Introduction

Prelude

In 1965, a recording by Gary Lewis and the Playboys, "This Diamond Ring," shot up the popularity charts shortly after its release, eventually reaching the number one position in February. At the end of 1965, *Billboard* magazine, the leading publication of the United States entertainment industry, ranked "This Diamond Ring" as the seventeenth most popular song of the year and ranked Gary Lewis the eighth most popular artist. Therefore, according to the measurements favored by the popular music industry, this was a very popular song, recorded by an artist who was very popular at the time. Exploring the phenomenon of "This Diamond Ring" – its significance and its popularity – will serve to introduce a number of issues critical to the interpretation of popular songs: the relationship of text to context, of musicians to audiences, of style to history, of artistry to commerce.

Surveying the pop styles represented in *Billboard*'s "Top 100" (the most important chart for "pop" music as opposed to the "Rhythm and Blues" [R&B] and "Country" charts) in the first part of 1965 can give us some idea of the musical field against which to assess the meaning of the popularity of "This Diamond Ring." Featured in the top ten during February 1965, the month in which "This Diamond Ring" first achieved the number one position, were the "hard-rock" sounds of "British Invasion" groups such as the Beatles ("I Feel Fine") and the Kinks ("All Day and All of the Night"). The smooth soul sounds produced by the Motown record company figured prominently, with Marvin Gaye ("How Sweet It Is [To Be Loved by You]"), the Supremes ("Come See About Me"), and the Temptations ("My Girl") all represented. Other songs by R&B artists such as Shirley Ellis ("The Name Game") and Joe Tex ("Hold What You've Got") filled the upper reaches of the charts as did a song by the "blue-eyed soul" artists, the Righteous Brothers ("You've Lost That Lovin' Feeling"); also present was "Downtown" by Petula Clark, a

song with production values that were more closely tied to those formerly associated with Tin Pan Alley and Broadway musicals.

Of the songs mentioned in the preceding paragraph, "This Diamond Ring" resembled most closely in instrumentation and basic rhythmic approach the style of the British Invasion groups; yet aspects of the production of "This Diamond Ring" differed notably from all of the songs listed earlier. While the name "Gary Lewis and the Playboys" stood for a band, rather than for a solo singer like Petula Clark, Joe Tex, or Shirley Ellis, none of the members of the Playboys played on the recording, the instrumental portion of which was recorded entirely by studio musicians; and none of the members of the band were responsible for writing the song either. This by itself was not so unusual: of the artists listed above, only the Beatles and the Kinks were responsible for the instrumental tracks on their recordings, and only those two groups, along with Joe Tex and Shirley Ellis, wrote or co-wrote the songs they recorded. A strict division of labor was in effect for all the other recordings mentioned: the roles of singer, instrumentalist, and songwriter remained separate as they had from the inception of the popular music industry.

Put another way, there is no single "author" for these recordings. In popular songs, most listeners probably hear the lead vocalist as the source of a song's emotional content; it is the words and sounds associated with the most prominent voice in the recording that are heard to emit the signs of emotion most directly, to "speak" to the listener.[1] It is thereby easiest to conflate the song's "persona" with at least the voice, and possibly the body, media image, and biography of the lead singer. For example, only a fraction of the audience would have been interested to know that David Ruffin, lead singer of the Temptations on "My Girl," did not write the song; but that Smokey Robinson and Ronald White, who did not perform on the recording at all, in fact wrote and produced (i.e., supervised the arrangement and the recording of) it. To the majority of the audience, it was David Ruffin (insofar as he was known as an individual outside of the Temptations) exulting about "his girl," not Smokey Robinson or Ronald White.

Yet, in this respect – that is, in the construction of an author for the pop music text that conflates some combination of singing voice, body, image, and biographical details – "This Diamond Ring" is somewhat of an anomaly. Listeners may notice a strange, almost otherworldly quality to the lead vocal which they may attribute to the presumed youth of the singer, his inexperience, or some innovative double-track recording

technique. However, a listener making these attributions would be only partially correct. John Morthland explains the curious genesis of this song:

> Producer Snuff Garrett . . . signed Gary Lewis and the Playboys simply because he lived two doors down from Jerry Lewis in Bel Air and was intrigued by the idea of breaking a group fronted by the child of a celebrity. He moved Gary from drums to vocals, but the boy's voice made it onto "This Diamond Ring" only after it had been well reinforced by the overdubbed voice of one Ron Hicklin. Similarly, the Playboys didn't play on the song.
>
> (Liner notes from *Superhits 1965*, Time-Life Music)

Truly, this is an example of a simulacrum that would warm Jean Baudrillard's heart: a song "recorded" by a group who doesn't play on it, who didn't write it, with a lead singer who is barely present on it.[2] One's head spins in search of the "original" in this instance of artistic production. Perhaps if we follow Roland Barthes and assert that the "Death of the Author" means that a "text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination" leading to the "birth of the reader," then what matters in this case is whether any individual listener believed that the lead singer was Gary Lewis or Ron Hicklin.[3] Then again, the concept of "voice" and authorship in song, due to its performative nature, is a complex one, the discussion of which will have to be forestalled until later in this chapter.

Curiously enough, "This Diamond Ring" belongs to a pop music category that relies heavily on biographical details of the "artist" for its appeal. Steve Chapple and Reebee Garofalo termed this tributary of pop music "schlock-rock," a descendant of the "teenybop" music of the fifties and early sixties;[4] and in its detachment of singing voice and author, "This Diamond Ring" anticipates "bubblegum" groups such as the Archies and the Banana Splits, the recorded voices of which do not correspond to biological humans at all but instead to cartoon characters (and it also anticipates such notorious recent "fakers" as Milli Vanilli). The scene and persona described and projected by the lyrics of "This Diamond Ring" typify those of teenybop music: the image of the teenybop idol "is based on self-pity, vulnerability, and need"; he is "sad, thoughtful, pretty, and puppylike"; in the lyrics, teenybop male protagonists are "soft, romantic, easily hurt, loyal," while women emerge as "unreliable, fickle, [and] more selfish than men." Teenage magazines directed towards a female readership feature male pop stars, but make little mention of the music; instead they dwell on the star's personality, his "looks and likes."[5]

Since a tight link between the biographical details of the biological author and the actual performer heard on the recording cannot account for the appeal of "This Diamond Ring" and its resultant success, we must look elsewhere. Perhaps, as described in the preceding paragraph, it was the ability of Gary Lewis and the Playboys to fit so smoothly into the teenybop category in image and recorded material that won them their success, notwithstanding the fact that Gary Lewis' "looks and likes" did not correspond to those of the lead singer heard on "This Diamond Ring." Or perhaps elements of its musical style distinguished "This Diamond Ring" from its competitors? Musically, "This Diamond Ring" both resembles and differs from its "competition" in several respects. The song features basic "combo" instrumentation heard on many recordings of the era (electric guitar, organ, bass, drums), modal (dorian) inflections in the harmony and melody of the verse, and a basic rock beat pattern; in the chorus it features functional harmony, "closed" phrase structure (a type of phrasing associated with functional harmony and "rhyming" periodic structure), a minimum either of instrumental riffing ("open" phrase structure) or of melodic variation on the part of the lead singer, and little of the rhythmic play found in contemporaneous R&B or rock songs. Instrumentally, the verse features timpani, an instrument rarely found in R&B or rock songs, while the arrangement uses other "novelty" percussion instruments throughout the piece.[6] The transition between verse and chorus contains a modulation of a kind – C minor (dorian) to G-flat major – that is harmonically daring and rare in the popular music of the period.

"This Diamond Ring" also contains several specific references to contemporaneous popular tunes. The harmonic progression of the chorus resembles that found in many Lennon-McCartney songs: the descending bass (G-flat/F/E-flat/D-flat) is reminiscent of "Bad to Me," while the vi–iii (E-flat minor to B-flat minor) movement is found in many of the most popular Beatles songs ("Please Please Me," "I Want to Hold Your Hand," "She Loves You," "And I Love Her," to name a few). The melodic turn on "true" ("if you find someone whose heart is *true*") also resembles similar turns in many Beatles songs (e.g., "Please Please Me" – "Last night I said these words to *my* girl"; "Do You Want to Know a Secret" – "nobody knows, just we *two*") and in many other popular songs from the period. In other words, the musical style of "This Diamond Ring" skims aspects from contemporary rock songs, cobbles a "hook" together out of other hooks from successful songs, and is then produced and arranged from the aesthetic vantage point of "easy-listening" music.

As in the cover songs of R&B hits during the fifties, the musical profile of "This Diamond Ring" indicates an attempt by the music industry to produce a "rock" song according to the old Tin Pan Alley formula: a song is written by a more or less anonymous group of staff songwriters; a producer or A & R ("artists and repertoire") man assembles a group of studio musicians, hires an arranger, and organizes this around a particular singer, whose image is complemented by the song lyrics. The link to Tin Pan Alley aesthetic values was recognized by radio programmers and the music industry at large when *Billboard* included Gary Lewis and the Playboys in their rankings of the top "Easy Listening" (the category for Tin Pan Alley survivors and "middle-of-the-road" music) artists of 1965. Of the artists mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, only Petula Clark was listed in the "Easy Listening" rankings, which also included Herb Alpert and the Tijuana Brass, Robert Goulet, Frank Sinatra, and the San Remo Golden Strings.

The description of the musical features of "This Diamond Ring" has thus far stressed its "standardized" features, portraying it as little more than the product of a musical assembly line. However, "This Diamond Ring" is not without its "individualized" elements: in addition to the aforementioned modulation, it possesses a catchy hook, and features competent instrumental performances, especially that of noted LA session drummer, Hal Blaine.[7] Far from being automatons, some of the other musicians behind the scenes later became recognized as "creative" popular musicians. One of the co-songwriters, Al Kooper, went on to fame as a session musician for Bob Dylan's early electric recordings and as a member of the Blues Project, an innovative blues-rock band; and Leon Russell, keyboardist and arranger for these sessions, became known as a solo rock artist in the late sixties, and as the director for Joe Cocker's "Mad Dogs and Englishmen" tour, both musical roles ostensibly far removed from the "pop" world of "This Diamond Ring." Of course, these "rock" music worlds were unavoidably saturated with their own form of commercialism as well; however, they were more successful (and interested) in effacing the signs of commerce and substituting signs of artistry than were the perpetrators of "schlock-rock."

Despite this attempt to salvage a measure of musical value for "This Diamond Ring," the case history and synchronic comparison presented would seem to be little more than a study of how "non-musical" factors can determine the popularity of a song. And this study largely tells a story of a passive audience of consumers manipulated by the will of the music industry. If the producers of Gary Lewis and the Playboys were trying to manipulate the audience, then they did a remarkably consistent

job for the remainder of 1965: although none of the subsequent releases equaled the chart success of "This Diamond Ring," "Count Me In" (number two in May), "Save Your Heart for Me" (number two in August), and "Everybody Loves a Clown" (number four in November) all performed well, a track record achieved by few teenybop (or non-teenybop) acts. Clearly, Gary Lewis fitted many of the physical (young, clean-cut but not too attractive) and sociological (white, bourgeois) requirements for his position in the pop pantheon of the time, and his hit recordings circulated widely, receiving maximum exposure to the widest possible audience.

What is interesting is how poorly the songs attributed to Gary Lewis and the Playboys have stood the test of time. Compared to another song released in 1965, "In the Midnight Hour," "This Diamond Ring" enjoyed much greater pop success at the time. However, in the years since then, "In the Midnight Hour" has become enshrined in the canon of "classic rock," recognized as a song with enduring appeal beyond the moment of its appearance, while the appeal of "This Diamond Ring" remains inextricably tied to its moment.

There are several approaches to trying to understand the fluctuations in value that occur during a text's historical reception. One way of theorizing these aesthetic judgments is by emphasizing the importance of a synchronic analysis of a series of historical moments rather than by relying on a purely diachronic approach; this emphasis helps develop an idea of convention (or "horizon of expectations") against which we may understand a specific work.[8] These cross-sectional analyses permit the understanding of categories and hierarchies of styles and genres that gain meaning in relation to one another rather than in isolation, thereby avoiding the overprivileging of "innovation" that often occurs in diachronic historical narratives about art. These analyses may also permit us to understand the aesthetic "questions to which these works pose answers." Therefore, a text continues to elicit interest if the questions to which it posed an answer continue to be asked.

We have already situated "This Diamond Ring" within the popular music field of 1965, and explored how its "meaning" derives at least partially from its similarity to and difference from contemporary styles, as well as from a connection to stylistic precursors. Using this information, we can venture that "This Diamond Ring" answered questions like the following: how can a song in the teenybop genre incorporate musical elements from the Beatles and other popular songs, orchestral effects from popular TV shows, and still remain recognizably a teenybop song? Can someone who can neither sing nor play, nor look particularly

appealing in an androgynous fashion, become a teen idol? Is it still possible to create a teen idol, the heyday of which, 1955–1962, has already passed? Can the forces responsible for a popular music production – songwriters, A & R men, radio programmers, record executives, instrumentalists, singers, fan magazines – by themselves provide the impetus to make someone a star?[9] That this last question was important is pretty much conceded by Morthland's statement quoted earlier: Snuff Garrett (a leading producer of teen-oriented popular music) "was intrigued by the idea of breaking a group fronted by the child of a celebrity."

However, the aesthetic questions that "This Diamond Ring" answered have lost their relevance. Gary Lewis and the Playboys were succeeded by the Monkees (who, even more than the Playboys, benefitted from extensive television exposure; but who, unlike the Playboys, were allowed to play and sing to various extents on their recordings), and then by a plethora of teen idols such as the Partridge Family (featuring teenybop star David Cassidy), the Osmond Brothers (with teenybop idol Donny), and Bobby Sherman, all of whom provided points of identification for teenybop fans after Gary Lewis no longer could (or was no longer promoted in such a way so that he could).

Another approach to understanding the reception of "This Diamond Ring" could employ the Bakhtinian opposition of monologism/dialogism. According to Bakhtin, in a dialogic text "consciousness . . . is always found in intense relationship with another consciousness . . . Every experience, every thought of a character is internally dialogic, adorned with polemic, filled with struggle, or is on the contrary open to inspiration from outside itself." On the other hand, "Monologism, at its extreme, denies the existence outside itself of another consciousness with equal rights and equal responsibilities, another I with equal rights (*thou*) . . . Monologue is finalized and deaf to the other's response, does not expect it and does not acknowledge in it any decisive force."[10] Could it simply be that a work such as Wilson Pickett's "In the Midnight Hour" is charged with "polemic," is "open to inspiration outside itself" in a way that "This Diamond Ring" isn't? That "In the Midnight Hour" addresses an audience which still exists? "This Diamond Ring" was not produced primarily to inspire participation among its listeners; instead, it presented itself as an object to be consumed, interpellating its listeners merely as objects of consciousness, and not "another consciousness" (although it is possible that those "objects" did occasionally dance and sing along). "In the Midnight Hour" demands physical response in dance, and in its blues and gospel references summons up a social collectivity absent in the

world of serialized consumption evoked by "This Diamond Ring" (although some of these socially collective "subjects" were undoubtedly happy to "consume" this recording as well). By specifically "targeting" an audience of young consumers, the production combine responsible for "This Diamond Ring" cannot acknowledge these listeners as having "rights and . . . responsibilities" equal to their own. "In the Midnight Hour" comes from a tradition of R&B music which assumed an aesthetic of participation between a performer and an audience of adult listeners, hence the more mature subject matter of the lyrics.

Yet another approach to this matter of historical reception could consider the idea of musical coding and listener "competence." Before addressing these concepts at any length, I will touch briefly on the idea of "undercoding" and "overcoding" as a way of explicating the reception history of "This Diamond Ring." In an undercoded piece, "aspects of a piece . . . are received within a general sense of 'understanding.' Pieces in this category may create their own individual codes." Examples of undercoded pieces would be avant-garde art music, and "free" jazz. On the other hand, in an overcoded piece, "every detail is covered by a network of explicit codes and subcodes. A piece in this category may be so tightly bound to socialized conventions as to be 'about' its code." Examples of overcoded pieces would include muzak and advertising jingles.[11] Twenty-nine years later, "This Diamond Ring" seems to be relatively "overcoded." Aspects of this recording such as the novelty sound effects may have sounded cute and even "novel" at the time, but now seem tightly wedded to mid-sixties situation comedy soundtracks. The harmonic and melodic hooks discussed earlier, which may have appealed at the time, again seem reminiscent only of their era, without much resonance for latter-day listeners. The teenybop lyrics, too, project an innocence and naïveté with little relevance for the modern teenybopper, who has probably been exposed to Madonna's *Erotica* despite the efforts of Tipper Gore. The lack of rhythmic and pitch inflection in the vocal part renders it ultimately predictable, a quality not contradicted by the competent but understated instrumental parts (and this would lessen its value even for a kind of "distracted listening" which may privilege physical involvement). There seem to be no competing perspectives projected by this song, nothing that prompts us to return to it again and again, no irony, satire, or self-reflection emanating from the song's persona: "who wants to buy this diamond ring?" asks the persona, who merely wants to find "someone whose heart is true." What could be simpler?

However, the preceding discussion risks glorifying and romanticizing the audience for "In the Midnight Hour" at the expense of the audience for "This Diamond Ring"; and it risks simplifying the extraordinary complexity of historical processes and their impact on aesthetic evaluation. In the end, the adaptability of cultural forms depends on an "irregular chain of historical transactions" involving countless negotiations, exchanges, and competing representations, which come into prominence or recede based on fluctuating power relations.[12] The chapters that follow explore these "irregular transactions" in more detail than has the discussion of "This Diamond Ring." For now, let us admit that we cannot fully account for why "In the Midnight Hour" is "classic rock," while "This Diamond Ring" is not.

I

Codes and competences

The previous discussion of styles, genres, aesthetics, and reception touched on several factors that influence interpretation and meaning; however, we have not really explored how musical sounds may convey meaning except through borrowings and connections to other songs, and through a brief synopsis of the content of the lyrics. The notion of the "musical code" offers a way of theorizing the connections between musical sound and such "extra-musical" factors as media image, biographical details, mood, and historical and social associations; it can explicate the connection between an individual piece and the conventions of the period that surround it, the connection between a particular piece and the general *langue* from which it derives, and permit us to speculate about the connection between the musical sounds we hear and the "human universe" implied by the lyrics.[13] The "musical code" may be explained as that aspect of musical communication that describes the relationship of a semantic system to a syntactic system, the relationship of "content" to "expression."[14] Richard Middleton has distinguished between two levels of coding, what he terms "primary" (form and syntactic relationships) and "secondary" (content and connotation) signification, both of which feed into a number of "general codes," ordered here from the most general to the relatively specific: *langue*, norms, sub-norms, dialects, styles, genres, sub-codes, idiolects, works, and performances.[15] This chapter thus far has informally discussed the following levels of "general codes" with respect to "This Diamond Ring":

a. *norms.* In this case, the mainstream conventions governing the post-1900 period of popular music;
b. *sub-norms.* The conventions associated with a particular era, in this case mid-1960s pop music – the importance and unusual quality of the modulation, the relationship of the song's hooks to other songs of the era;
c. *style.* Teenybop and Tin Pan Alley pop in the context of British rock, Motown soul, R&B;
d. *idiolect.* The style traits associated with particular performers, e.g., the Beatles, Gary Lewis;
e. *works and performances.* "This Diamond Ring" as recorded by Gary Lewis and the Playboys.

Middleton discusses three main forms of "primary signification": *sens* (links "between the verbal signifiers and the musical signifying process"), "auto-reflection" (the way in which structurally equivalent units refer to each other, including quotation, stylistic allusion, and parody), and "positional value" (the value of an element based on its syntactic position – this is the level that corresponds to the metalanguage of music analysis).[16] On this level, we have discussed structural relationships in "This Diamond Ring" using terms such as "verse" (section A) and "chorus" (section B), the positional importance of certain harmonic features (the progression of vi–iii, the modulation), and melodic events (the "turn" on "true"); the stylistic allusion of "auto-reflection" (these hooks "sound like" the Beatles); and we have employed *sens* in the use of terms such as "hook," "open and closed phrasing," and "melodic turn."

We have also touched on a number of factors in the discussion of "This Diamond Ring" that could be grouped in the category of "secondary signification," including the following:

a. *Intentional values.* These are recognized, intended connotations of specific structural or thematic effects: the finger cymbals and wind chimes in the introduction connote novelty;
b. *Positional implications.* These are connotations arising from structural position: the memorable melodic line and harmonic sequence in the chorus create the hook;
c. *Ideological choices.* These are particular, preferred meanings, selected from a range of possible interpretations: "This Diamond Ring" evokes a world of serialized consumption as opposed to the social collectivity of "In the Midnight Hour";

d. *Emotive connotations.* These refer to the agreed affective implications of musical events: teen idols singing teenybop songs are associated with vulnerability, need, self-pity, loyalty;

e. *Style connotations.* These are the associations summoned up by coding at the general level of style: teenybop pop means adolescent, middle-class, predominantly female fans, listening by themselves or in small groups;

f. *Axiological connotations.* These refer to moral or political evaluations of musical pieces, styles or genres: teenybop is a commercial sell-out/an empowering form of identity/a benign form of entertainment.[17]

It should be obvious that the "secondary" level of signification is related to, and ultimately inextricable from, the "primary" level (despite the implications of the terms "primary" and "secondary," the question of which one of the levels is the foundational one is moot). That is, categories of "secondary signification" such as "intentional values" and "positional implications" depend on knowledge of the syntactic relationships described by "primary signification." Conversely, certain aspects of "primary" signification depend on "secondary" signification: *sens* cannot exist without the discourses (and their attendant connotations) surrounding various styles and genres, without the language of musical description which arises out of specific contexts; "positional value" can rarely be perceived without an awareness of "positional implications" (although these may not be admissible or overt in certain theoretical contexts); and the aspects of quotation and stylistic allusion contained in "auto-reflection" can be either "primary" or "secondary" depending on whether the act of interpretation emphasizes either expression or content. In general, Middleton sees the difference between these types of signification as the difference "between the roles of individual effects, privileging mechanisms of connotation, and of synthesized syntactic structures, privileging primary types of significations."[18]

The idea of the "code" has been criticized for its reductionism, that is, for arbitrarily limiting the range of possible relationships between signifiers and signifieds.[19] But focusing on the purely relational aspects of every signifier to every signified without grouping them leaves us with no way of interpreting the resulting sign. Without the concept of the "code" there can be no connotation, meaning, or "communication," which throws the emphasis from meaning back to structure. And indeed, this is what Jean-Jacques Nattiez, the best-known critic of the idea of the musical code, posits as an alternative: "[We can] consider that, all in all,

structuralism was not wrong in recognizing some level of material immanence in the text – a level that cannot be outlined, and that is not exclusive. This insight is worth retaining, even when pure structuralism has proven unworkable."[20] The recourse to "immanence" relegates discussion of a musical text to an ahistorical, non-cultural vacuum, a vacuum without perceiving subjects. It is true that, in some sense, codes *are* inevitably reductionist, as is any device that attempts to categorize or group utterances; but they do permit discussion of *meaning*, which forms an important part of the everyday discourse about music: "kd lang is sensuous," "Chris Isaak's guitar evokes wide-open spaces," "Springsteen means what he says," "I don't understand contemporary art music," "the Who's *Tommy* was pompous, the death of rock."

If musical meaning is conveyed through a code that is sent or produced by somebody then it also must be received or consumed by somebody. This raises the question of "competence": what is the relationship between sender and receiver, and how does this affect the interpretation of musical messages? Gino Stefani has outlined a model of musical competence which, in its hierarchies, parallels Middleton's presentation of general codes.[21] Stefani presents five levels of musical competence:

> *General Codes* (GC): basic conventions through which we perceive or construct or interpret every experience (and therefore every sound experience). This is the "anthropological" level of musical competence that everyone may exercise;
>
> *Social Practices* (SP): cultural institutions such as language, religion, industrial work, technology, sciences, etc., including musical practices (concert, ballet, opera, criticism);
>
> *Musical Techniques* (MT): theories, methods, and devices which are more or less specific and exclusive to musical practices, such as instrumental techniques, scales, composition forms, etc. It is at this level that one usually finds the definition of music as "the art of sounds";
>
> *Styles* (St): historical periods, cultural movements, authors, or groups of works: that is, the particular ways in which MT, SP, and GC are concretely realized;
>
> *Opus* (Op): single musical works or events in their concrete individuality.

Of course, different listeners will bring these levels to bear in varying ways based on their experiences. Stefani thus describes two basic

competence types, which he describes as "high competence" and "popular competence." High competence focuses on pieces as autonomous works, while popular competence experiences pieces more on the levels of the General Codes (GC) and Social Practices (SP). Moreover, the degree to which a piece may be decoded depends on the range of levels available to an individual listener: a maximum "signification effect" would occur when a piece is interpreted on all levels; a relatively weak effect would occur if a General Code were interpreted without any information from the other levels, or, conversely, if a piece were interpreted purely on the Op level – as would occur if a piece were perceived solely as an autonomous work, without any social significance or connotative meaning.[22] Stefani also indicates that there may be particular regions of the GC which are of interest to those with high competence, and aspects of Op coding which are the province of those with popular competence. Thus, frequent contrast at the GC level might interest those with high competence, while specific knowledge about popular songs and performers may be the province of those with largely popular competence. Stefani's basic competence types recall the formulations of Pierre Bourdieu, with his notions of "popular" and "legitimate" aesthetics. According to Bourdieu, these aesthetic positions emphasize either function or form, and are related to the amount and type of "cultural capital" (acquired through a conjunction of class background and academic training) possessed by an individual.[23] In other words, listener "competence" in this formulation refers to the range of subject positions available to a listener dependent on that individual's history and memory.

The advantage of Stefani's model over either a purely structuralist emphasis on codes which ignores their reception or a Chomskyian notion of linguistic competence which posits a trans-cultural human "nature" into which linguistic structures are programmed, is that it introduces the notion of context. There are no ideal "addressers" or "addressees"; "context" functions not only in the Jakobsonian sense of providing a context for a specific message, but also in telling us about the larger social and cultural context, about the individual backgrounds of the senders and receivers of the message, and about the background of the message itself.[24] Furthermore, "codes" are no more static than are the types of competence that listening subjects may bring to bear on them. As discussed earlier, an "undercoded" piece may create new codes; similarly, in the act of interpretation, the way in which we "decode" a piece may change our sense of the piece we are hearing, necessitating an infinite series of new perspectives in the act of listening.

A brief example should suffice to demonstrate how these competence levels can operate in the listening process. At the GC level, we may initially perceive "This Diamond Ring" as a series of events broken up by brief pauses, followed by uninterrupted activity which still is irregular, followed by more flowing activity. On the SP level, a listener socialized by Euro-American musical practices may interpret these events heard as an "introduction," followed by a statement of an idea, then followed by a "chorus," which suggests dancing, physical movement, and singing along more strongly than the preceding material. It is here that vaguely affective qualities may become apparent: feelings of vulnerability, resoluteness, comradely advice, all parts of the "human universe" that the song inhabits, created by the words and emphasized by musical codes. At the MT level, the listener hears introduction, verse, and chorus delineated by specific rhythmic, melodic, and harmonic ideas. At the St level, correlations could be made between this song and other songs, grouped in various ways (Beatles songs, British rock, Tin Pan Alley pop music, teenybop), and even historicized (this is *mid-sixties* pop). At the Op level, there is explicit recognition of the song, "This Diamond Ring," performed by Gary Lewis and the Playboys.

II

Who is the author?

This chapter has already touched on some of the problematic aspects of "authorship" in popular song in the somewhat quirky instance of "This Diamond Ring." In some respects, that song was not anomalous: frequently there is no single origin for the popular music text; and what is perceived by the audience as the emotional focal point of the song (the lead vocalist) may or may not be responsible for other aspects of the song's production (songwriting, instrumental performance, arranging, engineering). In some cases, there may be a relatively tight link between functions: in the case of the singer-songwriter, for example, the lead singer is responsible both for writing the song and for playing an instrument around which the accompaniment is based. In this category, the song's lyrics usually fall into the "confessional" mode, appearing to reveal some aspects of the singer-songwriter's inner experience. At one level, the idea that there exists some correspondence between the biography of the singer-songwriter and his or her songs seems unquestionable. Music magazines and biographies often focus on the parallels between songs and the singer's lives: thus, Joni Mitchell's "My

Old Man" is "about" her relationship to Graham Nash; James Taylor's "Sunshine, Sunshine" is "about" his sister Kate, and his "Knocking Around the Zoo" is "about" his stay in a mental hospital – indeed, the sometimes explicitly autobiographical references invite these kinds of associations. These associations then lead to statements such as "[Joni Mitchell's] primary purpose is to create something meaningful out of random moments of pain and pleasure in her life."[25]

Yet there are distinct disadvantages to this way of conceptualizing the relationship between singer and song. Even for singer-songwriters it is questionable whether the song *only* expresses the autobiographical details of their lives. At the most basic level, if this were true it would mean that a singer-songwriter could only write or sing sad songs when sad, happy songs when happy. At another level, there exists the possibility that a song and a recording may present a range of affect that *exceeds* the composer/performer's intentions: listeners may interpret a song in a way that has little to do with what the performer "felt" when he or she recorded or wrote it. At still another level, the notion of a strict identity between lived experience and a song's meaning eliminates the effect of the song as a musical performance: the musical codes and the manner in which the song is performed may either contradict or reinforce the content in the lyrics, adding new layers of nuance by "acting out," inflecting, and contextualizing them. There is thus the possibility – even in a performance by a solo singer-songwriter in which singer, instrumentalist, arranger, and composer are one and the same person – of a *multiplicity* of authorial voices in the musical text.[26] For example, in many Bob Dylan songs in which the lyrics express rage or scorn towards someone, there are moments in which his voice conveys a sense of compassion and tenderness (e.g., the line "I didn't realize how young you were" from "One of Us Must Know [Sooner or Later]"); or, conversely, Dylan gives an ironic or humorous lilt to lyrics that could otherwise seem lustful (e.g., the title line from "I Want You"; compare this to the menacing affect produced by Elvis Costello's rendering of the same line in his "I Want You"). This does not even touch on the way in which other instrumentalists or singers may contribute "voices" to group performances, or on what happens when a singer-songwriter performs somebody else's song: when James Taylor performs "You've Got a Friend," does it mean that he actually wants to console a particular person, or that he empathizes with the desire of Carole King (the songwriter) to console somebody? The fact that Carole King sings in the background of James Taylor's recording further complicates the relationship between the authorial voices heard in the recording, and

between the performers and the composer. Belief in literal correspondences could lead to a whole series of specious interpretations about the "friendship" between Carole King and James Taylor, or the possible friendships between both of them and a third party (and, indeed, this kind of speculation often fuels a certain kind of "Paul-Is-Dead" interest among members of the audience).[27]

The concept of authorship becomes more complex when we examine songs in genres other than that of the singer-songwriter. We have already touched on some of the complexities of the situation when the roles of songwriter, instrumentalist, arranger, producer, singer, and "star" are divided as in "This Diamond Ring." Group situations in which there are a multiplicity of singers, songwriters, and instrumentalists present a ready-made assortment of "voices," which individually do not maintain a strict identity between performer and authorial voice (or persona). For example, in descriptions of the Beatles' personalities, John Lennon was typically characterized as fiery and belligerent, Paul McCartney as sensitive and romantic, George Harrison as serious and spiritual. Yet John sang ballads, Paul sang hard-rock tunes, and George sang silly ditties. They sang together in different combinations, assumed different roles, and contributed additional "voices" through their instrumental parts. And, of course, there are other pop music contexts, including "This Diamond Ring," "Downtown," "My Girl," and many more, which feature different degrees of creative input between the various people responsible for a pop recording (songwriter, producer, singer, arranger, instrumentalist), and the play of "voices" that present themselves to the listener.

This idea of a multiplicity of voices within the text brings us close to Roland Barthes' idea cited earlier, that a "text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination," an idea which questions the importance of the belief in a single, originary author. Kaja Silverman has described how a film may create a sense of multiple authorial voices through characters, plot, dialogue, and the cinematic apparatus itself; these voices can then combine to create an author "inside the text." Nonetheless, there remains the possibility that through the insistent repetition of certain ideas (in lyrics and music) and through the association of these ideas with ideas and images outside the text (interviews, biographies, etc.), the author "inside the text" may inscribe the author "outside the text" as one of the text's voices; this is the effect we observed in the case of the singer-songwriters. This suggests how we may sense that musicians are expressing "themselves" in song as *one* of the many personae they project musically.[28] In the chapters that follow, one of my concerns is to trace