stones were constantly compared to the early Beatles in terms of physical attire, hair style, and cleanliness. The fetishization of female *beauty*, however, vastly surpasses the tangential treatment of the male body in music criticism. Descriptions of beauty are pervasive, often necessary components to press profiles of emerging women artists. As has been stated previously, album and concert reviews during this period seem to identify the instrumental faculties and musical proficiency of male artists far more than those of women. These trends speak to fact that women were often viewed as profoundly embodied. Their musical contributions, by extension, could have been taken less seriously than that of their male counterparts.

With this general discussion, I have sought to lay the foundation for my particularized discussion of women in folk, and the regulations of performance practice. I have aimed to identify the ways in which music criticism of this period has offered unequal treatment for artists

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[147] Penny Valentine, "Marianne Faithfull Talks to the Rolling Stones," *DISC*, August 1964, 5.
[148] *Shindig!*, 2.26, "Shindig!," performed by Vashti Bunyan, aired December 16, 1965, on ABC, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9yUV80YV_ZE.

due to systemic gender bias. As I return to folk and psychedelic folk, I use this section as context for the gender-based evaluation of folk performance. Female performers in folk seem to be held up against ideals of female vocal purity and compositional authenticity. In this sense, solo women artists in the psychedelic folk vein like Linda Perhacs, Vashti Bunyan, and Susan Christie may have been ignored or discredited due to their transgressions of gender-based folk performance practice. Ultimately, in this particular period, patriarchal impulses seem to infiltrate music criticism and public reception. This likely resulted in the disregard for solo women in psychedelic folk (or the subsequently labelled, "freak folk") who transgressed both music norms in general—with their experimentation in form, harmony, and metre—and folk traditional norms in particular with their unconventional vocal aesthetics.

4.3 Bunyan & Folk Authenticity

In 1966, Peter Snell tried to market Bunyan as a folk singer with "Train Song" b/w "Love Song." The single failed, but Bunyan found herself consistently associated with the folk genre and its psychedelic offshoots. Her relationship with folk has always been problematic, even though Boyd tried to situate her firmly in the psychedelic folk genre with *Diamond Day.* As I mentioned in earlier sections, she received significant disapproval from the press, and from other musicians in her field, for failing to fulfill the requirements of "folk performance." She remembers that her contemporaries doubted her authenticity, because she did not attempt to be a traditional folkie.[149] I argue that Bunyan, indeed, did not fulfill the practical and imagistic requirements for folk performance at this time, especially those necessary for women. She invented guitar chords and seemed to stray from metrical regulation with her unique strumming patterns. Her songs failed to follow in the tradition of the clear, repeatable, and highly

[149] Empire, "Flash Forward: Folk Legend."

recognizable folk ballads of Pete Seeger, Ewan MacColl, or Joan Baez. She was also terribly shy in both demeanour and sonic presence. In her 1965 television appearance on *Shindig!*, she sits on a stool dressed in a dark, engulfing jumper. She avoids eye contact with the audience at all times, skillfully hiding behind her long black locks. Her stage presence repeatedly contradicts the semblance of authenticity, honesty, and directness which has been so integral to folk performance.

Brocken explains the entanglement of folk performance and the appearance of authenticity. "The presentation of folk music," he writes, "assumes something more than just a musical style. It is a point of identification, an expression of something 'authentic,' and a source of affective alliance between fans."[150] Indeed, Cecil Sharp (1859-1924)—the foremost musical archivist of folk songs from England and Appalachia, and forebear of the English folk revival—stresses the central tenet of directness and honesty in folk performance. "The unconscious music of the folk," he explains, "has all the marks of fine art; that it is wholly free from the taint of manufacture, the canker of artificiality; that it is transparently pure and truthful, simple and direct in its utterance."[151] The ethos of folk music is structured on the dichotomous relationships between; artificiality/authenticity, commercialism/unmediated musical expression, and indirectness/directness. Even though Sharp makes his claim in relation to the twentieth-century folk performers he researched, his valuation of the "authentic" and unmediated folk performance continues to permeate public reception of folk.

Vashti Bunyan did not achieve this performative directness, nor did she possess a marketable, curated image of authenticity. This could have contributed to the public and critical disregard for her work. Indeed, Bunyan's relationship to folk is a complicated one. She began her

[150] Brocken, *The British Folk Revival*, 141.
[151] Young, *Electric Eden*, 68.

career trying to succeed as a pop singer with Oldham, then Snell bought out her contract with Decca and tried to market her as a folkie. When that failed, Bunyan made a record with Boyd, under the label of psychedelic folk. Bunyan was by no means trying to be a folk singer like Joan Baez, Mary Travers, or Bob Dylan. However, from 1966 onward, she became entangled with the folk genre, and with all its associated traditions of performance practice. As I have suggested in earlier sections, this has largely to do with Bunyan's incommensurability. While she is now understood as the forebear of twenty-first-century freak folk, before such a genre could coalesce, she was necessarily categorized by the only available genres of folk and psychedelic folk. In the 1960s/70s, Bunyan thus became associated with, and judged in relation to, folk.

Aligning more with psychedelic folk than any other folk subgroup, Bunyan's work presents a kind of multi-leveled transgression. On the one hand, her alternative music, performed with an airy, grainy, quiet voice, transgresses against mainstream musical convention. On the other hand, it more specifically transgresses against the very regulated performance codes embedded in the British and North American folk revival. This dual offence, I argue, is heightened by Bunyan's status as a solo female artist. Other psychedelic folk artists like the String Band, Fairport, and The Pentangle were able to achieve commercial success and critical legitimation even with their (similar) dual musical transgressions. Vashti Bunyan—along with Linda Perhacs, Susan Christie, Wendy Flower, and Sibylle Baier, and many female members of psychedelic folk bands—received vastly different treatment. I wonder if this is because the weight of their transgressions doubled due to their gender.

Tracks like "Love Song," "Trawlerman's Song," and "Window Over the Bay," present Bunyan's unique vocal timbre, with its weak, airy quality, its imprecise pitch, an very narrow range. Her later recordings, even over the expanse of three decades, maintain this aesthetic.

Tracks like "Lately" and "If I Were" off of *Lookaftering*, "The Boy" off of *Heartleap*, and "It's You" off of *Prospect Hummer* emanate from the same sonic space as those of Bunyan's 1960s/70s recordings. In the early 2000s, however, Bunyan has stated that she obtained the freedom to sing exactly as she intends. These tracks thus present even more profound vocal breathiness and weakness as they travel along subtle melodic contours.

"Lately" figures as an example of the kind of pitch precision to which I refer.[152] Throughout the song, Bunyan's vocals are dry, breathy, and weak in substance. Unsupported by vocal power, her pitches float and waver into chromatic territory. At 0:24 Bunyan audibly struggles to leap the disjunctive vocal line from G# to D. Instead of approaching the note through a vocal slide, she pauses, attacking the note in such a way that signals an audible vocal strain. Further, at 1:04 on the lyric "go," Bunyan holds the E note but, unable to sustain the note clearly, her E falters and breaks into dissonant fragments. Robert Kirby describes Bunyan's defining vocal timbre in Evan's documentary. He states,

> [Bunyan's] songs are solid throughout. They have beautiful melodies, they have beautiful structures ... And I think that all that worries her, because she has got a "weak" voice—and I'm using "weak" simply as what it means, the opposite of strong, not good or bad. You have to concentrate, it doesn't work as background music.[153]

Sibylle Baier's *Colour Green* bears similar sonic traits. Her songs are sung alongside quiet, metrically irregular, guitar playing. Her vocals, moreover, align stylistically with Bunyan's. Baier's "Says Elliott" exhibits similar pitch imprecision, vocal cracking, and a lack of timbral clarity.[154] Between 0:30-0:38 on the lyrics "Days keep growing short, nights too / Let us go then," the vocal line ascends in pitch as Baier's voice appears discernibly unsupported. Audible pitch breaks pervade the phrase, particularly on the lyric "short." These breaks inject

[152] See Discography.
[153] *From Here to Before*, directed by Evans.
[154] See Discography.

into a sense of uncomfortable dissonance into an otherwise innocuous track. Most evidently, at 0:50 on the lyric "burns," Baier's voice undergoes a dramatic break where the intended F degenerates into dissonant oscillations.

Countless artists in the freak folk milieu of the early twenty-first-century have timbral structures similar to Bunyan, Baier, and their contemporaries. Performers like Phosphorescent, Iron & Wine, Tiny Vipers, and Animal Collective create vocal tapestries akin to Bunyan in softness, in the use of dissonance, and in a stylised lack of clarity. Indeed, some artists execute even more unconventional vocalizations. Singers like Joanna Newsom (and to some extent the duo Coco Rosie) push further into eerie realms of vocal manipulation. Newsom, on tracks like "Peach Plum Pear," creates an undeniably unique vocal environment with screeching heights and child-like whining gestures. As Anthony Carew puts it, "With artists like Banhart and Newsom enshrined as figure-heads of the movement, some would suggest that having a vivid, divisive, individualistic style of singing must be a pre-requisite."[155] While "individualistic" vocals—often characterized by weakness, breathiness, pitch imprecision, or more drastic stylization—colour the freak folk landscape now, Bunyan in particular, faced a very different environment in the centre of the mid-twentieth-century British and North American folk revival. In this sphere, clarity and dexterity was integral to vocal performance, especially for women. Bunyan's style entirely missed the mark.

4.4 Vocal Timbre & Folk Traditions

Brocken explains that, "the folk singer or instrumentalist has to be rather dispassionate, maintaining a certain non-emotional style, perhaps even a 'distance' from the music being performed. This distance is then expected to maintain a certain level of purity…"[156] The folk

[155] Carew, "Genre Profile: Freak Folk."
[156] Brocken, *The British Folk Revival*, 119.

singer, in particular, creates this sense of purity by honing a vocal timbre that is altogether clear, powerful, unaltered, and evocative. According to Young, British folk singer Shirley Collins follows this performance tradition ideally. Her voice,

> … was uniquely suited to this purpose: not heavily accented, but with enough flattened vowels to indicate her provenance in the south-east. But the main quality was its clarity and neutrality. Sometimes accused of coldness, her voice was in fact an ideal folk voice, sounding as though it was grappling with the words for the very first time, and yet equally as though it was so inured to the pain and suffering so often portrayed in the songs that it had insulated herself from them.[157]

Collins presents vocal virtuosity, marked diaphragmatic power, a clear timbral quality, a wide range, and precise pitch. These very qualities occupy a central tenet of folk performance, and it seems that critics repeatedly celebrate such traits in women artists. Whereas male artists in the psychedelic folk milieu held the monopoly on critical appraisal in terms of instrumental virtuosity, female singers in the broad sphere of folk regularly receive judgement and praise for their *vocal* virtuosity. Bunyan's vocal aesthetics stray markedly from the Collins ideal. As a solo female artist creating alternative folk music with an unconventional vocal style in the psychedelic field, she may have lost critical attention due to her transgressions against folk tradition. As part of my analysis of gender-bias in the critical reception of early freak folk, I present this ultimate section on folk music coverage. I aim to show that women singers in the folk revival were held up against heightened standards of vocal performance. Correspondingly, I suggest that Bunyan and her contemporaries were taken less seriously due to their timbral transgressions in the psychedelic folk subgroup.

In a 1962 *Time* profile of American folk singer Joan Baez entitled "Folk Singing: Sibyl with Guitar," the young artist is celebrated for her vocal purity, her virginal (and yet maternal) demeanour, and her artistic authenticity. According to the reviewer, Baez upholds the central

[157] Young, *Electric Eden*, 207.

tenets of female folk performance. She embodies performative honesty, anti-commercialism, and docile femininity. The profile reads,

> Her voice is as clear as air in the autumn, a vibrant, strong, untrained and thrilling soprano. She wears no makeup, and her long black hair hangs like a drapery, parted around her long almond face. In performance she comes on, walks straight to the microphone, and begins to sing. No patter. No show business … The purity of her voice suggests purity of approach. She is only 21 and palpably nubile. But there is little sex in that clear flow of sound. It is haunted and plaintive, a mother's voice, and it has in its distant reminders of black women wailing in the night, of detached madrigal singers performing calmly at court, and of saddened gypsies trying to charm death into leaving their Spanish caves.[158]

For such an ostensibly unprocessed performance, Baez seems to incorporate nearly every aspect of a highly specified ideal of femininity here. The reviewer fetishizes her demeanour, celebrating her graceful negotiation between the maternal and virginal spheres of ideal femaleness. Folk music in particular structures itself around fictions of idealism, and this obsession with female purity, made audible through an untainted vocal performance, functions as part of this ideological construct. Benjamin Filene in *Romancing the Folk: Public Memory and American Roots Music* (2000) explains that in the 1930s, at the outset of an American folk revival, "many romanticized a mythical time in the past when Americans were more vigorous, more honorable, and more self-sufficient."[159] Further, he states that "images of the folk attracted Americans because they suggested sources of purity and character outside the seemingly weakened and corrupt mainstream of society."[160] Just as it idealized a nostalgic past, and a pure, uncorrupted sound, the folk revival equally idealized femininity.

Music press for folk categorically favours those artists who possess a wide-ranged, dexterous, virtuosic, and clear voice. In regards to Joan Baez, Whiteley explains that "her whoop

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[158] "Folk Singing: Sibyl with Guitar," *Time*, November 1962, 56.
[159] Benjamin Filene, *Romancing the Folk: Public Memory and American Roots Music* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 64.
[160] Ibid., 65.

to a high note confirmed her status as pure, untrained, unsophisticated and, by implication, non-commercial."[161] In a performance review dated 1969 for *Rave*, Baez is again commended for her "crystal clear voice."[162] This exact phrasing appears in the above *Variety* review of Joni Mitchell published in 1966. Whitelely explains that, like in the case of Baez, critics characteristically described Mitchell's vocal delivery as "distinctive and clear, with the highs and lows reflecting the imagery of the lyrics."[163] In 1968, writer Eliot Tiegel stresses that Mitchell has "an excellent range" and "utiliz[es] breath control to extend final note endings."[164] Again Tiegel singles out Mitchell's vocal clarity in a "Talent" profile for *Billboard* in 1969. He writes, "Miss Mitchell, frail in appearance, but possessing a beautiful voice, rich in clarity and understanding, offered 12 songs, the majority hers."[165] Notably, here he employs the same rhetorical procedure that separates physical weakness from musical competence as seen in section 4.2. Ten years later in a *Variety* article, Salt critiques Mitchell's performance due to an apparent breakdown of her vocal strength. "Mitchell is an excellent performer … When she attempted intricate jazz singing of later tunes, however, her voice did not have a strong hold on melody changes and was a bit whispery."[166]

My supposition is that in the folk vein, women performers had their voices scrutinized heavily to uphold a certain ideal of performative clarity.[167] Whether or not this has to do with an ideal of femininity or female "charm," is secondary. In the end, within folk and its offshoots, the

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[161] Whiteley, *Women and Popular Music*, 73.
[162] N.L., "Joan Baez," *Rave*, October 1969, 27.
[163] Whiteley, *Women and Popular Music*, 78.
[164] Eliot Tiegel, "Talent: Joni Mitchell Clicks in 'Turned On Act,'" *Billboard*, June 1968, 18.
[165] Eliot Tiegel, "Talent: Joni, Crosby and Stills Rack 'Em," *Billboard*, September 1969, 31.
[166] Salt, "Music-Records: Concert Reviews – Joni Mitchell (Forest Hillstaid, N.Y.)," *Variety*, August 1979, 74.
[167] Historically, the female voice in both speech and song has undergone profound scrutiny. For an analysis of this phenomenon in relation to current political events, see: Elspeth Reeve, "Why Do So Many People Hate the Sound of Hilary Clinton's Voice?," *The New Republic*, May 1, 2015, https://newrepublic.com/article/121643/why-do-so-many-people-hate-sound-hillary-clintons-voice. Also see: William Cheng, "The Long, Sexist History of 'Shrill' Women," *Time*, March 23, 2016, http://time.com/4268325/history-calling-women-shrill.

female voice receives better attention in its clear, "pure," wide-ranged, technically proficient form. This phenomenon of critical and public taste, therefore, could have effected the foundering of women artists in the nascent freak folk vein, since they did not attempt to fulfill this ideal. Transgressing once with their alternative, psychedelic folk compositions, perhaps these artists failed to make their mark due to a *second* transgression against the conventions of folk vocal performance. A comparison between Mitchell's "Night in the City," released on her debut LP, *Joni Mitchell (Song to a Seagull)* (1968), and Bunyan's "I'd Like to Walk Around in Your Mind," off of *Dimaond Day*, reveals stark stylistic differences that may have contributed to reception.

Mitchell invented her own chords, manipulated metre, and created tapestries of highly complex melodic maneuvers. Like Bunyan, she attempted rather unorthodox musical procedures and produced her own songbook. She was a composer, and a novel one at that. However, where Bunyan failed to achieve critical attention, Mitchell was celebrated by the press and even reached number one in Canada and number two in American charts with her 1974 album, *Court and Spark.* With the repeated praise for her vocal clarity and strength, it seems as if vocal timbre played a major role here in determining commercial success in the folk milieu.

The production of "Night in the City" prioritizes Mitchell's vocals above all other sonic elements. Her voice is clear, high in the mix, where her vibrant dexterity glows. On "I'd Like to Walk Around in Your Mind," by contrast, static invades Bunyan's hollow vocal track, with synthetic reverb causing her subtle tones to bounce in and out of clarity. [168] Moreover, her vocals are only slightly above the volume of the more resonant guitar notes. Her narrow range (spanning about one octave between E3 and A4) glides over a largely conjunct melody with few

[168] See Discography.

leaps. Pitches seep into chromatic territory at times, falling in and out of tune. Mitchell's track distinguishes itself with the repeated leap from the pitch of D4 on "Night in the the" to "Ci-" (B4) "-ty" (G4).[169] Her vocal jumps display virtuosic dexterity and her clarity in pitch precision separates her from any air of amateurism. In a *Variety* review of *Joni Mitchell (Song to a Seagull)* dated April 24, 1968, her vocal prowess seems to signal her potential for folk success. "Joni Mitchell is a young songstress in the folk groove," it reads, "On this debut disk she proves highly endowed with poetic and vocal talent, taste and timeliness. A lot of appeal and staving power are generated on such selections as 'Michael from Mountains,' 'Marcie,' … [and] 'Night in the City.'"[170]

Vocal dexterity and clarity contributed profoundly to the positive reception of women artists in the folk field like Joni Mitchell and Joan Baez. Indeed, it seems safe to suggest that vocal timbre played a prominent role in the failure of solo female psychedelic folk artists like Bunyan. With a style so diametrically opposed to folk convention, Bunyan could have received critical and public disdain for failing to achieve the kind of vocal "purity" so habitually associated with female folk performance. Press responses to male vocal performance, by comparison, appear to accommodate difference. Nick Drake's vocal timbre resembles Bunyan's strikingly in its softness and thinness, which could have been why Boyd suggested the two artists form a team back in 1970. Instead of receiving criticism for his unclear vocals, writer Stephen Demorest for the *Rolling Stone* commends Drake's style in a review dated June 30, 1977. He states,

> Drake's impressionistic lyrics are vivid but provocatively sketchy, making them as curiously personal as phrases mumbled in sleep. They're delivered in an airy, nearly

[169] See Discography.
[170] "Record Reviews," Review of *Joni Mitchell (Song to a Seagull)* by Joni Mitchell, *Variety*, April 24, 1968, 56.

> unconscious whisper that blends as naturally into the arrangements as a breeze through tall grass.[171]

Similarly, Glenn McCurdy in a *Chicago Tribune* profile of Eric Andersen celebrates the singer's "raspy voice with rough open-road blues overtones."[172] Further, Gene Clark of the Psychedelic folk/Folk rock band The Byrds receives comparable appraisal in a piece written by Pete Johnson for the *Los Angeles Times*. "Clark has the best voice of the lot," it reads, "a gentle wandering baritone of cracks and emotional strength."[173] The rhetorical genres of these reviews are diverse, but a pattern forms between them when male artists are accepted for fluctuations in vocal clarity (viewed as a sign of humanity, or even "strength") whereas solo female artists are held up against heightened stylistic scrutiny.

My last line of questioning concerns the ways in which we can *read* the freak folk of Vashti Bunyan as a mode of feminist revision. If she avoided upholding an idealized form of female vocal performance, could Bunyan have been negating the regulations of female performance practice in folk? Perhaps the lack of vocal clarity in the psychedelic folk work of Bunyan (and others in her field, especially Baier) can be read as a mode of retaliation against the expectation of purity and timbral perfection of the wider folk tradition. Perhaps their vocal cracks and pitch slips inject fallibility (whether consciously or sub-consciously) into the feminine ideal held up in folk, thereby critiquing it, and humanizing it. I do not suggest here that Baier and Bunyan intentionally created a more fallible sounding voice in order to activate a feminist critique. I postulate that they simply do not *attempt* to achieve the purported ideal of female vocal clarity so upheld by critics. In the absence of that attempt, these artists may be distancing

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[171] Stephen Demorest, "Nick Drake: *Bryter Later*," Review of *Bryter Later* by Nick Drake, *Rolling Stone*, June 30, 1977.
[172] Glen McCurdy, "The Making of a Folk-Rock Legend 1967," *Chicago Tribune*, May 1967, I26.
[173] Pete Johnson, "Byrds Appearing at Whisky a GoGo," *Los Angeles Times*, September 1967, D20.

themselves from acceptable definitions of femininity. Such an investigation into the revisionary practices of freak folk could span an entire new paper. For now, I turn to my concluding remarks.

Part 5: Conclusions

In 1970, *Just Another Diamond Day* went "unheralded" and "under-promoted," sounding decidedly unfit for "a world that was now moving away from the hippie dream."[174] As Boyd remembers, "basically, I think, a few hundred records at most were pressed. And it was very disappointing to me and terribly disappointing I think to Vashti."[175] Bunyan decided to leave the recording industry permanently after the failure of her debut LP. "From then on I couldn't play my guitar or listen to the sound of my own voice," she recalls, "because it reminded me of *Diamond Day*, which had been so roundly ignored. And although it was partly my fault, it was also that the world didn't want to hear what I had to say at all."[176] After giving birth to her son in London, she retreated to the Scottish Highlands and Ireland with Lewis where they lived in relative obscurity for nearly thirty years. Then, without any notice of Bunyan or Boyd, *Diamond Day* quietly began to grow in importance, skyrocketing in price on vinyl collectors' websites. Boyd explains that, "over the years the paucity of records in circulation had an effect, because people discovered this wonderful gem of a record. And particularly, once the internet got involved, and record auctions started, the value of those very few records that were in circulation soared."[177]

In light of this unprecedented arousal in interest, Spinney re-released *Diamond Day* in 2000. The proceeds were substantial, so Bunyan took her royalties and bought a computer. She started to compose again, now inspired by an emerging audience turning its attention to her work. Before releasing *Lookaftering* and *Heartleap*, she featured on countless collaboration albums. She worked with Piano Magic on "Crown of the Lost" off of *Writers Without Homes* in

[174] Leech, *Seasons They Change*, 121.
[175] *From Here to Before*, directed by Evans.
[176] Young, *Electric Eden*, 42.
[177] *From Here to Before*, directed by Evans.

2002. In the full embrace of Banhart's New Weird America, she played on "Rejoicing in the Hands" off of his 2004 LP of the same name. She then went on to work with Animal Collective in 2005, Anthony Reynolds in 2007, and Vetiver in 2008. Highly influential artists started to cover her songs as well. Canadian folk/pop artist Feist and Ben Gibbard recorded "Train Song" in the 2009 compilation album entitled *Dark Was the Night* created for the awareness of HIV/AIDS. In the same year, experimental electronic band Fever Ray covered Bunyan's "Here Before" on *Fever Ray (Deluxe Version)*.

A niche market has formed around the legacy of Vashti Bunyan, with new artists claiming her as an integral creative forebear. Women artists in the freak/alternative folk milieu like Joanna Newsom, Tiny Vipers, and Kimya Dawson continue to make ephemeral, unconventional, alternative music, and they receive both critical and public appraisal. In a review of Joanna Newsom's *The Milk Eyed Mender* (2004), Brandon Stosuy for *Pitchfork* applauds her musical unconventionality. He writes,

> Creating avant-garde American music from the back porch, she expands upon tradition without losing authenticity. In this sense, her practice could be linked to Devendra Banhart, a friend and kindred spirit. Both map a pile of eccentricities that tumble together to create something useful, familiar, and nearly sacred. Here's hoping to a duet for the new folk future.[178]

Many factors have contributed to the disjointed history of Vashti Bunyan, and to the contemporary boom in freak folk. Perhaps it has a lot to do with the increased specialization of music press. Back in the 1960s/70s, alternative music magazines were only beginning to emerge, and mainstream publications dominated the critical landscape. Now, alternative press outlets cover all manifestations of cultural production. Peripheral artists, once denied public attention, can now access new platforms to share their work. This likely contributed to the reinforcement of

[178] Brandon Stosuy, "Joanna Newsom: *The Milk Eyed Mender*," Review of *The Milk Eyed Mender* by Joanna Newsom, *Pitchfork*, March 17, 2004, https://pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/5893-the-milk-eyed-mender.

the freak folk movement. I have stated above that the re-issue culture of the late 1990s and early 2000s also contributed to the resurgence of forgotten freak folk from the twentieth-century. We also know that many issues with distribution, marketing, and production could have led to initial disregard for *Diamond Day* in particular. My thesis has sought to outlay this array of contributing factors.

I have also sought to shed light on gender-based biases in the press. I have argued that gender inequality in the field of critical reception may have contributed to the poor response to solo female freak folk artists in the 1960s/70s. I have also considered the regulations of female vocal performance in the folk milieu, questioning how Bunyan's particular vocal style conflicted with a crucial set of expectations. Now, Bunyan's *Diamond Day*, Perhacs' *Parallelograms*, Baier's *Colour Green*, Wendy and Bonnie's *Genesis*, and Susan Christie's *Paint a Lady* have been reissued and continue to generate positive responses for the press and a listening public. Most of these women continue to make music today, with fruitful record deals. Their disjointed reception history reveals shifting attitudes within music criticism, the recording industry, and audiences alike. With new solo female artists developing in alternative/freak folk, it seems as though there are vastly different attitudes toward women making divergent, psychedelic, and novel folk music. With increasing feminist attitudes permeating the socio-cultural terrain of North America and Britain, there exists now more conceptual room for alternative expressions of folk by women.

To conclude, throughout this analysis I have stressed the incommensurability of Bunyan's music. In the mid-1960s, she tried to enter into the popular music industry, but neither Oldham's production nor the Rolling Stones' composition could assure her success. Bunyan's style struggled to fit into the sonic traditions of pop music of this time: she was not Marianne

Faithfull. Under Peter Snell's direction, Bunyan entered into the folk realm, despite the fact that she was directly admonished by Peggy Seeger and Ewan MacColl for her ephemerality. With "Train Song," a track imbued in the rhetorical tradition of train migration in folk music, Bunyan was still in the wrong space. When Boyd tried to inaugurate her into psychedelic folk with *Diamond Day*, even that ostensibly open genre had no room for the melancholic solo songs of Bunyan and her guitar. None of these genres seemed an adequate conduit for her particular mode of sonic expression. Her work was incommensurable, unknowable, a voice without language. Only decades later, with the assemblage of the "freak folk" genre and New Weird America, Bunyan found a generic category that rendered her music both intelligible and accessible.

Bunyan's music was altogether illegible until the early 2000s. For further clarification, Brackett describes the concept of legibility in his first chapter of *Categorizing Sound.* When a text associates with an appropriate genre, it is rendered legible and accessible to an audience. He writes,

> This relationship of a text to the conventions of a genre that it invokes leads us to consider how a text becomes associated with a genre label in the first place, and how a text achieves legibility, that is, how it becomes capable of being understood as participating in a genre at a given place and time.[179]

Without the alignment between a text and a corresponding genre, the content of that text evades perception. Without a proper generic alignment, Bunyan's incommensurable work escaped proper understanding in the 1960s/70s. This also recalls Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of addressivity. Appropriate genres for texts provide the conduit by which textual matter is transmitted to recipients in an intelligible form. The generic title concretizes the "addressee" or the directed recipient. Bakhtin writes, "Each speech genre in each area of speech communication

[179] Brackett, *Categorizing Sound*, 12.

has its own typical conception of the addressee, and this defines it as a genre."[180] Moreover, "the style of the utterance depend[s] on those to whom the utterance is addressed, [and] how the speaker (or writer) senses and imagines his addressees."[181] Speech genres here translate to genres of music (an utterance of a different type). Ultimately, without the assemblage of the "freak folk" genre, to which Bunyan is appropriately connected, her work in the 1960s/70s went without the proper crystallization of an addressee. Her music evaded classification, and an audience could not form around an incommensurable subject.

Gender, commensurability, and production decisions have led to the peculiar resurgent reception history of Bunyan and her contemporaries. In the spirit of sisterhood, I have compiled these factors here to better understand Bunyan's history. I have sought to reveal structures of power within the music industry that have led to Bunyan's reception. Finally, I have presented this thesis to direct scholarly attention toward a very quiet and unassuming branch of psychedelic folk history, in the hope to reveal its profound historical significance.

[180] Brackett, *Categorizing Sound*, 14.
[181] Ibid.

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