

**This interview with  
BARBRA STREISAND  
was conducted by the Library of Congress  
on April 11, 2019**



*Barbra Streisand*

**Library of Congress: “People” was your fourth album. When you went into the studio to record it, did you approach it differently than your previous collections? Did you want to bring something to these sessions that you hadn’t done before?**

Barbra Streisand: It was different in one significant way. The songs on my first three albums basically came from the material I’d been performing live in clubs and concerts. For the “People” album, the only song I knew was “People” which I’d been singing every night on Broadway. For the rest of the album, I was back to square one, looking for new material like I did when I was 18 years old. I loved discovering hidden gems from overlooked musicals. “Don’t Like Goodbyes” came from Harold Arlen and Truman Capote’s “House of Flowers.” The show got mixed reviews and didn’t run very long, but I loved the score. (I also found “I Never Has Seen Snow” from that show, as well as my favorite, “A Sleepin’ Bee”). “How Does the Wine Taste” came from a musical that closed in Philadelphia called “We Take the Town,” and Irving Berlin’s “Supper Time” came from one of his lesser-known musicals, “As Thousands Cheer.”

In those days we worked fast! It was typical for artists to record two albums per year. I’d listen to the playbacks and pick the best takes. If there were mistakes, or if the tempo felt too fast or slow...too bad...you were basically out of time, because there was always someone watching the clock!

The songs on “People” were recorded in about four days... we did three or four songs in a three-hour session...so that’s 12 hours to make an album! With all the technology today, my last album called “Walls” took almost 12 months!

Thank God I was only 22 years old and had boundless energy, because I had two jobs--my “day job” was rehearsing and recording the album, and my “night job” was playing Fanny Brice on Broadway.

**LOC: The album was produced by Robert Mersey. What sort of working relationship did you have with him? What did he bring to the album?**

BS: Not to minimize the importance of the record producer in those days but, at least in my case, they were usually assigned by the label to organize the sessions, book the studio, and make sure no one went over budget! I don't recall a lot of creative involvement from Bob. I found the songs, and then I worked with Peter Matz and Ray Ellis to come up with interesting arrangements. Columbia had great recording studios and wonderful engineers like Fred Plaut and Frank Laico. The engineers captured the sound, the arrangers conducted the orchestra, and I sang...so there wasn't a lot of "production" like there is today.

**LOC: As difficult as it might be, among the cuts on the "People" album, do you have any particular favorites?**

BS: Well, I loved "Absent Minded Me" which Jule Styne and Bob Merrill wrote for me. It's a sublime melody and the lyrical perspective is unique. "Will He Like Me" was from the Harnick/Bock musical "She Loves Me," and Rodgers & Hammerstein's "My Lord and Master" was in the first act of "The King and I," which was a show I loved. I was just recording songs I could relate to as an actress, with lyrics and melodies that resonated within me.

**LOC: The "People" album went to #1. Did you expect that sort of success?**

BS: I didn't have any idea if it would be a hit or not. Looking back, it was an interesting time in music, especially for traditional singers, because rock 'n' roll and Beatlemania was in full swing. Still, there were many hit songs coming from Broadway musicals.

In fact, my A&R man, Jay Landers, just told me that my "People" album replaced the Beatles "A Hard Day's Night" soundtrack as the #1 album in the country. Even though I was the same chronological age as the Beatles, somehow, I gravitated towards music from an earlier era. Jay also told me the Beatles won their first Grammy for Best New Artist the same year I won the Best Female Vocal Performance for the "People" album...and "Funny Girl" won for Best Broadway Cast Album.

I should mention, the version of "People" on the "Funny Girl" album is quite different from the "People" album version. The Broadway cast recording is how I sang it in the show, with a lovely introductory verse and big horn fanfare at the end. The "People" album version, which became a single, has a softer, more reflective ending.

My long-time manager, Marty Erlichman, reminded me that the "Funny Girl" album was released on Capitol Records, because they'd helped finance the show. But Marty made sure I had the right to record "People" again on my Columbia solo album.

**LOC: In the subsequent years, since you first recorded "People," do you sing it--approach it--differently now than you did back in 1964?**

BS: In 1964, when I sang "People" on the stage, it was a love song for a character who didn't have a partner in her life. The meaning changed as I got older and it took on a broader point of view. But the essence of song's underlying message remains the same. Even though the external world--fashion, politics, the atmosphere--is always changing, people don't really change that much internally. We all basically want the same things in life--love, family, community, the desire to connect ...we all need each other. In other words, we're all "people who *need* people."

**LOC: The cover image of the album is now iconic. Was this photo taken specifically for the album's cover or was it selected more "after the fact"?**

BS: First of all, I don't love having my picture taken. The "People" cover actually came from a photo shoot I'd done for a magazine article in 1963, a year before the album came out. I'd been in Chicago performing at a nightclub called Mr. Kelly's. The photographer and I went to a beach, and he took a series of pictures. I asked him if he could take one from the back, while I was looking out at the sea and the beautiful sunrise...taking in the wonder of nature! He caught an honest moment, which is what I always strive for in my work.

When it came time to talk about the cover, the label wanted a good shot of my face. That was the typical way they packaged albums back then. But I thought that was sort of an uninteresting approach, and, frankly, I was too lazy to do another photo shoot! That's when I remembered the photo from Chicago with my back to the camera...and it struck me as the perfect cover! It had a certain mystery and an understated way of capturing the mood. Some of the executives at the label vehemently disagreed with me. And that's when the "creative control" clause in my contract came in so handy, because I was able to get the cover I wanted! I must admit it was a sweet victory when Columbia's art department won the Grammy for Best Album Cover!