

An Analysis of "I'll Be Seeing You"

By Jennifer Amaya

Judy Collins' recording of "I'll Be Seeing You" borderlines the style of 20th-century "art song" with its wide, virtuosic vocal range, its employment of a full orchestra (including an abundant use of tubular bells and harp), and the inclusion of accompanying *gestures*, rather than phrases of music that help support the vocal melody. There is, however, a tendency for the accompaniment to be melodic at times, which actually distances the arrangement from the art song genre. This clash between "artistic" and "popular" places the tune in the abyss of categorization, however one important aspect of the recording itself, the large-room reverb, answers the question of "where does this tune fit in" in the world of popular music. Everything considered, it's obvious upon listening to this tune that it was arranged with the theater in mind, a musical venue whose music historically crosses the line between popular and classical art. Where Crosby's version of the tune lends itself toward the motion picture sound of the 40s, and Holiday's arrangement reeks of the small jazz clubs of the 40s, Collins' version of "I'll Be Seeing You" would be at its best if performed where it was originally intended -- on stage, in a theatrical production. Further, even though she takes the tune back to its 1938 theatrical roots (it was originally written by Sammy Fain and Irving Kahal for the Broadway flop, *Right This Way*)¹, Collins' version is more suited for the vocal and musical styles of the 20th-century.

Although she started out in the folk music realm, Collins is now very well-respected for her vocal prowess on both art songs and theatrical pieces. In 1975 she won "Song of the Year" for her version of "Send In The Clowns," which was originally "...written by Stephen Sondheim for the Broadway musical 'A Little Night Music.'"² In the same year, she released her album, "Judith," which included both her award-winning "lush orchestral arrangement"³ of "Send In The Clowns" and a similar version of "I'll Be Seeing You."

¹ http://www.songwritershalloffame.org/exhibit_bio.asp?exhibitId=49

² <http://judycollins.com>

The most obvious difference between Collin's version of "I'll Be Seeing You" and those of Crosby and Holiday is the addition of the first verse, which begins the tune:

Cathedral bells were tolling
As our love sang on.
Was it the spell of Paris,
Or just the April dawn?
Who knows if we shall meet again,
But when the morning chimes ring sweet again...

One could draw many conclusions as to why Collins chose to include this verse on her recording, while Crosby and Holiday did not. First, the verse is quite picturesque, and lends itself beautifully toward Collins' music. In fact, we hear the "cathedral bells" toll, and the "chimes ring sweet" in the tubular bells and harp. This type of word painting is popular in musical theater, which is another reason to categorize her arrangement as such. Another reason for Collins to include this verse is to set up a sense of time and place, to make her recording even more visually-appealing. Her recording is, thus, more personal, drawing us in to her, the vocalist, as a sort of "character" who we can visually see in Paris on an April morning, listening to the bells chime from the cathedral towers. From the beginning, it's a much more personal, theatrical, story-telling piece than both Holiday's and Crosby's.

And it is the specific story-telling that Crosby and Holiday were probably trying to avoid in their versions of the tune. Omitting that first verse leaves us with the following lyrics:

I'll be seeing you
In all the old familiar places
That this heart of mine embraces
All day through.

³ <http://launch.yahoo.com/read/review/14189441>

In that small café,
The park across the way,
The children's carousel,
The chestnut trees, the wishing well.

I'll be seeing you
In every lovely summer's day,
In everything that's light and gay,
I'll always think of you that way.
I'll find you in the morning sun,
And when the night is new,
I'll be looking at the moon, but I'll be seeing...
You.

In the remaining lyrics there are no specifics that tie the story to any person or place. Those lyrics, when stated alone (as they are in the Crosby and Holiday recordings) allow the tune to speak to a much wider audience. Further, it allows the line about “familiar places” to open up for interpretation, no longer tied down to familiar places *in Paris*. Hence, it seems like a much more “pop-like” idea to omit the first verse and to allow a wider audience of listeners to believe the singer, and to connect with the song on a more emotional and personal level. Some also say that “I’ll Be Seeing You” was made popular in the 40s because it perfectly expressed “the feelings and emotions of lovers parted by World War II.”⁴ If this were the case, then excluding the bit about Paris might have been necessary in order for the tune to become popular in the States. Regardless of it’s popularity, if Crosby were to attempt the first verse, it could be possible that he is singing from Paris, and thus a believable and successful performance. On the contrary, if Holiday tried to sell that verse, it would probably be a distraction to the emotional impact of her recording. (Hint: Her version, with her voice and inflections, does not at all sound like it’s coming from Paris.) It is important to note, however, that while the first verse is missing from her recording, Holiday did not always exclude that verse from her *performance* of the tune.⁵

⁴ http://www.songwritershalloffame.org/exhibit_bio.asp?exhibitId=49

In terms of form, there are many differences between Collins', Crosby's, and Holiday's arrangement of *I'll Be Seeing You*. The Collins version begins in 4/4 with a 6-bar introduction of unrelated musical gestures, including a mysterious and spacious rising quarter-note figure that reappears later, in a small interlude, and at the end of the tune. After this introduction, the vocal enters on the "and of 2," which strengthens the ethereal quality and continues to convey a sense of mystery. (The tune itself does not appear to begin until the vocal enters.) Crosby's introduction is probably four bars in a fast 4/4 time (although it's difficult to determine if it is in 4/4 or a slow 8/8), and includes orchestral sweeps that lead right into the start of the vocal line on beat 1. Holiday's introduction is quite simple, a solo piano playing four bars of melodic material, with the tune beginning on beat 1 of bar 5, even though Holiday's voice does not enter until the "and of 2." Collins' version, obviously, begins with that mysterious first verse, while Holiday and Crosby have gone right into the *I'll Be Seeing You* chorus.

Jumping ahead to compare the remainder of the tune, from the first statement of "I'll Be Seeing You," the three versions are actually quite similar. With exception of the last line, "You," every line of lyric listed above is given two bars of music in all three versions. Where they differ is in the treatment of the last line, and where the tune repeats to from there. In all three recordings, the last word of the tune, "You," is held for two bars. Crosby's version ends after those two bars, while Holiday repeats back to "I'll be seeing you in every lovely summer's day," and Collins repeats back to "I'll find you in the morning sun..." Once again, Holiday holds the final "You" for two bars, then adds a two-bar ending. Collins, on the other hand, has chosen to hold the final syllable for three bars (which we'll see later is her strength in this arrangement), also adding a two-bar ending. Hence, there are some formal differences between the three versions, even though the body of each tune is quite similar.

When comparing the style of each artist, we see what is probably the biggest difference between the three versions of *I'll Be Seeing You*. Crosby's version lacks any sense of rhythmic connection between orchestra and voice. It is difficult, if not

⁵ <http://www.tophitsonline.com/lyrics.php?songid=23140>

impossible, to listen and conduct *either* his vocal line *or* his orchestral accompaniment. It's as if the two were recorded entirely separate of one another, and spliced together to make them fit. The tempo is moderately slow, with an abundant use of *molto rubato*. It's obvious from the recording that the vocal is the most important aspect (it is very "up front"), and the way the orchestra accompanies him, it's as if Crosby is an iconic legend, and the orchestra a submissive servant. In this way, the Crosby version of *I'll Be Seeing You* is very impersonal. However, it is a brilliant arrangement that, with its sweeping orchestral figures, defines the motion picture sound of its time. And, because the recording has made Crosby out to be an icon, it fits well in the world of "movie stardom."

The Holiday version of *I'll Be Seeing You*, in comparison to Crosby's, is very sincere. It, too, is quite slow, but unlike Crosby's, the accompaniment is attached to the vocal, and the two parts serve each other. It is easy to conduct the piece, both the accompaniment and the vocal, and it is safe to say that the performance is genuine. Similar to how Crosby's serves the purpose of film music of its time, Holiday's serves the purpose of jazz club music of its time.

Finally, the Collins version is sincere in its own right, but, as stated earlier, it is serving the purpose of painting a picture. With the use of an orchestra similar to Crosby's, there is a slight disconnect between the vocal and accompaniment, and once again, the vocalist is pulled to the front as the most important aspect of the piece. The difference here is that the vocal style is not portraying Collins as a singing icon, but rather as a character within a story.

Compared to the "crooning" style of Crosby, and the darkness and pain in Holiday's vocals, Collins uses a very open tone, with not much vibrato. Her vocals are very well-pronounced and clear, similar to what you would hear in an American musical production. Regardless of how she sings the vocal, however, the abundant use of reverb in the recording takes complete control and places the vocal in a specific time and space on stage. Even when Collins adds an inflection to her voice, as she does on the word "the" when she sings "the park across the way," and on "love-" when she sings "in every

lovely summer’s day,” the inflections are barely audible and have less of an impact than when she sustains a tone with her crystal-clear tone, as she does on the word “you,” at the end of “but I’ll be seeing you,” and comes off of that tone while it is still ringing because of the reverb. Those sustained, upper-range tones are Collins’ forte, and what makes the piece impress it’s sense of yearning for that special someone who she’s spent that time with in Paris, almost as if she’s yelling out for him. Again, it plays well with the story line.

Like Holiday’s version, Collins’ rhythms vary widely from the sheet music⁶:

The image displays a musical score comparison for the song "I'll Be Seeing You" in E-flat major, 4/4 time. It features four staves: Sheet Music, Crosby, Holiday, and Collins. The lyrics are: "I'll be see-ing you in all the old fa-mil-iar pla-ces." The Sheet Music staff shows a standard melody with lyrics underneath. The Crosby staff features a more rhythmic melody with triplets and a syncopated entrance. The Holiday staff shows a complex, syncopated melody with triplets and a syncopated entrance. The Collins staff shows a melody with elongated notes and a syncopated entrance, transposed into E-flat major.

Collins has a tendency to elongate certain syllables. The elongation is what adds to that same “yearning” emotion as stated above. She uses a perfect combination of landing on the beat in conjunction with using syncopated entrances for variety. Her range in this piece is from the G# below the treble staff, to the D# on the fourth line of the staff, which she saves until her final statement of “when the night is *new*.” She holds that high D# out, with the purest of tone, even after the music stops. It is probably the biggest and most exaggerated moment in all of the versions of the tune. It is *very* theatrical, but also very well-done, and not at all self-indulgent.

⁶ The transcription of the sheet music material, Crosby, and Holiday is from David Brackett’s [Interpreting Popular Music](#), page 63, Example 2.1. Collins’ version has been transcribed by the author, and transposed into Eb for comparison.

Each different version of the tune *I'll Be Seeing You* that has been discussed (Holiday, Crosby, and Collins) is indicative of the recording artist's style. Each piece is well-done and serves its own purpose in the popular music world. It's hard to say who's version of the tune is "best" when they're all so different. At any rate, it's hard to imagine either of the singers switching places and recording each other's arrangement -- it would not work. Staying true to themselves, they've stayed true to this music, and they've all created something popular and different out of the same basic material.