

10 | '(You Make Me Feel Like) A Natural Woman': Women in Songwriting

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For over a hundred years, the history of popular music has been male-dominated, populated by the men who sing the songs, write the songs, produce the songs, and run the record companies and distribution strategies. The male experience in popular music can therefore be assumed to be well documented. The terrain would look very different without Billie Holiday's 'Fine and Mellow' (1939), Nina Simone's 'Mississippi Goddam' (1964), Carole King's '(You Make Me Feel Like) A Natural Woman' (1967), Joni Mitchell's *Blue* (1971), Kate Bush's 'Wuthering Heights' (1978), or Adele's *19* (or *21*, or *25*, released 2008, 2011, and 2015 respectively). Since Mitchell and King, these examples all come from one tradition: the confessional singer-songwriter that emerged from the 1960s New York folk club scene. As David Shumway has commented, the term singer-songwriter came into use in the early 1970s. Proponents of the idiom, according to him, '[are] not anyone who sings his or her own songs, but a performer whose self-presentation and musical form fit a certain model . . . [Joni Mitchell, Carole King, and others] created a new niche in the popular music market. These singer-songwriters were not apolitical, but they took a confessional stance in their songs, revealing their interior selves and their private struggles.'¹

Lucy O'Brien explains that throughout popular music history, female songwriters have sought to 'make sense of their world, to clear an inviolable space that is theirs rather than the possession of a man'.² The female perspective could be understood from this standpoint: these songs were an authentic representation of the singer-songwriter's experiences, and they were able to connect with their audience through both their music and through sharing a close physical space with the singer-songwriters in the bars and coffee shops in which this tradition began. The four case studies I explore in this chapter – Carole King, Joni Mitchell, Kate Bush, and Adele – are singer-songwriters. I differentiate here between performing singer-songwriters and behind-the-scenes songwriters such as librettist Dorothy Fields (1904–74) or songwriter Diane Warren (b.1956). I explore their early lives and musical experiences, their emergence on the scene as singer-songwriters, and what – if anything – makes their female perspective stand out from the male norm in popular music.

Carole King

Carole King was born Carol Joan Klein on 9 February 1942 in Brooklyn, and added the 'e' to her first name to stand out from two high school peers with the same name. Following in a long line of Jewish entertainers who sought success under a non-ethnic name, she chose 'King' to replace 'Klein'.³ King learnt to play the piano as a child, and was encouraged in this by her parents. She attended James Madison High School in Brooklyn. While a high school student, she volunteered to contribute to the annual James Madison High School Sing, and writes in her autobiography that she found writing and arranging songs very satisfying. She explains that although she performed some of her songs herself, she gained the most pleasure from teaching other students to sing what she had written, eventually forming a doo-wop group from her Advanced Mathematics class (the 'Co-Sines'). Although her main goal at this point was to complete the arrangements and hear them performed, she realised that if she sang one of the four vocal lines herself, she needed to bring in fewer performers.⁴ The focus of her recollections suggests that she did not write songs as a vehicle for herself as performer, but that she performed them as a way to get the music heard.

At this time, King's main musical influences were the popular records that Alan Freed played on his radio shows.⁵ As King recalled: 'The music that had informed the songwriters on the records Alan played was a lot more gritty and diverse than the simple pop ditties, show tunes, and classical music to which I had been listening for most of my life. But I was determined to learn, and the timing in popular music and political history was favourable.'⁶

King recalls how her arranging technique over the years stems from her high school experiences:

In those days I wrote exclusively on piano . . . I've always loved wrapping layers around a melody. When arranging for voices with a band, usually I begin with a foundation consisting of melody, lyrics, and the chords and rhythm coming from my piano. Then I bring in the rhythm section: a drumbeat on a kit with three drums, several cymbals, and a pair of sticks, mallets or brushes; a bass line that's pretty close to what my left hand plays on the piano; a rhythm guitar that complements my piano; and sometimes a lead guitar to add accents and fills to the mix of piano, rhythm guitar, bass and drums. Then I add vocal harmonies. And if I'm lucky enough to have the use of an orchestra, I add a final layer of orchestral instruments.⁷

She was aware that the weakness in her songwriting lay in her lyric writing, commenting:

Though I wasn't good at writing lyrics myself, I knew how important they could be in a pop song . . . Lyrics aimed at my generation didn't need to be good, but they needed to be relevant to the burning issues of a teenager's life. As far as I knew, the biggest concern of girls in the fifties was 'Does he like me?'⁸

After graduating high school in June 1958, she set about obtaining a record contract. While supportive of her endeavours, King's parents encouraged her to attend the nearby Queens College and study for a teaching qualification as a fallback.

King met Gerry Goffin at Queens College, and they began to collaborate on songs, with King writing the music and Goffin the lyrics. By August 1959 they were married and King was pregnant with their first daughter Louise, who was followed later by Sherry. Since leaving high school, King had visited the Brill Building on Broadway regularly to try and sell her songs, and now did so with Goffin. One day in 1960 she bumped into singer-songwriter Neil Sedaka, who suggested she meet with Don Kirshner and Al Nevin, with whose publishing company he had recently signed. She set up a meeting and played them some songs in their office. They suggested she return with Goffin the next day, and the pair were immediately signed with Aldon music, and given an office at 1650 Broadway, which along with 1619 Broadway, was known as the 'Brill Building'. The songwriters hired by Brill Building producers were younger than traditional popular music songwriters, and therefore closer in age to their intended audience. An important development from the pop music that had come before was the inclusion of women. As Mary E. Rohlffing comments: 'It was at this time that women made their entry into rock'n'roll . . . as composers, players, and producers.'⁹

Crucially, these songwriters could write about and therefore validate important life experiences for their listeners. In his 2002 categorisation of forms of authenticity in rock, Allan Moore suggests that authenticity is not created from certain musical features, but rather from the interpretation that can be brought by listeners. Goffin and King's songs offered 'second-person authenticity' to many fans: '[This] occurs when a performance succeeds in conveying the impression to a listener that that listener's experience of life is being validated, that the music is "telling it like it is" for them.'¹⁰ Their first major hit was 'Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow?', recorded by the Shirelles and released on 21 November 1960. The song stayed at No. 1 in the Billboard 100 for ten weeks. As King had predicted, 'Does he like me?' was the issue that spoke most keenly to the popular music audience, which was largely comprised of teenage girls. The song documented the insecurities and anxieties faced by a young woman after a one-night stand, with lines such as:

Tonight you're mine, completely . . .
 But will you love me tomorrow?
 Is this a lasting treasure
 Or just a moment's pleasure . . .
 So tell me now and I won't ask again
 Will you still love me tomorrow?

However, as King has commented:

A lot of people think I wrote the lyrics for 'Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow?' because they express so keenly the emotions of a teenage girl worried that her boyfriend won't love her anymore once she gives him her most precious one-time-only prize. Those lyrics were written by Gerry, whose understanding of human nature transcended gender. My contribution to 'Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow?' included writing the melody, playing piano in the studio, and arranging the string parts.¹¹

(See also Chapter 8, 'Leaders of the Pack: Girl Groups of the 1960s'.) After this hit, both King and Goffin were able to give up their day jobs to focus on their writing. During the 1960s, the pair wrote a number of classic songs for a variety of artists. Throughout her career thus far, King had been indifferent to performing her own songs. Her voice, and her piano skills, provided a method through which to hear her music.

King and Goffin divorced in 1968. She moved to Laurel Canyon in Los Angeles with her two daughters, and continued songwriting, as well as reactivating her performing career by forming The City. Her position as a behind-the-scenes songwriter was to change still further in 1971, when she released her second studio album.¹² *Tapestry* (Ode Records, produced by Lou Adler) was a collection of songs written or co-written by King, and performed by King at the piano (Box 10.1).

Box 10.1 *Tapestry*, track listing and songwriter credits

Side 1

1. I Feel the Earth Move
2. So Far Away
3. It's Too Late (lyrics by Toni Stern)
4. Home Again
5. Beautiful
6. Way Over Yonder

Side 2

7. You've Got a Friend
8. Where You Lead (lyrics by Carole King and Toni Stern)
9. Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow? (lyrics by Gerry Goffin)
10. Smackwater Jack
11. Tapestry
12. (You Make Me Feel Like) A Natural Woman (Goffin, King, Jerry Wexler)

Tapestry was to become one of the best-selling albums ever, with over 25 million copies sold worldwide. It was also well received critically, with esteemed rock critics claiming that her unadorned and untrained voice would provide a touchstone for female singer-songwriters, and that *Tapestry* surpassed previous milestones of personal intimacy and musical accomplishment.¹³ In 1972, it received four Grammys: Album of the Year, Best Pop Vocal Performance (Female), Record of the Year, (for 'It's Too Late'), and Song of the Year (for 'You've Got a Friend').

King cut her teeth working as the musical half of the songwriting team Goffin and King, essentially working behind the scenes providing songs for famous performing artists. Despite a lack of confidence in her own lyric-writing ability, she had given a good deal of thought to the subjects that would appeal to a popular music audience comprised predominantly of young adults in her demographic. However, it was when she recorded an album of her own performances of a collection of such songs that she reached significant success. She was able to connect with her audience in two ways: through creating relevant material and content, and through her accessibility as a performer.

Joni Mitchell

'Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow?' was No. 1 while Joni Mitchell (born Roberta Joan Anderson, in Fort Macleod Alberta, 7 November 1943) was establishing herself as a performer on the folk circuit in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan and Toronto, Ontario. The folk scene in each city tended to accord veteran folk performers the exclusive right to perform their signature songs, which were most often not written by the performer. Mitchell resolved to write her own songs, which often reflected personal concerns of love, sorrow, and joy, as well as wider political and environmental anxieties.

In 1964, Mitchell was touring the folk circuit in Ontario. She was pregnant by an ex-boyfriend, and unable to raise the child. She gave her daughter, Kelly Dale Anderson, up for adoption. She later attributed the inspiration for her early songwriting endeavours to this experience, claiming it forced her to write songs that put her personal emotions and experiences on show. In late 1965, she left Canada for the first time with American folk singer Chuck Mitchell. They moved to Detroit in the United States, and married in June 1965. This marriage and musical partnership ended in early 1967. Joni kept his surname and moved to New York City, playing venues up and down the East Coast. She performed frequently in coffeehouses and folk clubs, and by now her repertoire often included her own material. By this time she was beginning to become well known for her unique songwriting and her innovative guitar style, informed in part by disabilities caused by a childhood bout of polio.

In addition to the success of other artists' versions of her songs, Mitchell continued to rise in prominence for her own performances and interpretations of her own work, becoming, to many, the archetypal 1960s confessional singer-songwriter. Renowned singer-songwriter David Crosby heard her performing in a club in Coconut Grove, Florida, and introduced her to friends in his musical circle back in Los Angeles. As a result of this, Elliot Roberts became her manager. Roberts introduced her to producer David Geffen, and she was eventually signed to Reprise in 1968.

Mitchell's best known album is her fourth studio album. *Blue* was released just four months after *Tapestry*, in June 1971. The period 1970–71 was a fruitful one for Mitchell and King, both of whom recorded their albums at the same time in Sunset Sound in Hollywood. The two singer-songwriters were part of the same musical community, and as well as sharing recording space, shared musical collaborators. While recording her album, Mitchell was in the throes of a love affair with singer-songwriter James Taylor, who played guitar on the tracks 'All I Want' and 'A Case of You'. *Blue* documents several romantic relationships she had during its creation. People were keen to speculate on Mitchell's liaisons and often let gossip preclude discussion of her music, as the following comment by Jack Hamilton shows: "A Case of You" is (maybe) about Leonard Cohen; "My Old Man" is (likely) about Graham Nash; "Carey" is (almost certainly) about an unfamous expat bartender that Mitchell met while vacationing in Crete.¹⁴ "The Last Time I Saw Richard" is about leaving Chuck Mitchell. King had met James Taylor in 1970, and the pair established a long-standing

musical relationship. Taylor was recording his own album *Mud Slide Slim and the Blue Horizon* at Sunset Sound concurrently to King's *Tapestry*, and both albums featured versions of 'You've Got a Friend'. King played piano on *Mud Slide Slim*, while Mitchell sang backing vocals. Taylor played guitar on *Tapestry*, and both Taylor and Mitchell appeared as backing vocalists.

Box 10.2 *Blue*, track listing. All songs written and performed by Joni Mitchell

Side 1

1. All I Want
2. My Old Man
3. Little Green
4. Carey
5. Blue

Side 2

6. California
7. This Flight Tonight
8. River
9. A Case of You
10. The Last Time I Saw Richard

Joni Mitchell wrote the songs for *Blue* during a self-imposed sabbatical in Europe. The songs, which develop and refine the idiom of the confessional and relatable singer-songwriter, traverse a range of life experiences and the associated emotions. As her biographer Mark Bego has commented:

She had dug deep inside herself and created a masterpiece. Joni admits '*Blue* was the first of my confessional albums, and it was an attempt to say, "You want to worship me? Well, okay, I'm just like you. I'm a lonely person." Because that's all we have in common.'¹⁵

The opening song, 'All I Want' is the most uptempo and upbeat song on the album. It is addressed to the man she loves, and she sings of the many ways she plans to express her devotion:

All I really, really want our love to do
Is to bring out the best in me and in you
I wanna talk to you, I wanna shampoo you . . .

I wanna knit you a sweater,
Wanna write you a love letter

She also addresses the depression when she and her lover hurt each other:

Do you see how you hurt me baby
So I hurt you too
Then we both get so blue

In the third song on the album, 'Little Green', Mitchell addresses the child she gave up for adoption. She nicknames the child Kelly Green, and sings of the devastation she felt at giving her up and all the events she will miss in the child's life:

Choose her a name she'll answer to
Call her green and the winters cannot fade her
Call her green for the children who have made her little, green . . .
There'll be crocuses to bring to school tomorrow . . .
There'll be icicles and birthday clothes and sometimes
There'll be sorrow

This is a song from the 1967 era, and the only accompaniment is Mitchell herself on guitar. This serves to make the song more intimate and personal, and projects the feelings behind the song to her audience. The audience seeks and believes that the music they are hearing communicates authenticity of experience: a confessional singer-songwriter is someone who writes lyrics about their own experiences, and sings and accompanies themselves in performance. The unadorned vocal and accompaniment styles of both King and Mitchell help portray the idea of an unmediated, authentic persona, and their music may be seen as a direct line of communication to an audience that is always searching to validate their own experiences. In addition to the second-person authenticity (validation of experience) of King and Goffin, King's solo work and Mitchell's confessional style exhibit 'first-person authenticity', or 'authenticity as expression'. As Moore explains, here an unadorned vocal and instrumental style can help reduce any perceived mediation of content. The audience feels closer to the performer because they believe they are sharing autobiographical experiences, which they themselves may have experienced too.¹⁶

Mitchell accompanies herself on piano for the title song, 'Blue'. This song is purportedly about her relationship with James Taylor, and she sings of his melancholy, and his tendency to bury his feelings with a variety of methods:

You can make it through these waves
Acid, booze, and ass
Needles, guns, and grass
Lots of laughs

Mitchell continued her live touring and studio recording practices throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Her style evolved throughout her career, as shown by jazz and pop influences on later albums including *Court and Spark* (1974) and *Mingus* (1979). In 1994, she won a Grammy for the album *Turbulent Indigo*. *Taming the Tiger* (1998) was her last album of new original songs for some time: in 2000 she released an album of reinterpretations of jazz standards, *Both Sides Now*, followed two years later by *Travelogue*, an album of reworkings of her own material. In 2006, she released *Shine*, a much-anticipated album of new songs. Her influence on musicians around her has continued to be evidenced through her entire career: in September 2007, the prominent jazz musician Herbie Hancock released an album of jazz covers of Mitchell's songs entitled *River: The Joni Letters*. Throughout her career, Mitchell asserted her creative authority by producing all her albums herself. In recent years she has suffered from a variety of health issues, and at the time of writing (August 2019) does not perform any more but occasionally appears in public to speak on environmental issues.

Kate Bush

The English singer-songwriter Kate Bush was born Catherine Bush on 30 July 1958. She began songwriting aged eleven, and after sharing many of her self-recorded songs with family friend Ricky Hopper, who passed them on to Dave Gilmour (guitarist from Pink Floyd), was signed by EMI at sixteen. O'Brien has commented that Bush's 1978 No. 1 debut single, 'Wuthering Heights', 'an offering to the lost love of Cathy and Heathcliff, was a brittle, shivering pop song with a folk base incorporating strings, piano and mournful echo. Nothing like it had been heard before: especially the voice – a high-pitched wander through octaves that pierced through the banality of daytime radio.'¹⁷ 'Wuthering Heights' debuted at No. 1 in the UK singles chart, where it remained for four weeks. Bush was the first female UK singer-songwriter to achieve a No. 1 with a self-penned song. 'Wuthering Heights' was released just a month before her debut album *The Kick Inside*, which also topped the album charts in the UK. The album was

named after the eponymous song, which took an old English folk tale about an incestuous pregnancy and consequent suicide as its inspiration.

Box 10.3 *The Kick Inside*, track listing. All songs written by Kate Bush

Side 1

1. Moving
2. The Saxophone Song
3. Strange Phenomena
4. Kite
5. The Man with the Child in His Eyes
6. Wuthering Heights

Side 2

7. James and the Cold Gun
8. Feel It
9. Oh to Be in Love
10. L'Amour Looks Something Like You
11. Them Heavy People
12. Room for the Life
13. The Kick Inside

Kate Bush's musical style incorporates a number of musical influences including pop, classical music, glam rock, folk and ethnic styles, and studio effects. Her primary instrument, piano, is the feature upon which most of her accompaniments are built. It is worth noting here that female singer-songwriters have historically been more readily accepted when their primary instrument is typically understood to be feminine. Lucy Green's suggested 'performance of femininity' is not disrupted by the piano-playing of King and Bush, nor by Mitchell's acoustic guitar.¹⁸

Bush's soprano voice is unusual in the singer-songwriter idiom, and the listener's attention is immediately grabbed by its high frequency and clear timbre. Her music has been described as 'surreal', in part for her frequent references to literature and the cinema, and for her rapid switches between emotional states.¹⁹ Unlike King, who appealed largely to universal emotions, and Mitchell, who validated thousands of listeners' personal experiences, Bush embodied characters she had

created in her songs, making them believable through her vocal portrayal. After Simon Frith and Philip Auslander, Moore defines this type of character construction in popular song as 'song character', or 'song personality'.²⁰

In 1979, Bush embarked on a six-week tour of her rapidly produced second album *Lionheart*. She had recently begun to study dance, and the shows utilised complex choreography, lighting, several costume changes, and Bush performed onstage alongside a magician. After this tour, dubbed The Tour of Life, Bush refused to do live tours of her work, choosing to save her creativity for the studio and music videos. She produced a *Live on Stage* EP from her tour, and co-produced her 1980 album *Never for Ever*. Like Mitchell before her, she asserted authorial authority by self-producing all ensuing albums. All her studio albums charted, as did many of her singles.

This hiatus in live performance lasted until her 2014 *Before the Dawn* residency at the Hammersmith Apollo. The Beatles had famously set a precedent for artists that chose to perform and create in the studio, by refusing to perform live after August 1966. As they had demonstrated before her, it was possible to produce much more intricate soundscapes in the recording studio than those it would be possible to perform live. Her albums utilised synthesisers, drum machines, huge orchestras, and double tracking and layering of her own voice. Once again, the pattern for existing in the popular music world had been established and reinforced by male 'genius' figures. Bush continued to write and record studio albums through the 1980s and early 1990s before taking a career break to focus on marriage and motherhood until *Aerial*, which was released in November 2005.

Bush represented the evolution of female singer-songwriters: no longer bound to confessional songs based on personal experiences and understandings of the world, and no longer restricted to unadorned simplicity of vocal style, she was able to extend her expressivity and musical style with a range of techniques and references.

Adele

Adele Laurie Blue Adkins was born on 5 May 1988, in Tottenham, North London. Adele (the name which she later used as her stage name) graduated from the BRIT School of Performing Arts in Croydon (South London) in 2006. A friend posted a demo song she had written for a class project on Myspace, which led to a phone call from Richard Russell, owner

of the independent record label XL Recordings. She was signed by the label in September 2006. Adele is a contemporary pop singer, and credits her musical influences to such towering figures as ‘Etta [James] to get a bit of soul, Ella [Fitzgerald] for my chromatic scales and Roberta Flack for control’.²¹ Her first two albums, *19* (2008), and *21* (2011), were famously break-up albums, attributed to different failed relationships. They are titled after her age during the main writing and recording period of the albums. Her first album included her first song, ‘Hometown Glory’, written aged sixteen, about West Norwood in South London, where she spent a good deal of her youth.²² The album *19* also included ‘First Love’, ‘Daydreamer’, and ‘Tired’, providing a focal point for audiences who wanted to associate with a public figure who wasn’t afraid to advertise her romantic failures. The lyrics to ‘Tired’, for example, show a despondent acceptance of her partner’s lack of interest:

I’m tired of trying
 Your teasing ain’t enough
 Fed up of biding your time
 When I don’t get nothing back

Adele’s audiences, like Mitchell’s and King’s before her, seek the second-person authenticity defined by Moore as ‘authenticity of experience’. The album was hugely successful, gaining platinum status eight times in the United Kingdom, and three times in the United States. Adele commenced the first of three world tours to promote the album, playing enormous and prominent venues such as Wembley Stadium and the American TV show *Saturday Night Live*, setting her far away from the intimate venues in which King and Mitchell performed in their early careers.

Box 10.4 *19*, track listing and songwriter credits

1. Daydreamer (Adele Adkins)
2. Best for Last (Adkins)
3. Chasing Pavements (Adkins/Eg White)
4. Cold Shoulder (Adkins/Sacha Skarbek)
5. Crazy for You (Adkins)
6. Melt My Heart to Stone (Adkins/White)
7. First Love (Adkins)

8. Right as Rain (Adkins/Leon Michels/Jeff Silverman/Nick Movshon/Clay Holley)
9. Make You Feel My Love (Bob Dylan)
10. My Same (Adkins)
11. Tired (Adkins/White)
12. Hometown Glory (Adkins)

As Box 10.4 shows, Adele herself was the primary songwriter for *19*, which helped provide her audience with a sense of intimacy and the authenticity of shared experience. Sarah Suhadolnik argued in 2016 that, although Adele tried to retain some ownership as songwriter of her material with her second album, audiences were by now focused on the power of her voice and her vocal delivery. ‘Recurring themes on fan commentary’, Suhadolnik writes, ‘consistently point to the sounds of sincere, heartfelt angst as a primary draw.’²³ Many of the songs on 2011’s *21* were collaboratively written (see Box 10.5), as Adele’s public figure shifted from one that commanded second-person authenticity through the experiences expressed, to one who begins to embody third-person authenticity, or ‘authenticity of execution’. As Moore explains: “third person authenticity” . . . arises . . . when a performer succeeds in conveying the impression of accurately representing the ideas of another, embedded within a tradition of performance’.²⁴ Adele’s command of the bluesy, soulful style, along with the association with the African American singers she lists as inspiration, situates her within a distant tradition that connotes pain and hardship.

Adele’s breakthrough successful album was *21*, which won her six Grammys, two BRIT awards, and three American Music Awards, achieving platinum status seventeen times in the United Kingdom, and certified diamond status in the United States. Having established a reputation and public profile as an authentic singer-songwriter who spoke to shared experiences through perceived autobiographical content and her singing voice, sole authorship of the musical and lyrical material became less crucial.

Box 10.5 *21*, track listing and songwriter credits

1. Rolling in the Deep (Adele Adkins/Paul Epworth)
2. Rumour Has It (Adkins/Ryan Tedder)
3. Turning Tables (Adkins/Tedder)

Box 10.5 (cont.)

4. Don't You Remember (Adkins/Dan Wilson)
5. Set Fire to the Rain (Adkins/Fraser T. Smith)
6. He Won't Go (Adkins/Epworth)
7. Take It All (Adkins/Francis White)
8. I'll Be Waiting (Adkins/Epworth)
9. One and Only (Adkins/Wilson/Greg Wells)
10. Lovesong (Robert Smith/Laurence Tolhurst/Simon Gallup/Boris Williams/Pearl Thompson/Roger O'Donnell)
11. Someone Like You (Adkins/Wilson)

Adele is also an interesting case study for the idea of the constructed persona. As Moore has suggested: '[when listening to popular song] it is usually more helpful to recognise that we are listening to a persona, projected by a singer, in other words to an artificial construction that may, or may not, be identical with the person(ality) of the singer'.²⁵ This disjunct is underscored further by the personality that comes across in interviews. Suhadolnik comments:

Adele has ... drawn clear distinctions between her instrument and her self, constructing a performer identity that is generally obscured by her music. Ask her, as *Vogue* did in 2012, about what it is like to be a girl who 'sings her own blues', and she will likely respond that she is the total opposite of her records. In the extensive interview, Adele characterised herself as 'chatty, bubbly and kind of carefree really'.²⁶

The difference between Adele's artistic and performed persona and her off-stage personality is underlined by her acceptance speech at the BRIT awards in 2012:

Nothing makes me prouder than coming home with six Grammys, and coming to the BRITs and winning Album of the Year. I'm so, so, proud to be British, and to be flying our flag, and I'm so proud to be in the room with all of you –

[HOST JAMES CORDEN MOUNTS THE STAGE]: I'm so, so sorry, and I can't believe I'm about to do this –
 ADELE: You're going to cut me off?
 CORDEN: I'm so sorry!
 ADELE: Can I just say then, goodbye, and I'll see you next time round, yeah?
 [Flips the middle finger]

Adele took a short career break after the worldwide success and fame *21* brought. She released *25* on 27 November 2015, commenting:

My last record was a break-up record, and if I had to label this one, I would call it a make-up record. Making up for lost time. Making up for everything I ever did and never did. *25* is about getting to know who I've become without realizing. And I'm sorry it took so long but, you know, life happened.²⁷

The 'life happen[ing]' that she alluded to included settling down into a long-term relationship with Simon Konecki, and giving birth to her first son Angelo in October 2012. Her relationship with Konecki was confirmed to have ended in April 2019.²⁸

Box 10.6 25, track listing and songwriter credits

1. Hello (Adele Adkins/Greg Kurstin)
2. Send My Love (To Your New Lover) (Adkins/Max Martin/Shellback)
3. I Miss You (Adkins/Paul Epworth)
4. When We Were Young (Adkins/Tobias Jesso Jr.)
5. Remedy (Adkins/Ryan Tedder)
6. Water Under the Bridge (Adkins/Kurstin)
7. River Lea (Adkins/Brian Burton)
8. Love in the Dark (Adkins/Samuel Dixon)
9. Million Years Ago (Adkins/Kurstin)
10. All I Ask (Adkins/Bruno Mars/Philip Lawrence/Christopher Brody Brown)
11. Sweetest Devotion (Adkins/Epworth)

As on *21*, all these songs are collaborations. Adele made her name as an authentic down-to-earth performer, with a powerful, soul-inspired voice. It seems that a direct line of communication expressing her own experiences is of lesser concern to her audiences than it was earlier in her career. The album *25* is credited with rekindling British record sales: it was the best-selling album worldwide for 2015, and debuted as No. 1 in 25 countries. The album won many accolades: including the BRIT award for British Album of the Year in 2016, and Grammys the following year for Album of the Year and Best Pop Vocal Album. The opening single 'Hello' won Grammys for Record of the Year, Song of the Year, and Best Pop Solo Performance the following year.

Conclusion

Carole King, Joni Mitchell, Kate Bush, Adele; my focus on performing songwriters in this chapter has provided an explanation for why female singer-songwriters evoke strong feelings of authenticity and relatability from their audiences. By writing about their own experiences, and then performing these songs themselves in fairly unmediated formats and venues, King, Mitchell, and Adele represent a seemingly direct line of communication, from emotional narrator to emotional receiver. These examples, along with other female singer-songwriters, provide a visible focal point for audiences. Bush is an outlier to this trajectory, and has been included in this chapter to showcase the commercial success that can be achieved by a female singer-songwriter who is unapologetic about using extensive artistic reference points and studio techniques.

Notes

1. David R. Shumway, 'The Emergence of the Singer-Songwriter', in Katherine Williams and Justin A. Williams (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Singer-Songwriter* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 11.
2. Lucy O'Brien, *She Bop: The Definitive History of Women in Rock, Pop and Soul* (London: Penguin Books, 1995), 176.
3. Sheila Weller, *Girls Like Us: Carole King, Joni Mitchell, Carly Simon, and the Journey of a Generation* (New York: Washington Square Press, 2009), 5.
4. *Ibid.*, 60.
5. Most histories of popular music include an extensive section on Freed's career and significance. See, for example, Phil Hardy, *The Faber Companion to 20th-Century Popular Music* (London: Faber and Faber, 1990), 358–9.
6. *Ibid.*, 44.
7. *Ibid.*, 60–1.
8. *Ibid.*, 73.
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10. Allan Moore, 'Authenticity as Authentication', *Popular Music*, vol. 21, no. 2 (May 2002), 220.
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