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A 70's Dream Queen: Carole King's Tapestry

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A 70's Dream Queen - Carole King's *Tapestry*

Kortney Burton

A good songwriter is a storyteller. A good songwriter is capable of transforming listeners' minds and showing them how to be empathetic. A good songwriter can make one feel connected to the music they are listening to. It is quite rare to find someone so capable of writing music that has this sort of impact, but Carole King proved her songwriting capabilities with her second album *Tapestry* that came out in 1971. Although not her first album, *Tapestry* was her first record that really showcased her personal style and gained recognition. King was no stranger to the music industry prior to this, however. By the time her second album came out, she had already written hit songs for artists such as Bobby Vee and The Monkees. Already having her foot in the door as an established songwriter allowed for the attention King received for *Tapestry* as critics realized that she could not only write, but also perform her own music.

King kicks off the twelve song album with a track titled "I Feel the Earth Move." This song was a great song to start off the album, with its upbeat piano riff and syncopated rhythm. The fact that it is quite simple lyrically and structurally allows for listeners to easily catch on and sing along or dance. Listeners hear the album transition a little bit in the next couple of songs to more ballads. Even when King writes ballads, she still manages to incorporate piano riffs or guitar licks that change up what would typically be considered a slower tempo song. One of the more popular songs on *Tapestry* is track nine titled "Where You Lead." This song is about doing whatever is necessary to be with the one you love. King says she will "follow where you lead" if she is needed by the person she loves. This song employs a chorus that comes in throughout the song and at the end as it fades out. The background vocals along with a gospel-sounding electric piano blend seamlessly. The title track "Tapestry" is comparatively a more lyrically dense song that tells a

story and embodies what the entire album is about. The final track of the album is called “(You Make Me Feel Like) A Natural Woman.” Another popular song from this record, it starts off with just King’s vocals and a piano. The song builds in dynamics though and being just vocals and a piano, listeners are able to focus on the simplistic beauty of the song.

Carole King’s writing abilities were never in question, and the reason she did so well as a songwriter was because her songs were relatable. Music critics were very aware of this and how consumers reacted to the album *Tapestry*. In a review in *The Times* written by Richard Williams the same year *Tapestry* was released, Williams writes, “[The] songs never had any auteur signature, except for their hummability, yet each one did (and still does) its job to perfection” (New Albums from Carole King, Carly Simon *et al*). A song written by King and performed by another artist would not necessarily be immediately recognized as her work; she did not have a unique writing style that was categorized as her own. However, her ability to write a song that listeners from all different backgrounds could find solitude in is what made her songs special. Williams goes on in his article to mention a couple of the songs from *Tapestry* claiming that they were “possessed of the same direct warmth” as songs she had written in the past. He writes, “‘Smackwater Jack’ is an amusing cowboy yarn with a tight, loping arrangement, while a similar sense of orchestration graces ‘I Feel The Earth Move’ (has she been reading Hemingway?), where the band sets up a groove which should be the envy of every electro-acoustic four-piece” (Williams). Williams noticed that lyrically, the songs from this album are poetic, even comparing her writing style to Ernest Hemingway, a renowned poet. King’s lyrics draw listeners in and once their attention has been caught, they stay for her quirky vocals and simple but catchy melodies.

Not everyone thought that *Tapestry* was a resounding hit, however, nor did everyone think Carole King was even that great of an artist. Some music critics saw King as a mediocre artist

before and after she came out with *Tapestry*. In an article titled “Carole King: King Is The Queen”, Rob Partridge writes, “Three mediocre albums in a row have established Carole King, at least for me, as the Queen of the Mawkish and the Bland.” This article was written based off of her performance in London at the Hammersmith Odeon. As the article goes on, Partridge admits that her stage presence actually surprised him, in a good way. He recognized that even though her music or her vocals may not have been the absolute best, her lyrics were captivating, and when she sang them on stage the audience connected emotionally. Although obviously not the biggest fan of her work, Partridge states that *Tapestry* was still “her finest album” to date (“Carole King: King Is The Queen”). The same year she played in London when Partridge wrote the previous article (1973), she also played a show in Central Park in her hometown of New York. In a review for *The New York Times* written by Grace Lichtenstein, she is raved about and readers are reminded that *Tapestry*, at the time, was “the biggest selling rock album in history.” While King may not have been every music lover’s cup of tea, it cannot be argued that *Tapestry* broke records when it was released.

Music is so loved all over the world because it allows humans to express emotion and relate to others. When a songwriter writes a song that makes people feel something, that is when they feel accomplished. Carole King has continued to write songs that people still sing today almost fifty years later. *Tapestry* was and still is an album chock full of songs that although musically simple, resonate with listeners making it a notable and admired album.

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