

Bruce Cockburn: Canadian, Christian, Conservationist

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Abstract:

Since his first album was released in 1970, Canadian singer-songwriter Bruce Cockburn has produced 30 more, 20 of which have gone gold or platinum. His institutional honors includes 13 Juno awards, seven honorary doctorates, induction into both the Canadian Music Hall of Fame (2001) and the Canadian Broadcast Hall of Fame (2002), and many other honors. An official Canadian postage stamp was even issued in 2011. Such public recognition provides some insight into Cockburn's long, successful, and consistent career, but these facts only touch on the surface of the complex connections of identity, religion, and ethics that guide and define him.

Keywords: Bruce Cockburn | environmentalism | ecocriticism | ecomusicology | Canadian | ethnomusicology | Christianity

Article:

Since his first album was released in 1970, Canadian singer-songwriter Bruce Cockburn ("KOH-bern") has produced 30 more, 20 of which have gone gold or platinum. His institutional honors includes 13 Juno awards, seven honorary doctorates, induction into both the Canadian Music Hall of Fame (2001) and the Canadian Broadcast Hall of Fame (2002), and many other honors. An official Canadian postage stamp was even issued in 2011 (see Figure 1). Such public recognition provides some insight into Cockburn's long, successful, and consistent career, but these facts only touch on the surface of the complex connections of identity, religion, and ethics that guide and define him.

FIGURE 1 OMITTED FROM THIS FORMATTED DOCUMENT

Figure 1. Canadian Stamp Honoring Bruce Cockburn. *Source:* © Canada Post, 2011.

Cockburn presents complex philosophical and aesthetic positions that go beyond typical pop-and-rock music messaging of sex, fun, and rebellion. Such a figure might not seem a likely

candidate to produce so many gold or platinum albums. What is it that audiences find so compelling? Do audiences care primarily about his sound—that is, his voice, arrangements, virtuosic guitar techniques, and so on? Or is it the political messages in his poetry?

While tracing specific desires and reasons for aesthetic preferences of large groups is a slippery endeavor, there is a more specific question that interests me here: how does Cockburn engage with environmental issues and effect change? With regard to environmentally oriented popular music, David Ingram suggests that “Further research is needed in reception studies to investigate how particular pieces of music have actually affected listeners, and whether they have played a part in organizations or subcultures involved in environmental activism” (Ingram 2010, 236). While this short study cannot claim to make definitive pronouncements about either popular music in general or Bruce Cockburn in particular, I do hope to offer some insights into how we might understand him and how he engages with environmental issues.

Environmentalism is not an isolated issue for Cockburn; rather, it is part of a complex of concerns for nationality, personal religion, and humanitarianism. Cockburn’s environmentalism is but one component of a broader expressive and activist agenda that links music and poetry with issues of identity, belief, and stewardship. And if we are to consider how Cockburn is a political musician—how he and his music have changed the world for the better—then we should consider his contributions in this ecological matrix.

There are no comprehensive book-length biographies about Cockburn, although he is reportedly at work on his own memoir. However, there is one master’s thesis in theology that takes Cockburn as a topic (Olds 2002), and Canadian theologian Brian Walsh has written two books about Cockburn and religion (Walsh 1989, Walsh 2011). Cockburn has more often been the subject of websites, magazine articles, and book chapters. The collaborative “Cockburn Project” website (cockburnproject.net) lists all the albums, their credits and lyrics, and many of Cockburn’s statements about each song from published songbooks and live interviews and concerts, as well as other primary sources, such as Cockburn’s speeches and public writings. I have relied on many of the anonymous and credited submissions of fans to this website in order to flesh out my knowledge of Cockburn and his works. Further, I was fortunate to discuss him with various fans, including two that run popular websites on Cockburn and two Canadian musicians who grew up listening to him, and their reflections have also contributed to my understanding and appreciation of Cockburn.

Journalists, critics, and scholars have taken a variety of approaches to Cockburn’s career. Regenstreif (2002) sees Cockburn as being a spiritual and political songwriter. Adria (1990) traces Cockburn through his “adopt[ing], in turn, the personas of happy hermit, travelling troubadour, Christian ecstatic and ... social critic.” Wright (1994), in charting changes in nationalism among Canadian pop musicians in the 1960s through 1970s, locates Cockburn in the dynamic and often paradoxical relationship between musicians and Canada at this time. Rice and Gutnik (1995) seek to demonstrate that Cockburn is an artist, as opposed to an artisan, and an eclectic Canadian one at that. They categorize Cockburn’s then career, from the late 1960s until the mid-1990s, into three phases: a first of bilingualism and national identity, a second of dance music and multiculturalism, and a third of world travel and north-south relations. Wright’s and Rice and Gutnik’s nuanced analyses are useful contributions to the following biographical

overview, which situates his life and works in the context of Canadian identity, Christian belief, and conservation ethics. This last is of most interest to me, and so I also provide an ecocritical musicological analysis of Cockburn's songs in the pastoral mode.

Canadian Identity

Born on May 27th, 1945 in the Canadian capital of Ottawa and active since the late 1960s, Cockburn has come to be identified as quintessentially Canadian. After his string of successful albums in the 1970s, he was awarded in 1983 the Order of Canada, the second highest honor for Canadian civilians; in 2003 he was promoted to Officer of the Order. In 1984, one critic referred to Cockburn as "Canada's musical consciousness" (in Rice and Gutnik 1995, 249). In 2011, the Canada Post Corporation created a stamp of Cockburn to honor his lifetime of achievement: against a backdrop of ten of his song titles is a black and white image of his bespectacled visage next to the insignia of the Order of Canada. The stamp presents Cockburn as an icon of Canada.

Although he does self-identify in practice, if not always in word, as Canadian, Cockburn does not wrap himself in the maple leaf flag. Fans and critics regularly identify him as Canadian. Although a certain amount of contrast to American culture constitute his Canadian-ness, Cockburn goes beyond simple contrast to construct his national identity but does not become nationalistic. In 1971 he said:

I'm a Canadian, true, but in a sense it's more or less by default. Canada is the country I dislike the least at the moment. But I'm not really into nationalism—I prefer to think of myself as being a member of the world ... The Canadian music scene is not yet as rotten as the US scene. But it's showing signs of catching up. (Quoted in Wright 1994, 287)

Cockburn's life in the intervening four decades has substantiated that claim. He has maintained his principal residence in Canada, moving from the outskirts of Ottawa to Toronto (1980) and then to Montreal (2001)—rather than moving, say, to New York, Nashville, London, or Paris. Furthermore, Cockburn has consistently published his English lyrics with French translations (and the occasional French language song, such as "Badlands Flashback," *Dancing in the Dragon's Jaws*, 1999); he has also written songs mixing English verses and French choruses, as with "Prenons La Mer" (*Further Adventures Of*, 1978). In doing so, Cockburn espouses the official bilingualism of Canada, which has been regulated by federal law since 1969, but which would not normally apply to poetic song lyrics. He has recorded exclusively with one Canadian label since his start, Bernie Finkelstein's True North, and has remained dedicated to the label despite changes in ownership.

Cockburn has traveled the world extensively for tours and social causes, particularly through the Unitarian Service Committee (USC) of Canada. In addition to travel to promote his albums, receive accolades, and make appearances at prestigious venues (for example, Saturday Night Live, Madison Square Gardens, and so on), he has also made numerous international tours: Central America (1983), Australia and New Zealand (1983), Europe (1986), US Solo (1988), and so on. Furthermore, he has traveled extensively for humanitarian work: Nepal (1987 and 2007), Mozambique (1988 and 1995), Cambodia and Vietnam (1999), Baghdad (2004), and so on.

In the latter half of the 20th century, the idea of a Canadian nationalist artist was a contested category, particularly in the realm of rock, pop, and/or folk music and particularly in the period after the Canadian Centennial of 1967. Robert Wright (1994) has explored the nationalist dilemma English-Canadian musicians faced ca. 1968-72, particularly regarding tensions with the mainstream American pop music industry. This period saw a flourishing of accessible Canadian popular music, but it “had less to do with homage to Canadian geographical and historical landmarks than with the extent to which it had co-opted and preserved an earlier American folk-protest tradition” (Wright 1994, 284). Many, including Cockburn and Gordon Lightfoot, Neil Young, Joni Mitchell, et al., both protested against and participated in that American system.

In addition to the multicultural policies of the federal government of Canada, led by Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, one common element for Canadian musicians of this period was a rule promulgated by the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC). Starting in January of 1970, 30 percent of all programming had to be written, performed, or produced by Canadians. Also beginning in 1970 were the Juno Awards, named for CRTC president Pierre Juneau and based on Canadian content criteria. According to Wright, “Paradoxically, however, the CRTC ruling was problematic for Canadian performers. Perhaps unexpectedly, it fostered a keen and what would become an enduring awareness in the Canadian pop music industry of the limitations of nationalism.” Canadian musicians wanted to avoid appearing nationalist or sanctioned by their government, and many felt “constrained rather than liberated” (Wright 1994, 286-8).

The American folk music scene burgeoned in the 1960s and 1970s, which is just the time when Cockburn developed his style and approach to composition and performance. Between 1964 and 1966, he studied at the Berklee School of Music in Boston; he did not graduate but did receive three honors from this institution: their Songwriter’s Award (1988), Distinguished Alumni Award (1994), and an Honorary Doctorate (1997). Cockburn’s time in the United States studying and traveling influenced his musical style and ideology. The mainstream American music industry of the 1950s strove to be apolitical. By the time of the Vietnam War and the folk music movements of the 1960s and 1970s, however, music took on greater political resonance, particularly in the hands and voices of Pete Seeger and Bob Dylan, who were particularly influential for many Canadians, including Cockburn (Wright 1994). Canadians drew on American music industry, styles, and artists in a manner resembling Bloom’s (1997) “anxiety of influence”: it is neither simple copying nor complete avoidance, but rather a sophisticated style of learning that builds on and changes the model. In this case a Canadian might either succumb willingly or try to avoid completely the American model; more likely, he might want to avoid it but be helpless to do so.

Cockburn avoided mainstream American styles and the strictures of the pop market, but he nevertheless learned stylistic and political lessons from American folk music. As Cockburn explained in 1972:

I think a lot of the songs that are being written are distinctively, if not obviously, Canadian. Playing something close to American music but not of it. I think it has something to do with the space that isn’t in American music. Buffalo Springfield had it. Space may be a misleading word because it is so vague in relation to music, but maybe it

has to do with Canadians being more involved with the space around them rather than trying to fill it up as Americans do. I mean physical space and how it makes you feel about yourself. Media clutter may follow. All of it a kind of greed. The more Canadians fill up their space the more they will be like Americans. Perhaps because our urban landscapes are not yet deadly, and because they seem accidental to the whole expanse of the land. (Quoted in Wright 1994, 292)

In this statement we can see the complex relationships here: American music, or “something close to” it, is okay but Canadians should emulate Americans less. Furthermore, the urban-rural contrast is important for Cockburn’s reception as Canadian and for his conservationist ideals.

Cockburn’s year in Boston and other travels in the US led to his distrust of America. He felt uncomfortable being there, believed the politics and bellicose positions of the government to be reprehensible, and found the urban decay and violence disturbing. At the same time, however, he knew Canada did not have all the right answers; it was just different. Cockburn and other Canadian musicians who had similarly conflicting impulses did not express a simple anti-Americanism; rather, as Wright concludes, “they were able to judge life in America from the vantage point of the outsider and the insider simultaneously, blending toughness and sympathy in a way that was unique to the American music scene” (294). Canadian musicians like Cockburn combined numerous factors—a distaste for American society and a deep understanding of Canada, an engagement with policies such as the CRTC’s nationalism and Trudeau’s multiculturalism, and an appreciation of America’s musical styles and protest singers—to create the Canadian national folk style of the 1960s and 1970s.

Simultaneously despite and because of his relationship with the United States, Cockburn’s style was influenced by American folk styles of the 1970s: Appalachian music, white gospel, blues, jazz, and so on. Cockburn picked up some elements of his early acoustic guitar picking style from the American bluegrass musician David “Fox” Watson; such influence can be heard on *Bruce Cockburn* (1970) and *High Winds, White Sky* (1971). The title track of *Sunwheel Dance* (1971) is an instrumental piece that reflects Cockburn’s learning from Watson. Cockburn’s albums *Night Vision* (1973) and *Salt, Sun and Time* (1974) are infused with jazz chords, jazz instruments (for example, clarinet), and extended jazz solos. He first recorded using electric guitar, electric bass, and synthesizer in “It’s Going Down Slow” (*Sunwheel Dance*), in which his distorted blues guitar style reflects the war protest of the text (Rice and Gutnik 1995).

If there are distinctive so-called “Canadian” elements in Cockburn’s music, they might be traced to some general aspects of English folk songs or, more specifically, native Canadians themselves. Cockburn references First Nations peoples in text, as in his lament for their being imprisoned (“Gavin’s Woodpile,” *In the Falling Dark*, 1976), and in music, as with a refrain using the non-lexical vocables common to many First Nations’ songs in “Red Brother, Red Sister” (*Circles in the Stream*, 1977) (Rice and Gutnik 1995). The texts of two songs included on the 2011 Canada Post stamp also resonate with Canada. “Coldest Night of the Year” (on *Resume and Mummy Dust*, both from 1981) cites “the Scarborough horizon” and “Yonge Street,” both well-known features of Toronto. Paradoxically, “Tokyo” (*Humans*, 1980), which was written after Cockburn’s tours in Japan, also resonates with Canadianness: the lines in the verse,

“Tonight I’m flying headlong/To meet the dark red edge of dawn,” and in the chorus, “Oh Tokyo—I never can sleep in your arms,” both indicate going home, eastward to Canada.

Beyond American and Canadian styles and references, Cockburn draws on many national and international influences, including those he experienced close to home in Toronto. His father was a doctor and went to Europe after the war, but that perspective was not the only thing that influenced young Bruce. The Trudeau government (1968-79 and 1980-84) promoted a multiculturalism that impacted the cultural fabric of major urban centers. This multiculturalism is reflected in Cockburn’s music, and it is perhaps this international musical language that most identifies Cockburn as Canadian.

Cockburn included Caribbean calypso in “Burn” (*Joy Will Find a Way*, 1975) and reggae in “Wondering Where the Lions Are” (*Dancing in the Dragon’s Jaws*, 1979), “Rumours of Glory” (*Humans*, 1980), and four of the nine songs on *Stealing Fire* (1984). *Stealing Fire* includes at least two songs—both on the 2011 Canada Post stamp—that were inspired by Central American crises: “If I Had a Rocket Launcher” is stifled anger at the fate of Guatemalans along the Rio Lacantún (bordering the state of Chiapas in Mexico), while “Lovers in a Dangerous Time” is about finding beauty despite the tenuousness of life. Songs on *Stealing Fire* use various Latin American instruments and devices picked up on Cockburn’s 1983 tour. Cockburn continued the use of Latin American instruments on *World of Wonders* (1986), about which he admitted: “It’s true that the new songs have a more consciously internationalist sound, but that has less to do with those particular styles than with the fact that I come from a country with no musical tradition at all” (in Rice and Gutnik 1995, 250).

This sentiment is one Cockburn also expressed some ten years earlier, when he stated that, “With a few minor changes, I ripped off an Ethiopian thumb harp piece to make the guitar part” for the title track of *Joy Will Find a Way* (1975) (in Rice and Gutnik 1995, 248). On that same album are two pieces, “A Life Story” and “Arrows of Light,” that reference North Indian classical music. An earlier song, “Shining Mountain” (*High Winds, White Sky*, 1971), evokes a Persian *avaz* and Turkish and Balkan meters: the unmetred introduction is played on a hammered dulcimer, a cousin of the Persian *santur*, while the metrical groupings of the song shift between two and three, referencing Turkish and Balkan traditions. Middle Eastern music is also cited in “Sahara Gold” (*Stealing Fire*, 1984), and Klezmer gets a nod in “Anything Can Happen” (*Big Circumstance*, 1988) (Rice and Gutnik 1995).

In more recent works, such widespread interests continue together with Canadian references. “Each One Lost” (*Small Source of Comfort*, 2011) is about Canadian soldiers killed in the Middle East; together with appropriate solemnity there is anger in the verse: “... all these inventions/arise from fear of love/and open-hearted tolerance and trust” which is followed by “Well screw the rule of law/we want the rule of love/enough to fight and die to keep it coming.” Death and potential death (by suicide, perhaps) is explored in “Anything Can Happen” (*Big Circumstance*, 1988), in which the opening verse references the Bloor Street viaduct in Toronto. Numerous albums and live performances include guest appearances by Americans Bonnie Raitt, Ani DiFranco, and many other accomplished musicians. *Breakfast in New Orleans, Dinner in Timbuktu* (1999) references its two cities verbally and sonically: lyrics refer to Chartres Street and Kaldi’s Coffee House in “When You Give It Away,” and jazz and blues inspired “Down to

the Delta.” Various songs on *Breakfast* also use non-Western instruments: “Deep Lake” uses a dilrubā, a fretted string instrument resembling an Indian sitar but played with a bow; and “Mango,” “Let The Bad Air Out,” and “Use Me While You Can” all include a kora, a 21-stringed bridge harp of the Mande people of West Africa and, specifically, of Mali, in the center of which is the city of Timbuktu. In “Tibetan Side of Town” (*Big Circumstance*, 1988), various scenes from Kathmandu are described. On the instrumental “The End of All Rivers” (*Speechless*, 2005), Cockburn plays Tibetan bowl and Navajo flute. *You’ve Never Seen Everything* (2003) uses recordings of frogs from northern Zambia. And Cockburn goes beyond just non-Western instruments to demonstrate a broad aesthetic palate: *Life Short, Call Now* (2006) incorporates a string orchestra, and an instrumental on that album, “Nude Descending a Staircase,” begins with random radio static.

By synthesizing an entire world of sound, Cockburn was being distinctly Canadian. His multicultural musical references reflect the politics of Canada from the 1970s to the 1990s, particularly under the internationalizing Trudeau government and particularly in Toronto. Rather than settle into a comfortable career writing love songs or Christian music in a system that could guarantee airplay for a Canadian musician, Cockburn expanded his horizons for artistic and political reasons, all the while not losing site of his home and native land. Fans report a certain kind of nostalgia with Cockburn’s music. In part, this stems from his long career of making music and from many fans that have followed him for decades; but it also may relate to a broadening of cultural horizons that came with being a Canadian. While Cockburn could have rested on his domestic laurels and reputation as a nationalist artist, his broader outlook made him more a citizen of the world.

Christian Spirituality

Cockburn wears his religion on his sleeve, which may seem unusual for a musician not in the “Christian Rock” category. He is neither a fundamentalist, nor an evangelical, nor a mystic; rather, he is an open and committed Christian, one who does not easily fit into simple categories. Cockburn’s beliefs have been the subject of intense study and interpretation (Olds 2002, Regenstreif 2002, Walsh 1989, Walsh 2011), and I do not intend to expend much further energy on the matter. My goal is, rather, to situate his spirituality as one element of the complex positions he espouses and presents to audiences; moreover, as many fans attest, there are various ways to interpret and categorize the issues in his songs, and Christianity is but one. Cockburn’s spirituality mutually reinforces and is reinforced by both his global perspective as a Canadian and his conservation ethics. Together, these forces fuel Cockburn’s politically informed music.

An important question here is: what, and who, defines the “Christian Rock” category? The standard musicological source for an answer, the venerable *Grove* encyclopedia, does not provide a subject entry on that or related categories, nor does it provide an entry on Cockburn. One popular website (www.drindustrial.com) that bills itself as “the ultimate online Christian rock CD database” makes no mention of Cockburn. The leading music industry trade magazine in the USA, *Billboard*, does include two charts, “Christian albums” and “Christian songs,” which use data from Nielsen SoundScan and Nielsen BDS, respectively, to provide rankings. But Cockburn has never appeared on these charts, although he has appeared on other *Billboard* charts (see Table 1). Apple’s iTunes has one relevant category, “Christian & Gospel,” but it includes

only one song by Cockburn: “Strong Hand of Love” on the compilation album *Strong Hand of Love: A Tribute to Mark Herd* (1994), which includes 16 other artists or groups. Twenty-seven of Cockburn’s albums instead appear in the iTunes “Singer/Songwriter” category.

Table 1. Cockburn on *Billboard* Charts (from www.billboard.com, accessed 27 December 2011)

Album/ “Song”	Chart Name	Peak on Chart	Time on Chart
Small Source of Comfort (2011)	Folk Albums (2011)	7	3 weeks
Speechless (2005)	Jazz Albums (2005)	14	17 weeks
“If a Tree Falls” (1988)	Alternative Songs (1989)	20	8 weeks
“Wondering Where the Lions Are” (1979)	Hot 100 (1980)/Adult Contemporary (1980)	21/22	17 weeks/13 weeks
“A Dream Like Mine” (1990)	Alternative Songs (1991)	22	—
Stealing Fire (1984)	Billboard 200 (1985)	74	15 weeks
“If I Had a Rocket Launcher” (1983)	Hot 100 (1985)	88	3 weeks
World of Wonders (1986)	Billboard 200 (1986)	143	7 weeks
Dart to the Heart (1994)	Billboard 200 (1994)	176	2 weeks
The Charity of Night (1996)	Billboard 200 (1997)	178	1 week
Big Circumstance (1988)	Billboard 200 (1989)	182	7 weeks

Cockburn may not be presented as a “Christian musician,” yet he self-identifies and is recognized as a Christian and as a musician. This is itself the most telling aspect of his religious worldview: open and committed, yet not easily categorized. A variety of experiences led to Cockburn’s eventual realization of his faith, and both biographical context and poetic texts contribute to understanding how he presents his ideas.

To please his Presbyterian grandmother, the Cockburn family, of Scottish descent, he attended the United Church (Adria 1990, 86). But he had no moment of conversion; rather, his realization was gradual. As he explained in 2002:

I didn’t grow up in a religious household. We were exposed to the imagery of Christianity. We went to Sunday school when we were little, that sort of thing. But it was purely for social reasons and not out of a deep faith on my parents’ part. I first became aware of the need to pay attention to the spiritual aspect of life in high school when I was reading beat literature. I got introduced to Buddhism through that. It seemed to make sense to me. Later on, I flirted with a few different things. I went through a period of being interested in the occult in its various aspects and gradually evolved through all that into becoming more and more like a Christian. I became so much like a Christian that I started calling myself one. (In Regenstreif 2002, 36)

His songwriting relies on his faith as much as other experiences of his life:

I think it’s sort of the job of an artist to translate what we can understand of life into whatever form you’re working in and that includes all aspects of life: the political, the romantic, the sexual and the spiritual are all fair game for subject matter for songs. Spirituality is central to everything in existence. It’s central to my understanding of the world and therefore affects what goes into the songs a lot. (ibid.)

Cockburn’s musical education did not emphasize religion; rather, as a teenager he supplemented his formal studies in clarinet, trumpet, piano, guitar, and composition with his own studies of

jazz guitarists (Herb Ellis, Gabor Szabo), jazz pianists (Oscar Peterson), and pop and rock music (Les Paul, Buddy Holly, Richie Valens, Elvis Presley). Late in his teen years, before and amidst his semesters at Berklee, he got into folk, particularly the music and poetry of John Lennon and Bob Dylan (Adria 1990, 86-7). Moreover, blues guitarist Mississippi John Hurt was a great source of inspiration for Cockburn, and he contributed two pieces to the compilation album *Avalon Blues: A Tribute To Mississippi John Hurt* (2005).

Cockburn says that solitude is a necessary element for his creativity. Reading Beat works, such as Kerouac's *On the Road*, and traveling in Europe and the USA encouraged Cockburn's introspectiveness. The young Bruce sought out solitude as a way of coping with his sensitivity to what he termed "another side of life." Myrna Kostash, an early chronicler of Cockburn, described him in the early 1970s as "still playing the part of the wilderness poet." That desire for solitude was personal, spiritual, and musical: his reliance on an ever-changing group of "mercenaries" as bandmates fits into that trait. Cockburn prefers to not work with the same musicians too much; his four decades of albums and tours demonstrate that, but he also says that he does not want to "settle in to certain musical habits" because he needs "to be shaken up every now and then" (in Adria 1990, 85-7). After studying at Berklee and returning to Ottawa, Cockburn was involved in a number of bands, including The Esquires, The Children, and Threes a Crowd. But by 1969, he went solo full-time and played at the Mariposa Folk Festival and in popular clubs in Toronto, Ottawa, and Montreal. During this period Cockburn connected with Bernie Finklestein, who is still his manager today (Regenstreif 2002).

Cockburn expressed his ideas of being solitary in the love song "Loner" from *Inner City Front* (1981):

I'm a loner
With a loner's point of view
I'm a loner
And now I'm in love with you¹

He even switched into Spanish for part of a verse to establish a bit of distance from his otherwise mostly French-Canadian or English audiences (or, perhaps, the language shift was intended as some intimate message). In "Use Me While You Can" (1999), Cockburn reflects:

I've had breakfast in New Orleans
Dinner in Timbuktu
I've lived as a stranger in my own house, too
Dark hand waves in lamplight
Cowrie shell patterns change
And nothing will be the same again²

This verse also provides the line for the album as a whole, and it illustrates his loner status, distance, introspection, and role as a citizen of the world.

¹ Written by Bruce Cockburn. Used by permission of Rotten Kiddies Music, LLC c/o Carlin America, Inc.

² Written by Bruce Cockburn. Used by permission of Rotten Kiddies Music, LLC c/o Carlin America, Inc.

Adria interprets Cockburn's early career (up to the late 1980s) as going from first being a "happy hermit" then to a "travelling troubadour" and finally to a "Christian ecstatic." Such teleology, however, displays more about the interpretation and opinions of the author than it does about his subject. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that Cockburn changed, and in the early 1970s he began to shift from the poetic introspective images of the rural to more explicitly Christian references in his songs. Since then, he has regularly identified as a Christian.

Cockburn first publicly proclaimed his Christian belief in "All the Diamonds" (*Salt, Sun and Time*, 1974), a song he wrote in 1973 "the day after I actually took a look at myself and realized that I was a Christian" (in Regestreif 2002, 36). Adria observes (1990, 85) that the popular culture acceptance of religion was not unusual in this period and cites the success of the Broadway musicals *Godspell* (1971) and *Jesus Christ Superstar* (1969/1971). While Cockburn's confession is clear, it is subtler than these contemporaneous popular manifestations of Christian belief. Even before "All the Diamonds," the chorus of "My Lady and My Lord" (*Sunwheel Dance*, 1971) makes a veiled reference to religion: "Come on, come on, wind and rain/I know the sun will shine again/Till then my lady and my Lord will keep me sane." In "The Bicycle Trip" (*Bruce Cockburn*, 1970), he sang of "Shades of the eternal dancer/God has buttered the land with sunlight." However, the lyrics for "All the Diamonds" are more explicitly Christian:

All the diamonds in this world
That mean anything to me
Are conjured up by wind and sunlight
Sparkling on the sea
I ran aground in a harbour town
Lost the taste for being free
Thank God He sent some gull-chased ship
To carry me to sea
Two thousand years and half a world away
Dying trees still grow greener when you pray
Silver scales flash bright and fade
In reeds along the shore
Like a pearl in sea of liquid jade
His ship comes shining
Like a crystal swan in a sky of suns
His ship comes shining³

Here, as with "My Lady and My Lord," nature frames spiritual belief. The clear reference to God is complemented with the subtle imagery of fish scales. The fish connects with the biblical stories of Jesus feeding the multitude and of several of Jesus' Apostles being fishermen, both literally and figuratively. Furthermore, the fish is a Christian symbol, based on the Greek acronym for Jesus: "Ichthys" ("fish").

This subtlety is a hallmark of Cockburn's poetic style. Explicit statements are common on the album *Christmas* (1993), as would be expected with covers of carols, but his own poetry is usually more obscure. As such, Cockburn's poetry is likely to be interpreted as Christian by

³ Written by Bruce Cockburn. Used by permission of Rotten Kiddies Music, LLC c/o Carlin America, Inc.

those who want to find it, whereas those who may not express or share such faith may not be put off by it. A few examples of the many Christian references in his songs will have to suffice here.

A number of songs on *Dancing in the Dragon's Jaws* (1979) continue the mix of natural and religious imagery. Consider "Creation Dream":

Centred on silence
Counting on nothing
I saw you standing on the sea
And everything was
Dark except for
Sparks the wind struck from your hair
Sparks that turned to
Wings around you
Angel voices mixed with seabird cries
Fields of motion
Surging outward
Questions that contain their own replies⁴

On the one hand, this could be a love song. The opening track of the album, the first lines are accompanied by marimba (along with guitars and drums) and might conjure the image of a surge of love from the poet seeing his beloved, framed by some tropical ocean, hair touched by the breeze, with angelic seabirds nearby. The second verse becomes more ecstatic with references to dancing, shooting stars, power, mercury waves, and "Shots of silver in the shell-pink dawn." But the title, together with various comments Cockburn made at concerts, point also to potential Christian interpretations.

Also on *Dancing*, "Northern Lights" has more explicit references, but the set-up in the song shies away from being preachy and thus allows for other interpretations. Three statements of "Sunday night and it's half past nine" are followed by "I'm leaving one more town behind"; the pattern repeats with the three-fold statements of subsequent verses, describing what seems to be a nighttime drive during which the "Stars are pinned on a shimmering curtain of light." But then: "I've been cut by the beauty of jagged mountains/And cut by the love that flows like a fountain from God." The nature imagery and reference to a relatively common experience (the grandeur of a night sky) soften the explicit Christian reference to "God" late in the song (preceded elsewhere with "heaven"), but the poignancy of belief still comes through.

"Wondering Where the Lions Are" (also from *Dancing*) is another song from the 2011 stamp. It mixes nature, ethics, and the spiritual:

Walls windows trees, waves coming through
You be in me and I'll be in you
Together in eternity
Some kind of ecstasy got a hold on me
...

⁴ Ibid.

Young men marching, helmets shining in the sun,
Polished as precise like the brain behind the gun
(Should be!) they got me thinking about eternity
Some kind of ecstasy got a hold on me⁵

Cockburn reports that the song, which went on to be featured on an episode of the television program *ER* in 1999, was inspired by a conversation that he had with a relative who worked for the government and feared an impending Sino-Russian nuclear war (Ladouceur 2003). The liner notes to the album also indicate the importance of British novelist Charles Williams, perhaps his *The Place of the Lion*, which deals with spiritual strength.

Big Circumstance (1988) includes at least three songs with Christian references, one of which caused a bit of a stir. In “Shipwrecked at the Stable Door,” Cockburn says the album title twice, which functions as a sort of fate (or deity) amidst vague references to the crèche (nativity scene). The fourth and final verse of “Shipwrecked” contains clear references to the Sermon on the Mount from the Gospel of Matthew:

Blessed are the poor in spirit
Blessed are the meek
For theirs shall be the kingdom
That the power mongers seek
Blessed are the dead for love
And those who cry for peace
And those who love the gift of earth
May their gene pool increase⁶

In the liner notes to the album, Cockburn acknowledged Brennan Manning’s book *Lion & Lamb: The Relentless Tenderness of Jesus*, which includes a chapter “The Shipwrecked at the Stable.” In “Where the Death Squad Lives,” Cockburn ends with a positive outlook—“This world can be better than it is today/You can say I’m a dreamer but that’s okay”—but the previous five verses are bleaker. The song begins:

Goons in blackface creeping in the road
Farm family waiting for the night to explode
Working the land in an age of terror
You come to see the moon as the bad news bearer
Down where the death squad lives⁷

He acknowledges that “It’ll never be a perfect world till God declares it that way/But that don’t mean there’s nothing we can do or say.” Other Christian references in the song include a mention of a “never-ending Easter passion” and a reassurance that “Bombs aren’t the only things that fall from above.”

⁵ Written by Bruce Cockburn. Used by permission of Rotten Kiddies Music, LLC c/o Carlin America, Inc.

⁶ Written by Bruce Cockburn. Used by permission of Rotten Kiddies Music, LLC c/o Carlin America, Inc.

⁷ Ibid.

A third song from *Big Circumstance*, “Gospel of Bondage,” caused a bit of a stir due to its explicit critique of the so-called “Religious Right”:

We’re so afraid of disorder we make it into a god
We can only placate with state security laws
Whose church consists of secret courts and wiretaps and shocks
Whose priests hold smoking guns, and whose sign is the double cross
But God must be on the side of the side that’s right
And not the right that justifies itself in terms of might
Least of all a bunch of neo-Nazis running hooded through the night
Which may be why He’s so conspicuously out of sight
Of the gospel of bondage ...⁸

Cockburn told his audiences that this song was his “way of saying ‘fuck you’ to them,” that is, Pat Robertson (the “grinning skull”) and his ilk (“scum-bags”) (in Richardson 1988). He may be a Christian, but Cockburn is particular about the kind of Christians with whom he is associated. He also recognizes multiple Christian perspectives—perhaps on a spectrum from progressive (him) to fundamentalist (them).

On *Breakfast in New Orleans, Dinner in Timbuktu* (1999), a number of songs continued Cockburn’s typical less confrontational, more subtle, but no less sincere religious infusions. In “When You Give It Away,” Cockburn’s lyrics allow for sacred and secular interpretations simultaneously:

Deep in the city of the saints and fools
Pearls before pigs and dung become jewels
I sit down with tigers, I sit down with lambs
None of them know who exactly I am⁹

Here the loner is talking about New Orleans and alters the biblical verse from the Sermon on the Mount (Gospel of Matthew) that is usually translated as “pearls before swine.” Yet for those unfamiliar with the Bible, the verse might also reference the comic strip by Stephan Pastis called *Pearls Before Swine*, or even the quip by American poet and writer Dorothy Parker: after being told “age before beauty” when a door was held open for her, she replied “pearls before swine” and walked through. Another song on *Breakfast*, “Look How Far,” is ostensibly about an encounter with Ani DiFranco, but many of its words and phrases— “Glasses of wine on a crate between us/Catch the light—seem to glow from within,” “Like you’re lit up from within,” “And this is simple/And this is grace,” and the refrain in the chorus “Look how far the light came”— could be interpreted in a generically religious way. The song “Embers of Eden” also mixes the title’s explicit Christian references with a love song (“Your lips were hot and my shocked heart screamed”) together with a view of planet earth from space:

And the embers of Eden burn

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Written by Bruce Cockburn. Used by permission of Rotten Kiddies Music, LLC c/o Carlin America, Inc.

You can even see it from space
And the great and winding wall between us
Seem to copy the lines of your face¹⁰

That refrain, sung twice, hints at those well-known sights visible from so far away: the Great Wall of China and burning forests.

Written after a trip to Iraq, *Life Short, Call Now* (2006) includes songs, such as “This is Bagdad” and “Mystery.” In the latter, Cockburn exhorts his listener to “Grab that last bottle full of gasoline”; such a line might resonate more with the theme of the war in the Middle East, but the only repeated verse includes “You can’t tell me there is no mystery” and “And don’t tell me there is no mystery/ It overflows my cup.” Together with references to a “Shaman” and “Star-strewn space,” he again opens up the text for interpretations from multiple perspectives. Another song continues this trend: “To Fit in My Heart” mentions “Wave forms” and observes that “Seas come, seas go/Where they stood deserts flow” in the first two verses, while the third verse reads “Spacetime strings bend/World without end/God’s too big to fit in a book.” The refrain for all three verses is “Nothing’s too big to fit in my heart.” Here the biblical reference is from “Saecula saeculorum” (“Age of ages” or “World without end”), the ending words of many Christian doxologies; amidst the nature imagery, Cockburn also references secular science and love, and the idea of love could be either sacred or secular.

Of Cockburn’s over 300 songs and more than 30 albums, the selections here are but a small and selective sampling. One could have, perhaps, chosen other songs to represent the more devout or more secular sides of Cockburn, but I find that his ability to appeal to both sides in explicit and subtle ways is part of the successful messaging in his music.

Despite the clear Christian elements of his poetry and in his life, Cockburn’s spirituality has continually evolved and drawn on non-Christian religious practices. In his late teens and early 20s, Cockburn explored Buddhism and the occult, and he has read widely in fiction and non-fiction Christian writings by modern writers. But he has also returned to Buddhism and Sufism. Cockburn summarizes his openness and respect for multiple perspectives:

In the end, I think it comes down to language, culture and modes of thinking. We’re all heading for the same place and we’re all after the same thing. We have, for many different reasons, different ways of expressing or getting at it, but the crux of the matter is do we, or do we not, have a relationship with the divine. If we do have one, what is it? It’s the attempt to try and understand what it is that is the journey. (In Regenstreif 2002, 37)

And journeys have been a significant part of Bruce’s experiences to understand the world and spirituality and to express himself as an artist. In addition to his worldwide touring, he has traveled extensively for humanitarian purposes to be a witness and voice of conscience. In 1983, he visited Central America for the international relief agency Oxfam; the experiences of refugees that he conveyed in his songs on *Stealing Fire* (1984), especially “If I Had a Rocket Launcher,” were so powerful that it shocked those who thought he was a gentle Christian troubadour

¹⁰ Ibid.

(Regenstreif 2002, 37). He has also worked with the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, which organization was a co-laureate of the 1997 Nobel Peace Prize. The song “Mines of Mozambique” (*The Charity of Night*, 1996) reflects his involvement with that organization and a trip he made to that country in 1995. The second verse illustrates the problem as understood through his compassionate lens:

There’s a wealth of amputation
Waiting in the ground
But no one can remember
Where they put it down
If you’re the child that finds it there
You will rise upon the sound
Of the mines of Mozambique¹¹

One further example, included on the 2011 stamp, is the title track from *Waiting for a Miracle* (1987). The strained voice seems to express the impatience of searching for peace, for shelter from the “hot sun”:

Somewhere out there is a place that’s cool
Where peace and balance are the rule
Working toward a future like some kind of mystic jewel
And waiting for a miracle¹²

Cockburn wrote this song after his second trip to Nicaragua—as if he knew they too were waiting for a stop to the bloodshed.

One of Cockburn’s long-standing affiliations has been with the international development and aid agency the Unitarian Service Committee (USC) of Canada; that involvement reflects both his commitment to a religious organization and his ethical desire to help. He says that, “their overhead was low and that the money you gave actually went where it was supposed to go, and so I donated money, and I kept on doing it” (in Young 2007, 40). He traveled to Nepal twice with the USC, in 1987 and 2007; he worked with them on the landmine issue; and they collaborated on a film regarding desertification in Mali. His open and committed Christianity connects to his global perspective as a Canadian and his ethics of conservation.

Conservationist Ideals

In addition to publicly proclaiming his spirituality to the public, Cockburn’s “All the Diamonds” also indicated his conservationist ethics when he sang, “Two thousand years and half a world away/Dying trees still grow greener when you pray.” These two lines encapsulate the fundamentally optimistic perspective that Cockburn brings to his music, message, and activism. They also touch on each of the three elements on which I have focused. First, Cockburn’s global Canadian perspective is indicated by his orienting himself “half a world away”; I interpret this as his being in Canada yet referring to Jerusalem (or perhaps the Holy Land in general of the

¹¹ Written by Bruce Cockburn. Used by permission of Rotten Kiddies Music, LLC c/o Carlin America, Inc.

¹² Ibid.

eastern Mediterranean). Second, his spirituality comes through clearly with the exhortation to “pray.” And third, Cockburn’s environmentalism is expressed in his lament for “Dying trees” and hope for them to “grow greener.”

In 2010, Cockburn received Earth Day Canada’s Outstanding Commitment to the Environment Award. This recognition acknowledges his decades of working for and singing about the natural world. Since the 1980s he has participated in and donated time and money to environmental causes, such as the Haida Nation’s land claims, as referenced in the song “Stolen Land” (*Waiting for a Miracle*, 1987), and the anti-logging fights in the Stein River Valley, both in British Columbia. In the mid-1990s, he was honorary chairperson of Friends of the Earth Canada. In his album *Dart to the Heart* (1994), he includes the following appeal in the liner notes:

The ozone layer is being depleted. UV-B radiation is on the increase. The threat to our food supply, to animals, to our health, becomes more ominous by the minute. If this scares you as much as it does me, you might consider contacting: Friends of the Earth, we are an international organization working hard on ozone protection, as well as other environmental issues.

In his 1997 acceptance speech for the honorary doctorate Berklee College of Music awarded him, Cockburn cited a litany of issues that he wanted the students to address: “Land mines, the quality of life for inner city folks, loss of the ozone layer, the treatment of migrant workers, the depletion of the earth’s resources, social atrocities like the School of the Americas—it’s an endless list. Endless but not overwhelming. Just pick one you relate to and kick ass.”

In a 1999 collaboration with the USC, Cockburn was the subject of the hourlong television documentary *River of Sand*, which chronicled desertification in Mali and featured him interacting with local musicians. Some musical upshots from the event were included in the album *Breakfast in New Orleans, Dinner in Timbuktu* (1999). More recently, he has signed on to public protests against oil pipelines in Canada, and in 2005 at the United Nations Summit for Climate Control in Montreal he performed his anthem “If a Tree Falls” (*Big Circumstance*, 1988).

That song was featured on the David Suzuki sponsored album, *Playlist for the Planet* (2011), which was a celebration of the Canadian environmentalist and educator’s 75th birthday, a fundraiser for his foundation, and an attempt to develop environmental anthems. Over 600 musicians and ensembles submitted songs on which the public voted. The final “Playlist” represented 12 winners. The album on iTunes included 18 bonus tracks, the first of which was Cockburn’s. Suzuki and Cockburn worked together a number of times in the past decade, including fundraiser events for the USC; Suzuki even participated (with Gordon Lightfoot) in Cockburn’s 2001 induction into the Canadian Music Hall of Fame.

While Cockburn is certainly known for his celebrity involvement in conservationist causes, his environmentally themed music has reached an even larger audience. His most popular environmental song is “If a Tree Falls,” one of the dozen or so titles that Cockburn made into music videos. The video, which begins with a “whole earth” shot of the planet and zooms in to

the upper Amazon, presents scenes of the pristine forest and native peoples contrasted with logging and deforestation while Cockburn renders the verses in spoken word:

Rain forest
Mist and mystery
Teeming green
Green brain facing lobotomy
Climate control centre for the world
Ancient cord of coexistence
Hacked by parasitic greedhead scam
From Sarawak to Amazonas
Costa Rica to mangy B.C. hills
Cortege rhythm of falling timber.
What kind of currency grows in these new deserts,
These brand new flood plains?¹³

Cockburn invokes his internationalist perspective (Sarawak in Malaysia, Amazonas in South America, Costa Rica in Central America, and the “mangy B.C. hills” in Canada), spiritual side (“mist and mystery”), and conservationist ethic and desire to protest against the “parasitic greedhead scam” of corporations. He even adds a touch of punning on the musical “chord” and the wood measurement “cord.” But then the philosopher comes through when he sings the chorus, at which point in the video he is finally visible, in stark contrast to the proceeding images, with his electric guitar and in black leather:

If a tree falls in the forest does anybody hear?
Anybody hear the forest fall?¹⁴

Returning to spoken word, he injects just a little appropriate pedanticness, reinforced with associated images in the video, for the next verse:

Cut and move on, Cut and move on
Take out trees
Take out wildlife at a rate of species every single day
Take out people who’ve lived with this for 100,000 years
Inject a billion burgers worth of beef
Grain eaters—methane dispensers.¹⁵

Without an intermediate chorus, the final verse jumps to emphasize the poetic message that music can convey so well:

Through thinning ozone,
Waves fall on wrinkled earth
Gravity, light, ancient refuse of stars,

¹³ Written by Bruce Cockburn. Used by permission of Rotten Kiddies Music, LLC c/o Carlin America, Inc.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

Speak of a drowning
But this, this is something other.
Busy monster eats dark holes in the spirit world
Where wild things have to go
To disappear
Forever¹⁶

A final repetition of the chorus sends the message home. In this song, Cockburn mixes seamlessly the many aspects of his poetic career: the nature images flow between and among spiritual reverence for the mysteries of the word and real world problems. “If a Tree Falls” did not spring *ex nihilo*; it is a logical culmination of Cockburn’s Canadian perspective on nature, his spirituality, and his desire to leave the world a better place.

Nor is “If a Tree Falls” an isolated venture. He used the contrast of spoken and sung in other songs (for example “Look How Far,” “Use Me While You Can,” “When You Give It Away”), and many other songs express his environmentalist perspective. “The Embers of Eden” make reference to burning rainforests. “Down where the Death Squad Lives” compared deforestation to senseless killing of people. Cockburn associated the instrumental “The End of All Rivers” with the sea, but at a 2006 concert wondered “is a river still a river if there is nothing to swim in it?” Cockburn wrote “Radium Rain” (*Big Circumstance*, 1988) after his visit to Germany just after the Chernobyl disaster; in the song, the refrain laments “Ain’t it a shame/Ain’t it a shame/About the radium rain,” while the second verse warn us: “don’t eat anything that grows and don’t breathe when the cars go by.” The anger comes out in the third verse, with “I walk stiff, with teeth clenched tight, filled with nostalgia for a clean wind’s kiss,” while the final verse concludes:

A flock of birds writes something on the sky in a language I can’t understand
God’s graffiti—but it don’t say why so much evil seems to land on man
When everyone I meet just wants to live and love, and get along as best they can
Ain’t it a shame¹⁷

And in “Gavin’s Woodpile” (*In the Falling Dark*, 1976), Cockburn muses while splitting firewood; the third verse references a local Ontario environmental issue:

I remember crackling embers
Coloured windows shining through the rain
Like the coloured slicks on the English River
Death in the marrow and death in the liver
And some government gambler with his mouth full of steak
Saying, “If you can’t eat the fish, fish in some other lake.
To watch a people die—it is no new thing.”¹⁸

¹⁶ Written by Bruce Cockburn. Used by permission of Rotten Kiddies Music, LLC c/o Carlin America, Inc.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Written by Bruce Cockburn. Used by permission of Rotten Kiddies Music, LLC c/o Carlin America, Inc.

The liner notes report that the Reid Paper Company polluted the English River. The song concludes with optimism: “The earth is bread, the sun is wine/It’s a sign of a hope that’s ours for all time.”

The *Playlist for the Planet* project was preceded by another socially and environmentally oriented project, the compilation album *Honor: Benefit for the Honor Earth Campaign* (1996). Cockburn’s contribution was “Wise Users,” a critique of the anti-government “wise use movement,” which is less an organized movement and more an anti-environmentalist position advocating stewardship of nature purely for human benefits. The five verses are separated with the repeated chorus:

Use it wisely ... go on
Reap your harvest, Wise Users
‘Til everything is gone¹⁹

Cockburn’s anger is evident in the verses that might evoke the same kind of surprise as “If I Had a Rocket Launcher.” He begins “Wise Users” by calling out his opposition:

Hear me you business blackmailers
When I see what you’ve done to the wild
I feel like a man standing over
The corpse of his murdered child²⁰

The environmentalist concerns come out in the second verse:

Haul the last fish from the ocean
Poison the beds where they spawn
Drag the last tiger to market
So some prick can stand tall in Taiwan²¹

The third and fourth verses express his anger, “I’d take your wallet and spit right in your eye,” and even go so far as to suggest the wise users commit suicide: “If I gave you a gun with one bullet.” Unusual for Cockburn, the optimist does not win out; rather, resolute anger continues in the final verse:

And yes, I believe there is beauty
And yes, I believe in truth
And in the seemingly infinite hunger
Of humans for destroying them both²²

In addition to Cockburn’s conservationist perspective—his desire to point out environmental problems and the need to address them—he also is a keen observer of nature. Many of his early

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Written by Bruce Cockburn. Used by permission of Rotten Kiddies Music, LLC c/o Carlin America, Inc.

songs render this perspective; the text of “When the Sun Falls” (*Sunwheel Dance*, 1971) is a particularly concentrated example:

When the sun falls
The bird of paradise
Spreads his wings wide
When the rain shines
The earth sighs gratitude
And spreads her hues bright
You come to me
Bringing the sun and rain
Bringing my song²³

And it is Cockburn’s interest in nature—in documenting it, poetically conveying emotions about it, and exhorting engagement with the problems that both it and humans face—that brings us to a broader examination of his work as a pastoral poet and musician.

Ecomusicology is the study of the dynamic relationships between music, culture, and nature; it often draws on the field of literary ecocriticism, which considers the human-environment relations imagined and portrayed in cultural products such as literature and poetry (Allen 2013). Ecocritics have been particularly interested in environmental ideologies, such as the pastoral, a perspective common in environmentally themed literature and music (Ingram 2010, Allen 2011). Cockburn’s pastoral texts are thus ripe for ecomusicological analysis. What kind of pastoral worlds do Cockburn’s songs imagine? Do they tell us about his conceptions of nature? And do such perspectives help us understand how he may have changed or imagined changing the world?

Lawrence Buell defines the “[t]raditional pastoral, dating from the poetry of Theocritus, [as] a stylized representation of rusticity in contrast to and often in satire of urbanism, focusing in the first instance on the life of shepherds” (Buell 2005, 144). Cockburn’s music, life, and reputation fit into this idea of the pastoral. His song texts and musical materials often provide urban-rural contrasts. Cockburn initially fled from the city to the country, but later moved from his rural home to urban environs; once in the city (Toronto, Montreal), he continued to visit the country—in person and via his songs. Considering not only his personal and musical confessions of faith, students of Cockburn can find a place for understanding their bard in a different pastoral sense: Theocritus’ Greek sheep herder in pastoral poetry becomes instead God’s messenger in the Bible. The metaphor of the shepherd, or “pastor,” tending his flock, or congregation, can be extended to the singer-songwriter offering spiritually uplifting messages for his audiences—be those messages about multiculturalism, spirituality, or the environment.

Such reflection on worldly and spiritual life relates to another aspect of the pastoral that Buell identifies: the genre of the pastoral “may direct us toward the realm of physical nature, or it may abstract us from it” (Buell 1995, 31). As with many musical experiences, there is contradiction in

²³ Ibid.

Cockburn's pastoral music: it is usually experienced in large social situations (concerts) or via technological mediation (stereos) often indoors.

The tradition of the pastoral is millennia long, and there are various archetypes of Arcadian pastoral (for example those presented by Gifford 1999). Buell and Leo Marx, however, have elaborated on four types of pastoral relevant for understanding Cockburn. First, pastoral nationalism is a way of understanding the hinterlands of one's own country, in contrast (or even similar) to how European colonial lands were understood in pastoral terms (Buell 2005, 144). Second, pastoral outrage relates to concerns of landscape degradation in the context of environmental justice advocacy (Buell 2005, 15). The third and fourth types of pastoral relevant for considering Cockburn come from an often cited (and critiqued) theory of the pastoral: Leo Marx's *Machine in the Garden* (Marx 1964), which David Ingram's *Jukebox in the Garden* (Ingram 2010) expanded with regard to music. Marx outlined two types of pastoral: the simple or "popular and sentimental" pastoral, and the "imaginative and complex" pastoral (ibid., 5). The simple pastoral reflects feeling: "the felicity represented by an image of a natural landscape, a terrain either unspoiled or, if cultivated, rural" (ibid., 9); and/or a movement "away from the city and toward the country" (ibid., 10). That simple pastoral is essentially the "garden" of Marx's title; the complex pastoral, however, introduces the machine into that space: "What begins as a conventional tribute to the pleasures of withdrawal from the world—a simple pleasure fantasy—is transformed by the interruption of the machine into a far more complex state of mind" (ibid., 15). The complex pastoral presents "the illusion of peace and harmony in a green pasture" (ibid., 24). Although Ingram does not make his critique of Marx explicit, the former's *Jukebox in the Garden* is a corrective to Marx's notion that the simple and complex pastoral were indicated by low and high culture, respectively (Ingram 2010, 11-12ff, 54ff). Ingram's work shows that popular music can express the complex pastoral, and Cockburn's music illustrates that point well.

The four categories of the pastoral—simple, national, outrage, and complex—find resonance in Cockburn's works. Simple pastorals are most evident in the nature imagery of songs like "When the Sun Falls," but they crop up in small moments of other songs as a fleeting image, as in "All the Diamonds." The national pastorals are his homage to the Canadian landscapes and other locales (New Orleans, Timbuktu, Tokyo) on albums such as *Breakfast* and songs such as "Gavin's Woodpile" and "Red Brother, Red Sister." Pastoral outrage finds a place in "If a Tree Falls," "Wise Users," and "Radium Rain." The complex pastoral describes Cockburn's work and career as a whole: beautiful, spiritual music, tinged with anger and outrage at the injustices of the world.

Cockburn's Complexity

Cockburn's passions go beyond conservation, he believes in more than just Christianity, and he is more than a Canadian artist. His words and deeds plead for love and human rights and against militarism and corporate greed around the world. Neither spiritual nor environmental music are new, but Cockburn brings his global audiences a complexity of positions that goes beyond simplistic pop-music messaging.

Cockburn's music itself—sounds, texts, performances—is sometimes complex. The *New York Times* has hailed his “quiet virtuosity” on the acoustic guitar, and guitar aficionados regularly extol his talents. One fan I interviewed said, “It was as a guitarist first and humanist second” that he was drawn to Cockburn; his unique approach to the guitar was greater than his influence as “a citizen,” particularly in the “use of my right thumb,” which is treated “as a separate instrument” in order to “cultivate its independence from the rest of the hand.” This kind of complex virtuosity—as a composer, poet, and performer—goes against the grain of typical pop folk music, just as his complex positions are not easy to simplify or fit into neat categories such as “Canadian,” “Christian,” or “environmentalist,” or in genres such as “folk,” “rock,” or “political.”

Can such complexity lead to change, particularly regarding pressing environmental issues, or is it just a form of (post)modern art? Regenstreif (2002, 38) observed that, “As a listener, I’ve often found that political songs, by Bruce and by others, have sparked an interest in an issue or helped to clarify my feelings.” He asked Cockburn about making a difference through writing and performing, and Cockburn replied:

I don’t know how much I’ve been able to contribute in terms of ideas for improving things, but it’s certainly easy enough to react strongly to the things that are around us and it’s that kind of strong emotional reaction that tends to produce songs for me. For me, it takes some kind of personal contact with an issue for a song to be born and the song is really just how I feel about it. I hope in exposing that to people, and in sharing my feelings with people, that they might be inspired to look around and see and wonder if that’s right. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn’t, but the original motive for writing those songs is exactly the same as writing a love song or a song about spiritual things or anything else. It’s just what’s happening.

Cockburn’s witnessing and telling stories indeed impacts his listeners. In my conversations with fans, all agreed that, while he may have been an “incidental activist” (according to one) or communicating with people who “shared similar beliefs anyway” (according to another), Cockburn was someone who increased awareness of emotional, identity, political, environmental, and humanitarian issues. While such awareness-raising may not be the same as changing behaviors, it is an important precursor. Cockburn does not preach about the problems and insist we do something, but nor does he ignore entirely the issues that concern him. Rather, through his complex positions—his personal identity, the problems to which he has dedicated himself, and his poetry and music—he affects and opens us to believe in a better world, to raise our voices individually and collectively, and to ask for change.²⁴

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²⁴ My thanks to Gavin Douglas, Bernie Finkelstein, Daniel Keebler, David Newton, Mark Pedelty, Jennifer C. Post, Kailan Rubinoff, Arminda Trevino, and Kristine Weglarz.

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