

# Joan Baez: The Music Is Unimportant

By JOSEPH HASS

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CHICAGO — The young woman endured a few routine questions about her concert in the opera house. Then, in the voice of a child wheedling a favor, Joan Baez asked, "Do we have to talk about music?"

No, what you talk about with Joan Baez is war and peace, civil rights and civil disobedience, Vietnam, black power and Negro rioting, the hippies and the acidheads, resistance to the draft and, her most important commitment, nonviolence.

For not only does she possess one of the loveliest of human voices and a face that could serve as an analog for serenity, she also seems blessed with a beautiful soul. Whether or not you agree with her, it is impossible to doubt the sincerity of her dedication to the causes she believes are just.

Miss Baez was at her home in Carmel, California, where she conducts the Institute for the Study of non-violence, when I spoke to her by phone.

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THE INSTITUTE right now is in the midst of one of its summer sessions. The students, limited to 25 at a time, learn the philosophy and practice of nonviolent protest by open discussions of the writings of Gandhi and other practitioners of this form of social action.

"We don't try to teach anything, to indoctrinate them. We want to overcome what school has done to them, to allow them to think. It's an unbrainwashing job to begin with.

"We have a sort of schedule, and we stick to it, but it's all open discussion. At 1 o'clock, there is exercise, whatever anyone feels like doing—walks, playing ball. Then at 1:30 we sell a bad lunch for 50 cents; it's sort of crummy, but we don't put any emphasis on that sort of thing. At two o'clock the first seminar begins with 20 minutes of silence. Some people can't take it, and they can get up and walk around, but most people stick it out."

Mostly they discuss the writings of Gandhi but, "If a GI walks in from Fort Ord with questions about Vietnam, we might spend the whole time answering him." At the time of the Detroit rioting, a Negro from that city visited the school to air his mixed emotions, and the students spent 2½ hours talking with him.

"It turned out that, emotionally, he was a black power man," Miss Baez says. "It's understandable that the colored can feel that way, but it's so exasperating. They're doing just what the other groups in this country have done, trying to isolate themselves in the worst kind of tribalism.

"I think black power is just as silly as any other kind of 'power.' I really and truly think that power corrupts, except for the power of love. It's just more of the isolation process of another kind of nationalism which is the worst thing in the world today, this business of 128 nation-states."

The 26-year-old singer doesn't feel that the surge of Negro violence means a failure, or an abandonment, of nonviolence in the civil rights movement. "Not enough people in the movement were truly nonviolent, anyway. Dr. (Martin Luther) King is, but too many of them felt it was just a tactic to use to grab power, to become like the American white, and who needs that.

"What happens is that they use nonviolence as a tactic for years but, if their commitment isn't truly to it, their patience begins to wear thin. And those who are not really nonviolent may switch to violence. If their real roots were in nonviolence, they would feel that the white man is their brother, and this leaves room for some kind of understanding. That's what is needed. The movement is falling apart because civil rights has never meant human rights to enough people."

Of fiery agitators such as Stokely Carmichael and H. Rap Brown, Carmichael's successor as head of the misnamed Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee, Joan says, "From the things I've read that they've said, if they've been quoted correctly, they just sound . . . I don't know what they sound like . . . just insane. This willingness to take life just adds to the violence heap.

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AMONG JOAN'S crusades is the encouragement of young men to refuse to serve in the armed forces. "We've got a number of young men at the Institute



JOAN BAEZ: Nonviolence is the key.

who will be going to jail soon for refusing to cooperate with the draft. This we belong to . . . I think it's called just The Resistance. What we do is to align ourselves with young men who resist the draft, encourage them openly and give them support. This will make us liable to the same penalty that they face, five years in jail.

"We've set Oct. 16 for the big step. That's when some 500 young men all over the country will just turn in their draft cards and begin a series of non-co-operation with the draft laws.

"I'm very brave when I talk about going to jail. Maybe it's because I know that sometime I will go. It's not the cheeriest thought in the world, but the issues are important. I mean, what is my going to jail to protest the war in Vietnam compared with what others have to face, their children being burned up and their sons going to Vietnam to kill or to be killed."

Joan denied she ever said that she would not go to Vietnam to entertain American soldiers, but that she would travel to Hanoi to perform for the North Vietnamese. "What I said was that I would perform for both Vietnams if I felt that what I did was politically relevant or useful. But I would not perform for any boy to help him have nice dreams that night and then get up in the morning to get his head blown off."

The solution in Vietnam, she feels, is unilateral, unconditional withdrawal of American forces. "Our troops should get out of Vietnam, period. They could take along with them those South Vietnamese leaders whose heads would be severed if they remained, and give them sanctuary somewhere."

Such one-sided action for peace, she believes, would not simply open us to a lot of pushing around by the Communist nations. "First of all if we showed the first sign of human decency, we would gain the respect all over the world that our country completely lacks now. We're just as out of favor as the Germans ever were. If we took one civilized step, the world for the most part would heave a sign of relief."

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AND IF the United States pursued a policy of international nonviolence? "I know what people say, 'The enemy would invade our country. What would we do then?' We could say, 'Come on over and have some tea or matzo balls. But what if they shoot you? People ask! OK, they shoot you, but if violence is the only course we follow, someone is going to shoot us anyway.

"What has to occur is worldwide nonviolence, men and women willing to be nonviolent soldiers. The biggest thing we have to fight isn't violence, but passivity. Nonviolence isn't passive. That's one of the worst and most common misunderstandings of it. . . ."

Nonviolence means you have to be willing to give up your passivity and fight the way Gandhi fought. You have to be willing to give your lives and your minds

and your hearts to fight against violence. There's no guarantee you won't get your brains blown out, no more than the guarantee that your chances of living are better if violence is used.

"One trouble is too many people think of nonviolence in terms of what happened to the Jews under Hitler. They were not nonviolent fighters, they were simply passive, and that's not the same thing.

"My favorite example of imaginative nonviolence took place in Montgomery, Ala., at the beginning of the civil rights movement. The Ku Klux Klan came into the Negro community and warned that, at 11 o'clock that night, they were going to ride through it and that if any Negroes were on the streets, if any lights were on, more than a cross would be burned.

"That night, when the night-riders galloped into the community, they found all of the lights and the radios and the phonographs on. And all of the people were out in the streets, smiling and throwing confetti and streamers and shouting, 'Welcome! Welcome! The Kluxer didn't know what to do, they were confused and split among themselves about how to react and they rode away and never came back."

Another of Miss Baez' means of protest against the Vietnam war is her refusal to pay the percentage of her income tax she feels would be used for armaments. "I pay 28 per cent of what they're asking for now, and they collect the rest by liens and attaching concert fees and so on. Some people say what's the point of it since the government gets it in the end anyway? I know they get it, plus fines, but it costs them money to get it so it evens out along the line.

"And now there are at least two groups organizing to spread this kind of protest, the War Tax Refusal, people who make the government take the money from their incomes so they don't have to pay it. And the Taxpayers Against War, who pay the tax and plan soon to sue the government to regain that amount spent for whatever their consciences do not agree with.

"Even if nothing comes of this, it does raise a huge question in the minds of some people who might never have thought about how their money was being used. A Saigonese monk visited the Institute one day and he said, 'Many people in my country have heard of the woman in the United States who would not volunteer her money to drop bombs on our people' and that's more than anyone could ask for as results go."

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THE TIME was drawing to a close, but there was still time to ask her opinion on some topics of current interest.

What of her old friend, singer-composer Bob Dylan, of whom not much has been heard since he was seriously injured some time ago in a motorcycle accident? "Oh, I haven't seen him for a long time. All I know is that he's in good health and that now he and his wife have two children."

And oh yes, about the music in her concert. "Well, the only change will be in repertoire. I've grown up a little bit, not a whole lot, but it will be different. I was a little tired of singing the same old songs. You have to change, you know. So I'll be doing some Simon and Garfunkel songs, 'Dangling Conversation.' Some Timmy Hardins, some songs I wrote the music for. A woman I've still never met, Nina Dusheck, sent me some poems.

And what of LSD and the acid scene? "A., I don't think there's a shortcut to enlightenment. B., I think that drugs can be terribly harmful physically. C., It's a bore. And D., I'm a puritan and I don't believe in taking drugs."

How about the hippies and the Flower Power thing? "Nothing has proved to me that it's that gentle. I mean, those kids are picking up a lot of bad habits from values that they're supposed to be rejecting. Like stealing. Again, I can understand why they're acting this way, the world being the way it is, and I really love them for it. But what they're doing is conforming as much as anyone else is. And I keep thinking, 'What if the potential energy of the hippie movement could ever be channeled into something constructive, like nonviolence?'"

And what of her personal life and of her confession, once, long ago, that sometimes she felt a bit envious and nostalgic when she walked among the homes of suburbia and heard the echo of a slamming screen door? "I don't feel that way anymore. I'm not even secretly interested in being married. I would like to remain rootless, to be able to be as comfortable anywhere in the world as I am at Carmel."

