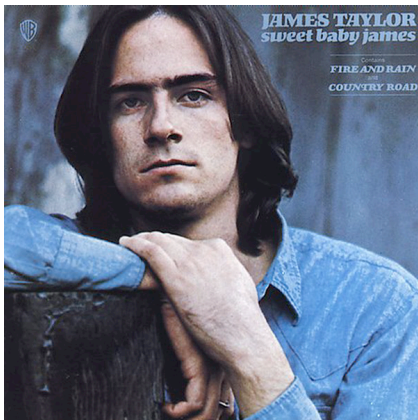




TDT'S COLLEGE OF USELESS KNOWLEDGE

CK/JT 301 Carole King & James Taylor, Superstardom

In November of 1969, Taylor had fully recovered from his motorcycle wreck & was booked for a second multi-night gig at the Troubadour. This time he brought with him a friend that was virtually unknown on the west coast, Carole King. Taylor & King had been friends from the New York days but her string of false starts as a singer made her uneasy to perform publicly. Taylor's long time friend & guitarist, Danny Kortchmar, had also known Carole in New York & played guitar on many of her Brill Building songwriting demos & her previously unsuccessful single releases. With both Kortchmar's & Taylor's urging, she reluctantly agreed to try to overcome her paralyzing stage fright & make a cameo appearance at one of JT's Troubadour shows. Carole sang "Up On The Roof", "You've Got A Friend" & other of her own compositions & dueted with James on a few of his songs. This was King's first live solo performance ever & she wowed the crowd with her songs & her voice.



Certain that his future success was to be realized on the west coast, Taylor moved to California, retaining Asher as his manager. In December 1969, he recorded his second solo album, *Sweet Baby James*, with the guidance & backup vocals of King. The album was released in February 1970 & became Taylor's critical & popular breakthrough. Anchored by the single "Fire & Rain", a song about Taylor's painful, recurring experiences in psychiatric institutions & the suicide of his close friend, Suzanne Schnerr. Suzanne had died during the early stages of recording JT's debut album at The Beatles' Apple Studios in London. His bandmates & friends kept the news from him for several months, fearing for his fragile emotional state & to not let anything distract from the completion of his album.

*Just yesterday morning they let me know you were gone
Suzanne, the plans they made put an end to you
I walked out this morning and I wrote down this song
I just can't remember who to send it to
I've seen fire and I've seen rain
I've seen sunny days that I thought would never end*

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*I've seen lonely times when I could not find a friend
But I always thought that I'd see you again*

*Well, there's hours of time on the telephone line
To talk about things to come
Sweet dreams and flying machines in pieces on the ground*

An urban myth has grown up around this song that claims Suzanne was his fiancée, who'd been carrying on a long distance phone relationship with James. While she was flying to surprise James & celebrate the completion of his first album her plane crashed, killing everyone on board. In truth, the flying machine in pieces on the ground was James' former band, The Flying Machine, that had figuratively crashed & burned in the Bahamas.

Another popular misconception is that James Taylor himself is the *Sweet Baby James* of the album name & title song. James actually composed the song for his nephew while driving from his home outside Boston to North Carolina to meet his brother Alex's new born son, who they named for JT & nicknamed sweet baby James. The illusions of cowboys, dogies & life on the open range, being the prototypical tale for a little boy, which we all know are made of snips & snails & puppy dog tails.

*There is a young cowboy he lives on the range
His horse and his cattle are his only companions
He works in the saddle and he sleeps in the canyons
Waiting for summer, his pastures to change*

*Now the first of December was covered with snow
And so was the turnpike from Stockbridge to Boston
Lord, the Berkshires seemed dream-like on account of that frosting
With ten miles behind me and ten thousand more to go*

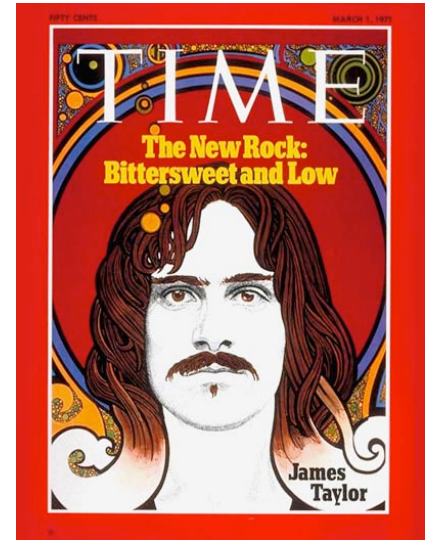
*Goodnight you moonlight ladies
Rockabye sweet baby James*

The album was not an instant hit but after several months of airplay on the new medium of FM radio & word of mouth in a pre-internet, pre-iTunes world, it began to build momentum. The release of "Fire & Rain" as a single in late summer of 1970 got the album noticed on a nationwide basis & it leapt to the top of the charts. Just a couple of months after the Kent State shootings & weary from a decade of riots, protests & never ending war in southeast Asia, "Fire & Rain", & the rest of *Sweet Baby James*, caught the country at a musical, political

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& cultural crossroads, longing for a return to simpler, less chaotic times. Both the album & single reached #3 in the Billboard charts with *Sweet Baby James* selling more than 3 million copies in the US alone. This success drove a groundswell of interest in Taylor, prompting a 1971 Time Magazine cover story on Taylor & his recycled single & now a hit, "Carolina in My Mind".



Sweet Baby James was received as a folk-rock masterpiece, an album that finally showcased Taylor's talent to the mainstream public. It marked the direction he would take in following years & made Taylor the leading voice of the developing singer/songwriter movement & the first rock star of the brand new, post Beatles decade. It earned multiple Grammy nominations including Album of the Year but lost out in all but one category to Simon & Garfunkel's masterwork, *Bridge Over Troubled Water*. It did secure James the first of his many Grammys in the category of Best Pop Male Vocal. *Sweet Baby James* would be listed at #103 on Rolling Stone's 500 Greatest Albums of All Time. "Fire & Rain" was also listed at #227 on Rolling Stone's list of the 500 Greatest Songs.



Almost simultaneous to Taylor's "overnight" success, after his years of torturous personal & professional struggles, Carole King seemed to also be on the brink of her long sought success as a performer. After her divorce from Goffin, Carole met & married Charles Larkey, former bassist for the New York band Myddle Class & the couple also moved to California. There the new couple met up with long time friend, Danny Kortchmar, & the trio formed the band, The City. The City put out only one album, 1969's *Now that Everything's Been Said*, but couldn't tour due to Carole's overwhelming stage fright so it

flopped miserably. Interestingly, the album did contain 3 King compositions that would later prove successful for other artists. The Byrds would have a minor hit with "Wasn't Born to Follow", Blood Sweat & Tears would take "Hi-De-Ho" into the top 20 & James Taylor would soon have a mega hit with "You've Got a Friend" which would go on to become one of his signature songs.

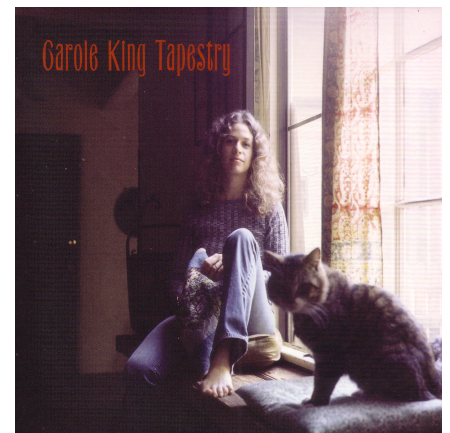


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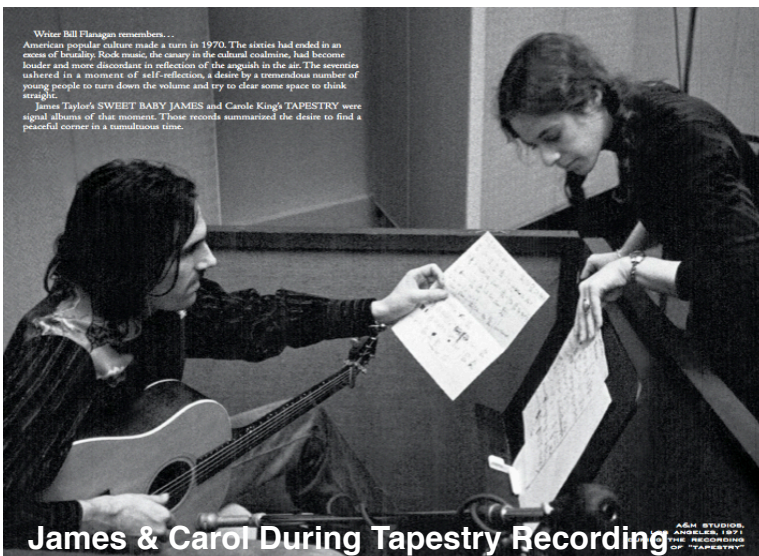
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Carole then released her first solo album, 1970's *Writer*, but it too proved unsuccessful commercially, although it was critically praised. Discouraged & convinced that a life as a performer was just not to be, Carole contemplated giving up on the music business. Her now close friend Taylor convinced her otherwise & encouraged her to make one last full blown push at a performing career. Buoyed by the warm reception she'd received during her one night cameo with James at the Troubadour, Carole spent the winter of 1970 secluded in her Laurel Canyon home, with her new husband & her cat Telemachus, writing several new songs. The window seat from which she wrote many of the songs would later become recognizable around the world, along with her cat & a piece of heavy thread embroidery she was working on at the time.

Carole released *Tapestry* in March of 1971. It was an instant worldwide phenomenon, propelling the shy, little known singer into superstardom. With *Tapestry*, Carole helped James bring the fledgling singer/songwriter genre to the masses. It would turn out to be one of the most successful albums in music history, remaining on the Billboard album charts for a previously unfathomable 6 years. It remained the top selling album of all time for almost 12 years, until Michael Jackson's *Thriller* in 1982. With 3 #1 singles, *Tapestry* held the #1 spot on the album charts for 15 consecutive weeks, selling 10 million copies in the US, & 22 million worldwide. The



album won 4 Grammy Awards including Album of the Year; Best Pop Vocal Performance, Female; Record of the Year, "It's Too Late"; & Song of the Year, "You've Got a Friend". The album initiated the practice of awarding platinum albums & would eventually be the first to be certified Diamond. The album placed at #36 on Rolling Stone's 500 Greatest Albums of All Time. Almost 40 years later, it remains the 5th longest charting album in history by any artist & the longest ever by any female



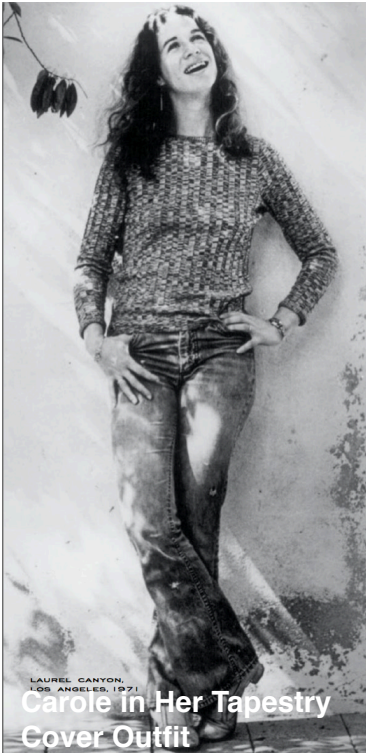
Writes Bill Flanagan remembers... American popular culture made a turn in 1970. The sixties had ended in an excess of brutality. Rock music, the canary in the cultural coalmine, had become louder and more discordant in reflection of the anguish in the air. The seventies ushered in a moment of self-reflection, a desire by a tremendous number of young people to turn down the volume and try to clear some space to think straight.

James Taylor's SWEET BABY JAMES and Carole King's TAPESTRY were signal albums of that moment. These records summarized the desire to find a peaceful corner in a tumultuous time.

AGH STUDIOS, ANGELES, 1971 THE RECORDING OF "TAPESTRY"

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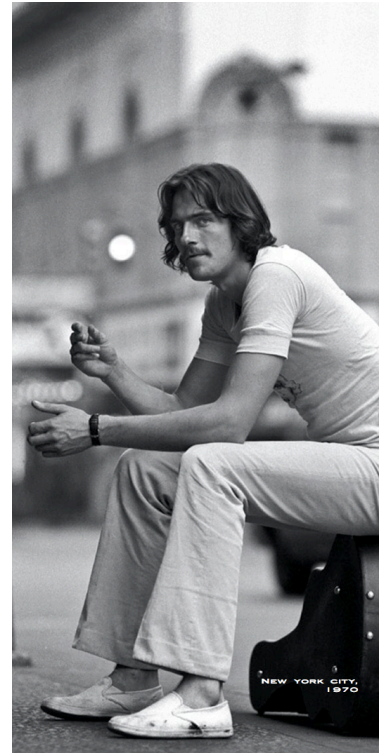


performer.

Rolling Stone Magazine's description of the album summed it up this way:

"A remarkably expressive & intimate record, it's a work of consummate songwriting craftsmanship. Always a superior pop composer, King reached even loftier heights as a performer. New songs like the hits "It's Too Late" & "I Feel the Earth Move" rank solidly with her past compositions for other artists, while chestnuts like "You've Got a Friend," "Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow," & "(You Make Me Feel Like) A Natural Woman" take on added resonance when

delivered in her own warm, compelling voice. With its reliance on pianos & gentle drumming, Tapestry is a light & airy work on its surface, occasionally skirting the boundaries of jazz, but it's also an intensely emotional record, the songs are at times confessional & direct. In its time it connected with listeners like few records before & far fewer since. It remains an illuminating, emotionally moving, personal experience four decades later."



It was a once in a lifetime convergence of music, culture & time, combining the magical coincidence of being the right songs, the right sounds, the right voice, at the right time in history. In the same way The Beatles', *Sargent Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* had done to jump start the Summer of Love in 1967, *Tapestry* changed the music business forever & for a brief moment in time, brought a weary world a little closer together.

After both catching lightning in a bottle within a few months of each other, Carole & James followed their breakout albums with works of comparable critical & popular achievement. No one-hit-wonders for either as they both cranked out album after album & hit song after hit song to prove that despite their long journey to success, neither had any intention of giving up their hard earned place at the top.

TDT'S COLLEGE OF USELESS KNOWLEDGE

CK/JT 301 Carole King & James Taylor, Superstardom

Carol followed up *Tapestry* with *Music*, released in December 1971 & by January 1972 it too reached #1 on the album charts featuring the song "Sweet Seasons". *Rhymes & Reasons* followed in late 1972 with the hit song "Been to Canaan", this album also went gold, reaching the #2 on the Billboard charts. 1974 saw another album, *Wrap Around Joy*, & both the album & the hit song "Jazzman" reached the #1 position. With 4 straight smash albums to her credit, in barely 3 years, Carole had gone from a timid, awkward, unknown performer, who had to be almost carried onto the stage of the intimate Troubadour club just 24 months prior, to the most popular & recognized musical artist in the world. In 1973 Carole performed in front of a then unheard of audience of over 100,000 people in the first ever free concert in Central Park. Only Simon & Garfunkel's reunion concert in 1981, & Diana Ross in 1983, whose crowds were each half a million strong, have topped Carole's 1973 crowd.

James too was hard at work to ensure his followup efforts didn't succumb to the "sophomore slump" that many artists who achieve monstrous early success experience. In April 1971 Taylor released *Mud Slide Slim & The Blue Horizon*, which contained the hit & future Taylor trademark song, "You've Got A Friend". James was assisted on the song with backup vocals by Joni Mitchell. "You've Got A Friend" reached #1 & the album #2 on the Billboard charts, earning Taylor another Grammy for Best Pop Vocal Performance, Male & another for King in the Song of The Year category. November 1972 saw the release of *One Man Dog*, an experimental, concept album in the vein of The Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper* & the Beach Boys' *Pet Sounds*. Because of its unusual & avant-garde nature, it was not the super smash hit Taylor's previous two albums had been but it still sold strongly, reached the album Top 10 & contained the hit, "Don't Let Me Be Lonely Tonight, featuring a cameo appearance by Linda Ronstadt.

Two of the unlikeliest of superstars had reached heights even they'd not dreamed of. Although they wouldn't maintain the same constant chart topping success over the next 40 years, they've never been too far from the spotlight. Both are constantly on radio playlists around the world, individually selling millions of records & song downloads & perform to sold out crowds whenever they elect to tour. Family, social & political causes have also occupied a great deal of their time in recent years. After talking half heartedly about touring together for more than 35 years, another performance in 2007, at the place that started it all for both of them, would be the final shove they needed & the Troubadour Reunion Tour became a reality.