

## **LOVE & JUSTICE IN THE MUSIC OF PETER, PAUL, & MARY**

The music of Peter Yarrow, Noel Paul Stookey, and Mary Travers has been part of my life as long as I can remember, but if you had asked me about their greatest hits, I couldn't have told you. They helped to start and nurture the careers of Bob Dylan and John Denver, and many others and many of their biggest and most enduring hits were written by Bob, John, Pete Seeger and others. They helped plan the March on Washington and they marched in Selma. They were in Chicago for the '68 Democratic Convention and the riots. Their music inspired opposition to the Vietnam War. They opposed nuclear proliferation and ill-thought-out Nuclear plants. They were there to support Earth Day and anti-pollution efforts. And they showed up to fight homelessness. They were there singing for social Justice on all the big issues of the '60s, '70s, and '80s and they sang the folk songs that backed their positions. They only sang what they believed. They were one of the earliest Folk Renaissance Groups in the early 1960s, playing concerts on college campuses across the country as well as International venues. Before the invasion by the Beatles, they were one of the best known groups in America. They were more politically active than many musicians of their peak era, but their music has continued to influence many of us even well into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century! Though they had a period when they mostly went separate ways during the '70s; Peter, Paul and Mary remained friends and after getting the group back together, continued to make music over a period finally spanning 5 decades. They performed for the Queen of England and they performed here in Stockton. But for Mary's death in 2009 after her body was weakened from Blood Cancer and Leukemia, they might still be performing. They had an amazing career and their work helped to change the world for the better.

Until I began working on this service, I did not remember a quarter of the things that they had done or the songs that they had sung. Many thanks to Ian for choosing Peter, Paul and Mary for the theme of this Music service and many thanks to Peter, Paul and Mary for all they have done to make this world better. What an inspiration they have been for the work of shaping a better world in the areas of racial and economic justice, ecological concerns, and education. Among their albums are 2 for children and many for adults. Several times they challenged the residual blacklisting of artists like Pete Seeger and Paul Robeson after the Anti-Communist crusades of McCarthyism in the 1950s. Many times they planned and participated in Benefit concerts for groups and charities and to address important needs. They were amazing human beings as well as amazing musicians. As musicians they celebrated and encouraged other musicians as they worked to produce the best and most sincere music possible, sharing songs old and new. Peter Yarrow and Noel (Paul) Stookey also wrote a great deal of music individually and in collaboration with multiple other musicians.

Peter, Paul and Mary used their talent and celebrity not to bring wealth and notice to themselves as too many recent celebrities have done, but rather to make a difference in ending apartheid, supporting the rights of women, LGBTQ persons, and minorities, speaking out for immigrants and the downtrodden, bringing peace, and caring for the earth.

As I researched Peter, Paul and Mary, I found a very helpful and lengthy article by William Ruhlmann written for the April 12, 1996 issue of Goldmine on their official website, [peterpaulandmary.com](http://peterpaulandmary.com), along with a more recent historical update from 2007 and listings of albums and songs. Many of their songs and albums remain available. The Ruhlmann article provided a good bit of information about the historical context in which the group appeared and came to prominence in the early 1960s as well as information on Peter, Paul, and Mary individually.

As former US Secretary of State John Kerry penned in his Foreword to Peter Paul and Mary, *Fifty Years in Music and Life*:

*Peter, Paul, and Mary's music asked more of us than to simply sing along. "The Hammer of Justice" and "the bell of freedom!" These are more than just lyrics; they were then, and they remain, a call to conscience, and as Peter especially has always reminded me, when something pulls at your conscience, you need to act.*

*(Kerry continues) They changed the cultural fabric of this nation forever. Peter, Paul, and Mary brought folk music from the shadows of the McCarthy blacklist era to the living rooms and radio stations of every town in America. They gave the world its first listen to young songwriting talents from Bob Dylan to John Denver, Gordon Lightfoot to Laura Nyro....They marched for peace, for racial justice, for worker's rights. They marched against gun violence, homelessness, and world hunger. They marched for clean air and clean water, against apartheid and nuclear proliferation. Through both their songs and their struggle, they helped propel our nation on its greatest journey, on the march toward greater equality. With their passion and persistence, Peter, Paul, and Mary helped widen the circle of our democracy.*

Peter, Paul, and Mary sang Bob Dylan's "Blowin' in the Wind" and Pete Seeger and Lee Hays song "If I Had a Hammer" when Dr. King gave his "I Have a Dream" Speech at the March on Washington in 1963, and they kept singing those songs. And through the turmoil of the '60s and the decades since, they were the musical interpreters of the times. We honor and thank them today!