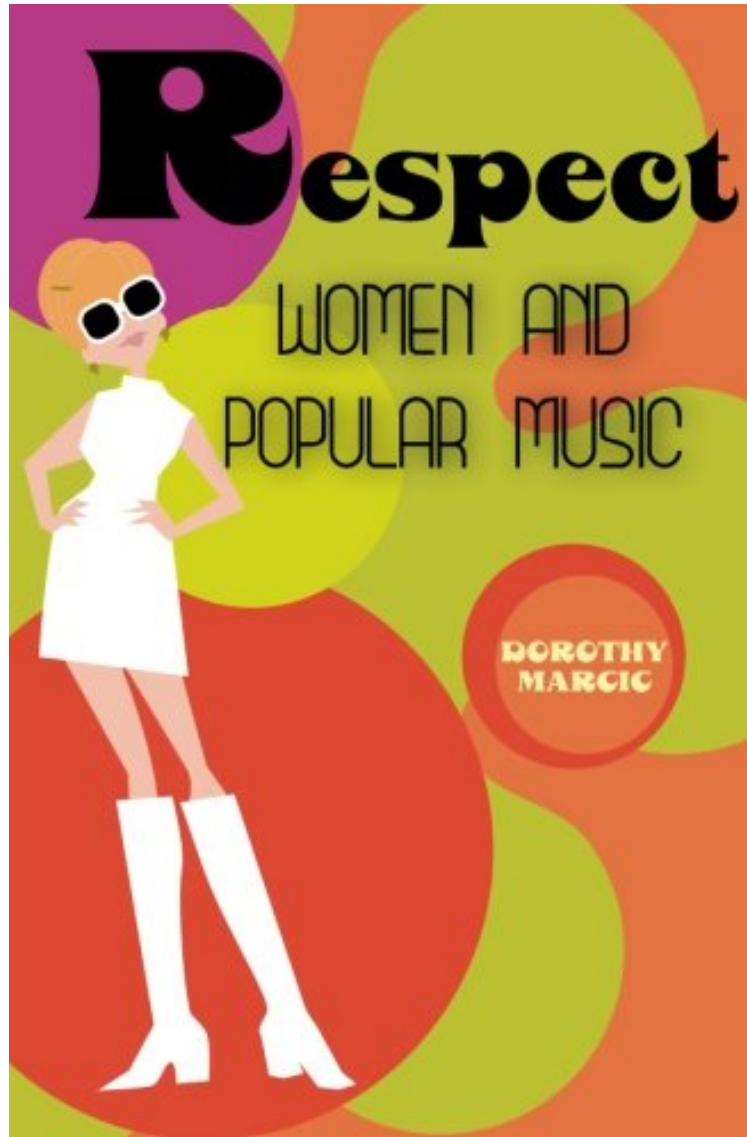


Respect: Women and Popular Music

Dorothy Marcic

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Dorothy Marcic : Respect: Women and Popular Music before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Respect: Women and Popular Music:

For more than the first half of the last century, the voice of women in Top-40 popular music has been one of neediness and dependency. Please love me; Ill do anything for you; just be my baby, even if youre no good and treat me bad;

hey, Ill even do the cooking and pay the rent just LOVE me and Ill stand by my man. But if you leave me, well, it will be the end of the world. By the end of the century, things were quite different. Popular music had come far enough with songs of women looking for the hero within themselves, wanting a man to stand beside them--rather than in front of, being urged to get on their feet and make it happen, ready to stand on her own with or without a man. A lot happened in between. Womens own voice in Top-40 hits went through transitions during that time, from dependency to sex pot, which started in the 30s with the Betty Boop phenomenon. During World War II there was a short reprieve from doormat-status when men went off to war and Rosy the Riveter took over. There was even a womans minor league baseball association established in 1943. Music of women now had some strength, but that quickly faded when the war ended and women went back home. From the 50s through mid-sixties, the message was one of rigid gender roles--oh how she enjoys being a girl of focus on materialism diamonds are a girls friend, after all--to more whining, wishing and hoping and praying that he will just love her. Perhaps it was the publication of Betty Friedans Feminine Mystique or the protest movements, but something changed in the late 60s. The tone changed from total dependency to a sense of unease, that is, something was not right. She was still powerless in his presence, but she was beginning to see her deal was not so great. Sure, he was a sweet-talking guy and not to be trusted, but he was her kind of guy. About the same time that Affirmative Action and EEOC became law, our woman singer started to push back with anger, saying you dont own me or all she wants is a little R-E-S-P-E-C-T, which turned to revenge and the promise of how her boots were gonna walk all over him. It was the dawn of consciousness. Hit songs began to show the kicking back of denial, a new awareness of just how wronged she had been all these years. By the seventies, she was ready to show her own strength, just as Billy Jean King did in 1973 when she beat Bobby Griggs in the Battle of the Sexes tennis match. That new strength was reflected in song, too. Initially, it was power born of anger and demand for respect. Helen Reddys I am woman or Gloria Gaynors I will survive were still sung by pushing back, while Donna Summer asserted the fact that she does, indeed, work hard for the money and should be respected. But even the new awareness was too much to bear, because the 80s brought a rash of songs that were filled with cynicism. Gushy hopes were gone as the nation finally recognized a new syndrome. In 1985, Connecticuts Tracey Thurman became the first woman to win a civil suit as a battered wife. Similarly, Madonna and Tina Turner were not singing mushy love or even anger, but rather a sense of hopelessness about the pipe dreams they had lived. They belted out messages of whats love got to do with it, anyway, or how the material girl of today doesnt care for love, but only wants cold, hard cash. Inner strength finally appeared in the nineties. Oprah became the highest paid entertainer in 1993 at \$49 million per year, the very same year Mariah Careys #1 song crooned advice to find the hero within. At the end of the decade, JoDee Messina wanted a man who would stand beside her, not in front. It was the first time that women could stand on their own, without leaning on a man or pushing back against him. Perhaps not coincidentally, it was the first time that womens popular music outsold that of male singers. The new era had arrived.

About the Author Dr. Dorothy Marcic is a professor turned playwright, who went from footnotes to footlights, and whose her Off-Broadway musical, SISTAS, Is in its 5th year. RESPECT, based on this book, has played in 48 cities. She is adjunct professor at Columbia University, and a former professor at Vanderbilt University. She was a Fulbright Scholar in Prague, and is the author of 15 books, including the best-selling Understanding Management and Managing with the Wisdom of Love. Dorothy started her career in the arts as a production assistant on the TV program, Mister Rogers' Neighborhood. She has appeared on C-SPAN, CMT, and Bravo Network. She lives in New York City.