REVISED AND UPDATED 25TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

SHE BOP

THE DEFINITIVE HISTORY OF WOMEN IN POPULAR MUSIC

LUCY O'BRIEN

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For Malcolm, Erran, and Maya

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04.

CAN THE CAN

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THE ROCK CHICK?

"How can I say this without sounding sexist? Janis was one of the guys. When I was with her, there was no sense of she's female, I'm male … Her male balance was as strong as my female balance. We both acknowledged that place, the other side of our sexual whole." PAUL ROTHCHILD, RECORD PRODUCER[1]

"Sexism killed her. People kept saying that she was just 'one of the guys' … that's a real sexist bullshit trip, 'cause that was fuckin' her head around … she was one of the women. She was a strong, groovy woman. Smart, you know? But she got fucked around." COUNTRY JOE MCDONALD, MUSICIAN AND FORMER LOVER[2]

One afternoon in September 1970, Janis Joplin walked out of LA's Sunset Sound studio with her Full Tilt Boogie crew. Walking up to the band's car, she turned and looked at the group of men, wondering who should drive. "Who's got the biggest balls?" she asked. Then after a pause she answered: "I do."

Victim, visionary, and Valkyrie, Joplin was dubbed the first pin-up hippie girl and first major girl sex symbol in rock. She expressed the confusion of a woman raised with the repressive sexual codes of the 50s, yet embracing the bewildering lack of boundaries that came with 60s hippie counterculture. Before the supposed sexual liberation of the 60s, 'good girls' didn't, and 'bad girls' did. Joplin tested this dichotomy, not just in her sexuality, but through her music and the way she lived her life on the cusp of a regressive era and a youth revolution.

The first white woman to negotiate the explosive, murky depths of psychedelic rock'n'roll, Joplin made up the rules and suffered for it. The 'serious', grown-up rock that emerged in the late 60s from a composite of beat groups, the blues, and an elevation of the unwashed musician as 'artist' created an elite male scene based on guitar virtuosity, rambling lyrics, and an ability to get stoned. On entering this world, Joplin saw no other option than to imitate. But in drawing on that sound to accompany the full force of her unfettered blues voice, she created something startlingly original – driven, expansive, out of control. When Joplin stood on stage and screamed out 'Piece Of My Heart', there was a sense of megalithic rock being re-sung and reinterpreted through a woman's perspective.

Her brief, fiery four-year career symbolised the most extreme dilemma for women in rock'n'roll: how to compete with men yet not lose a valuable sense of self. Despite her rockin', cussin', and swearin' stance, Joplin once made a concerted application to the girls' club when, in 1965, she temporarily returned home from wild living in San Francisco, scraped her hair back into a demure bun, dressed down, applied make-up, and warned friends to watch their language. Although that period seemed out of character, it showed how Joplin's rebel activity was not simply about being 'one of the lads'. It was as much a reaction to the 50s prom-queen brand of femininity that excluded her during those crucial teenage years. She had been a bright, co-operative child before adolescent hormones raged in her body, sending her complexion into a ravage red of acne. A heavy girl with a gutsy voice who wanted to take her space in the world, she found it impossible to squeeze into the rigours of decorative small-town femininity. Although part of her longed to join this aloof sorority of womanhood, she cast herself in a role so anti-social, so anti-traditional femininity, that she would never have to compete.

06.

LADIES OF THE CANYON

FEMALE SINGER-SONGWRITERS OF THE GRAND HOTEL

"**Frailty** (see fragile): Insubstantiality … nothingness … illusion … fallacy … weak thing … trifle … folly … fantasy … empty talk … brittle … chimera." ROGET'S THESAURUS

"Frailty, thy name is woman!"
WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *HAMLET*

"Young Woman her name was Dull." JOHN BUNYAN, *THE PILGRIM'S PROGRESS*

"Wommen desiren to have sovereynetee."
GEOFFREY CHAUCER, *THE HOUSE OF FAME*

In 1928 Virginia Woolf wrote that an aspiring woman writer who wanted to speak her mind needed "a room of her own and five hundred a year".[1] From the early 19th century women made a major contribution to literature, partly because their modestly growing economic independence could stretch to a desk, a chair, and a piece of paper. The tools of the trade were inexpensive and easily available, unlike, say, the materials and teamwork it would have needed to stage a play, paint an epic portrait, or compose for a symphony orchestra. With writing a woman was less reliant on patronage or established institutions to get her work done.

Women excel at singer-songwriting for the same reason that they are good novelists, because it is an easily accessible medium. In folk music all a female songwriter needed was an acoustic guitar (if that) and a voice. The lullabies and ballads women sang to lull babies to sleep became a part of folk history, as did the songs they sang at work, brewing, baking, seamstressing, weaving, fish-gutting – music created by 'ordinary' people with songs and trades that had been handed down through generations.

Pure economics has meant that women have often taken simple instrumentation as their resource, opting for solo expression as a way of not having to negotiate the male network of band politics, other musicians' egos, or complicated tour arrangements that interfere with childcare. Although the word 'genius' has been used unreservedly to describe male artists such as Bob Dylan and Leonard Cohen, women have turned out consistently high-quality writing in far greater quantity than male solo singer-songwriters, their material ranging from the autobiographical to the poetic and the perverse.

Women have always written to make sense of their world, to clear an inviolable space that is theirs rather than the possession of a man. Folk singer and archivist Peggy Seeger says: "A lot of folk music expressed feminist opinions and reflected women's lives. There were ballads outlining women's social positions and rights, talking about ownership of women by fathers, sons, families. There were revenge songs in code showing women to be smarter than men, or dressed as men, proving themselves just as good in certain situations."

Until 1880 in England, a married woman was not allowed by law to own property. Man was a creature of substance, while woman was insubstantial – there to look decorous or work the horses, depending on her social class. As her experience did not reflect the outer world of war, politics, and finance, it was not deemed relevant. But swaddled in her domestic interior, giving birth to, raising, and cooking for the men of the future, she wrote down copious observations in diaries and letters, most of which, like countless songs spontaneously made up in

Her 2011 album *21* was a global bestseller, a punchy set of ballads about "the most poignant, important and devastating relationship I ever had". It went straight to Number One in the USA and the UK, and by 2012 Adele became the first artist in history to have an album remain at Number One on *Billboard* while three singles from it top the Hot 100. For Adele this success was unexpected: "really surreal and really moving". Not reliant on gimmicky videos to get her message across, she sang with a bald honesty that had huge appeal.

In a crowded market, many artists are vying for attention. "It almost gets competitive," says Tori Amos. "Well, what happened to you? The billboard of pain. The media try to make it a catfight, but we turn on ourselves before men even need to lift a finger by saying so and so's copying me. If you know what you've contributed you can hold that inside yourself. You owe that to your soul."

Amos is modest about her role. "The younger artists – they're all very unique women with their own take on it, with their own language and story to tell. Listen, there's room for everyone to claim their own story, there cannot be a hierarchy." Effectively summing up the importance of a women's history, she says: "Some have paved ways, and women before me have taken their machete into the jungle, parts of the jungle that are not so traversed. Other offshoots made their own. You honour the women before you and after you. There isn't a copyright on this story."

16.

FUTURE FEMINISM

NEW SOUND, NEW IDENTITIES

"There's a thoughtful group of people who read between the lines and know it's not just about rhyming words together … there's an intention that comes through." LANA DEL REY[1]

"We say 'Time's up' for pay inequality; 'Time's up' for discrimination; 'Time's up' for harassment of any kind." JANELLE MONAE[2]

"We don't have to be any one fixed thing in order for us to be normal. When are we ever not in flux? We're literally, like, fucking fluid." ARCA[3]

“It will make you want to form a band, it will make you angry, it will make you laugh, and it will educate you.” — *Gina Birch*

Luca O’Brien

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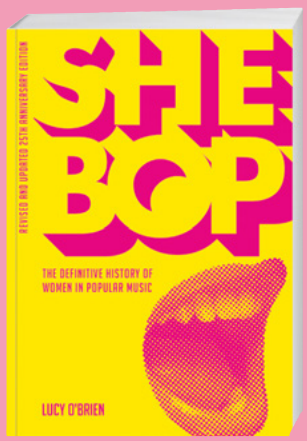

- Revised and updated edition of a seminal text widely praised as ‘a contemporary classic’ and ‘a must for any serious muso’s bookshelf’.

- *She Bop* has always bridged the academic and popular market, and is now a university set text in the UK, Europe, and the USA, so there will be additional promotion in the academic market.

- **Drawing on more than 270 original interviews with female artists and women working behind the scenes in A&R, marketing, music publishing, and production, *She Bop* presents a feminist history of women in popular music, from 1920s blues to the present day.** Talking to iconic artists from **Eartha Kitt** and **Nina Simone** to **Debbie Harry** and **Beyoncé**, acclaimed author Lucy O’Brien charts how women have negotiated ‘old boy’ power networks to be seen and to get their music heard.

- This revised edition updates that story through many fresh interviews and new perspectives. Since She Bop was first published in 1995, digital downloading has transformed the music landscape. But has the issue of gender inequality changed too? In a new introduction and closing chapter, O’Brien celebrates the rise of unique women such as Lizzo and Billie Eilish, who are bursting through and creating new possibilities for female artists, while also looking at the struggles of artists like Kesha, and wondering whether the pop industry has had its #MeToo moment yet.

- Published to celebrate the original book’s 25th anniversary – and in a year that also marks 50 years of Women’s Liberation – this new *She Bop* will appeal to a huge cross-section of readers, from music fans to the LGBT audience and women of all generations.

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