



The Words and Music of Paul Simon (The Praeger Singer-Songwriter Collection)

James Bennighof

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Paul Simon is commonly acknowledged to be one of the most successful singer-songwriters of the pop-rock era. His work has flourished in the context of Simon and Garfunkel as well as in his own solo career. Starting with the folk-rock style that marked his earliest significant success, he has drawn on a wide variety of influences, including many American traditions and, later, many international ones as well. He has won multiple Grammy awards in both the duo and the solo phases of his career. His songwriting has also provided the impetus for brief forays into film and musical theatre. After providing a brief biographical overview, this work examines Simon's songwriting work in depth, providing a critical discussion of each song as a fusion of text and music so as to help the reader to identify elements that enhance appreciation.

A particularly valuable contribution in this context is the discussion of the wide variety of musical elements that contribute significantly to the value of Simon's work. These include such easily-understandable issues as verse-chorus structure, melodic variation, selection of particular instruments and even performers, variation of musical style within a song, general harmonic characteristics, relationships among keys, rhythm and pacing of text, etc. While the book proceeds chronologically through Simon's recorded output, specific threads are developed throughout, and the discussion of individual songs takes place in the context of these threads, both drawing on them and developing them further. The diversity of Paul Simon's work reflects his very American background, and no discussion of American music is complete without accounting for his influence.

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