

Hear Me Roar

"You hear most of the male representatives of culture say the '60s was really when things were happening, and then the '70s and the '80s were dead. But I think that's because women rose to a sense of self-value and appreciation in the '70s, and developed a cultural phenomenon that men weren't in the middle of. So they don't think it happened."

—Holly Near, in the Olivia Records video *The Changer: A Record of the Times*

In December 1972, Helen Reddy's "I Am Woman" hit number 1 on the *Billboard* charts. It was, as the title of one of her later albums put it, a long hard climb, both for the song and Reddy's career. The song was Reddy's fourth single, and her first Top 10 hit, but its significance went beyond the fact that it established Reddy as a major star. Whereas previous songs such as Lesley Gore's "You Don't Own Me" and Aretha Franklin's "Respect" had addressed the issue of female independence, neither were as explicitly associated with feminism as "I Am Woman" was. The song, co-written by Reddy, had been written as a direct response to the feminist movement of the early '70s and Reddy's own involvement in that movement. The music may have been easy-listening pop, and the lyrics delivered in an equally light-hearted fashion, but the underlying message was clear: from the opening line, "I am woman, hear me roar," to the chorus, with its repeated assertion, "If I have to, I can do anything/I am strong, I am invincible," "I Am Woman" was a statement of female pride and solidarity articulated with a directness that had never before reached the pop Top 10.

By the early '70s, feminism, or "women's liberation," had emerged as a powerful social, cultural, and political force. This "second wave" of twentieth-century feminism was the result of several contributing factors from the previous decade, such as the

publication of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963, the formation of the National Organization for Women (NOW) in 1966, and the anti-war and civil rights movements. Women working for these causes had raised the issue of women's equality in groups like SNCC and SDS (Students for a Democratic Society), but the topic was not necessarily regarded seriously by the men: "Both the new left and the civil rights movement were dominated by men who were, at best, uninterested in challenging sexual inequality," wrote Alice Echols in *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-1975*. As Judy Dlugacz, a founder of Olivia Records, told *New York Newsday*, "I abandoned leftist politics because of the inadequacy of the left's agenda in a lot of areas." As a result, women began leaving the "new left," utilizing the organizing skills they'd developed while working in the movement to form their own women's groups.

The first "women's lib" action to capture national attention was a protest at the 1968 Miss America Pageant in Atlantic City (a beauty pageant established in 1920, the same year women received the right to vote). A cheery flyer invited all interested women to participate ("It should be a groovy day on the Boardwalk in the sun with our sisters"), and approximately one hundred women from as far away as Florida arrived to picket and engage in "guerrilla theater": chaining themselves to a Miss America puppet, throwing "instruments of torture"—high heels, copies of *Playboy* and *Cosmopolitan*, and bras (which sparked off the myth of "bra-burning feminists")—into a "Freedom Trash Can," and crowning a live sheep as "Miss America." Inside the hall where the pageant was held, sixteen protesters (five of whom were later arrested) held up a banner reading "Women's Liberation" as the previous year's Miss America read her outgoing speech, while chanting "Freedom for women!" and "No more Miss America!"

This dramatic action brought feminism into the national spotlight, and helped galvanize women into joining the movement, forming their own groups, and staging their own actions. In 1970, NOW joined other women's liberation groups to hold the Women's Strike for Equality, and in the same year over one hundred women invaded the New York offices of the *Ladies' Home Journal* to hold a "sit-in," demanding that the magazine hire more women and change their editorial content to "focus on the real issues facing women today." 1970 also saw the publication of Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics*, Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex*, and the anthology *Sisterhood is Powerful*, edited by Robin Morgan; Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* followed in 1971, and in 1972 *Ms.* magazine was launched, with its first issue of three hundred thousand selling out in eight days.

The reaction to feminism from the mainstream press was not always as positive. Articles ignored the issues feminists were raising and instead focused on their looks ("Ugly women screaming at each other on television," wrote *Commentary*), and in 1970 *The*

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Atlantic reported that a male editor at *New York Newsday* assigned a female reporter to write a story about women's liberation with the words, "Get out there and find an authority who'll say this is all a crock of shit." Among the youth culture, reaction to feminism often mirrored the disinterest of the "new left." Others viewed women's liberation as a continuation of sexual liberation: *Sisterhood is Powerful* quoted Black Panther Eldridge Cleaver as saying, "Women? I guess they ought to exercise Pussy Power," while Youth International Party ("Yippie") co-founder Abbie Hoffman stated, "The only alliance I would make with the Women's Liberation Movement is in bed."

But the so-called "sexual revolution" was viewed with skepticism by women who couldn't help but notice that though the "revolution" aimed to liberate all people from outdated attitudes toward sexuality, pervasive ideas of what constituted "proper" sex roles remained steadfastly unchallenged. As Anselma Dell'olio's 1972 article in *Ms.*, "The Sexual Revolution Wasn't Our War," pointed out, "The Sexual Revolution was a battle fought by men for the great good of mankind. Womankind was left holding the double standard." This double standard had been upheld in a wide range of rock songs performed by women, where submissiveness, however debasing, was offered as the ultimate proof of one's femininity. Such "doormat" themes were readily seen in songs like the Crystals' "He Hit Me (And It Felt Like a Kiss)" and Joanie Sommers' "Johnny Get Angry," though not all songs went to such masochistic extremes: Bobbi Martin's 1970 hit "For the Love of Him" merely urged women to make their man the absolute center of their homebound universe. In this kind of atmosphere, a song that openly embraced feminism, as Helen Reddy's "I Am Woman" did, was bound to be a very radical statement indeed.

Helen Reddy was born in 1942 in Melbourne, Australia, into a show business family and had been performing before audiences from the age of four, both with her family and other acting troupes. Originally hoping to become a dancer, Reddy had to switch to singing when her dancing career was curtailed because of a kidney operation. "I more or less was forced into specializing, I guess," she says. "Coming from a family such as I did, we obviously did not want to be competing with each other for jobs, and while I don't think anything was ever said, or perhaps even thought on a conscious level, each of us tended to carve out our own little niche. I went into music and it is, in retrospect, what I am best at."

Although Australia in the 1950s was far removed from the rock & roll boom occurring in the United States, Reddy got an enticing taste of the new music in 1958 when her parents made a trip to the States and brought back every single currently in the U.S. Top 40 as a present for her. "A lot of it was stuff that had not been released in Australia, including what would at that time have been called 'race music,'" she says. "So I

was suddenly exposed to Chuck Berry and Ray Charles and a lot of people I really wouldn't have known about. But I was very snobbish because I was coming basically out of a jazz background—although I don't think of myself as a jazz singer by any means. I did in the early days sing with jazz groups, and there was a tremendous snobbishness about these rock upstarts who only played three chords, and every song sounded the same. So I was very hostile on an intellectual level, but on the other hand, when I heard rhythm & blues I wanted to go *whoa!* It moved me!"

By the '60s, Reddy had moved into pop, finding it "a nice middle ground; I always think of pop as your borrowing bits and pieces from this and that." She also had her own radio show, *Helen Reddy Sings*, which aired twice a week on the Australian Broadcasting Commission, but she was looking to move into greener pastures. In 1966, she entered a "Bandstand International" contest (not affiliated with *American Bandstand*), which offered a first prize of a trip to New York and a recording contract with Mercury Records. Reddy won the contest, but found claiming the prize to be a bit more difficult. "It took me four months to pin them down to when I was going," she remembers. "I was in a kind of limbo. I sold all my furniture, because I wasn't planning on coming back. And I didn't want to take any jobs, because I couldn't guarantee that I was going to be there to do them. Finally, after daily phone calls, at the end of four months, they came through with the ticket."

By the time the ticket came through, Reddy's daughter from her first marriage, who could have flown free at the age of two, had turned three, meaning Reddy had to buy a ticket for her, which wiped out the prize money. Things were little better on their arrival in the States, where Reddy found plans for her career amounted to "absolutely nothing" in the eyes of her new record company. "When I got here, somebody from the record company took me to lunch," she says. "I said, 'What's happening about the record deal?' And he said, 'Oh, well, the prize was for an audition, and they sent us a tape, and you sing very nicely, dear, but we were really hoping for a male group; do give us a call before you go back to Australia, and have a nice time while you're here.' So a lunch is what I got. Who said there's no free lunch? Of course, looking back as a businesswoman, I can see where they were coming from: there weren't any female solos on the charts except Petula Clark, and the airwaves were full of male groups."

Nonetheless, Reddy was glad to have arrived in America. "If you were a painter in the 1880s, you wanted to be in Paris," she says. "If you were a musician in the '60s and '70s, you wanted to be in Los Angeles. If you become a star in America, you're automatically an international star. It's the big time! I just wanted to be exposed to all those wonderful musicians." Reddy then tackled the task of earning a living for herself and her daughter, which entailed working almost continually to maintain a hand-to-mouth

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existence. "I did a lot of going back and forth to Canada," she remembers. "I'd get a booking and work up there for a week or two until I had some money so that I could come back to New York and afford to live for another week or two while I did the rounds of the agents. And some of the agents were willing to overlook the fact that I didn't have a green card and book me in some little spaghetti place where I got fifty bucks for the night or something. Quite honestly, I don't know how I did it, but you just take it a day at a time. That's the thing about show business—it's like winning the lottery. You never think that something's going to take twelve years. You think it's going to happen tomorrow, or maybe next week, or at the very latest, next month! That's what keeps you going. It's just slightly out of reach. It's just around the corner. You *know* it's going to happen."



Helen Reddy
1986 at Genetti's in Hazleton, Pennsylvania,
Photo by Mark Reinhart/RFU, courtesy Jim Keaton

While in New York, Reddy met Jeff Wald at a "fundraiser" party her friends threw for her birthday. Wald, who later became Reddy's husband and manager, was then working at the William Morris Agency; he also managed Tiny Tim and George Carlin. The two moved to Chicago, where Reddy worked in a theater revue and Wald was a talent buyer for a local club; in 1968, they moved to Los Angeles. But though she was again living in one of the country's music centers, Reddy initially had trouble finding work. "Basically, nothing at all happened for the first five years I was in America," she explains. "Jeff was managing other people and he was on the road a lot with other acts. I didn't know a lot of people, so I was more or less out of circulation. That was a factor, and also, musically, it was a time when male groups were the dominant sound."

Then, in 1970, Reddy landed a spot on *The Tonight Show* with the help of her friend, comedian Flip Wilson, who was guest-hosting the show. Her spot on the show, her first major television appearance, helped her to secure a contract with Capitol Records for one single. "So we are talking pressure here," Reddy says. "In other words, you've got one chance to have a hit." Reddy had been impressed by a song she saw Mac Davis performing on *The Tonight Show*, "I Believe in Music," and felt it was a good choice for the

single's A-side, and the ballad "I Don't Know How to Love Him," from the rock opera *Jesus Christ Superstar*, was suggested for the B-side. Reddy didn't particularly care for the number, but agreed to record it: "They said to me, 'If it's on the B-side, it doesn't matter. No one ever listens to the B-side.'"

"So we went into the studio," she continues. "Oh God, I remember that night! I had never in my life felt such pressure. And when I listened to the playback later on, 'I Believe in Music' sounded like 'I Believe in Terror.' It just wasn't there. But all of the emotions I'd been feeling worked perfectly for 'I Don't Know How to Love Him.' It was obvious, even to me, that it was the superior cut, that it had to be the single. And I thought, oh well, that's it, because I really didn't think that it had a chance. I also found out there were other people that recorded it, and some of them had names far better known than me." One of those people was Yvonne Elliman, who had starred in *Superstar* and recorded the original version of the song, but it was Reddy's version, released in 1971, that came out on top, peaking at number 13.

"After that, it was panic time!" says Reddy. "Because record companies make money on albums, and all of a sudden, here I am, a hit artist on their hands, and they don't have any product. So they couldn't wait to rush me into the studio." Reddy was presented with a list of current hits to choose from, but she held out to include songs from the new crop of singer-songwriters who were now rising to prominence, though she did agree to let the album be named *I Don't Know How to Love Him* to tie in with her first single. Reddy released two further singles in 1971, "Crazy Love," and "No Sad Song," and the album *Helen Reddy*, none of which charted in the Top 40.

During this time, Reddy had become involved in the burgeoning feminist movement, welcoming the opportunity to interact with people who shared her feelings about women's inequality in society. "When the women's movement, as we called it, first started to happen, it was like I'd come home," she says. "At long last, there were other people who felt the way I did, that women should be valued. I remember when I was a little girl, I saw a show, and one of the comedy sketches involved a guy who was painting a model, and he wasn't really painting at all; the joke was that he wasn't an artist, he was just a dirty old man. And I was so offended—at the age of four! I wasn't able to articulate why, but it really bothered me, it bothered me so much that here I am forty-four years later, and I still recall it! So whatever it is, whatever the feeling is, it's very deep with me and always has been."

Spurred on by her friend, fellow Australian and rock critic Lillian Roxon, Reddy began holding her own consciousness-raising sessions. "I was living in the Hollywood Hills at the time, and we started a little Hollywood CR group," she says. "I was going to a lot of meetings and getting involved. I was very politically correct at the time—I

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didn't want to shave under my arms and all that stuff." She was also inspired to include a song about her involvement with the women's movement on her first album. "I wanted at least one song on the album that said something about how I now felt about being a woman," says Reddy, who quickly found that most songs about the "female experience" presented stereotypical "good women" bravely accepting their position of subordination. "Have you heard 'If You're Born a Woman' by Sandy Posey?" she says. "It's all about how her man treats her like absolute shit, but when he comes home he makes me glad and happy that way. It is just a *total* doormat song! And every song I looked at, this was what I was coming up against. I finally realized I was going to have to write the song myself because it simply didn't exist. And that was the genesis of 'I Am Woman.' It was my statement as a feminist."

At the time of its initial release, "I Am Woman," co-written with Ray Burton, was simply another track on *I Don't Know How to Love Him*, and there were no plans to release it as a single. "I certainly didn't hear it as a hit," Reddy admits. "I didn't hear it as an anthem." The song might well have remained an album track, but a year later Reddy was approached by the makers of a feminist documentary, *Stand Up and Be Counted*, who wanted to use the song in the film. "So I agreed, and Capitol said, 'Well, why don't we put it out as a single to coincide with the release of the film,'" says Reddy. "It was too short to be a single because there were only two verses, so I wrote an extra verse and went in and re-recorded it, and that was the version that was put out as the single. So of course the picture came and went in six days, and the song became a hit a year and a half after it was originally released!"

Released in May 1972, "I Am Woman" initially met with resistance from radio stations. "I always got a very strong reaction to the song in person, and fan mail used to mention it, which seemed a little odd because we knew we were getting no airplay whatsoever on the song," says Reddy. "But it was obvious that we were touching some sort of a nerve. So because of the resistance to airplay, I went on television. There were a lot of television variety shows in those days, and I sang 'I Am Woman' on nineteen different shows. Then women started calling up radio stations and requesting the song, so it was women who forced the airplay on it. My son was born the week the song went to number 1. It was a very emotional time in my life. There was a lot going on within and without, so I really felt that the revolution had come, that we were just going to blaze it on down."

As an anthem, "I Am Woman" differed from protest songs of the '60s in that it was so obviously pop-based in melody and was born out of optimism and hope rather than frustration and anger, however righteous. From a musical standpoint, it's difficult to understand what it was about "I Am Woman" that so bothered the press, but the fact

that this pleasant pop tune addressed the issue of feminism made it an easy target. Critics found the song "not effective either as propaganda or as schlock," and found Reddy herself "beneath contempt" and a "purveyor of all that is silly in the women's lib movement." "For a lot of men, thinking about the women's movement makes them grab their groins," says Reddy. "What can I say? I didn't say that we were going to cut their dicks off or anything, you know? But one guy told me that he was going to medical school, and he used to play that song every morning just to get him going, so it obviously transferred. It was just a positive statement of self."

Reddy's statement about the nature of God when she accepted the Grammy award for Best Contemporary Female Pop Vocal Performance (for "I Am Woman") also got her into trouble, when she ended her list of thank-you's with God "because She makes everything possible." When the remark prompted angry letters, such as one that began "You skinny, blasphemous bitch," Reddy defended herself in an interview with the comment: "I knew any feminist would understand what I was saying; it seemed like the only thing I could say that summed it up." Ironically, while derided for being a feminist by some, Reddy was also derided for not being feminist enough by others in the women's movement. "As soon as I became popular, I was not politically correct anymore," she says. "This does tend to happen. But people talk about the 'women's movement' like it's all one organization with a party platform, but there are so many different people with so many different points of view. I am first and foremost a singer. That's how I earn my living. I don't earn my living as a feminist. Nobody else speaks for me, and I can't really say that I speak for anybody else. If you relate to what I'm saying, great, but I don't represent X amount of women. I'm a feminist and I always will be, but I will not have my life dictated by somebody who has set themselves up as an authority on what is politically correct."

The criticisms—from whatever side—had little overall impact on Reddy's career, and she had substantial chart successes through 1976, with such Top 10 hits as "Leave Me Alone (Ruby Red Dress)," "You and Me Against the World," "Ain't No Way to Treat a Lady," and two further number 1's, "Delta Dawn" and "Angie Baby," along with seven Top 20 albums. She also was the first host of the rock music television variety program *The Midnight Special* in 1973 and returned to the show in 1975 as the regular host, and in 1977 she made her film debut in the Walt Disney feature *Pete's Dragon*. Though she was never associated with a particular feminist group or organization, and never wrote another song in the vein of "I Am Woman" (though the song "Don't You Mess With a Woman," on *Long Hard Climb*, was a feisty number in celebration of "the sisterhood"), Reddy continued to represent the women's movement to many people and was repeatedly questioned about her views on feminism in interviews. In 1975, declared

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the International Year of the Woman, the United Nations used "I Am Woman" as its theme song, and while on a world tour that year, Reddy was able to see the feelings generated by her song on an international level. "Even to this day, I'm not somebody who deals in numbers and charts," she says. "That's not how I measure achievement. To see women linking arms and singing outside the stage door in New Zealand, in Japan, in places where you never imagined that they would respond . . . if you can have a positive effect on somebody's life, then you've served a purpose. When somebody comes up to me on an airplane and says, 'I went to law school because of you' or 'I had the courage to leave a battering husband because of you,' this is what 'achievement' means to me. This is what it's all about."

At the same time that Reddy was enjoying her Top 40 successes, there were other women mobilizing on a more grassroots level on behalf of women who wanted to be involved in some aspect of the music industry. The year Reddy accepted her Grammy for "I Am Woman," a group of women in Washington, D.C., formed Olivia Records, a woman-owned-and-operated record company that helped crystallize the musical movement that came to be known as "women's music." It was natural that this movement developed at the same time as the feminist movement. "I think that we were very much paralleling the women's movement," says Judy Dlugacz, who was part of the collective that founded Olivia Records and is today Olivia's president. "The term 'women's music' was an organically developing term, which enabled people to identify that this music spoke about women and to women," she says. "It was really speaking from a woman's point of view about women's lives. At that time it was really a very baby concept, and it also was, whether anybody knew it or not, an extremely wonderful marketing tool, because it let women know right away that this was something they might be interested in. And at that point in time, that was a very significant, revolutionary concept."

Although recording for a major label, Reddy herself shared this viewpoint; asked by the British music weekly *Melody Maker* if she minded the continual questions about feminism, Reddy replied that she didn't, stressing, "I sing songs about women's lives," making the connection that the issue of feminism was also "about women's lives." She also understood the necessity of having women gain control by running their own businesses (a step Reddy would take in the '80s when she started her own production company, Helen Reddy Inc.). "I think small business is the way to go, because trying to advance in the corporate world—there's just no way they're ever going to let you play with the big boys," she says. "That's the way I feel about it. And when you've got your own company, you're playing by your rules. In fact, you're inventing a whole new set of rules."

Olivia Records was also based on this philosophy of giving women opportunities

and inventing new rules. "What we were trying to say at Olivia was that women have never really been given the opportunity to participate in this industry, and we would like to create those opportunities," Dlugacz explains. "And if it required us to make loud, clear statements, we would do that; and it did indeed require that! It was such a travesty in terms of women's participation in the music business, both on the musical end and in the main office. And so we said, we're going to try to find out what the possibilities could be of women performing together, and women producing albums, and women being the players. And the structure of Olivia was based upon creating that opportunity."

Dlugacz was twenty years old and living in Washington, D.C., at the time of Olivia's inception. A fan of Motown, late '60s progressive rock, and female singers like Joplin, Laura Nyro, and Joni Mitchell, Dlugacz initially had no interest in the music business; in addition to working with retarded children and becoming involved in the feminist movement, she was planning to attend law school. At the same time, the group of friends Dlugacz was working with in the feminist movement had been looking for a new project to work on. "In the midst of having these discussions, Cris Williamson came through town and did an interview with two people in our group, Meg Christian and Ginny Berson," says Dlugacz. "And they asked Cris what it was like to be in the music industry [Williamson had recorded a solo album for Ampex Records], and she talked about some of the positive things, some of the negative things. And out of that conversation, Cris said, 'Gee, why don't you all start a women's label? A women's record company?'"

The idea gave the group a focus, and, true to the spirit of the times, Olivia began life as a collective of ten people, which quickly became five "as it became clear that this would be a big commitment." After raising four thousand dollars in donations, Olivia's first release was the single "If It Weren't for the Music," performed by Williamson, backed with Carole King's "Lady," performed by Christian. After the single's release, the collective decided to relocate to California's Bay Area and concentrate fully on launching the new label. "The only way we could really do that was to live together and work together twelve to sixteen hours a day," Dlugacz explains. "We were this combination of very hopeful and idealistic; we believed that we could change the world and at the same time really loved the possibility of what we were undertaking. It was very exciting." At the time the collective moved in 1975, Olivia had been preparing for its first album release, Meg Christian's *I Know You Know* (which contained the archetypal song of a teenage crush, "Ode to a Gym Teacher"), and the albums arrived in Olivia's Oakland living room at the same time the new owners did. Sales quickly surpassed even the collective's own expectations, and *I Know You Know* went on to sell more than sev-

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June Millington and Cris Williamson, Fall 1974
Courtesy of Olivia Records, Inc.

enty thousand copies. "We thought we'd sell five thousand records over the course of several years, and that would be a nice start," remembers Dlugacz. "We really didn't understand very much about the economics or anything."

1975 also saw the release of Cris Williamson's *The Changer and the Changed*, which became Olivia's most successful album, eventually selling over a quarter of a million copies. Williamson's clear voice and melodic style combined to create a women's music classic, with songs (all but one written or co-written by Williamson, who also produced the album) that addressed passion ("Dream Child" and "Sweet Woman"), female solidarity ("Sister"), and spirituality ("Waterfall" and "Song of the Soul"). As the best-selling women's music album, and one of the best-selling albums on an independent label, *The Changer and the Changed* was actually not far removed from the best-selling commercial album of the time, Carole King's *Tapestry*: both records featured strong vocal performances, flowing, piano-based melodies, and songs clearly written from a woman's perspective.

June Millington was another musician who played on *The Changer and the Changed*, an appearance that served as her introduction to women's music, the women's music community, and feminism. "I always say that women's music was the feminine principle becoming manifest, because it was time for it to manifest," she says. "And it was

expressing itself through all these people through music. These songs touched a very, very deep nerve and a deep impulse in a lot of women at the same time who needed to take control of their lives. It was just amazing. It was like the first bloom of an incredible love affair, and it will never be the same again. I just happened to be at the right time, and the right place, where something was exploding."

Before her work on *The Changer and the Changed*, Millington's involvement with the music industry had been in the commercial realm, as lead guitarist with the all-female band Fanny, the first all-female band to have a Top 40 hit. Fanny was part of a wave of all-female and mixed-gender bands—who played their own instruments, unlike the all-female vocal groups—that sprang up in the late '60s and early '70s, including Berkeley's Joy of Cooking and the Deadly Nightshade on the East Coast, who were also signed to major labels. Other groups, such as the New Haven and Chicago Women's Liberation Rock Bands, formed as the result of the feminist movement.

But despite the increase of female musicians in the music scene, women who played instruments other than acoustic guitars were still seen as something of an oddity. About the only women in the rock scene who didn't challenge anyone's preconceptions were the groupies, the young women who hung around bands to provide sexual favors or other services such as cooking or sewing for their idols. This aspect of the rock scene was initially kept carefully under wraps because of the potential controversy, but the "sexual revolution" had resulted in sexual matters being discussed more openly—if sexual mores remained unchallenged. "Status in the groupie world was determined by what stars a woman hung out with, just as the status of her mother, or any woman in straight society, was determined by the man she married," wrote Steve Chapple and Reebee Garofalo in *Rock 'n' Roll is Here to Pay*. Groupies may have felt they were "rebellious" against the plastic uptightness of straight American consumer society, but their "rebellion" only reaffirmed a social system in which women were defined by the man they were aligned with.

Such a definition also meant that women did not consider artistic participation in the rock scene as a viable option. "I wanted to express myself creatively . . . [but] I didn't know what to do or how to do it," said Pamela Des Barres, author of *I'm With the Band: Confessions of a Groupie*, in 1989. "The nearest thing was to be with the people who created the music." Des Barres was also a member of groupie contingent the GTO's (Girls Together Outrageously), who were pictured in the center spread of *Rolling Stone* when the magazine did a cover story on the "groupie phenomenon" in 1969 (the fifth issue of the magazine to feature women on the cover). Des Barres eventually found her creative outlet when Frank Zappa produced the GTO's album, *Permanent Damage*, and released it on his Straight Records label. The "songs" were primarily spoken-word

pieces, with lyrics written by the GTO's and music provided by Zappa's Mothers of Invention, Jeff Beck, and Rod Stewart. The album is now a highly sought after item among record collectors, but the GTO's appeal at the time remained strictly limited to a cult audience of L.A. scenesters.

The 1970 film *Beyond the Valley of the Dolls*, by sexploitation director Russ Meyer, also found a substantial cult audience. The storyline (co-written by Meyer and film critic Roger Ebert) was drenched with the groupie credo of sex, drugs, and rock & roll, but the film also was (and remains) one of the few rock movies from any period that featured an all-female rock band who were the film's main characters. As the "Carrie Nations," "Kelly," "Casey," and "Pet," become superstars in true rags-to-riches style, while confronting typical expectations regarding their musical abilities. Upon being told her niece "has these friends in a rock group," Kelly's aunt jokes, "Don't tell me you're a groupie!" When Kelly explains, "It's the other way around—it's my group," a male lawyer comments in disbelief, "Now let me be sure I fully understand this—you are a rock & roll singer?" (Kelly's wide-eyed reply: "Why? Is that a no-no?") In between dealing with innumerable romantic complications and flouncing around in a state of undress, the group also finds the time to make music not too dissimilar to Fanny's brand of West Coast rock.

The experiences of real-life all-female bands at the time were not that far removed from those of the "Carrie Nations" in some aspects, at least as far as their musical abilities were perceived. "What would happen to us a lot is people would walk into a building where we were playing and start bopping around," remembers the Deadly Nightshade's Pamela Brandt. "Then somebody would come out and say, 'Hey it's a really good band, they're all women.' And the people would go, 'Oh no they're not! No way!' Then they would go in and see that it was all women, but initially they would have thought, 'Gosh, they sound so good, it couldn't possibly be women playing those instruments.' And these guys would always come up and tell me this and mean it as a compliment! I would always smile and be pleasant, and then I would think, 'Here I am, proving myself once again!'"

By the time the Deadly Nightshade was signed by RCA in the mid-'70s, Brandt, who played bass in the group, had been "proving herself" as a rock musician for almost ten years. Born in 1947 in Upper Montclair, New Jersey, Brandt studied piano for ten years before switching to guitar, though her mother insisted on her studying classical guitar "because it was more dignified." A fan of Peter, Paul and Mary and Ronnie Gilbert of the Weavers, Brandt had not considered playing rock & roll until her sophomore year at Mt. Holyoke College, when she was asked to play in an all-female quartet called the Moppets. "At the time I was sort of sneering about the idea of being in a rock & roll