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### Contrafactum: Career of a Tune

*I came to it all backwards, as one does.*  
— Thom Yorke

In 1973, when Paul Simon released “American Tune,” a popular item in his repertoire ever since, part of what we responded to was a melody now four centuries old. If we know this, we came to it piece by piece, like family history. The tune I recognized behind Simon’s work was one I knew first from a rousing song called “Because All Men Are Brothers,” rather than from its more famous home in Bach’s *St. Matthew Passion*. The sequence was chance: in 1965 I was both listening to Peter, Paul & Mary, who recorded the song that year, and beginning to learn Bach, though I was more enthusiastic about the *Well-Tempered Clavier* than about choral church music. By 1973, though, I heard in Simon’s “American Tune” both these antecedents at once, and this resonance was part of the pleasure. Might more history produce more pleasure?

The label on the 1965 LP, *See What Tomorrow Brings*, credited “Because All Men Are Brothers” to “Bach / Glazer.” Presumably J. S. Bach wrote the music and someone named Glazer wrote the words. I quizzed more knowledgeable friends and discovered the locus in Bach of what is in fact often called the Passion Chorale. Later I explored the collection known to music students as Riemenschneider, the *371 Harmonized Chorales*, which includes the same melody in nine different versions under three titles. According to a note in the *371*, Bach “left eleven harmonizations of it, five of which are found in the ‘St. Matthew Passion.’” More recent scholarship raises the total to at least nineteen.

These two somewhat fuzzy points, Bach and Glazer, made a line, which, because it vectors back, constituted a story. Or three, if we include Peter, Paul & Mary. That was enough to think about: a sort of chorale had been turned into a sort of activist anthem with a Wobbly feel to it, perhaps from the twenties or thirties: “Because all men are brothers, wherever men may be, / One union shall unite us, forever proud and free.” In 1965, Peter, Paul & Mary were well-established stalwarts, or headliners, if there was a difference, from the 1963 March on Washington and many other rallies and protests. “No tyrant shall defeat us, no nation strike us down”: the song sounded as defiant as “Blowing in the Wind,” the hit single that in 1963 had made both them and its writer superstars before the term was current, somewhere near the empyrean of the Beatles. (The liner notes on *See What Tomorrow Brings* reported that the Beatles called them Pizza, Pooh, and Magpie; “Their magic is bigger than our magic,” said Peter.)

The trio was famous for spirited and precise performances that depended on exceptionally tight, rich vocal harmony. When they broke off for solo efforts, even briefly during their collective recordings, the result could be affecting — John Denver’s “Leaving on a Jet Plane” was another big hit in 1967 — but it exposed sentimentalities that would not wear so well. In this 1965 song, though, mostly sung *tutti*, their use of Bach felt stylistically appropriate; the *a capella* opening verse sounded plenty high-church. Bach was also in the process of

becoming cool. Not until 1968 would Wendy (then still Walter) Carlos's *Switched-On Bach* herald the era of popular electronic music, trumping the merely electric; already in 1963, though, the Swingle Singers had released *Bach's Greatest Hits* — a great leap forward from the previous year's chart-topper by the Singing Nun, but equally a sign of unsettled times in the world of pop music. Peter, Paul & Mary's recording implicated Bach in the politics of the decade, or in what felt like the decade's torch-carrying of a labor politics from before the (Second World) War; it conscripted him as not only chic but hip.

This account would have been too simple even if Paul Simon had never given us a later point on the line. Glazer, whoever that might be, must have constructed "Because All Men Are Brothers" by fitting new words to Bach's old melody, but the way Peter, Paul & Mary recorded the song evidently went beyond Glazer's act of appropriation, or underscored it: they added sophisticated harmonies and contrapuntal lines, especially prominent in the unaccompanied first verse, and these features gave the tune a sound much more like choral Bach than any songwriter seemed likely to have specified.

A song is, at the least, some words and a melody to sing them to, a melody and some words to sing to it. "To" is perplexing. The songwriter's craft is to combine a string of syllables with a string of notes. They constrain each other: music in a given style has its principles of continuation and coherence, words in a given language have their own; each series rides the wave of its own rhythmic implication, and coordinating the two is far from automatic; verbal rhythms are both distinct from, and deeply (but only deeply) related to, musical rhythms. The notes and words also transform each other when combined. Every speaker of English knows, consciously or not, that the word "somewhere" has a primary stress on its first syllable; if a native speaker can't summon up that knowledge, the memory's ear may be distracted by the opening notes of "Over the Rainbow," an upward octave leap that stamps indelible stress on the second syllable.

Beyond melody and words, most songs we know have (or have been given, perhaps more than once) a harmonic framework, which shows up on the sheet music in a set of chord symbols for guitar or ukulele as well as in the simplified piano accompaniment. The sequence of chords — which again has an interior logic separable from that of the notes, though affiliated — implies that when more than one voice sings the song, they need not sing quite the same pitches. Harmony embodies a social idea, and even enacts it: the same song is being produced, the same work accomplished, by voices singing different notes. In some musical styles, counterpoint elaborates this model: independent voices, not all moving at the same time, sometimes moving in different directions, each pursuing its own coherent melody, nevertheless conspire in concert — making, repeatedly and as if merely incidentally, harmonies.

Mary Travers, Noel (Paul) Stookey, and Peter Yarrow all have individually *confiding* voices. Acquainted listeners — fans — easily identify the personality linked with each voice. When the three singers trade a melody line by line ("Bob Dylan's Dream") we have no difficulty telling who has it, and when they adopt the blues device of call-and-response ("Tryin' to Win") we hear who's who. Again like the Beatles, however, when they sing together they blend remarkably. Their timbres fuse. The individuality-and-unity, in a word the harmony, is thematic in many of their songs ("If I Had a Hammer"), if merely

supportive in others ("The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face"). Both the musical effect and its communal import are strengthened by variation, as when the voices divide and recombine ("When the Ship Comes In"), or when an arrangement begins with a single voice that's joined by another and then the next, giving the song an expansive dramatic trajectory ("Don't Think Twice, It's All Right"). These variations verge on, and technically constitute, counterpoint, which sometimes grows elaborate ("Rolling Home"). Yet "Because All Men Are Brothers" is unique in the trio's repertoire in adopting formally strict, continuous counterpoint throughout the first and last verses. Since J. S. Bach is the immovable center of the universe of counterpoint — if not its first or last still its ultimate master — the attribution of the song's music to him seems to make sense.

Yet the counterpoint Peter, Paul & Mary sing is not exactly Bach's. (Their arrangement may have been devised by Milt Okun, the group's conservatory-trained intermittent "musical director.") Stookey's part, starting with the opening phrase's distinctive downward leap and upward scale, largely duplicates the bass line of Riemenschneider #98, which is essentially movements 15 and 17 of the *St. Matthew Passion*. But the reduction from the customary four chorale voices to three required at least a tricky redistribution of notes, with some effect on the bass line and more on Yarrow's part, which continually selects strategically from the alto and tenor. Several un-Bach-like "open" harmonies punctuate the piece: the first two cadences omit the third of the chord — a hollow sound more evocative of Gregorian chant than of Bach — and all three singers meet on a single note (in two octaves) just before the end of the verse. While the voice-leading mostly goes by the book (a few hidden parallel fifths), the harmony is often more closely packed than Bach would have asked of his choirs: on the opening note, all three voices wedge themselves into a major third. Even more strikingly against the "common practice" that Bach was largely responsible for defining, the voices cross above and below each other. (In Bach's chorale settings the bass sometimes seems to cross above the tenor, but the Introduction of Riemenschneider explains that this is an illusion created by the absence of instrumental parts that doubled the bass an octave below.) Stookey's line, with a range of a twelfth — as big as the unsingable American anthem — and including the largest interval leaps in the arrangement, takes him above Yarrow's tenor at the beginnings of the first and second phrase-pairs, and from the end of the third into the beginning of the last. Travers is singing in so low a female range that her voice runs with or below Yarrow's throughout the last section of the verse. The closeness and the crossing strongly emphasize the intertwining of voices, corroborating the song's celebration of "union" solidarity. The constant shifts between tight and wide range among their harmonizing notes emphasize both the independence of voices and their cooperation even more strongly than does Bach's style of counterpoint. Beat by beat, though, these features mark departures from his style.

If the harmonization isn't quite Bach's, his credit on "Because All Men Are Brothers" might be taken to mean that he wrote the melody. This is not the case, as the chorale's multiple titles in Riemenschneider imply, though Riemenschneider never mentions the origin. While the melody is what Glazer took from Bach, Bach took it in turn from Hans Leo Hassler, a composer over a century older. This fuzziness of attribution recurs: the annual *Breaking Bread*

includes the tune as "O Sacred Head, surrounded" (as have many Catholic hymnals since Vatican II; the Protestant version is "O sacred head, now [or "so," or "sore"] wounded"). To maximize readability in a Large Print edition, the words are set to a single melody line without harmony parts. The hymnal credits Hassler but adds, "adapt. by Johann Sebastian Bach." Yet Bach invented nothing on that page. Versions of "O sacred head" can be found in most American hymnals of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries — Peter, Paul & Mary's arrangement could have been influenced by them — often with credit to Bach, often in the Riemenschneider #98 harmonization. (#80, movement 44 of the *Passion*, is also fairly common.) But though Bach, and in particular the *St. Matthew Passion*, became the channel through which a variety of writers have received the tune for their words, he was not its source.

Born the same year as Shakespeare and Galileo, Hans Leo Hassler left Nuremberg at the age of twenty (1584) for Venice; he studied and collaborated with the Gabriellis, father and son. A year or two later, he was among the first to carry the Italian musical innovations we identify as late Renaissance back to Germany, where they would eventually give rise to what we call the Baroque. He enjoyed wide repute as an organist and expert in organ design; for years he was agreeably retained by the Fugger family of bankers. In 1601 he published the collection of madrigals in which our melody makes the debut of its long career.

When we have worked our way back to this original, we find a tune instantly recognizable, but also startlingly distinct from the one Bach and then Glazer transmitted. Only a single pitch has changed (in later versions the second-to-last note rises to the fifth degree of the scale; Hassler repeats the preceding second degree instead), but the whole last pair of phrases is doubled, altering the basic shape of the verse. Later the tune gets compressed into the AAB form we're accustomed to in hymns (*stollen, stollen, abgesang*), each stanza beginning with a repeated pair of musical phrases, though with changing words. The form of Hassler's verses is more symmetrical overall, with repetitions both fore and aft; and since at the end he repeats the text as well as the music, the stanza's last lines feel like a refrain, with a refrain's emphatic closure.

Even more strikingly, the rhythm of Hassler's song is complex and jaunty. (As a song is words wedded to a melody, a melody is pitches fitted to a rhythm.) Scholars differ on how to parse this music between modern bar-lines, but it clearly mixes duple and triple rhythms, suggesting complicated dance forms, contrasting sharply with the four-square march of the later hymn. Many Renaissance compositions give off this air of freedom from the strictures through which later music would achieve its architectonic marvels. Side-by-side performances of Hassler's tune and the *Passion Chorale* speak directly to the ear both about the doggedness of the hymn, and about why Hassler's madrigal appeared in a collection called *Lustgarten*.

I should mention one more music-theoretical feature of Hassler's tune, though I leave detailed discussion to David Hill, who devoted a large part of his 1994 dissertation (*The Persistence of Memory: Mode, Trope, and Difference in the Passion Chorale*, SUNY Stony Brook) to analyzing treatments of this melody between Hassler's composition and the chorale's apotheosis in Bach. The melody is ambiguous with regard to musical mode. Composers might handle it as though the last note were a sort of home pitch, called the "final," which casts the whole into the somewhat peculiar Phrygian mode; or we can let our modern

hearing — neither irrelevant nor inevitable as a context for this piece written during the long transition from modes to tonality — place it squarely in a major key, so that the last note becomes the third of the scale. As Hill shows, a tradition of organ treatments favored the former interpretation; an alternative lineage of vocal pieces strengthened the claims of the latter; and Bach brought the possibilities together in the *St. Matthew Passion* and various cantatas.

All of the musical characteristics that distinguish Hassler's tune from the one Peter, Paul & Mary sing disappeared in the course of the seventeenth century, within fifty years of the original composition, well before Bach was born. Some of them reappear obliquely in Paul Simon's song. Before we return to that near-present, though, we can hardly help noticing the even more varied other side of the story: what happened to the words.



*Singing is a trick to get people to listen to music for longer than they would ordinarily.*

— David Byrne

Hans Leo Hassler's song had lyrics — his own, as far as I can tell — appropriate to a *Lustgarten*: "Mein G'müt is mir verwirret / das macht ein' Jungfrau zart." "My spirit's perplexed by a maiden fair — I'm well and truly lost, my heart sore, no rest ..." If this doesn't sound quite like pleasure (*Lust*), it sets forth love's symptoms as poems have all the way back to Sappho, and displays the same attachment to the source of turbulent feeling.

Hans Leo died of tuberculosis in 1612. One year later his older brother Kaspar, also a musician like their father, republished the music almost note for note, but with a drastic change indicated by the title of the collection: *Harmoniae Sacrae*. For Hans Leo's madrigal lyrics Kaspar substituted the hymn-poem text, "Herzlich tut mich verlangen": "Heart-sore I yearn for a blessed end, since here I am surrounded by misery ... O Jesus, come quickly!" The poem was written by Christoph Knoll; dozens of references give the date, with equal certitude and in roughly equal numbers, as 1599, 1605, or 1611, so the words may have been brand-new when Kaspar adopted them, or they may have been around for a dozen years. Hans Leo might or might never have seen or heard them.

Whatever our modern reaction to Kaspar's act might be, what he was doing to his brother's song was far from unusual. Musicologists use the term "contrafactum," which is cognate with our "counterfeit"; a neutral verb is also available, "retexting." The practice goes well back into the Middle Ages; as *Grove's Dictionary* puts it, "The constant re-use of older ... melodies is so fundamental to both the technique and spirit of medieval music that it does not constitute a special usage." "Contrafactum," not a Classical word, comes into use in the fifteenth century, especially for what are also sometimes called "religious parodies" of secular songs. Lutherans relied on it heavily, beginning with Luther: "Why should the Devil have all the good tunes?" (Luther may not have said that; it's also attributed to Rowland Hill around the turn of the nineteenth century.) The Protestant need was obvious, and the impulse may be perennial. Why do Garrison Keillor, "Weird Al" Yankovic, the Capitol Steps, and countless others,

perfectly ready to compose their own topical and satirical songs, habitually borrow old melodies for them? Good tunes may be harder to write than good lyrics — but that's another debate. A better reason is that the existing tune, which is always chosen as being well-known to the audience, adds a pleasure of recognition and of recognized transformation.

Kaspar's conversion of "Mein G'müth" into a hymn began what it took the rest of the seventeenth century to work out. (Hill's dissertation, to which I'm indebted, discusses all this in much greater analytical detail.) In 1627 Johann Hermann Schein publishes a "Herzlich" version that keeps the old duple-triple rhythms but removes Hassler's repeated ending, creating the AAB tune everyone has used since; Bach may have known it from Gottfried Vopelius's 1682 recompilation. Schein also settles the tune firmly into a major key, but in 1634 Johann Stobäus goes the other way, treating the melody as Phrygian, and so inaugurates the tradition of later organ treatments, though his is choral, with another new text, "Ich harrete des Herren." The organ works would most often adopt text and title from yet another poem, Cyriakus Schneegass's 1597 version of Psalm 6 called "Ach Herr, mich armen Sünder" ("O Lord, poor sinner that I am"), an attitude better suited by the dark, unsettled feel of the Phrygian. (Think of the Jefferson Airplane's "White Rabbit" or the score of *Predator*.) Stobäus's setting begins to regularize the tune's rhythm into duple time, though he still changes pace in the middle of the verse, at the beginning of the *abgesang*; while Samuel Scheidt's "Herzlich" of 1640 again plays with shifts into triple time, though different shifts in different places from Hassler's. In 1640 Johann Crüger adopts strict duple meter. He also suggests several more possible texts for the hymn, and in later editions of his *Praxis pietatis melica* these alternatives include one that will become even better established than "Herzlich tut mich verlangen." "O Haupt voll blut und wunden" — the various English "O sacred head" versions are translations — is the first stanza of a 1656 poem by Paul Gerhardt (1607-1676), who after Luther was the most influential Lutheran hymn-poet. Gerhardt was in turn translating "Salve caput cruentatum," one of a series of seven addresses to the various parts of Christ's body on the Cross (feet, knees, hands, side, breast, heart, face), which was written either in the twelfth century by St. Bernard of Clairvaux or by Arnulf of Leuwen (Löwen, Leuvin, Louvain) in the thirteenth.

By 1649, when Andreas Fromm includes "Herzlich" in an early German oratorio, the transformation of Hassler's tune into the one we know from Bach is complete: the meter is of uniform quarter notes within every phrase, and Fromm is the one who raises the penultimate note from supertonic to dominant, giving the tune's end a little fillip without which it would now sound flat to us. (Hassler's doesn't because he repeats the last pair of phrases.) Near the end of the century, Buxtehude's chorale prelude has all the modern characteristics, and Pachelbel's triple meter, in its regularity, more resembles the hymn's duple than Hassler's mixture.

Bach inherited an old tune, worn smooth, associated with several different sets of words, and all these things pleased him. The familiarity meant that he could count on his devout listeners to think of words when none were sung, and of one set when they heard another. In the Christmas Oratorio he used the melody with a triumphal text about the futility of devils' interference; for his congregation the music echoed ("O Haupt ...") with lament from the Passion

awaiting at the other end of the story. In the *St. Matthew Passion*, the five different texts he sets to this one chorale, taken from two different poems by Gerhardt, outline the chorus's reactions to the events of Matthew 26 & 27. "Befiehl du deine Wege" ("Entrust your path to him who governs Heaven") is the complacent middle setting, preceded by two passages from "O Haupt voll blut und wunden" that don't include the title stanza about the blood and wounds. That most familiar of all texts, sung immediately before the Crucifixion, is the chorus's sympathetic response to the beatings and mockery. These first four settings, though sorrowful, are confidently faithful. When Bach brings the tune back once more, almost at the end of the *Passion*, he uses Gerhardt's most abject stanza ("When I someday must depart, do not part from me then ... When terror constricts my heart, wrest me from horror by means of your pain"), and gives it the most unsettling, Phrygian, and difficult harmonies he ever heard in Hassler's melody. A hymnal whose musical editor was Ralph Vaughn Williams includes this as an alternate version, but sternly warns that "It should only be attempted by good choirs."

These choices of text and harmonization reflect theological and dramaturgical decisions on Bach's part. (Both David Hill and Eric Chafe have published studies of these topics.) The adaptation of Matthew that he uses — written by Christian Henrici, who called himself "Picander" — ends not with the Resurrection of Christ but with the burial of Jesus, from whom the last we hear, moments before this final rendition of the chorale, is a question about being forsaken. Between this near-despair and the celebrations in the Christmas Oratorio (composed in 1734, seven years after the first version of the *St. Matthew Passion* and a decade before the last), Bach apparently heard the whole range of religious feeling his work needed, equipped with sets of words to codify any aspect of it, in the one hymn tune derived from Hassler's madrigal.

Bach's taste for archaic hymns had theological implications amid the rival Lutheran factions of his time, and eventually became a liability, as Albert Schweitzer's biography points out:

It was unfortunate for Bach's work that the old chorale took so prominent a place in it; for this reason it was included in the censure which Rationalism, in the name of purified taste, pronounced upon the church hymn of the past. For the second half of the eighteenth century Bach's cantatas and Passions did not exist; they had gone into exile with the old church hymn.

Bach's post-mortem obscurity is familiar from other stories: the sons selling the engraved plates of the *Art of Fugue* to pay for the funeral, Mozart's auspicious but surprisingly late encounter with the music, and so on. It wasn't until after Mendelssohn revived the *St. Matthew Passion* in 1829 that Bach regained and surpassed the eminence he had had during his life, so that by the twentieth century his reputation became as unassailable as Shakespeare's.

Largely because of Bach, Hassler's old melody permeated the North Atlantic musical world. Mendelssohn's chorale cantata on "O Haupt voll blut und wunden" came in 1830, Brahms's organ prelude on "Herzlich tut mich verlangen" in 1896. Between and before and since, there have been organ and choral and orchestral versions by Bender, Brosig, Callahan, Decker, Hesse, Kauffmann, Kuhnau, Marpurg, Reger, Schaffner, Walther, Zachau, .... Not to mention all those Protestant and Catholic hymnals. On this day of writing, a

search for "*o haupt voll blut und wunden*" gets 62,400 Google hits and "*herzlich (tut OR thut) mich verlangen*" 36,400 — substantial numbers for long quoted phrases, and omitting the dozen other titles, German (at least six are applied to Bach's own settings) and English (from the 1752 "O Head so full of bruises" and the 1871 Baptist "O Christ! what consolation" through the variations on "O Sacred head").

Which brings us to the twentieth century. My first guess about who wrote the lyrics of "Because All Men Are Brothers" was Joe Glazer, a folk-singer so closely associated with unions as to call his autobiography *Labor's Troubadour*. That was wrong, and I had misjudged the date as well. The song has a 1948 copyright, though it apparently accompanied a C.I.O filmstrip the year before, sung by Pete Seeger and the lyrics' author: Tom Glazer (1914-2003). The Almanac Singers also performed it, and when Glazer included the song in the 1970 collection he edited, *Songs of Peace, Freedom, and Protest*, he mentioned a recording by the Weavers as well as Peter, Paul & Mary's. He acknowledged the tune's history: "The melody is based on the famous Passion Chorale tune of J. S. Bach, who borrowed it himself from H. L. Hassler." It seems likely that he knew the hymns; he says that his own version shows up "in Unitarian and Lutheran hymnals."

Glazer worked for Alan Lomax in the Library of Congress Folk Culture project at the end of the thirties. Among the folk-music revivalists of the forties, though never as famous as Seeger and the other Weavers, or Josh White, Burl Ives, Leadbelly or Woody Guthrie, for two years after the War he had a radio show, "Tom Glazer's Ballad Box." In 1957 he composed the score for Elia Kazan's *A Face in the Crowd*, starring Andy Griffith. (His brother, Sidney Glazier, produced *The Producers*; a nephew of both, Mitch Glazer, is also in Hollywood.) He turned to children's songs, and may have written "Bingo" and "The Bear Went Over the Mountain." He recorded the *Singing Science* records in 1959 and 1960, including "Why Does the Sun Shine (The Sun Is a Mass of Incandescent Gas)," covered by They Might Be Giants; he co-wrote the Kingston Trio hit, "(It Takes) A Worried Man." His most famous work, however, is as anonymous as "Greensleeves" in the minds of its audience: "On Top of Spaghetti" is apparently known to more American children than the "Old Smokey" it parodies.

"The Star-Spangled Banner," too, is a contrafactum: a drinking song ("Anacreon in Heaven") rendered into an idiom not theological but political — a distinction somewhat diminished in the perspective that such transformations offer. In this sense, Glazer's "Because All Men Are Brothers" is not a reversal of Kaspar Hassler's retexting of his brother's madrigal, but a further modern twist. It's possible that Glazer got his title from Fénelon: "Because all men are brothers, all wars are civil wars." In Glazer's version of the supranational, "Where chimes the bell of freedom, there is my native land." From Martin Luther's redemption of bar tunes to the post-Enlightenment ideological *mélange* represented by a labor anthem in a Unitarian hymnal, the path is maze-like, but perhaps not very long. For that matter, whether the distance is greater from a plaint over love's discombobulations to a yearning for reunion with one's judicially murdered god, or from there to a panegyric on the anti-tyrannical efficacy of collective bargaining, may depend on one's mythic angle of view. On the evidence, however, some fundamental pleasure in singing about these varying things remains constant.



How much of these four centuries of history did Paul Simon know when he wrote "American Tune"? At least one early, atypical, protest song he composed pseudonymously, "He Was My Brother," appears in Glazer's book, and with Art Garfunkel he recorded at least one other song in the collection ("Last Night I Had the Strangest Dream," written by Ed McCurdy in 1950 and covered by many others). Like Glazer two decades earlier, Simon spent apprentice time — though much more engaged by blues and rock and roll — in the world of "folk-singers," where Prof. Child's collected ballads provided staples. The ballad tradition mixes and matches lyrics and tunes more promiscuously than the contrafactum tradition of hymns; the retexting of a ballad tune is a pragmatic resort rarely felt by singer or audience as a fraught or weighty transfiguration. For that matter, if hymnodists of the seventeenth century didn't worry about adapting Paul Gerhardt's adaptations of Psalms and of a medieval poem, still less was originality of tune a matter for anxiety until, more or less, the age of copyright. Paul Simon, born in 1941, lived his musically formative years between the garnering (and copyrighting) of folk materials by the Lomaxes, and the moment when George Harrison lost a suit brought by the writers of "He's So Fine."

If Simon, though obviously an eclectic listener, is unlikely to have heard Hassler's madrigal before writing his own song, it's virtually certain that he knew the *St. Matthew Passion*. Occasional comments in online forums that he "pirated" the melody from Bach are historically inept in several different ways. He means us to recognize the tune, and to recognize that he is giving it torques and weights different from those we know. "It's all right, it's all right," he repeats again and again, both summarizing the consolation on which centuries of hymns converge, and evacuating it.

"American Tune" is no folk song, but it begins to exhibit the endurance of a folk's own songs. In 2001 *Time* magazine marveled that "Simon's deliberation on the disintegration of the 60's [seems] even more poignant with the passage of 30 years"; a 2004 concert review in the *San Antonio News* says, "The surprise in hearing him sing it live 40 years later [sic] was that neither the lyrics nor music seemed dated." With or without Garfunkel — who is reported to regret that Simon wrote it too late to provide a hit for the duet — or with others such as Willie Nelson, Simon has performed or re-recorded the song a minimum of 30 times after its 1973 release, plainly not against the grain of his audience's tastes.

The song turns up in blogs, and the way it turns up elucidates its appeal. "American Tune" provides the opportunity for vicarious self-pity on which the allure of many songs depends. It resonates to an angst which may be expressed as communal or individual; one blogger endorses the song's truth by saying, "Just turn on the news. Or take a look at my heart." As a bumper sticker puts it, Where Are We Going? and Why Am I in This Handbasket? Longevity is also encouraged by the sentiment's apparent fungibility: references to the song occur most often in online entries about "9/11" and its anniversaries; in entries about Hurricane Katrina; and as a basis in fellow-feeling through which Americans can appreciate events such as the genocide in Darfur. How thin this response may spread is illustrated by the blogger who extols "American Tune" because she associates it with Simon's earlier song "America," which she values because it mentions the New Jersey Turnpike, "because the Turnpike is a thing that belongs to me ... It's mine because it's home and it's home because it's mine." On the one

hand, popular music often benefits from this Rorschach quality; on the other hand, "it's mine because it's home" is a remarkably precise formulation of what "American Tune" is at pains to deny.

If we imagine it back into its historical context, "American Tune" takes on a harder tone and becomes a richer and more particular statement. It's separated from Peter, Paul & Mary's "Because All Men Are Brothers" and the March on Washington by a decade of assassinations; the Viet Nam War, still two years from its end; and the re-election of Richard Nixon. (According to an online discography [<http://www.vex.net/~paulmac/simon/simon.html>], the recording session on March 3, 1973 where Simon first sketched the song with few of its words yet in place, later released as "Unfinished Demo," was his first musical activity after the July 14, 1972 reunion with Garfunkel for a McGovern Campaign Benefit.) The American Bicentennial was beginning to feel imminent and accumulate political and commercial frenzy. At the time, the song's grief had less to do with the weariness of its more or less anonymous persona ("tomorrow's gonna be another working day") than with his barely articulate sense that something larger is falling apart: the end of empire, latter days of the law, twilight of some peculiarly American gods. The song is about its own dispossession from either Bach's faith or Glazer's in something that might redeem this world and not merely palliate it or anesthetize us.

The risk in setting one's own troubles to the tune of the Passion Chorale — "Yes and I've often felt forsaken" — is obvious, whether we think of it as blasphemy or fatuousness. But Paul Simon's speaker is more nearly a member of Bach's chorus, helpless, half-clueless, on the edge of the terrible action. What the most self-indulgent responses leave out is the song's plot: its steady movement from individual malaise outward, from "I been" to "I don't know a soul who's not been." The second verse subtly enacts a step in this expansion when, after two isolated lines about other "souls" and "friends," Simon enjambes the next two lines to make the single, larger image, first conventionally abstract and then personified, of a "dream" first "shattered" and then "driven to its knees." The three verses stand in an order that can't be changed: as they repeat the ever more hollow "it's all right," they follow it with lines that grow from "I'm just weary to my bones," through the concession that we can't complain (a phrase that fills blank spaces in the "Unfinished Demo") because "we lived so well so long," to the dismayed acknowledgment that "you can't be forever blessed." The speaker gropes toward generality, and his song increases in scope until it encompasses Mayflower and Apollo as termini of the Euro-American story. What it means, after that, to say that what we come to sing "in the ages' most uncertain hours" (as opposed to when?) is "an American tune," we know no more than he does, though we know it does not mean being "forever blessed."

A key moment in this progression is the bridge ("And I dreamed I was dying ..."). It resembles a traditional dream-vision, but here it is no angel, but his own soul that "looking back down at me / smiled reassuringly" — how authoritatively, it's hard to say. The vision ends with most the most hackneyed and co-opted of American symbols, the French statue in the New York harbor; but here Liberty is "sailing away to sea," not welcoming but leaving us.

This bridge section, following two chorale-derived verses and preceding a third, is set to original music. Its melody begins by imitating the low cadential phrase that ended the verse preceding it, rises to a peak, and falls back by stages;

then it repeats the same arc, with a higher pitch at the peak; then closes with a third instance of the opening phrase. This is a cleanly dramatic melodic structure, in some contrast with the sturdier but more complex architecture of Hassler's melody. Simon also accompanies the bridge with a more expansive harmonic rhythm: while the chorale melody implies a chord-change every one or two beats, the opening chord of the bridge lasts for two whole measures, and the rest is almost equally stable. Musical contrasts, then, underscore the bridge's lyric departure from the verses.

Yet if Simon's verses are rooted in the melody Bach made familiar, he revises it far more than Glazer. His largest structural change is to repeat each verse's final phrase — the first time the verses were capped in this way since Schein dropped the refrain in 1627. Simon doesn't restore Hassler's original ending; he repeats only the last phrase, not the last pair. The effect is a little less closure, less a refrain than a tag. At the same time, he does something remarkable with the harmonies: the verse-ending phrase ("so far away from home") seems at first to arrive at a chord that will turn out to be the dominant of the relative minor, but for the moment sounds like a Phrygian cadence; while the closing repetition of the phrase resolves firmly in the major key. Simon could perhaps be heard as hinting at both modal interpretations which David Hill traced through the seventeenth century. More evidently to modern ears accustomed to tonality, he ends the verse first in minor and then in the major. If we want to call this shift uplifting, we have to qualify it as barely so, only in the belated tag ending.

The one place where Simon changes the melody's shape is just after the middle of the verse (in the hymn, the beginning of the *abgesang*). From Hassler on, this phrase began on the tune's highest note, fell to the middle dominant, and rose back to the high tonic. Simon's melodic curve starts high, but only falls. This is the phrase always joined to the lyric, "Oh but it's all right, it's all right."

Simon's most pervasive change in the tune is in rhythm. He transforms the steadfast 4/4 measure of the hymn — established by Stobäus, Crüger, and Fromm between 1634 and 1649 — into a much more syncopated, colloquial line. Notating Simon's melody requires inserting occasional 2/4 and 1/4 measures, but the difference is more detailed than that: the chorale's opening quarter note (the first syllable of "Because" in Glazer's song) is subdivided into a jittery sixteenth, eighth, sixteenth: "Many's the ..." (A quaint phrase designated "regional or colloq." by OED, "many's the time" gets 58,000 Google hits as against 58 million for "many times.") Throughout the song these speech rhythms embody and track the speaker's agitated questioning, a mode of song equally distanced from hymnal stolidity and from Hassler's lilt.

In the age of recording, composition blends with performance, or disappears into it. Simon's speech rhythms have that improvised feel to them, though naturally he repeats them fairly closely from one performance to the next. The same is true of the vocal elaborations by which he alters and embellishes the familiar melody: the third above the high tonic that he adds, with some vocal strain, in "a friend who feels at ease"; the melody note he omits at the end of the last verse's first line ("Well we come on a ship they call the Mayflow'r"), leaving the phrase hanging unresolved; the high and low tonics and intervening fifth he inserts into the line "I don't know a dream that's not been shattered" (and again in "We come in the ages' most uncertain hours"), creating a momentarily heroic, bugle-call arpeggio foreign to Hassler's mostly scale-wise melody. The

motivations for all these revisions are local, or feel as though they are: they underscore the emotion of what must be said at the moment. It's this multiplicity of attention to the needs of the moment, and to the historical weight of the received tune, as well as to the weight of history pressing upon the speaker, that makes the reading of the song as self-pitying — "In any case," says Gatsby, "it was just personal" — not wrong, but not adequate.