VILLAGE PRESERVATION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with Richard Barone

Conducted and transcribed by Josie Naron

New York, New York

April 23, 2025

General Interview Notes

This is a transcription of an Oral History that was conducted by Village Preservation. The Village Preservation Oral History Project includes a collection of interviews with individuals involved in local businesses, culture, and preservation, to gather stories, observations, and insights concerning the changing Greenwich Village. These interviews elucidate the personal resonances of the neighborhood within the biographies of key individuals, and illustrate the evolving neighborhood. Oral history is a method of collecting memories and histories through recorded interviews between a narrator with firsthand knowledge of historically significant events and a well- informed interviewer, with the goal of adding to the historical record. The recording is transcribed, lightly edited for continuity and clarity, and reviewed by the interviewee. Oral history is not intended to present the absolute or complete narrative of events. Oral history is a spoken account by the interviewee in response to questioning. Whenever possible, we encourage readers to listen to the audio recordings to get a greater sense of this meaningful exchange. The views expressed by the contributor(s) are solely those of the contributor(s) and do not necessarily reflect the opinions or endorsement of our organization.

THANK YOU

Summary of oral history with Richard Barone:

Richard Barone is an acclaimed recording artist, performer, producer, and author. Barone was born and raised in Tampa, Florida, then moved to New York in the late 1970s. He helped launch the indie rock scene in Hoboken, New Jersey, as frontman of The Bongos, then embarked on an acclaimed solo career after the band's dissolution in 1987. Barone has produced countless studio recordings and worked with artists in every musical genre. He has scored shows and staged all-star concert events at such venues as Carnegie Hall, the Hollywood Bowl, and New York's Central Park. His memoir *FRONTMAN: Surviving The Rock Star Myth* was published in 2007 by Hal Leonard Books. His second book, *Music + Revolution: Greenwich Village in the 1960*s, was published by Rowman & Littlefield in 2022, and launched at the Museum of the City of New York. His latest album, "Sorrows & Promises," is a celebration of the early 1960s music scene in Greenwich Village, where Barone lives to this day. He is affiliated with the Clive Davis Institute of Recorded Music at NYU and The New School of Jazz & Contemporary Music, serves on the Board of Governors of The Recording Academy (GRAMMYs), and on the Board of Advisors of Anthology Film Archives.

Highlights of Barone's oral history include memories of his early encounters with one of his lifelong mentors, Tiny Tim, and stories of folk music history passed down from Tiny Tim. The oral history paints a vivid picture of the social and economic contours of Greenwich Village's various music scenes in the 1960s and 1970s, augmented by Barone's own experiences as a working musician. Barone also reflects upon historical practices of songwriting and the folk music tradition of "covers," framing it as an important and necessary — but easily abused — part of Greenwich Village's music history. He reflects on changes in the neighborhood's cultural character and built landscape, while also thinking about ways that local history is built into the streets and walls.

Excerpts from oral history with Richard Barone:

“I really moved in. It was such an experience. But that's so historic. That's maybe my first like, touching and feeling the history of Greenwich Village, was recording and spending the night [laughs] at Electric Lady Studios during the mid '80s. But I did have a place on Perry Street. I loved it. Between West 4th and Bleecker. So it was a beautiful block, and it really made me love and fall in love deeply with Greenwich Village. And I started meeting other Villagers who would start mentioning the history and be like, “Oh, do you know what used to be there? You know, who used to live here?” That kind of dialogue made me love the Village more and more. As years progressed and as I've been -- I've been living in the Village now since 1984. I realize there's an endless amount of history to learn. And it's all fascinating. I mean, every street has so much history. Every brick has so much history. That I started -- slowly, at first -- learning about the music history of Greenwich Village. I mean, Tiny Tim used to tell me, "Oh, Mr. Barone, the musicians walk the streets." I'm thinking, where else are they going to walk? But he meant they were like gods on Mount Olympus. Tiny Tim saw his peers as musical gods. He would talk about Mr. Sebastian, meaning John Sebastian of the Lovin' Spoonful, or Mary Travers of Peter, Paul and Mary. These were gods and goddesses to him. And it got me into this mythological frame of mind about the musicians, the past, the history of the musicians here, the shadows that were now shadows on the street.” (12-13)

“Well, you know, [Gerde's] Folk City became -- when Folk City opened, which I think was 1960. So that's like a dividing line. Pre-'60, there really wasn't a legit music venue where you had to pay a little money to get in. It was just like, you'd wander in off the street and maybe you throw some money in a hat. You know that. It was the “basket house,” as they call that. They were mostly basements. I mean, the basement thing had a cool tradition. Because even Pete Seeger -- we're talking in the '40s with his Almanac Singers. I guess the Almanac Singers, they had a house on 10th Street. Yeah, West 10th Street. And they would do hootenannies. That was a phrase that was brought in by Seeger. Hootenanny was used as a phrase originally for like, rallies to raise funds for unions, I believe. It was a union-related phrase. Because folk music and unions were very connected; you know that. So hootenanny was a phrase made up -- somewhere in the Midwest, he heard hootenanny and he brought it to New York. So he would have hootenannies in the basement and you'd have to pay like a quarter. Literally, it was like so cheap to go into the basement to hear the Almanac Singers.

Who had a superstar lineup, including Woody Guthrie sometimes, or Josh White, who was a superstar at the time. And it was in the basement. So the basement idea is not bad. And the Vanguard, of course, was a basement. Café Society was a basement. They were all basements. But the first legit, I think, folk-based club that was not a basement was Folk City." (20)

"I think the Village never gets that credit. They never get that credit. Laurel Canyon in California gets a hell of a lot of credit for being the singer-songwriter center. Really, it's all based on Greenwich Village. I mean, it's almost the same people. They just transplanted with eucalyptus plants and cleaner sidewalks. They transplanted what was happening in Greenwich Village and made a safer haven that they felt, I think, at the time there. But really, a lot of things are missing. Number one, the buildings we talked about that had that sense of history did not exist out there. Secondly, the mix of people that would be in the Village, the races, the genders, [laughs] all the various types of people that we have in Greenwich Village did not exist in Laurel Canyon. It was more homogenous. It was white. It was a certain type. And the songs are insular. They're all about their own relationships and personal issues. Rarely about the "we." It's always about the "I." And not to criticize Joni Mitchell. I love those artists deeply. But it was no longer about the people. The Greenwich Village song movement was really about a universal message." (35)

"I lived by the Waverly Inn. Which is totally a historic block. And everything in the Village [laughs] -- everything was historic to me. I mean, this building [Jefferson Market Library]. I loved coming here. I used to just come to the library to literally check books out and DVDs out from here all the time. I mean, everything about the Village drew me in. It's hard to say what didn't draw me in. I was so offended when a Kmart came into the Village because I always thought -- at first, because I thought, it's so not Villagey. But then I got used to going there, too. The Village has a way of transforming and adapting and not losing too much. I said in the book, in my intro, I think I called it -- it's like a computer with an unlimited hard drive or something. It just keeps adding with very little deleting, you know, or that's the idea. Unfortunately, people want to delete stuff. And that's why Village Preservation is important to me is the idea of saving that, of not deleting too much, you know?" (45)

JOSIE NARON: I'm just going to read a little intro preamble and then we can get into it.

RICHARD BARONE: Okay.

JN: Okay. So I'm Josie Naron, the oral historian at Village Preservation. It's April 23rd, 2025, and I'm here today recording on site at the Historic Jefferson Market Library to speak with Richard Barone. Is it Barone or Barone?

RB: Barone.

JN: Barone. [laughter] A musician, author, educator, producer. Probably several other professional adjectives that I am neglecting to include here, but how does that do for --

RB: That's good.

JN: -- summing it up.

RB: That's good. I do a lot of things. And when I came to New York from Florida, I didn't know what exactly I would do. You know, I was interested in doing music for films. I was interested in acting and -- is the level okay for you?

JN: Mm-hm.

RB: And so, I think a lot of people -- they came to Greenwich Village at different times in the last several decades. And I mean, several. You know, more than several. [They] also had that feeling of like, anything could happen here.

JN: Yeah.

RB: So when I moved here, I knew about -- I'd read about Greenwich Village in my parents' travel books in Florida and was interested in the art scene of Greenwich Village as a child. You know, so it was kind of destined to happen eventually. And would you like to hear how, what finally pushed me to --

JN: I would! One of the things I was curious of about kind of off the bat was what type of imagery, accounts of the Village you did absorb when you were in Florida --

RB: Mm-hm.

JN: -- that kind of gave you the sense of almost like, the mythical Village.

RB: Absolutely mythical. I think my first real thinking about seriously moving to Greenwich Village came from reading an AAA travel book of New York City. And it talked about how all -- the artists' scene in Greenwich Village. I'm like, okay. That I can identify with. And that was always on my mind. But then in the mid ‘70s, I was in starting high school, and I met Tiny Tim. Now, he was a character on the Village scene who became very well known. Very famous, suddenly, even though he was almost like a street performer in many ways. You know, he would be appearing -- like, there was something -- The Living Theater. Have you covered that in your --

JN: I haven't in any of mine, but I think it might be in some of the other back catalog interviews.

RB: The Living Theater was a place and a lot of avant garde "isms" happened there. And Tiny Tim was often in attendance and would stand up in the audience and perform for the audience, you know? He was that kind of a very spontaneous performer who then went mainstream when he had a hit record in 1968. But when I met him, he was not in that bubble of fame anymore. It was after that. So he was now kind of just doing the circuit. Florida's a place where often performers will do a circuit. Like a -- I wouldn't say comeback, but not even that. It's just a place where people travel sometimes when they're not at their peak of their fame, let's put it that way.

JN: Yeah.

RB: That happened a lot in Tampa, I noticed, and met many of them. But Tiny Tim was special. He was a unique character. I gathered some friends from high school and said, "Let's go see Tiny Tim." You know? He seemed so kitschy, you know?

JN: Yeah.

RB: But then when we met him, we saw what he was about, and he was a musicologist and an historian and so fascinating. And just knew music from -- he knew pop, the history of popular music, in a very deep way. He was able to perform songs. He carried a shopping bag of sheet music and would do songs from what he called the analog era, which is the earliest recordings, you know, done on cylinders, or things like that. And he would do these obscure songs for us. And I told him I was a record producer. I was not yet, but I did say I was.

JN: How old are you at this point?

RB: I was 15, 16. And so I said, "I'm a record producer. Why don't we do some recordings?" I said, "Do you mind if I bring some equipment tomorrow?" So he was performing for like a week in a small place, you know. It was a part of a hotel, a motel on the highway, so it was obscure. He let me record him and then I said -- it sounded great. And I said, you know, "Do you mind if we go to the recording studio and do some proper recordings?" And he was up for that. So I booked a recording studio. Those were my first productions with Tiny Tim.

JN: Wow. And he was kind of unfazed by like, your age. He just kind of saw like a kindred spirit of --

RB: Oh no, he thought -- and I was serious with them. I was good. We set up microphones, we made -- it's a good recording session and they're very good. In fact, the records -- I didn't have any connections to put a record out when I was 16.

JN: Yeah.

RB: But I did later in 2000 -- 2009. I was finally able to release a CD of those recordings. It's called *I've Never Seen a Straight Banana.* And it's so funny. That was from 1933. He did songs usually of the 1920s and '30s mostly.

JN: Yeah.

RB: You know? And he was popular in the Greenwich Village folk scene because people like Peter, Paul and Mary, and -- especially Peter, Paul and Mary, but all of them, Dylan. They loved Tiny Tim. He was a unique, joyful, bizarre, but really smart guy. And they liked

him. And also, he taught them a lot about the history of music. So, Dylan, who loves that, would say, “Show me some songs.” You know? And eventually, even Dylan had summoned him to his Woodstock home when they were making what they called *The Basement Tapes,* with The Band. And Tiny Tim was there, showing them songs, jamming with them. So he was a special character. But he's the one who told me, "You know, Mr. Barone, you should really live in Greenwich Village."

JN: Yeah. And you said --

RB: You know?

JN: -- absolutely.

RB: And I'm like, you're right. So of course I had to get through high school. And I did start some college. I was studying film [at] the University of South Florida. But I met other musicians in Tampa who eventually, when the Monkees came through, it was Davy and Micky of the Monkees and their backing band. Do you wanna hear this?

JN: Yes.

RB: Do you like this?

JN: Absolutely.

RB: Their backing band was called the Laughing Dogs. Now, this was from the early CBGB scene, when that was emerging. And I was already on that as a kid. I'm like, I love punk rock. And so, I was like, I know you guys. You're the Laughing Dogs. Like, they were just backing up the Monkees as the backing band.

JN: Mm-hm.

RB: Because it was just Davy and Micky and then a band behind them, right. And it was the Laughing Dogs. And I said, "Oh, that's the Laughing Dogs," you know. So when I went back after the show and I said, “I know you guys,” they were so amazed that anybody in Tampa, Florida knew them. Because they were a New York local act at the time. We hung

out. I was with this girl also from Tampa, Jean. But they invited us on the rest of the tour. We went on some dates in Florida with them and just hung out. And then at some point I said, "We want to move to Greenwich Village." They said, Well, why don't you go stay in our loft in Brooklyn? Because we're going to be on tour.

JN: That's a pretty nice offer.

RB: It was very nice.

JN: Yeah.

RB: So we packed up soon after that. Sold whatever we could sell. And came up to New York, stayed in Brooklyn, looking for -- my goal was to get a place in the Village. But at the time, stayed in Brooklyn. And I got jobs. I was acting. And Jean got a job quickly at CBS television and got me a gig on a TV show called *As the World Turns*. So I was acting. So funny. And I loved it, by the way. I love acting. And it's a big part of what music -- music performance, of course. Anyway.

JN: How long were you on the soap for?

RB: Oh, just really briefly.

JN: Yeah.

RB: It was almost like extra work, but I did get into SAG-AFTRA.

JN: Yeah. And that's what counts. [laughs]

RB: Hey, I know, I know. I love it. So anyway, that was -- that could not continue because at the same time, I met musicians and we started a band. And it was the Bongos, eventually.

JN: Yeah.

RB: And that went on and we got signed to labels and we -- so I was in England soon. So things got sidetracked. My goal of coming to the Village was first sidetracked by being in

Brooklyn first. And then, when I met the Bongos, they -- the Laughing Dogs were losing their loft only because they were selling it. Because it was fantastic.

JN: What neighborhood is it?

RB: It was in Brooklyn Heights. It was near Brooklyn Heights on Jay Street, and it was an artist-in-residence building.

JN: Oh.

RB: Okay. So, do you know what those are? AIR buildings?

JN: Yeah.

RB: So it was an artist-in-residence. They had a whole floor and then made it into a soundproof recording studio and rehearsal space. It was great. So at some point, I think through me, they met someone who saw it and said, "I want to buy this place." And they sold it.

JN: Yeah.

RB: And then I had to find a place to live. Some of the Bongos -- some of the guys with the group had connections in Hoboken.

JN: Mm-hm.

RB: So I found myself in Hoboken. I just was like a leaf in the wind at that point. I found myself living in Hoboken. It was a whole different -- it was like a little Village in its own way. In fact, it was in some ways -- I think in the '60s, it served as -- I think Hoboken was also an annex to Greenwich Village. In one way is that when the show *Hair,* which is about -- primarily mentions Greenwich Village, all the auditions and rehearsals were in Hoboken.

JN: Huh.

RB: Did you know that?

JN: No, I did not know that.

RB: So Hoboken served as a little sort of --

JN: It's a small pipeline.

RB: A little pipeline. And a lot of artists lived there. I think Jackson Pollock and others had places in Hoboken for studio space.

JN: Was it about affordability or space or both?

RB: Yes. For both. Yeah. And manageability.

JN: Yeah.

RB: There [weren't] that many people. It's a small little town and it's right across the river. So it became --

JN: Yeah. You kind of get the best of both.

RB: Yeah. Of course. In my heart, I wanted to be in Greenwich Village, but I really loved Hoboken. And it was a very -- we were part of and helped create a very supportive music community there that did not really exist before we were there.

JN: Okay.

RB: Because we helped start, kickstart a nightclub called Maxwell's. The owner was already cool. Steve Fallon and his family had bought a venue. And is this okay that we're going a little off subject?

JN: Absolutely.

RB: Okay.

JN: Yeah. I kind of anticipate that oral history --

RB: But we're getting there.

JN: -- it's chronological, but it kind of skips around.

RB: Well, this is chronological so far.

JN: It is. And we'll get back to everywhere.

RB: Oh, we're coming right back to the Village soon, because I'll tell you how. So anyway, we started a cool music scene there. It went national. It got national attention. The Hoboken pop scene of the mid '80s actually was on magazine covers. There were two or three television specials about it. There's currently a documentary in the works now about it. Because there [were] a lot of bands. It was similar and predated the Seattle scene.

JN: Mm-hm.

RB: The grunge, that scene. And it was after the Athens scene, but it was during the time that Athens, Georgia, sort of had a music community with the B-52s, Pylon, and REM. Well, we had a similar scene in Hoboken. It was a parallel universe. And that was good. But I did want to be in the Village.

JN: Mm-hm.

RB: We were recording an album. We got signed to RCA, eventually. We were on different labels. Bongos were somehow magic. Somehow magic.

JN: Were you in any bands before that?

RB: Not really. In Florida, I had a band called the Snails. It was so much fun. But really, there was no market or venues.

JN: Yeah.

RB: The whole thing is venues too, you know? Greenwich Village, for instance. One of the reasons it exploded in the '60s, and it really did, was the number of venues. Simple as

that. I mean, they were great. A great number of venues, and they were great and each unique. But so, I think I'm not jumping ahead too much to say the Bongos did a lot of work, a lot of touring, and a lot of stuff. Got signed to first indie labels and then major. And then we were making an album at Electric Lady Studios on Eighth Street. That brought me back to my Village focus. Because we were there -- now, we had a budget to really sort of move into the studio, if you know what I mean, and stay there for a while. So I was [there] every day at Electric Lady. [BREAK IN AUDIO] So during the process of recording at Electric Lady, I realized -- and waiting for the PATH train, which did not run very frequently at night, I realized, okay, I'm going to move to the Village.

JN: Yeah. Okay. This is the moment.

RB: That was the moment. Now, at some point, right during that time my parents visited, they stayed at my place on Perry Street, so I stayed at Electric Lady Studios.

JN: Literally moved in. [laughs]

RB: I really moved in. It was such an experience. But that's so historic. That's maybe my first like, touching and feeling the history of Greenwich Village, was recording and spending the night [laughs] at Electric Lady Studios during the mid '80s. But I did have a place on Perry Street. I loved it. Between West 4th and Bleecker. So it was a beautiful block, and it really made me love and fall in love deeply with Greenwich Village. And I started meeting other Villagers who would start mentioning the history and be like, “Oh, do you know what used to be there? You know, who used to live here?”

RB: That kind of dialogue made me love the Village more and more. As years progressed and as I've been -- I've been living in the Village now since 1984. I realize there's an endless amount of history to learn. And it's all fascinating. I mean, every street has so much history. Every brick has so much history. That I started -- slowly, at first -- learning about the music history of Greenwich Village. I mean, Tiny Tim used to tell me, "Oh, Mr. Barone, the musicians walk the streets." I'm thinking, where else are they going to walk? But he meant they were like gods on Mount Olympus. Tiny Tim saw his peers as musical gods. He would talk about Mr. Sebastian, meaning John Sebastian of the Lovin' Spoonful, or Mary Travers of Peter, Paul and Mary. These were gods and goddesses to him. And it got me into this

mythological frame of mind about the musicians, the past, the history of the musicians here, the shadows that were now shadows on the streets, you know?

RB: So I was interested in that. And then one day, jumping to 2016, I was doing a performance at City Winery in SoHo when it was located there, and I came off stage. It was a show called "Nuggets," and it was like, '60s songs. And I was singing a couple tunes in that. And I got on stage and this gentleman, Mitchell Cohen, who was a writer for many magazines and newspapers, but also an A&R person at Columbia Records, said, "You should make a record about Greenwich Village in the 1960s." And I thought, oh, cool. Come over to my place tomorrow. I'm on now on Waverly Place. And we'll talk about it. And I say, "Well, think about who can be on it." And he said, "What do you mean who can be on it?" I thought he meant like a greatest -- a variety of artists, various artists collection. Because I had done a couple of those and produced before, and many of my concerts are like that. He says, "No, what are you talking about? I mean, you just sing the entire album." So I was like, "Wow, okay. Come over tomorrow. We'll talk about it."

RB: So that's where I really had to start studying because I wanted to learn about all the songs that I was doing on that album. It was called *Sorrows & Promises: Greenwich Village in the 1960s.* And it was songs by -- well, one by Bob Dylan. Not focusing only on him, because Bob Dylan already gets enough spotlight. There's so much on him already. My goal was to let's make an album where he's on side two, middle of side two kind of thing. Let's show artists like, well, for instance, Buddy Holly living in Greenwich Village in the 1950s. Why? Because he was drawn by the art scene and poets. He was especially interested in going to see poets. I mean, that's amazing. The album starts there. Because that is like rock and roll, rockabilly, rock and roll, whatever, meeting Beat poetry.

JN: Yeah.

RB: This led to so much after that. So I put Buddy Holly as the first song on that album, but there were others. Richard Fariña was a serious writer. He and Mimi Fariña, who was Joan Baez's sister. And Phil Ochs, my hero. There were so many artists to really showcase on that album. So, for each song I got into the person who wrote it; the performer, if it wasn't the same person. But usually it was, because we'll get to that in a minute. But also, the song itself

and how it emerged and their history and their relationship to the other musicians on the album. It got to be a deep dive.

JN: Is that the genesis of the book as well?

RB: It's the genesis of my book. And here at the Jefferson Market Library, that's when I started doing the events that I was saying when we were off camera earlier, talking about that. I did six events at least, here, probably more. But those were when I was working on that album.

JN: Okay.

RB: Because I wanted to understand what I was singing.

JN: Sure.

RB: I really wanted to get into the person, like the personalities. Janis Ian, for instance. She was 16 years old.[1] I could identify with that because I was also active at a young age. When I was seven, I was on [a] commercial radio station as a DJ.

JN: Yeah. I wanted to make sure we didn't miss that one.

RB: And that got me a lot of records. And so many of them came from the Greenwich Village scene. I mean, Lovin' Spoonful was one of them. So John Sebastian was a god to me in so many ways, you know? And I love Peter, Paul and Mary. So anyway I forgot where I left off. But I was working on the album and really studied. So I especially got into Janis Ian, who I had known and had sung with and worked with before. But now I got into her teenage years.

JN: Mm-hm.

RB: And the idea, she did a song called “Sweet Misery” that I covered on that album. The album's available and you could find it. It's on Spotify, all the services. But I kind of wanted to understand her personality. And also that song was like, proto-punk, which really tied me

[1] Ian was 15 when she first performed in the Village.

back into the folk [scene]. Because sometimes I thought, well, that's not really my music, because I'm not a folk artist. But certain of those artists, certain ones really cross into what later became punk rock. Like Janis Ian in a song like the one, “Sweet Misery,” that I was just talking about that I did, was really a great bridge to Patti Smith. And if you listen to it, you could see what I mean. I'm not sure if Patti is even maybe not aware of that song, but it's very much like what Patti would be doing soon. The attitude of the singing on it, et cetera. It's a continuum with the Greenwich Village sound and scene. The folk scene developed into the singer-songwriter scene, but that really merged with punk quite soon. By the early '70s, there [were] already artists coming out that were hinting at what the punk movement was going to be. You know?

JN: Yeah.

RB: It's amazing. It's an amazing story.

JN: I'm very struck by, like, the way you described Tiny Tim earlier --

RB: Yeah.

JN: -- is as kind of this font of music knowledge.

RB: Yeah.

JN: And really a bridge for the artists that he was meeting and introducing.

RB: Yeah. Isn't that cool?

JN: And you're very much trying to draw the same connections.

RB: He was a mentor.

JN: Yeah.

RB: The other thing about Tiny Tim that's interesting and was important to me at that age was his gender identity and also his -- he performed mostly in women's bars.

JN: Mm-hm.

RB: So he performed -- [laughs] his closest friends were lesbian women. So he would perform at a place called the Page Three. And there were other venues. He told me, "Oh, Mr. Barone, I'm the only man that's allowed." He would giggle. I'm the only man allowed in. [laughs] He was very proud of that, you know? So that was like, wow. So there are clubs that are like that? I was very interested in that scene in that part of the Village, too. You know? It was my freak. Because Florida tends to be still a conservative stage. And my thinking was always a little wider-ranging than that.

RB: And Tiny Tim opened that to me about Greenwich Village. Because these were all Village clubs that he talked about. He played at the Fat Black Pussycat. He played at -- gee, there was -- I mean, the MacDougal Street scene. There's other ones he mentioned to me. But he was a big part of the Village scene, I think. And Dylan, he played, of course, at the Café Wha. You know, there's stories of him and Dylan. They would do the lunchtime sessions and they were poor musicians, so they would raid the refrigerator between -- while other acts were on. They would go get a sandwich; they'd find the makings of a sandwich in the refrigerator, in the, you know, whatever.

JN: It's their artist's fee.

RB: You know? So Dylan talks about that in his book *Chronicles*. Yeah. Yeah. But anyway, so Tiny Tim was a great first mentor to me. I think he was my first mentor, really.

JN: Yeah. No, I mean, he sounds deeply important to you on a number of levels.

RB: Yeah. It's also his love of music. See, when I was at that age, I was thinking, okay, it's all either the Sex Pistols or the Beatles. And he was like -- and I like both.

JN: Yeah.

RB: But the thing was like, oh, Mr. Barone, he goes, he talks about the 1920s and '30s. And that they had their vibe and it was -- it's really valid. I mean, more than valid. It's what led to the next things, you know? So, anyway, yeah. What a teacher he was. But he was a Greenwich Village fixture.

JN: Yeah. No, I'm so glad you mentioned the part about him performing in different types of clubs.

RB: Yeah.

JN: Because I think especially when we think about folk music, you know, the scene has a lot of really well-known female artists --

RB: I know!

JN: -- but it's also a scene that had a lot of misogyny.

RB: Oh, the men were horrible. I mean, when I was writing the book -- people like Carolyn Hester. She was one of the most important figures in the folk scene, but rarely spoken about now.

JN: Yeah.

RB: And she's great. Still great. She performed with me at Carnegie Hall. You know, I did Music + Revolution at Carnegie Hall in 2023, and much of it was a benefit for the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation. But she performed there. She came in with her two daughters. I mean, this is a serious female artist from the '50s. She came to New York in the late '50s.

JN: Mm-hm.

RB: She was friends with Buddy Holly. She was from Texas and did so well. When Dylan came in, I mean, there's a certain macho quality that turns me so off --

JN: Yeah.

RB: -- that surrounded him and his cronies. You know, it's like, why, exactly? I know he was a fan of Carolyn Hester, but I don't think he hardly ever mentioned her anywhere.

JN: Yeah.

RB: Why? I mean, he was begging her, begging to be on her first album, which he was. He played harmonica. He said, "Can I play for you?" And she was like, "Well actually, you know, I play my own guitar." She said, "Do you play harmonica? Maybe you could do some harmonica." He goes, "Yeah, I play harmonica." He does great on the album. He was signed on the spot. Do you know that? It's different in the movie. It's different in the *(A) Complete Unknown* (2024) film. His manager brings him into Columbia Records and makes -- for a record deal. That's not how it was. He was performing for Carolyn Hester, who was signed to Columbia.

JN: Mm-hm.

RB: She said, "Yes, play on my album." Three songs. And while he was there, he had just gotten a *New York Times* review that was published the night before the session. That was a rave. One of the most raving reviews I've ever seen. It's like a [sighs] what can you say? Like a Rosetta Stone of music reviews, or some sort of major, you know, changing point of music criticism. It's outrageously flattering. So that had just come out. So then now he's at Columbia Records with John Hammond, who had produced and discovered Billie Holiday and Benny Goodman and then many, many, many others. And had signed Carolyn Hester. Was producing her album. Dylan, a kid, is on harmonica. And he played great, and was offered a record deal there at the session. That's how that really happened.

JN: Yeah.

RB: And Carolyn -- so, you know, you would think that Dylan would later say, "Yeah, she really got me started."

JN: Not a man who loved to acknowledge --

RB: No way. But she was right in the middle of things, so she was a star. See, the thing is, Columbia [Records] -- if you don't mind me saying. And I love the music industry. It's in my blood. But Columbia saw what they thought was a more marketable character. I think when John Hammond then produced Dylan's album a few months later and that came out before Carolyn's, and he got so much spotlight. And she did not.

JN: Yeah. I think I just saw some Joan Baez quote about *A Complete Unknown* where she was like, it kind of makes sense that the spotlight of the movie really is swallowed up by him because he tended to swallow up everyone around him.

RB: And that's what I feel. I never met him, nor do I want to.

JN: Yeah.

RB: But he seems to take up all the oxygen in the room. Someone like Phil Ochs, who was a fantastic songwriter. My partner Abraham is just discovering Phil Ochs now. He's 24 years old, my Abraham, and he's discovering the power of Phil Ochs' music. And it's always relevant. He was so criticized by Dylan as being, oh, you're just a journalist. You can't write. Give it up. You know, just tortured. And he was -- Phil Ochs was extremely affected by that. I mean, I think Dylan was berating to all. Is that the word? Berating to all of the other singer-songwriters, male or female, on the scene. As you know, he was very critical with Joan, who he was supposedly in a relationship with.

JN: Yeah.

RB: What was that about? But, yeah. So yeah, the women really get overshadowed. I interviewed many times, and I love Buffy Sainte-Marie, who was an early -- she was in on the Greenwich Village scene quite early in the '60s. And she was a very powerful songwriter. She's had controversy now, but it's meaningless, really, because ultimately it's about music. She represented, in however people may criticize it, the Native American peoples. And she still, regardless of her own genetic heritage, she identified in that way.

JN: Yeah.

RB: And she presented herself in that way. And it makes total sense to me. And she made some super powerful records. In 1964, she did her, I think, debut album release. But her songwriting was unique and fascinating and powerful and better than so many of the men. Let me just say that. And yet she never really, I don't think, got full credit for her innovations.

JN: Mm-hm. So what type of spaces are some of these lesser-known artists playing in at the time. Is there kind of like tiers of --

RB: In the clubs?

JN: Yeah.

RB: Well, you know, [Gerde's] Folk City became -- when Folk City opened, which I think was 1960. So that's like a dividing line. Pre-'60, there really wasn't a legit music venue where you had to pay a little money to get in. It was just like, you'd wander in off the street and maybe you throw some money in a hat.

JN: Mm-hm.

RB: You know that. It was the "basket house," as they call that. They were mostly basements. I mean, the basement thing had a cool tradition. Because even Pete Seeger -- we're talking in the '40s with his Almanac Singers. I guess the Almanac Singers, they had a house on 10th Street. Yeah, West 10th Street. And they would do hootenannies. That was a phrase that was brought in by Seeger. Hootenanny was used as a phrase originally for like, rallies to raise funds for unions, I believe.

JN: Huh.

RB: It was a union-related phrase. Because folk music and unions were very connected; you know that. So hootenanny was a phrase made up -- somewhere in the Midwest, he heard hootenanny and he brought it to New York. So he would have hootenannies in the basement and you'd have to pay like a quarter. Literally, it was like so cheap to go into the basement to hear the Almanac Singers. Who had a superstar lineup, including Woody Guthrie sometimes, or Josh White, who was a superstar at the time. And it was in the basement. So the basement idea is not bad. And the Vanguard, of course, was a basement. Café Society was a basement. They were all basements. But the first legit, I think, folk-based club that was not a basement was Folk City.

JN: Okay.

RB: I think so. And that's where they -- you had to pay a little money to get in. I'm sure it was like a dollar or less, you know, but you had to pay something. So that was like more of a curated venue where they'd book. So when Dylan got a booking there, that was a big deal, in

other words. And you know, again, another woman who was on the scene who was so important and who has done events at this library is Terri Thal. Terri Thal, who has a recent book out, also excellent book, called *My Greenwich Village.* She managed Bob Dylan. Not mentioned at all in the film. She managed him and got him his gigs. She recorded him on a tape recorder, reel-to-reel proper at the Gaslight, where she was booking with her husband Dave Van Ronk, basically. I think he was booking; she was managing some of the acts. It was a great power couple, you know? And she did the recording to help Dylan get gigs. Because nobody wanted him. So she said, "Well, maybe if I have a demo tape." You know? It makes sense, right. It's on auction this year for the first time. I told her, that is a great tape. She had never -- and I hadn't even heard it. We opened the box together and went to a recording studio to listen to it and transfer digitally.

JN: Mm-hm.

RB: But anyway, Terri Thal, another hidden name. It's like that film. What is it -- the NASA women. Hidden --

JN: Oh, *Hidden Figures* (2016).

RB: *Hidden Figures*. It's like that. There's a lot of hidden figures with the Village. They happened to be women, a lot.

JN: Yeah.

RB: Which is, you know -- I tried to, in *Music + Revolution*, I really tried to, without [sighs] alienating an entire gender, I tried to open that door.

JN: Yeah. No, it's important.

RB: Because Buffy; I mean, Janis Ian. Janis Ian was like 14 years old performing at the Village Gate. I mean, that's amazing.

JN: That is amazing.

RB: She was a prodigy. She was a true prodigy and very powerful. The men must have been afraid of her because she was so good. When she wrote "Society's Child," they would be so lucky to be able to write something so real, you know? There were a lot of great women on the scene. It's very important. It's a big part of the Greenwich Village [scene]. It would not have happened without these characters, without Terri Thal. She went to the Musicians' Union, trying to get these venues that did not charge and did not pay musicians -- trying to get them to pay. She couldn't do it. The union would not -- I'm a member, by the way. [Local] 802. It [was] dismissed as not being music, folk music. So musicians were not really getting properly paid. There was a lot of poverty on the scene, I think.

JN: Yeah.

RB: You know, Eric Andersen came in there. All these guys. Many guys and many women. And they were not making much money. So Folk City was a venue that changed that. You could get paid. And on Monday nights, they would have -- that was the slow night. So that's when they started having hootenannies. That phrase then became this catchphrase, right? So Monday night was the hootenanny night, and it was open mic.

JN: Got it.

RB: A lot of artists made their debuts there. You know, Dylan, I think he came to one open mic with "Blowin' in the Wind" one night after the a -- I believe so. I'm not sure about if it was an open, if it was a Monday night, but he was already playing at Café Wha and the Gaslight before he played it at Folk City. But it was Folk City that was a turning point. Because then it was a legitimate -- and he was opening for, who was it? Lightnin' Hopkins. Like, he was opening for a blues artist. He was opening, and I'm sorry, it's just -- it's in my book and I'm sorry there's a lot of facts. But he was opening for a well-known blues artist at Folk City. And in those days, they weren't one night stands. It was like, a week.

JN: Yeah.

RB: So you could really establish something. The next venue was the Bitter End, I think, that opened. '61, maybe '60. 1960, I believe was in January 1960. Starting the new decade.

JN: Yeah.

RB: They had a new venue and it -- the new venue was really an Italian restaurant, Gerde's. So they just talked to the owner. It was Izzy Young, from the Folklore Centrum. Do you know this? So Izzy Young went over there and said, "You could have folk music here." So he is like -- and the story goes that Mike, the owner of Folk City, was like, "What do you mean by folk music?" And he had to sing a little bit of a, I think it was a Pete Seeger song. He goes, "Oh, you mean those people that write messages in the music?" And he says, "Yes, that's exactly what I mean." By the way, it's Mike Porco. I should not go off with that saying -- I was just calling him Mike. It's Mike Porco, P-O-R-C-O. So, Mike Porco was the owner of the Italian restaurant. And they started allowing folk music to be there on, I think certain nights, at first.

RB: They called it -- the first name of the place was not Folk City. It was called The Fifth Peg, which is pretty obscure. But it refers to the fifth peg on a banjo. Now in my book, I analyze the meaning of that, because I'm always looking for meanings of everything. [laughs] It's my obsession. But the fifth peg on the banjo is not in line with the others, and it's on the left. And I always think that it had something to do with that. So the fifth peg is the weird one, and it's on the left. [laughter] Because that's the kind of music they want to do.

JN: Sure.

RB: That's what I think. But the fifth -- the name didn't stick. So eventually, they said, "We need a better name." So they came up with Folk City. But Carolyn Hester was the first artist to play at Folk City. I know, on opening night of Folk City with that name. It was Carolyn Hester. Very powerful character. She then married Richard Fariña, who was -- it was a tumultuous relationship because he was not at the time a folk singer. Right? He was a novelist. And he had written a novel, a famous one. Which now -- the title is long, but escapes me, but I'll think of it if you want me to tell you. But he wrote a famous book, *Been Down So Long It Looks Like Up To Me*, I think is the title. Something like that. Excuse me for if I have that wrong, but I think that's what it is.

JN: No, I can also check it.

RB: Okay. Yeah. I believe that's correct. But so, she helped him type and she was working with him. They had a whirlwind romance, et cetera, but he wanted to be a folk singer then. And she was like -- and he wanted to start -- he finally started to encroach on her own career. And she was like, I'm fine. You know, I'm good. And eventually, they split up. He went off with Mimi Fariña, which was Joan Baez's sister. But he started writing some cool songs. But she always says he was not a folk singer. Because she's more of a purist.

JN: Yeah. What type of music did she consider him fitting into?

RB: Okay. That's a very important point, is that folk music really is old music. Like, she would find old gospel or folk songs from a hundred years or so prior. And revitalize them in her performance. But it was folk music was old music. And a lot of -- some of the purists that I interviewed for my book and in my class and at events here really are very strict about that. Like, that's not folk music. That folk music is old music.

JN: Yeah. Do you feel as strongly about genre delineations?

RB: I'm such an open -- I feel like it's so influenced by that. So what happened was this. So I think that it's so influenced by folk music. It really became a new folk music. But you can call it the New Song Movement if you wanna be specific. And as a professor, I try to be -- when I tell 'em, talk to my students about it, I say, "Let's call this the New Song Movement." And this is where Buffy Sainte-Marie comes in and others. Tom Paxton was early on with this scene too, where they brought in new songs into the Village.

RB: Because otherwise, the Village scene was mostly old folk songs in the early, late '50s, early '60s. People were rearranging and revitalizing, I think, you could say, old songs. So when Tom Paxton -- he was in the military, you know, and he was not into it. He was [laughs] coming to the Village whenever he could get away from the base in Jersey. Whatever, Fort Dix or whatever it was called that he was in. And he would come in on weekends and perform and, you know, never in uniform. Even though in a movie he's seen in uniform in -- not *A Complete Unknown, Inside Llewyn Davis* (2013).

JN: Oh, [crosstalk] --

RB: There's a character based on Tom Paxton in a uniform. It's like, I would never -- he says it in my book, I would never in a million years think about coming to the Village in a uniform, military uniform. No way.

JN: That's a funny thing about those film depictions.

RB: Yeah, they do.

JN: They think they have to play a little fast and loose with the --

RB: It's a little annoying though, because -- as a teacher, it's annoying, because the students will ask, like, but professor, did he come in? I said, "No, he did not wear a uniform to perform at, you know, whatever, Café Wha, whatever it is. No."

JN: Yeah.

RB: So anyway. These artists, Buffy told me this, and Tom Paxton said this, is that when they started performing their own material, they would not mention that they wrote it. They would try to ease it in as an old song.

JN: Interesting.

RB: That's what Tom Paxton told me. Yeah. He said, "Yeah, I'd sneak it in."

JN: And that gave them kind of more like, bona fides as --

RB: Otherwise -- yeah, because it was criticism for if you didn't do -- and that's something we discussed in classes too. Is like, why would -- at the beginning of the Space Age, the new decade of the '60s, computers and just a new wave of technology. Why would kids in their -- like, barely 20 in that and slightly over? Why would they want to do songs from a hundred years ago?

JN: Yeah.

RB: You know? But they did want that. And so, these artists, Buffy and Tom, who told me specifically, would hide those originals in their set and not make a big deal about it. But one thing that connects with Village Preservation is I think that part of that love of that hundred-year-old music and all that comes from the surroundings of the Village buildings and the architecture and the -- what is still here and what was still here in the '60s that was from a hundred years before. And I think the shadow and the ghosts of that made a very appealing vote for doing old music.

JN: Yeah.

RB: I think so. And no one ever says that. You'd never hear that from Dylan or anybody else. But, you know, he was going to the New York Public Library to look at the *New York Times* from a hundred years ago to see how the wording was. And it's like, yeah, because you're -- he's staying in a building that was built then. You must be picking up the vibe, the mojo or whatever the phrase would be, of these buildings of the Village.

JN: Yeah. I mean, I --

RB: Doesn't that make sense to you?

JN: It makes total sense.

RB: But no one ever says that.

JN: No, I can see there being -- I don't know what the right word is here, but like a little too much of a fixation on almost the archives, on history and historical songs and --

RB: Yeah.

JN: -- and, you know, a huge part of these artists' daily lives is spent walking around the streets here.

RB: Exactly.

JN: Living in various states of apartments.

RB: [laughs] Yeah. Yeah.

JN: It's their milieu.

RB: It really affected the music, you know? So what happened next was what changed the music industry, the New Song Movement. Changed everything for a few reasons. And Dylan did have a spearheading role -- a little bit -- in this. Well, more than a little bit. A big way in this, when he wrote "Blowin' in the Wind," which Peter, Paul and Mary did. His version may not have had that explosion that the Peter, Paul and Mary version. Her voice on that, her purity. And the way they approached it, like an old folk song. And yet it was brand new, but based on, of course, based on an old song. Based on a post-slavery song called "No More Auction Block."

JN: Mm-hm.

RB: Dylan had more than one girlfriend. Susie Rotolo taught him so much about, or they say Rotolo. I've heard it pronounced different ways. But I think Rotolo is how the Sicilian -- I'm a Sicilian. I think they say Rotolo. Anyway, she taught him about civil rights. She was in CORE and these student activist groups. She was something. On the cover of *[The] Freewheelin' [Bob Dylan]*, she's leading him down the street. He's not leading her.

JN: Yeah. You don't see that so much in the movie.

RB: You don't see that in the movie. But she knew the Village. She lived here. She was from New York. She'd lived in Greenwich Village. Her parents lived off Sheridan Square. They lived in the same building that the Café Society was in, I believe. If not that building, the building attached to that building.

JN: Some deep Village roots.

RB: It's deep Village roots. She was showing him around. It's never presented properly, is it? But anyway, she -- I forgot where we were headed on that because I got sidetracked with Susie. Oh, yeah, I was saying Susie --

JN: New songs --

RB: New Song Movement became, you know, and she was teaching him about -- so she got him into writing songs that maybe had social context.

JN: Mm-hm.

RB: And that is mentioned in the film, in that current film.

JN: Yeah.

RB: I think she says, you know, you should write about what's happening. And, yeah. Because they were doing all of their songs. But I think like what Pete Seeger said. Pete Seeger was one of my mentors also. He was my next mentor, really.

JN: Yeah.

RB: Jonas Mekas.

JN: So there's also a nexus between Tiny Tim and Jonas Mekas, right?

RB: Oh yeah. And that's how I met Jonas. I was doing a show at Joe's Pub, which was a tribute to Tiny Tim. When that album finally came out that I had done when I was 16, we did a launch party.

JN: When did that --

RB: It was 2009.

JN: Okay.

RB: So in 2009, I believe, I was doing that show, because we might have had the show slightly earlier before. But so it's 2008 or 2009, and I got a note from Jonas Mekas. And I had studied him in film school. He says, "You may not know me. I'm Jonas Mekas." I said, [laughs] "I totally know you." So he had his phone number. I called him. We became instant friends for the next -- until he passed. We were always in touch. I felt very much a part of his family. I produced several fundraising events for Anthology Film Archives. They were great.

RB: Anyway. But back to the New Song Movement for now, is that when Dylan wrote “Blowin' In the Wind,” that was a game-changer. Because the arrangement, especially by Peter, Paul and Mary and other artists who were sort of covering that, made a commercial version of that that went mainstream. You know? And then the focus, that in the music industry had been on the idea of songwriters as professional people in buildings, writing songs for people. Including Carole King. Some really good ones, by the way. And Paul Simon. They were in song factories uptown at the Brill Building. At 1750, I think, Broadway?[2] [They] were places where you would go -- like, say you and I, we wanted to do a record together. We go, we need to buy a song. Let's go buy a song.

JN: And is that that kind of like Tin Pan Alley?

RB: It's like that. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. It's that. It is that.

JN: Yeah.

RB: So, but that's how it was for years. So it's like you'd go, you know, okay, we need a -- because they would get an assignment. Like, Carole King would get an assignment, we need a song for the Shirelles, the band. And she would say, "Sure." And they would compete. Like, there were people in cubicles competing on writing the song for the Shirelles. But, okay. So it is a crazy world, right. But that's how the music industry was. And some good songs came out of that.

JN: Yeah.

RB: Like, think of how great “Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow” as a song is. Because it came from Carole King and she knew she meant it. So, but now, okay, after “Blowin' In the Wind” and these New Song Movement participants, including Tom Paxton and Buffy Sainte-Marie and the others. There was one, Len Chandler, who was on the radio. He was African-American, and he was a high school teacher, but he was writing a song every day for his radio broadcast, I think on WNYC. And so, he was like, topical songs. Like what was happening in the news, you know? And Tom Paxton was doing that, especially coming from the military point of view, anti-war kind of messaging. And they were writing very topical

[2] 1619 Broadway.

songs. And some of them, the ones that kind of broke through, made such an impact in the music industry that it changed the focus from song factories to Greenwich Village. Like, Greenwich Village became kind of a song factory.

JN: Mm-hm.

RB: But instead of going to order the song, you would go see the performer perform. And you would say, "Okay, I'm going to cover that." Unbelievable amount of covers of these songs.

JN: Yeah.

RB: Fred Neil was the daytime host at the -- I hope I'm not talking too much for you.

JN: Not at all.

RB: So Fred Neil was a cool cat. He was the host of the daytime, like, lunchtime shows at Café Wha. And he had guests like Dylan and wonderful singer[s], wonderful artists, including, like I said, early Tiny Tim. But so many people performed. I'm trying to think of one right now that I -- the name is escaping me, which happens. By the way, I want to mention another songwriter who came to the Village and had an important song was Bonnie Dobson. A name that's forgotten. She helped trigger this music, this new music movement, New Song Movement, a lot. With a song called -- it's [sic] "Take Me for a Walk in the Morning Dew."[3] "Morning Dew," and it was about nuclear fallout. And it was a really super powerful song.

RB: She was a Canadian. On tour, played at Folk City and recorded her first live album there, live at Folk City. And when she did, I think, "Morning Dew," that song was like, wow. Heavy. It's about -- take me for a walk in the morning dew, honey. And then, the other character says, we're not going to go walking and there's no -- we can't go walking out there. It's like, end of the world kind of apocalyptic song. Very powerful. That was a big push, I think, that one. And Happy Traum, who recently passed away, was a Village -- [exhales] just a fixture on the scene since the very beginning, since the '50s. And the Washington Square

[3] "Walk With Me Out in the Morning Dew."

scene where the musicians would gather on Sundays, he was there from the beginning of that popularity. He told me Bonnie Dobson's song -- and that's why I'm trying to think of what people have told me, because I wasn't here, so I have to go by what I learned. And he told me that was a very major point when she wrote "Morning Dew." It was her first song she ever wrote, too. And it's super amazing. Check it out.

JN: I will.

RB: It was later covered by the Grateful Dead and all these other people and she was rarely properly credited. Painfully so.

JN: That is kind of the downside of that kind of tradition of covers.

RB: Well, yeah. And tradition, because they call it the folk tradition. And the thing is, the folk tradition can be so abused. And Dylan abused it, where you just completely rip it off. You know? But that's a contemporary song written by a 21-year-old of that year.

JN: Yeah.

RB: And she was ripped off. I could kind of see ripping off someone from a song from a hundred years before, maybe. I don't like that either, by the way. And I tell my students that. I think you should still say -- find who wrote it or even say traditional "arranged by." You can take an arrangement credit. But not a writing credit. That's not fair. But people took her like -- it was like the Wild West. "Okay, I'm taking that." Dylan would say, "I'm taking that," by the way.

JN: Yeah.

RB: He told Paul Clayton that.

JN: I feel like we have, at least in kind of popular cultural depictions. We have this very idealistic vision of the Village as starving artists.

RB: Yeah.

JN: And spirit of collaboration. And everyone's, you know, politically inflamed in --

RB: Yeah, yeah.

JN: -- exactly the same ways. But I think your work kind of complicates that in a lot of ways by pointing out some of the cracks in that narrative, but also thinking more about the intersections between folk and new song. But also blues and jazz.

RB: Blues.

JN: And kind of these concurrent scenes that are happening. Not just one monolithic folk scene.

RB: Yeah. Yeah. It's really multifaceted and I want to get into that.

[BREAK IN AUDIO]

RB: But I'm so glad you mentioned jazz and blues, because really, that's where the music side of it really got some heavy influence. I mean, a lot of the folk artists when they went out to see music, would go see jazz or blues. They didn't really go see other folk artists sometimes. Like Eric Andersen, who I interviewed, who turned out to be a friend of mine, he's great. I've worked -- I've done stuff with him. He's been in some of my shows now. Told me that he would just go see jazz. They got a lot of musical ideas from jazz. But my focus tends to be on the songwriting of the lyrics. That's why, when my book came out, people were saying, Well, what about all the jazz? And of course, I talk about jazz, but my focus is on the idea that Greenwich Village became a center for songs. Like, jazz is not really about songs. And the blues is often so personalized that yes, they are songs and they were often covered by these artists. So it's part of it, but they [were] often based on old blues.

JN: Mm-hm.

RB: The New Song Movement tended to be more folk based. It just happened to be that way. And that's how we got folk rock and all that and punk rock. It all comes out of this same -- it all comes out of the discovery of Lead Belly's thousand-song catalog or whatever. [laughs] Really so much of it comes back to Lead Belly. And people call him a blues artist,

but he was everything. He wasn't just a blues artist. And he also wrote. If you go back -- and he was so humble. I wish I could have met Lead Belly. Because like, he's so humble. He's like, oh yeah, I learned that song. But he wrote that. Some of them he wrote. But he's so humble. He doesn't say he wrote it. He says he learned it. There's a song called "Titanic." It's very specific. He didn't just find it. That didn't exist. He wrote it. Because he actually experienced when the Titanic -- that was a news item. He was writing the top of the song back in, was it 1912? Is that when the Titanic -- I think something like that.

JN: I think so.

RB: I think it's something like around that.

JN: [laughs] I can fact check that later.

RB: I think it's something around that. And he had a song about it with a social message that's really funny and interesting, but serious. How some -- an African-American person was not allowed on the boat and said, "Okay, fine." So he says, I wanted to go, but he -- they didn't let him on. But then it was a man -- he was a boxer. He takes a certain character. And then, this ship sinks and he's going, well, [laughs] you know, good. Do you know what I mean? It's such a funny song. I think it's one of his early songs, but I think Lead Belly wrote it. He says, "Oh, I learned it," but I'm pretty sure he wrote it. He's very humble. And brought all these songs, you know -- I mean, he wrote songs to get himself out of jail twice. He sang to the judge and both times he was let free. So, that's a songwriter when you can do that. But the New Song Movement that we're talking about in the '60s was -- pre-that time, it was rare to see someone, a singer-songwriter. Peggy Lee was a singer-songwriter. She was never credited quite fully for that.

JN: Mm-hm.

RB: And one of my favorite artists in the -- known famously, first in the '40s and '50s. But Peggy Lee wrote a lot of her own songs. A lot of her more signature songs were written by Peggy Lee. But as a whole, that wasn't the norm for most artists. So it changed with the New Song Movement, in which labels, if they signed you, expected you to come up with your own

songs. They no longer went out to the factory, the song factory, to find you a song. They would just assume that you were going to write your own songs.

JN: Yeah.

RB: It just happened like that. It was so interesting. I think the Village never gets that credit. They never get that credit. Laurel Canyon in California gets a hell of a lot of credit for being like, the singer-songwriter center. Really, it's all based on Greenwich Village. I mean, it's almost the same people. They just transplanted with eucalyptus plants and cleaner sidewalks. They transplanted what was happening in Greenwich Village and made a safer haven that they felt, I think, at the time there. But really, a lot of things are missing. Number one, the buildings we talked about that had that sense of history --

JN: Yeah.

RB: -- did not exist out there. Secondly, the mix of people that would be in the Village, the races, the genders, [laughs] all the various types of people that we have in Greenwich Village did not exist in Laurel Canyon. It was more homogenous. It was white. It was a certain type. And the songs are insular. They're all about their own relationships and personal issues. Rarely about the "we." It's always about the "I." And not to criticize Joni Mitchell. I love those artists deeply. But it was no longer about the people. The Greenwich Village song movement was really about a universal message.

JN: No, definitely. Right. More interiority, less --

RB: Yeah.

JN: -- movement music.

RB: You know? And even when it was not movement [music], it still had hints of these people living here in the streets and living and being at the cafés in the daytime. It was 24-hour; the Village was a 24-hour place back then. And they'd be in a pack, the coffeehouses or something, and you'd see so much stuff on the street. So much activity and such a mix of people and races and ethnic backgrounds. That's what made the music amazing.

JN: Yeah. I mean, it's very place-specific.

RB: Very place-specific. That's why when *Hair*, which -- I mentioned *Hair* earlier. That play, it's so Village. There's so many different characters in that because it represents all the different characters that would be sort of maybe on the streets of the Village, you know? Not to mention that it mentions locations like the Waverly -- maybe the diner, maybe the theater. I've heard that it could be either one of those. But it mentions places in the Village; subway stops. Because it was so colorful and so rich with that, with culture, with life. And I'm not sure if the Laurel Canyon had that. It had quality music.

JN: Yeah.

RB: And quality musicians, and I love them. And I really love them and admire them. But something was lost when the spotlight moved to California.

JN: Yeah. It's not city music.

RB: No. A big part of that change was the Mamas and [the] Papas, because they were here. The Byrds were here too. I mean, Roger McGuinn, who was then called Jim McGuinn before he changed to Roger, was playing at the Gaslight. But they weren't catching fire here, these artists.

JN: Yeah.

RB: They weren't catching, for some reason. I'm thinking of those two acts, the Byrds and the Mamas and [the] Papas. Because both are very California-related, you know, but they both did start out here. Cass Elliot was the hat check girl at the Bitter End and was at the Café Wha as the waitress. And she was singing with the artists. She was a great voice. A powerful woman. Imitated but never duplicated. But they weren't really clicking commercially here. The Mamas and [the] Papas or, I believe, or the Byrds. What he was trying to do, when McGuinn -- when he played at the Gaslight, the sign outside, I think said "Beatle impersonation" or something like that. The Beatles impersonation, I think is what it said. Some word, kind of insulting. By, you know, Jim McGuinn. Like he was doing Beatles songs, and it --

JN: And it wasn't landing here.

RB: It wasn't landing here. So, going out to California, it did. But of course, the first two songs the Byrds did were a Dylan song and a Pete Seeger song. It was so connected to Greenwich Village. And McGuinn said he was trying to play his guitar like a banjo, like Pete. He's very sweet. So that's what I'm trying to say. And I talk to my students about it. Because they ask me a lot about Laurel Canyon, and I say -- and I said in the textbook -- it was like they tried to transplant, tried to make this idealized version of what they had here. Where they could actually have some success. [laughs] Because they were not having success here. But the California labels signed these groups. And they were good. They delivered good records. The Mamas and the Papas, though, was my -- what I was starting to talk about was the song "California Dreamin'," which is so kvetchy, if that's the right Yiddish word.

RB: So kvetchy about New York. Like, all the leaves of brown and the sky is gray. I went for a walk on a winter's day. And then they had a song called "Twelve Thirty (Girls Are Moving to the Canyon)" [sic],[4] the Laurel Canyon, and the 12:30 -- we are in the building right now where the 12:30 was. It was the clock of this building, the library, that was stuck at 12:30. Because it says, outside my window, I see a steeple. It's this steeple. That's always like -- it always says 12:30. It's making fun of it. Like, it's stuck. It's old. We're moving to California. It's this negative anti-New York thing. It all started simply because Michelle Phillips was in New York in the winter without any winter clothing. She had her California beach -- she was a beach girl. Beach, LA person. And she's here in the winter and freezing, and they're like --

JN: Not the best introduction to --

RB: Listen, she's the one who started writing. He gets all the credit. John Phillips. But Michelle Phillips started writing that song. She said, look, I got this song. He goes, "Good. Good." You know how guys are. [laughs] And he's like, "I'll finish that." You know, it is -- so everywhere says, you know, written by John Phillips. I said, "Wait a minute." I know that she had started writing that song. Because it was her own experience. Anyway. He says he should have gotten a royalty for all the people that moved to California, just based on that song.

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[4] "Twelve Thirty (Young Girls Are Coming to the Canyon)".

JN: Maybe. [laughs] I'd love to bring it back to you a little bit.

RB: Me?

JN: Yes, to you. [laughs]

RB: Okay. Okay.

JN: So, I feel like we're describing maybe decade by decade the Village scene --

RB: Mm-hm. Oh yeah.

JN: -- shifting. And kind of where do you first slot in?

RB: Yeah. Wow. Yeah. Well, when I moved to the Village officially -- even though when I lived in Hoboken, I was always in the Village.

JN: Yeah.

RB: And I was part of the -- and certainly going to see punk groups. And you went to CBGB, which is really not the Village, but I consider that -- East --

JN: It's the extended Village.

RB: The extended Village. I think it goes to the Bowery for me.

JN: I have no strong feelings on the dividing line. [laughs]

RB: I know there are dividing lines, but spiritually --

JN: Yeah.

RB: Venues have to be wherever they can be. And the Bowery, I think, was connected to the Greenwich Village scene. As I was saying before, I think we wouldn't have the Ramones, Patti Smith, all those early groups, if it wasn't for the New Song Movement we just described in Greenwich Village.

JN: Yeah.

RB: It comes out of the idea of writing your own songs and being as idiosyncratic as you want. That whole idea was birthed in Greenwich Village in the '60s.

JN: Yeah.

RB: It was an explosion. It was a big bang, I think. There were a few big bangs in the music industry, but that was a big bang. So I came in. It was always in the Village, when I lived in Hoboken. I was always on the PATH train coming to -- getting off at either 9th Street or Christopher Street. And walking through the Village. I was already in love with the Village very deeply for me before I moved here. You know? But the Bongos rarely performed at any of -- they did play at Folk City. We backed a woman. There was a band called, you may know them, or you may not, called the Deadly Nightshade. Have you heard of them? It was three women. They were feminist, and really strong women.

RB: They did a couple of albums, one on RCA, similarly to where we signed soon after. But one of the women, Helen Hooke, went solo and she had been in an all-woman band, right? So her audience, it was women. But we were just starting the Bongos, and she asked us to back her up. So our first gig was Folk City. That was such a thrill for me, because I knew the history of Folk City, you know? So we're backing up Helen Hooke now. We were not ready for the fact that her audience would not really like that she had three boys behind her. [laughter] Because they were used to seeing her with all women on stage, which is -- and a virtuoso, by the way. But you know, we had so much fun just being a rhythm section. That's how we actually started. So, I guess you could say in some ways, even though, you know, we were playing in Hoboken in our hometown, our first real New York City shows were at Folk City.

JN: Mm-hm.

RB: We always felt so connected to the Village. The Village was an extension, like I said, of Hoboken, for us. It was right across the river. I mean, the streets of Hoboken -- I don't know if you've ever been there, but --

JN: Not in a long time.

RB: The streets are numbered and they're lined up with the numbers of these streets. And the top street of Hoboken is 14th Street. So they're lined up just as the Village is with 14th being the last street in the city. So we would look across, and we were right across the river.

JN: Yeah.

RB: You know? But we were here all the time, and we'd shop in the Village. 8th Street was all shoe stores. And we would shop. I was always buying my sneakers. And the Village was a big part of my life as soon as I moved to the New York area. Let me put it that way. But it's not until I lived here and really started absorbing it that I started being a historian of Greenwich Village and studying the music history. But so that's, I think, how my connection would be, could be seen. I think that that first show with Helen at Folk City, though, was a -- I could feel the history of that place in those walls, you know?

JN: Yeah. Do you happen to remember what year that show was?

RB: Maybe '79.

JN: Okay.

RB: Yeah.

JN: Yeah. So what's the dominant cultural scene in the Village at that time?

RB: Well, our first interview was for a magazine called *Christopher Street.* That was like, a glossy. And that was a gay, lesbian, LGBT magazine. It was so exciting to get coverage of any kind. But then in that, I thought, wow, this is really cool. So there was a story about us playing with Helen and her -- mostly about her. But I think that LGBTQ+ community was something that made me feel very at home in Greenwich Village, and was something that certainly I had missed through my time in Florida. We would look for bars where people could be -- it was usually mixed, men and women. But it was, you know, gay or lesbian bars, but they were usually mixed in Florida. But that was a really important part of it for me. And that freedom.

JN: Yeah, absolutely.

RB: That freedom to be. And sometimes, with the folk scene that we were talking about earlier, about the Greenwich Village New Song Movement, folk scene, et cetera, that was supposed to be so open-minded and liberal, they could be pretty brutal. They could be a little bit homophobic. Paul Clayton was a very important figure to Bob Dylan and others. His name is now, like Carolyn Hester, kind of just covered with dust because people just have been ignoring her for so long and ignoring him for so long. But Paul Clayton was gay and loved Bob Dylan. Do you know this? Have you ever heard this story? It's kind of sad.

JN: I don't know if I have.

RB: The thing about Paul Clayton, he really fell for Dylan, hard. I interviewed his roommate in the book. Let's see if I can find -- because I want to quote him exactly, but he said he fell horribly in love with Dylan.

JN: Mm-hm. Didn't that happen to [Allen] Ginsberg as well?

RB: What's that?

JN: Didn't that happen to Ginsberg as well?

RB: Yeah. [laughter] Oh, I'm sure. Yeah. They'd fall horribly in love. Well, because he's brutal. And so it's -- it was bad for Joan Baez, too. I mean, it's --

JN: Yeah.

RB: Anyway, horribly in love is the phrase. And Paul Clayton was one of the believers, like Carolyn Hester, we talked about before, in the old folk music. Like, the power of these old songs, these are -- this is folk music, you know? And Paul Clayton had been a virtuoso of that. I guess you could say a virtuoso, but more like a scholar. A prodigy. That's the word I'm looking for. In high school, he started studying folk music and would literally go into the Appalachian Mountains with a recorder, like, a tape recorder. The 1958 or so equivalent of your Zoom recorder. Whatever he could get to record -- like, on field recordings on people's front porches.

JN: So really doing like, ethnomusicology.

RB: Oh my god. Deep, really deep. Right? So he had a couple songs that were -- then became known. Because I think Buddy Holly was doing his song, really great song called "Gotta Travel On." A really great folk song. Beautiful. Oh yeah. Anyway, he had some great songs. So, when Dylan came to town, he knew Paul Clayton. Paul Clayton was also the most recorded young folk singer on the scene. He had 20 albums out. Twenty albums out! Of songs, and they're really cool. Worth looking into for anyone -- check [them] out. Because he has these themes. Like, there's songs of different murder songs and all these classics. He curated the way he would present these albums. It would be groups of old songs that were about certain subjects. Some are sexual, and really unbelievable.

JN: Yeah.

RB: But like, from a hundred years ago.

JN: Yeah.

RB: Yeah.

JN: Huh.

RB: So, that's Paul Clayton. So, Dylan, when he met him, was like -- he wanted to get whatever he could from him, let me put it that way. And I forget what we were actually leading to in this, what we were talking about. But anyway, it's all one topic. And I asked Terri Thal, I said, you know, "Did people tease him for being gay?" And then she says, "Well, yes. Yeah." Dave Van Ronk and Dylan, they would all tease him. But a lot of the teasing came from the fact that he loved Dylan, I think. But they teased him. You know, I could feel that for him. It's a sad -- he ended up [committing] suicide.

JN: Mm.

RB: Horribly. And Terri Thal, I had to call her because I was reading, I was studying -- when I wrote this book, it was during the pandemic. And I was up all night, every night, writing all night. The sun was way up when I could go to bed. And I was like, wait a second.

Well, what happened to Paul Clayton? Because first, it's like, he's the most recorded folk singer. Then he meets Dylan. He goes on this trip. He takes psychedelics. He gets a little bit messed up with Dylan. They do a cross-country road trip in a 1962 or something, or whatever, Ford station wagon. It's Dylan and Paul Clayton and one other man, guy. And they're going on this trip. But they take drugs; there's all kinds of stuff going on. Paul is already taking some other stuff, and he had psychological issues that were really severe. But I feel he was taken advantage of by others. Dylan, like, he had this one beautiful song. [BREAK IN AUDIO]

RB: He played it for Dylan. And Dylan said, I like that. I'm going to take that. And he took it, and he wrote -- [vocalizes]. He wrote the same song, basically. Do you know the song I'm talking about? It's called "Don't Think Twice, It's All Right." But it's really that. And, you know, so the phrase is -- the roommate was there when this happened.[5] He played it for Dylan. And Dylan's like, I like that song. I'm going to take that song. And he did. So Dylan wrote that other one, and it was a hit. It was on the radio by Peter, Paul and Mary, and others. And Paul Clayton was so poor. He never made anything from his records.

JN: Yeah.

RB: Dave Van Ronk said in his book, in his memoir, called *The Mayor of Macdougal Street,* Dave Van Ronk said, "Paul was so poor that you could see the soles of his feet through his shoes." Because he couldn't buy new shoes. And Dylan is like, raking in the cash from that song, which was written by Paul, really. Anyway, there was a lot of that going on in the -- it wasn't just Bob Dylan, but he had several lawsuits.

RB: And the woman, Jean Ritchie, who was a big influence on Paul Clayton, too. She played the dulcimer. And she had a lot of Appalachian songs that she brought from her family. She was from Appalachia. And would do the songs, but she had revised them and made them -- like, this legitimate folk process where you style it in your own way. Well, Dylan would take that style in her own way and just do it and say, well, he was his way. And she would call him and say -- you know, this is the Village. People were all in the streets. She would see him and say, "You took my song." And he goes, "Oh, just talk to my lawyer." It happened like three times.

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[5] Barry Kornfeld.

JN: That does not seem like the spirit of the Village.

RB: It happened like three times, and she'd make deals with the lawyers and she would get up the cash. Yeah. She just did a settlement. But really?

JN: Yeah.

RB: It's not quite fair. But there was a lot of that. Bonnie Dobson, I mean, this guy Tim Rice took that great song "Morning Dew." Which is just a phenomenal song, by the way. It's just a great song. And he just said, "I wrote it." Tim Rice. I was like, what? I mean, she went to his door and knocked on the door and said -- and this is not in this country. This is in the UK, I think, where he lived. And she goes, "You know, I wrote that song." And he goes, "Oh, yeah, I know." But it's like, they never really -- I don't think they ever settled it. I still see it online as written by Tim Rose [sic], but it's written by Bonnie Dobson.

JN: Yeah.

RB: She saw this movie about nuclear holocaust, and she wrote a song about it. It's a person's song. Anyway, the folk process was easily abused. You know?

JN: Yeah.

RB: I know you wanted to get back to me, so we can do that.

JN: Just a little bit.

RB: So my story, you know, I moved to -- when I moved to Perry Street. It was really cool because everybody helped me have more Village connection by telling me that was -- you know *Serpico* (1973)? Have you known the movie *Serpico* with Al Pacino? Like, that was *Serpico*. Like, I think it was his girlfriend's house, where I stayed. So it's like I had -- I felt so Villagey. But that's part of it. You feel part of something bigger than you, you know.

JN: Were there any places or spaces in the neighborhood that really drew you in when you first were properly living there?

RB: Yeah, so let me just tell you. So, I moved. When I moved to the Village in '84 and I was making an album at Electric Lady, it was all during that period. By the time that album came out, I was on the road for 300 shows a year.

JN: Wow. [laughs]

RB: So all my stuff just kind of stayed there. First Perry Street, and then I got a place on Waverly Place, because I needed more space. For the first year of being at Waverly Place, everything still was in boxes also. So, it took me a minute to then settle into where I actually was.

JN: Yeah.

RB: I lived by the Waverly Inn. Which is totally a historic block. And everything in the Village [laughs] -- everything was historic to me. I mean, this building. I loved coming here. I used to just come to the library to literally check books out and DVDs out from here all the time. I mean, everything about the Village drew me in. It's hard to say what didn't draw me in. I was so offended when a Kmart came into the Village because I always thought -- at first, because I thought, it's so not Villagey. But then I got used to going there, too. Even that became -- the Village has a way of transforming and adapting and not losing too much. I said in the book, in my intro, I think I called it -- it's like a computer with an unlimited hard drive or something. It just keeps adding with very little deleting, you know, or that's the idea. Unfortunately, people want to delete stuff.

JN: Yeah.

RB: And that's why Village Preservation is important to me is the idea of saving that, of not deleting too much, you know?

JN: Absolutely.

RB: Yeah.

JN: I think something that comes up in a lot of these that I do is people both having very kind of specific places that they have a lot of love and nostalgia for. But also, I think, a pretty

good sense of, I don't know, not being too upset about change. Like, recognizing that the Village --

RB: Yeah. Yeah.

JN: -- is constantly in flux and that the sidewalks and the buildings stay the same. Maybe the things in them change. But --

RB: I'm with you on that a hundred percent. But I do think certain Village residents -- I'm talking businesses, not people -- can have ways of overstepping their bounds. I think NYU goes -- and they were a former employer of mine. I taught at NYU for four years. But I do think, and I'm speaking -- let me just speak through other residents, not through me. But when I would attend the community board meetings, there was a lot of anger. There was a lot of anger toward NYU. I felt awkward that they knew that I taught there. I felt out of place because I'm a Villager first, you know? Yeah. That's my neighborhood.

JN: And they're a landlord.

RB: Yeah. And I think, you know, in the story, even in this book, when I'm talking about the early '60s, there's terrible things that happened because of NYU. The very first location of Folk City, where Gerde's was originally. It was completely -- the whole block became an NYU block and they had to move. And they lost half their business.

JN: Yeah. I'm sure there are a lot of such cases.

RB: Oh, yeah. Oh yeah. I know, yeah.

JN: I do think that's one of the important things about projects like this --

RB: Oh, yeah.

JN: -- is when, especially in a neighborhood where there's a really just kind of big looming presence, whether it's a university or a giant corporation or whatever it be.

RB: Yeah. It could be Google. It could be, yeah.

JN: Yeah. You know, whatever it might be. It tends to swallow up a lot in its wake. And I feel like the arts usually come first --

RB: Oh, yeah.

JN: -- in terms of the type of spaces that get gobbled up.

RB: Yeah. Yeah. And private residences. People that live happily -- you know, when -- the Village has survived Robert Moses. But then it still has battles with other factions. But that's a big part of my book, is the idea that the Village had to be protected from what Robert Moses wanted to do. To plow through it, you know?

JN: Yeah.

RB: For me, I think of other favorite places. I like Washington Square Park. I always have. It can have a downside, I suppose, with rowdiness or whatever, but it tends to be one of my favorite places. In the summer, I go there a lot. My students go there a lot. Maybe the fact that it was a graveyard adds a certain something to it. Maybe those spirits are saying, you know, enjoy life. But it has a joie de vivre, you know? It has something special at Washington Square Park, the vibe there, I think.

JN: Yeah.

RB: And I think it encourages -- there was something there yesterday, some music, Lorde?

JN: Oh, yeah, I saw that.

RB: What was all that? What happened, exactly?

JN: I think she didn't get a permit.

RB: She didn't get a permit. But when I did -- I brought my students there. They wanted to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the Beatnik Riot. This was about two years ago. And I was teaching the class and I had a great student in the front row of my class every week, twice a week, Sophia. And she was like, "Professor, can we go there? "After I was telling them about

it. I said, "Go where?" And she says, "To the park," she said, for the anniversary. And obviously she was already thinking this. And I was -- I said, "Yeah, we can go there!" So we actually went on the anniversary of the Beatnik Riot, which was in 1961, which was the first protest of any kind in Washington Square Park. And it was for the right to play music there. That's the first protest. So, it's bookended with Stonewall in '69. So, in '61, or -- yeah, '61. I think it's '61. It could have been '60, but I think in '61, the Beatnik Riot. They called it that. That was in the press. That was not a riot, and it was not beatniks. It was folk singers in the park protesting.

JN: Yeah.

RB: For the right to perform there. And then we have Stonewall in '69. So it's like, those are my bookend protests.

JN: Yeah.

RB: They're important.

JN: Very.

RB: But [pauses] I think that that protest was one of the eye-opening -- because it resulted in allowing music to be played in the park. I think it was one of the whatever, lynchpins, whatever. It was one of the key moments that triggered the idea that music could make a difference. Because it did.

JN: Yeah.

RB: It was like, wow. The city now says we can do music here. Now, when I wanted to bring my students there to commemorate that particular event, I went to my precinct. And I said, “I want to bring my students to Washington Square Park.” They go, Oh, you don't need a permit. I said, "They're going to play music." And they said, You don't need a permit. I said, "Are you sure they don't need a permit?" And we didn't. So no one bothered us. And the police knew we were going to be there. And they did have two -- I saw two cops checking us out. But no one bothered us.

RB: And it was so much fun, because the students played songs. I got some of the original people that were participants of the event to play with my students, including Happy Traum. Like I said, he recently passed. He was there. He was roughed up by the cops in those. They made it into a riot, the cops. I hate to say it, I respect NYPD, but they were roughing kids up with auto harps and guitars and banjos. They were roughing them up, you know? He was roughed up. But they didn't -- the police didn't bother us then. And I also had not only participants and my students, but I had the filmmaker who filmed it back in the original -- there's an award-winning documentary called *Sunday* (1961). People can find it on YouTube. It's in the permanent collection of the Museum of Modern Art. And it's filmed of that riot. Beautifully, artistically filmed, so that it's almost like a poem.

JN: Yeah.

RB: From beginning to height to end of the riot, so-called riot. It's really great. I had the filmmaker on FaceTime. So he could watch my students sing there, freely in the park.

JN: Oh, that's beautiful.

RB: Isn't that nice?

JN: Yeah. Have you done that for other, I don't know, location-specific teaching moments?

RB: Maybe. Well, the first assignment in my class is a Village walking tour, which --

JN: Seems appropriate.

RB: Right. Which they have to do. In fact, I have really pretty much gotten rid of all written work in the class, because I want it to be performance now. I think that they get more out of it if they learn these songs -- like "Morning Dew." We talk about the songwriting of it, and then for them to perform it, [sighs] I get goosebumps, because they feel it. They understand the dangers that we have, modern dangers, that are very parallel to the dangers that they felt, the young people felt in the early '60s.

JN: Yeah.

RB: Right?

JN: Of course.

RB: So, other things we do. The Village walking tour is a specific -- it starts with Buddy Holly's house. Because that's historically -- in our timeline that we studied in that class, that's the earliest.

JN: Yeah.

RB: Because Buddy Holly moved in like, '58. It was the last six months of his life. He was 22 years old. He moved to 8th Street, basically -- you know where he lived. 8th Street and Fifth Avenue. So fantastic. Then they walked through the Village to all the different venues, where all the venues were and where Dylan lived, where they all lived. As many as I could get. It's quite a long tour. It ends at the White Horse Tavern in the West Village on Hudson Street.

JN: Okay.

RB: That was a really important -- that way west was almost like another world. But that Hudson Street, believe it or not, was a very important part of the Greenwich Village scene. Because the White Horse was where the Irish -- so much of this music was Irish folk music. And that's where the Clancy Brothers, which were an Irish group, and their cohorts -- radical, by the way. Rebel Irish. Would play their rebel songs. That was a big inspiration to the Greenwich Village folk scene, were the Irish rebel songs. Dylan got a lot from that. [laughs] He got --

JN: He got a lot from everyone. [laughs]

RB: Oh, my God. And it's never mentioned in films, like *A Complete Unknown*. It seems like he just invented the whole world himself.

JN: Yeah. I am interested just because you do have this kind of whole other chapter of your life that I think is very film-centered. To you, is there a way to kind of adequately represent chapters of the Village on film?

RB: I think so. I would love to.

JN: Does anyone come close to it?

RB: No, I haven't seen that. You know, I haven't really seen it. I think there's a nice documentary about Greenwich Village.[6] Let me see if I can find the exact title. It's in my credits, you know?

JN: Mm-hm.

RB: Let's see. I don't have it right with me, but there's a Greenwich -- there's definitely a really good Greenwich Village documentary that I liked, but it's a documentary. It's not really acted. I wish there was a way to really bring it to life, to the screen, that doesn't have to make shortcuts or composite characters too much or -- like, we talked about *Inside Llewyn Davis*. And that captured -- that's an interesting view, but it really is such a downer. Like --

JN: Yes. [laughs]

RB: And I talked to Terri Thal, who was like, she was right in the -- because it was based on Dave Van Ronk's memoir, right? Well, this was Dave Van Ronk's wife and manager, Terri. She was like, "Honey, it was not --" she didn't say honey. I added that. [laughs] She was like, "It's not like that." People were happy to be there. And there was no fighting. Like, there [were] no fist fights behind the Gaslight. And there was no behind the Gaslight, by the way. There was no alley back there, you know? They just had to add some sort of prefabricated drama that didn't really need to be there. Because the Village is enough on its own without having to add that.

JN: Yeah.

RB: I would love to be involved in a project. Like, a proper film. Maybe like the BBC documentaries that are partially acted and then real footage mixed? I'm watching a couple right now and it's like, they really -- they're able to do it, but they have acting scenes and they

[6] *Greenwich Village: Music That Defined A Generation* (2012), dir. Laura Archibald.

have real stuff mixed in together, and to make a story. That would be really great. That would be a good film. I haven't seen anything quite like that yet.

JN: Yeah, I can't think of anything either, which is so strange to me because I can think of so many New York films that really get, you know, not every aspect right. But get the texture right for certain neighborhoods. And I can't really think of a Village film.

RB: I wrote this book to be like a film score. A film script, and score too, because the score is already built into the music that's there. But *Music + Revolution*, I mean, this was like -- that, to me, could be a movie. To be honest, I think it could be. I really wrote it that way. It's cinematic.

JN: Yeah.

RB: I mean, I can talk about the scene changes and stuff and the lighting. The lighting of the Village, it has a certain look. And I talked about how -- and then in '67, things got more psychedelic and the colors changed. Like, the black and white changes to a color. Because the Village then becomes psychedelic, you know?

JN: Yeah.

RB: I think there's a beautiful story of that decade. And it has a beginning. It really does have a good beginning, middle, and end. Because we talked about the clubs that started in 1960, right? When the decade started. That really legitimized the music scene here, to match the uptown New York scene, you know what I mean? And then, by the time Woodstock comes in 1969 and Stonewall; then, and the moon landing, peripherally, but importantly. Because it's like, it's a new -- it's going to be something new happening. That the space race has been sort of won or whatever.

RB: Woodstock was important to Greenwich Village. Because so many of these artists that were playing in the small coffeehouses -- I mean the "pass the hat" people -- were now playing for half a million people. And that changed, again, the music industry. And again -- okay, so the first step was the songwriting. Now it's in the hands of the artist performers. Then, when Woodstock hit, which were -- listen, it opened with Richie Havens, a Greenwich

Village fixture. And it closed with Jimi Hendrix, who got his solo start at the Café Wha. That's the bookends of Woodstock.

JN: Yeah.

RB: And half the music in there, even if it's not from Greenwich Village -- artists like John Sebastian, who lived on Washington Square Park, by the way. Who grew up there. That even if they didn't live here, they were all doing music that was either inspired or written here. Inspired by or written here. So, Woodstock is a great ending to this story if it was done to a film, you know? It would be great to have that. We don't have a film that really captures -- there's all these films, you know; *The Pope of Greenwich Village* (1980), there's *Next Stop, Greenwich Village* (1976). There's been movies, indie films throughout the years. But [that] focus on one character, or they're not really about the movement that happened here.

RB: Oh, yeah. I was going to say with Woodstock. So we had the New Song Movement; that changed the music industry with people writing their own songs. And labels allowing and expecting artists to write their own songs. But then, by the time Woodstock happened, it became big business. Big business. That's a big change. That's when the music industry as we know it today was formed, was after Woodstock. Because that's when everyone was like, wow, it actually sells. Because the Woodstock movie, the soundtrack, all that stuff. Multimillion seller.

JN: Yeah.

RB: And this was music that was indie music, you know?

JN: Yeah.

RB: So it exploded at Woodstock. So that's kind of the end of that era, I think.

JN: [pauses] I'm just seeing -- actually, in a roundabout way, we covered almost everything I wanted to get to.

RB: We didn't talk too much about my own world, but I'll tell you that now, I really love being involved with preservation in different ways, whether it's teaching or writing or

singing. When we were doing my album, *Sorrows & Promises*, that came out before the book. When I toured with that, I was able to tell some of these stories that we're talking about now --

JN: Mm-hm.

RB: -- to the audience. And it was really fun to have the songs. It was like a play. That's like a play, you know. So I'd start with Buddy Holly, again, you know, and I'd take it to the -- I'd end with "Bleecker Street" by Simon & Garfunkel. Because that was one of the few songs that literally, specifically -- I don't know if you know that song. I didn't really know it that well until I was asked to do that album. That's when I started diving in. And that Mitchell Cohen, who was really quite brilliant. He's an author, like I said, himself, and also a record company guy. I asked for three songs that he would recommend by each of the artists that he thought I should represent.

JN: Mm-hm.

RB: And one of the three for Simon and Garfunkel, or Paul Simon, was "Bleecker Street." And I thought -- I immediately gravitated to that. I said, "Well, that's really specific. Let's share that one." And I kind of knew it from hearing it. It's a classic folk rock song. But the lyrics talk about the streets. Walking the streets of Bleecker; walking Bleecker Street from -- it's almost like a walk from the East side to the West Village, you know? And he talks about, you know, $30 pays your rent on Bleecker Street. He's got these little lines in that that are so specific. I checked it out. Thirty dollars did not pay your rent on Bleecker Street.

JN: Yeah. [laughs]

RB: Ninety, maybe a hundred. But maybe he had three roommates, and -- maybe it was him and two roommates. So, in that case, $30 would've been [UNCLEAR]. But yeah, I love spreading the word about Greenwich Village, and the importance of it, really. It's not just because I live here and I want to. It's not for my own purposes, it's for the music history that should not be lost. Because if you lose history, you lose a big chunk of the reason why you're doing something. Artists should know and people should know where the music came from. I

think it's nice. They want to know. People are entertained by being educated, I think. Or at least I hope so. And I try to work that in, you know?

JN: I think they are.

RB: But I think that that's kind of -- I feel it's part of my job.

JN: Yeah. I think that is really kind of like the perfect nexus of Village resident, historian, performer, educator. Where it's just kind of like, your life is your work and the neighborhood is your life.

RB: And I love walking home to my place.

JN: Yeah.

RB: It's really -- I found my home. Tiny Tim was so right. He didn't even know, because he passed away in the '90s, you know. So, it's like he kind of knew that I lived in the Village, but he never knew how much -- what an impact he had, suggesting that I would be living here, you know? But he was so right. [laughs]

JN: Yeah. I want to be mindful of your time because we're at [about] an hour forty.

RB: That's a lot for you to have to do. You have to do your edits.

JN: I do.

RB: Take your time. And if you need me to help you edit it or anything like that.

JN: Thank you. I appreciate that.

RB: Because I did wander a bit. But I tried to answer the questions as much as I --

JN: I think it's great. Is there anything kind of before we close that --

RB: I wish I think of something that's --

JN: Anything about you, anything about the Village that -- I don't know, it's important for --

RB: I owe a lot to Greenwich Village and I always wanted to do my best to give back to it, number one. Two, I really hope that we can keep the development that sometimes seems to be encroaching around us, keep it in check. Because the history of Greenwich Village has a lot of power and it's created -- creativity that has accumulated over decades and decades, not just the '60s.

JN: Yeah.

RB: The book goes back to, as you know, the 1600s, but after that. But the thing is there's a lot here that it's because of the way it is that could be lost, you know? And I think we have to preserve it. And that's really what -- that's one of my goals, in my way, and whatever I can do to help preserve what needs to be preserved. Knowing that the Village is always evolving, too. But that's everything. But it can -- we have to hold onto the foundations of what the Village is and let the changes come and go, you know?

JN: Yeah.

RB: Does that make sense?

JN: It does. Yeah. It really does. I think New York is a city in general that kind of has always remade itself.

RB: Absolutely.

JN: But without properly noting different chapters of its history --

RB: You would lose a lot.

JN: -- what would we have?

RB: You would lose everything. You know, growing up in Florida, there were certain parts of town that I loved that were historic. They were so quickly and without a thought wiped

away to make a parking lot or a Kmart or a whatever store or some nonsensical, non-historical [thing]. And that town, it's unrecognizable from the place I grew up in. Anything that was charming has been removed, basically. And I think that any city has a danger of losing their personalities, but the Village personality -- there is such power, creatively. It's just in the walls, it's in the streets, and it needs to be preserved. It really does. So, I mean, fashions can change. Attitudes can change. Everything can change. But I think there's some foundational aspects that should remain the same. That gives us something to reflect on. That gives us some place in history.

JN: That's such a beautiful note to close on. [laughter]

RB: Okay. I believe that.

JN: No, I do too.

RB: Yeah. Yeah.

JN: Thank you so much, Richard. This has been so lovely.

RB: Awesome.

[END OF AUDIO FILE]

Oral History Interview with Richard Barone;

Narrator(s)	Richard Barone
Address	240 Waverly Place Suite 23 New York City, NY 10014
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Birthplace	Tampa, Florida
Narrator Age	65
Interviewer	Josie Naron
Place of Interview	Jefferson Market Library, NY, NY
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