

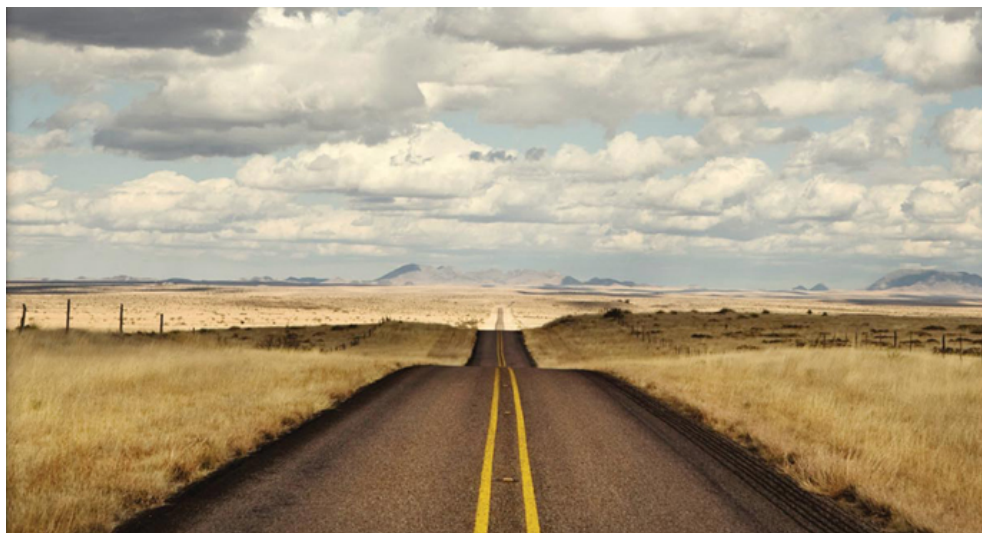


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Songs of 1966 That Make Me Wish I Could Sing

Elizabeth Crook



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All right, so I was only seven in 1966—not a child of the sixties, but a child *in* the sixties. And I wasn't one of those kids who knew about popular music. I spent most of my early years in the small Texas town of San Marcos, hardly on the cutting edge of pop culture. Music came to me in a spotty, haphazard and completely disjointed way, and it wasn't until a few years ago, when I started writing the novel *Monday*,

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Monday, a novel that begins in 1966, that I found I had suddenly tapped into one of the richest veins in American music. I was, of course, a few decades behind everyone else. I had arrived at the sixties in my fifties.

It's not that music was unimportant to me as a kid: I liked singing. I sang along to Burl Ives records. I could sing as loud as the next kid. I remember standing shoulder to shoulder with other children on small bleachers in a small room at Crockett Elementary, belting out a song in French that none of us knew the meaning of. I thought the words were "Allawetta, John T. Allawetta."

My dad was a politically liberal Baptist preacher who had resigned as the pastor of First Baptist Church in Nacogdoches to run for congress on a civil rights platform in 1961, and had lost, and had taken a job as president of the San Marcos Baptist Academy. When Lyndon Johnson became president he appointed my dad director of VISTA and then Ambassador to Australia, which for me meant a departure from San Marcos in 1967 to Arlington, VA and then, in 1968, when I was nine, to Canberra.

In Arlington I was hooked on watching the Monkees and was really into their **theme song**, along with "**Snoopy vs. the Red Baron**" by the Royal Guardsmen and "**Honey**" by Bobby Goldsboro. But it was in Canberra that I first experienced a real adrenaline rush from music. One of the guards at the embassy was a marine named Gary Metcalf who guarded the embassy during the day and would come back in his blue jeans in the evenings to join the crowd outside that was protesting the Vietnam War. He had served in Vietnam and knew what he was talking about. My Dad would get him to come inside. Gary and I were buddies; we would hang out in the living room listening to music. We listened to a lot of Bob Dylan, but the songs I remember most from those times are the Beatles' "**Yesterday**" and Jimmy Durante's "**One of Those Songs**." Gary found out that the butler was hiding the pantry key

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under the candelabra in the dining room, so we started raiding the pantry—Gary would take the cigarettes and I would take the chocolates. After Nixon was elected and sent my family packing back to Texas, Gary came to see us in San Marcos. He showed up with a monkey on his shoulder and the word “LOVE” embroidered on the fly of his jeans. I was totally smitten. He borrowed my dad’s saddle to ride horseback through Mexico, and came back without it. Later we were informed he had died in a tragic skydiving incident. I miss him to this day, and have tried to track down family or friends but can’t find any connection. “Yesterday” still brings a flood of tears.

I don’t remember much music from middle school after our return to Texas, except for the 45 record of Don McLean’s “**Vincent (Starry, Starry Night)**” I taped to the back of my 7th grade paper on Vincent Van Gogh. I had a huge crush on Van Gogh, because of what he did to his ear, and on Thomas Jefferson and David Cassidy, both of whose posters hung in my room. Briefly, I took guitar lessons and dreamed of being like Mary of Peter, Paul and Mary. I sat around strumming and dolefully singing “**The House of the Rising Sun**” and “**Sittin’ on the Dock of the Bay**,” but nobody in my otherwise supportive family ever suggested I “play that again.” Eventually I got the message and didn’t.

By eighth grade my friend Gerri and I sometimes wandered downtown to LBJ Street to hear the Jesus freaks play their music in a room on the second floor over the J. C. Penney’s. Not only was the music free; anyone on the streets was invited in. The room had to be accessed by a rickety set of outside stairs that were meant for a fire escape. The music was essentially folk-rock and the bands were terrific—especially a local band named Liberation Suite that later became popular and headed off to Ireland and England. Their **songs** inspired people to wave their arms wildly and sometimes speak in tongues. Gerri and I loved the music but had to clear out between sets to avoid getting

counseled and witnessed to, and this meant a lot of tricky timing and coming and going on the rickety steps.

In high school most of the music I heard was either at the roller skating rink or during halftime on the football field, followed by “Go Rattlers! Fang ’em!” The rest was blared out of a DJ’s speakers in the gym after the games.

Once a year we had lots of music at our local chili cook-off, Chilympiad. In the beginning, Chilympiad was held at a tourist resort called Aquarena and the bands played on the back of a flat-bed truck. Later it moved to the civic center. Over the years, we had Willie Nelson, Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys, Mickey Gilley, Ace in the Hole, Bobby Bare, Fiddlin’ Frenchie Burke and a lot of others. My favorite act at the Civic Center was Johnny Rodriguez, who sang “**Just Get Up and Close the Door,**” “**Pass Me By if You’re Only Passin’ Through,**” and “**Ridin’ My Thumb to Mexico.**”

But most of the year, we had to resort to the juke box at the pizza parlor if we wanted to hear Johnny Rodriguez, and even that was eventually off limits when the manager banned my friend Kelly and me from playing it because we played Johnny’s rendition of “**That’s the Way Love Goes**” too many times. Or was it because we sang along, and didn’t buy pizza?

The best known place for music in our neck of the woods was Gruene Hall, the oldest dance hall in Texas, where Willie Nelson and Jerry Jeff Walker and a bunch of other great country bands played. But it was twenty miles down the road from us, and usually too crowded to get into.

I sang a lot when I rode my horse—mostly songs from John Denver albums and *The Sound of Music*. After school I’d get in my pickup and head to Mr. Storts’ place where my horse was boarded in a back pasture. I’d grab a bucket of sweet feed, stand at the gate and

yell for Trigo, and he'd come running. He'd eat his feed and I'd jump on bareback and head for the cow pond. My friends Gerri and Tammy had horses there too; we'd smoke Gerri's father's fat Mexican cigars and ride our horses into the cow pond singing "Sunshine on My Shoulders." The trick was to let the horses wade out and start to roll before we slid off and swam away. I once cut my foot in the cow pond, and to hide the red streaks crawling up my leg I went to the dime store for taller socks. There wasn't a lot of euphoric singing when my mother spotted the streaks climbing out from the top.

I left for Baylor with my cousin in 1977, listening to Linda Ronstadt on an eight track player in her blue Bronco, our hair in heat rollers and our stuffed animals crammed against the windows in the back. In my luggage I had two records to play in the dorm room: *My Fair Lady* and *Camelot*. I wasn't the coolest girl at Baylor.

One weekend when I was home seeing my boyfriend, who was a year behind me and still in high school, I found some other girl's picture in his wallet in place of—or rather on top of—mine. She was the head majorette for the high school band. We were standing in his room at the time, listening to Fleetwood Mac's album, *Rumours*. The specific song playing was "**Go Your Own Way**." No kidding.

After two years at Baylor I transferred to Rice and didn't hear any music until I graduated. It was all I could do to keep up with the reading material.

For the next thirty years, except for Neil Diamond and James Taylor and a belated discovery of Leonard Cohen, it was all country for me. I danced my children to sleep to Johnny Cash.

And then I started writing *Monday, Monday*. The story wasn't about the music of the sixties, but about people who came of age to that music, and I suddenly realized,

listening to sixties songs, that I knew most of them—at least well enough to sing along. How had I learned so many of them? Where had I heard them all? It was strange and surprising to me to know them. It was as if those songs had been playing as background music for my whole life.

I've lived in Austin now—a city known for its music—for twenty-five years. I'm embarrassed to say I almost never go to venues like SXSW or to concerts. But when it's just me alone in the car with the XM radio, I crank it up. I switch back and forth between Willie's Roadhouse and Sixties on 6. And I love that the title of my new book is *Monday, Monday*—not only a **song** that brings up echoes from my youth, but one that was actually playing on the radio that terrible August day in 1966 when my novel begins.

Here are 16 songs from '66 that make me wish I could sing as well as my editor, Sarah Crichton, who sings in FSG's house band, **The Savage Detectives**.

These are in no particular order, except for the first one, which is my favorite:

“**When a Man Loves a Woman**” by Percy Sledge

“**Ballad of the Green Berets**” by SSGT Barry Sadler

“**Monday, Monday**” by The Mamas and the Papas

“**Wild Thing**” by The Troggs

“**Little Red Riding Hood**” by Sam the Sham and the Pharaohs

“**You Don't Have to Say You Love Me**” by Dusty Springfield

“**Daydream**” by The Lovin' Spoonful

“**Message to Michael**” by Dionne Warwick

“**I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry**” by B. J. Thomas

“**Ain’t Too Proud to Beg**” by The Temptations

“**Crying Time**” by Ray Charles

“**Homeward Bound**” by Simon and Garfunkel

“**Did You Ever Have to Make up Your Mind?**” by The Lovin’ Spoonful

“**Guantanamera**” by The Sandpipers

“**Bang Bang**” by Cher

“**King of the Road**” by Roger Miller

[Listen to the whole playlist here.](#)

ELIZABETH CROOK is the author of three previous novels. Her most recent, *The Night Journal*, won a Spur Award from Western Writers of America and a WILLA Literary Award from Women Writing the West. She has written for magazines and periodicals, including *Texas Monthly* and the *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*. She lives in Austin with her family.
