Loretta Lynn: Writin' Life

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Abstract
The release of Loretta Lynn's 2004 album Van Leer Rose welcomed back after 33 years one of the premier feminist voices in recorded music. The songs that Loretta wrote in 60s and early 70s were some of the most controversial and politically charged to hit the airwaves. They encompassed a microcosm of issues that rural women were facing including the changing sexual roles of women, ideas on marriage, the ravages of war and substance abuse. This textual analysis looks at the 94 songs that Loretta wrote and co-wrote between the years 1960 to 1972 (the year which she stopped writing), as well as the music of Van Leer Rose. By looking at Lynn's writing, we begin to understand the viewpoints of this trailblazing artist and how she reflected her life and the social times in her music. It is a testament to her that these works remain as timely and as politically charged today as they did 40 years ago.

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Recommended Citation

References


8. Consequently, it does not include many of the songs that are closely associated with Lynn but not expressly written by her. While hits such as "Wine, Women and Song" (1963), “Happy Birthday” (1964), “Woman of the World” (1968) and “One’s On the Way” (1971) are important, they are not a reflection of her writing, and are thus not the focus of this article.


11. Others female C & W artists like Jean Shepard, Goldie Hill and Wanda Jackson did have sporadic chart success in the 1950s but none to the level of Wells.


21. The songs original writing credit on 45 rpm and the album Songs From My Heart (DL 74620) went to Oliver Doolittle, Lynn’s husband. It was common practice in 50s and 60s to give song credit to a family member in order to spread the tax liability or as a personal gift. Since the release, Lynn has taken ownership of the song as her own.

22. This isn’t to construe that these songs were written solely by men. Betty Sue Perry contributed the top-20 hits The Other Women (1963) and Wine, Women and Song (1963) to Lynn. It must be said though that her other 6 hits were written by men.


24. Lynn has always had a love/hate relationship with male radio disc jockeys. In her autobiography she accuses them of being fearful that some of her songs such as The Pill (1972) would challenge men’s way of thinking. (Lynn, 90).


30. In 1970, Brown frequently referred to the world for young women being much “happier” than in 1960. She also claimed that there were more good jobs for young women and a greater degree of drug use.


32. Banner claims, as do other media scholars that although many media reported the women burning the bras at the protests, they actually only threw them into a giant container rejecting conformity, but the container was not lit on fire. The concept of angry “bra burning” feminists was one that conservatives often used. p. 234.


34. When the song was released in 1975 it was without credit to Lynn. This was due to the contract dispute with the Wilburn Brothers. Recent releases of the song include 3 other writers including her husband, Doolittle.
35. There are many reasons why Lynn quit recording her own material at the top of her career. Her touring schedule by 1971 not only included stops around the U.S. but in Europe as well. Demands for television and personal appearances were increasing. Most importantly, she believed her lifetime contract with the Wilburns kept her growing professionally. When told that she would have to honor the contract, Lynn in true rebellious fashion simply stopped writing.


Loretta Lynn: Writin’ Life. Danny Shipka. Published: 1 January 2010. by New Prairie Press. in Online Journal of Rural Research & Policy. Online Journal of Rural Research & Policy, Volume 5; doi:10.4148/ojrrp.v5i4.205. Publisher Website. Google Scholar. Album Loretta Lynn Writes ‘em and Sings ‘em. Fist City Lyrics. [Verse 1] You’ve been making your brags around town That you’ve been a loving my man But the man I love When he picks up trash He puts it in a garbage can And that’s what you look like to me And what I see is a pity You’d better close your face and stay out of my way. In song and life, Lynn could be a fierce lioness when it came to fighting for her man. As chronicled in Coal Miner’s Daughter, she had her hands full trying to tame a hard-drinking womanizer who felt threatened by his wife’s incredible success. On “Fist City,” for example, Lynn deliciously taunts a silly little thing whose interest in Lynn’s husband is destined to earn her a one-way invitation to a beatdown. Lynn herself states in her autobiography, Still Woman Enough Comprised entirely of songs written (or co-written) by Loretta, the album premieres new compositions alongside soulful reinterpretations of enduring classics from her catalog. “This new record means so much to me, but this last year I had to focus on my health and I decided to hold up the release,” said Loretta. Loretta Lynn’s life is still a work in progress. She’s still out there on the road, still writing songs and still recording them as only she can. “I ain’t a star – a star is something up in the night sky,” says Loretta Lynn. “People say to me, ‘You’re a legend.’ I’m not a legend.