

Music mania threatens campus friendships

The situation was almost perfect. My friends had just arrived — a dozen of them, just the right number for my tiny apartment. The beer was fresh and cold, the munchies were the munchiest imaginable, and the votive candles on the coffee table gave the scene a warm, intimate glow. And best of all, the topic of conversation was already beginning to swing away from the ubiquitous man-I-can't-believe-this-weather-meneither-I-got-a-letter-from-my-old-girlfriend-in-L.A.-and-she-says-it's-82-down-there-oh-man-and-we're-stuck-here sort of drivel and toward my favorite subject; that is, if Petticoat Junction reruns are really the harbingers of an Ultimate Galactic Doom. It sounds a little off-the-wall, I know, but a peach of a conversation could be whipped around it; I knew, it had happened before.

But as I say, things were almost perfect. The one blight on the evening was the music that I had felt compelled to put on my stereo.

It was a Bob Dylan album.

I didn't like Bob Dylan, I never had liked Bob Dylan, and I figured that nothing short of surgery would ever cause me to like Bob Dylan in the future. But I owned a Bob Dylan album, and whenever anyone came over to visit I put it on and tried to bear it. It was like, well, like something that one does. When somebody knocked on your door, there were certain things that you were expected to do; i.e., opening the door, saying hello, and putting on a Bob Dylan album. That was just the way it was, and if anybody didn't like it he or she could just hike into the Tibetan Himalayas and live with the Sherpas, who, though they loved Dylan, couldn't play his albums because there was no electricity.

But even though it was a social custom, for some reason my being forced to play a record that I hated in my own apartment really bugged me that night. It would be so nice, I thought, if I could play some pretty music, something nice, something relaxing, something that wasn't:

leh ledly leh, leh acrost muh big brayuss beyudd

steh ledly steh, steh whal the' naght eeyuz steel uh-hayudd... I couldn't stand it another minute. Something snapped.

"...nothing short of surgery would ever cause me to like Bob Dylan."

"No more!" I screamed, diving for the stereo with a keg tap lifted like a club. I wanted to pound the record to pieces, but my intentions were too obvious, and some of my burlier guests plucked me from midair and pinned me to the wall.

"Great Scott, man, that's a Dylan record!" one of them said incredulously.

Ah laung tuh reach fer yew, in the mawnin' laight...

"I know, I know!" I cried. I threw the tap at the insolent spinning disc, but my arm was bumped in a Sipple-esque maneuver and the tap plopped harmlessly into a bowl of clam dip.

"Don't you people see?" I gasped. "Hasn't anybody ever noticed? Bob Dylan can't sing! At his best he sounds like Arlo Guthrie with pneumonia, and at his worst he sounds like a cement mixer truck full of frying pans. And when he plays the harmonica, it sounds like the truck is running over a cat."

This put the fear in them. They had never heard such heresies before, and they fell to their knees, crying and wailing with one eye fixed on the ceiling in case it should split open to allow a bolt of vengeful lightning through to fry us all on the spot.

Iz clows uh dutty, but iz hans ah clean

'n yer th' bes' thang that e's zevuh seen...

"We will not listen to such blasphemy," one of them finally said. "It may be true that Bob Dylan is not the world's greatest vocalist..." at this his left eye screwed itself up and fixed on the ceiling so hard it nearly got stuck, and in fact I heard later that it had required a minor

operation to get both pupils focusing cooperatively again "...but he is a man among men, put here to sing and spread the message of life, love, beauty, truth..."

"...at six bucks an album and eight bucks a concert ticket," I supplied. "Look, if you want to listen to him in the privacy of your own quads that's fine with me, but I'm through with shelling out good money to buy albums I don't like just to preserve my image as a tuned-in student. You're all just a bunch of rock-chauvinists, and as long as I'm on the subject of people who can't sing, I want you all to know that not only do I refuse to play Dylan, but also Taj Mahal..."

A gasp.

"The Stones."

Another gasp, slightly bigger.

"And the Dead!"

The whole gang nearly fainted at that one, and for a moment I thought I saw a hairline crack developing in the ceiling above the

sofa, but it was probably my imagination.

"A man's stereo is his castle!" I roared, scrambling up to stand on one of my speakers. "Had the founding fathers known of stereo's coming, who can doubt that they would have listed freedom of the turntable as an inalienable human right?"

It was just too much for them, they cried and wailed and leaned on each other for support and supposed it was only seconds until the ceiling cracked and the lightning struck and they all went up to the pearly gates only to find that Woody Guthrie had crossed their names off the list for having witnessed such sacrilege. Presently, though, they calmed down, resigned to their fate, and the room grew silent.

Or almost silent, for from the hallway a couple of faint vibratos leaked into the living room.

I had left it on! Panic gripped me. How could I have been so stupid! I knew that I had already alienated my friends, but if they found out that I...well, it made me shudder just to think about it. Maybe if I raced to it I could hike...

But it was too late, they had heard it and were now clustered in the hallway around the source of the sound — my closet. They opened the door, and after a few moments of coat shoving and shoe pushing, one of them made the revelation that made my heart sink.

"Hey, he's got a stereo in here!" she said incredulously. "And a chair, and a lamp, and a little refrigerator, and...hey, there's a safe in the corner!"

And I left the door open, I mused grimly.

"And he left the door open!" she cried.

"What's that tune?" said one man, bending an ear to a tiny speaker.

"It's...John Denver!" gasped the woman by the safe. "And there are more in here!" She reached into the vault and pulled out a huge stack of

albums. "Oh my God!" she cried. "Look at these! Neil Sedaka, Bruce Springsteen, Olivia Newton John, Neil Diamond, Melanie, Elton John (after he sold out!) and ...and The Carpenters!"

She trailed off, and I anxiously searched the faces of the group. It was all over for me, I knew that. The only question that remained was what form their derision would take after the shock of the discovery wore off. Would they turn their faces in disgust and file away mutely, trying to forget that they had ever known me? Would they berate me with a chorus of denunciations about my perverted tastes? Would they leap on me like snarling wolves and tear me limb from anti-social limb?

Suddenly a giggle bubbled up from the back of the group. The stupefied expressions of the rest of the bunch melted into smiles, and soon they were all laughing — mildly, at first, and then uproariously.

"He... he listens to John Denver!" one of them howled, rocking with mirth.

"And Neil... Neil Seda... Sedaka!" screamed another, collapsing and guffawing breathlessly.

My humiliation was complete. I could have tolerated their disgust, I could have borne up under their verbal abuse, I might even have resisted a direct physical attack. But their laughter...it was just too much.

Defectedly, I shuffled back into the living room. I'll start all over again, I decided, wincing as the peals of laughter continued to float in from the hallway. I'll go to a small east coast school, change my name, dye my hair — it wouldn't be that tough. And this time I'd really make an effort to like the right musicians, Dylan especially. I hated to leave, but I had revealed the horrible defect of my musical preferences, and my options were closed.

After what seemed like decades, the horrible cackling finally subsided, and I heard the front door

open and my friends — former friends, I amended with a sigh — troop over the threshold and out into the damp night.

There was no point in putting it off, I decided, so I clumped back into the hallway, dragging my kitchen garbage can. Those records wouldn't make the trip with me; I had to kick my perversion cold turkey. Whistling "Society's Child" to fight back the tears, I gathered the scattered albums into a stack and prepared to drop them into the can.

But something was wrong.

The pile was lighter than it should have been, and shorter, too. Mystified, I spread the records out on the floor. "John Denver's Greatest Hits" had vanished, and "Born to Run"...in fact, a dozen records were gone. I stood up and tried to make sense of the disappearance, but before I could put together any theories the phone rang.

"Hello, my friend," said a voice that I recognized as belonging to the woman who had discovered my closet hideaway. "I just called to tell you that I took your Neil Sedaka record. I'm sorry, but I just couldn't resist." She lowered her voice to a conspiratorial whisper. "I'm crazy about him."

"But tonight," I sputtered, "you were laughing at me with the others and..."

"I'm sorry about that too, but I couldn't let them know you understand."

I assured her that I did.

"Anyway," she continued, "if you'd like to hear 'Breakin' Up is Hard to Do' on a really good system, come on over. I soundproofed my whole apartment, so it's safe."

"I will!" I promised, and hushed up, stunned. But I didn't have time to recover from my shock because as soon as I replaced the receiver the phone rang again.

And it kept ringing for the rest of the evening.



Graphic by Steve Sandstrom