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The Many Hats of Robert Altman: A Life in Cinema

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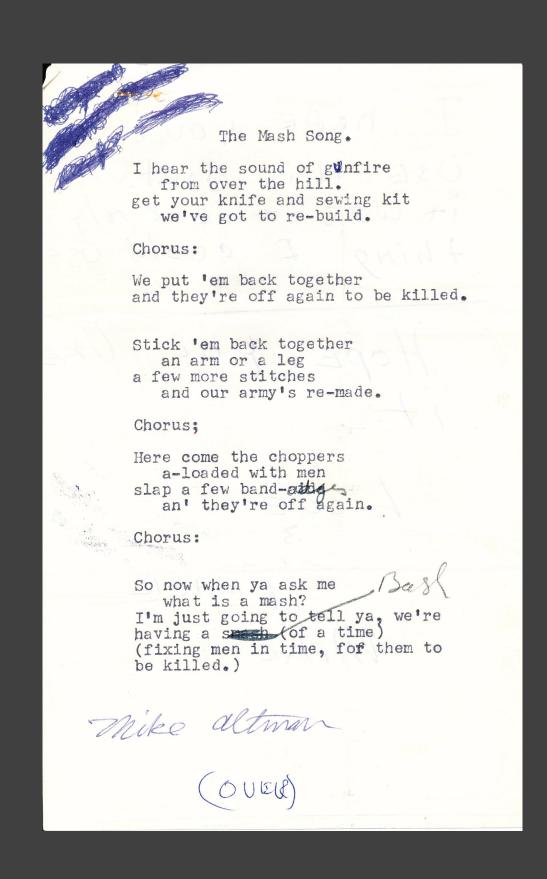
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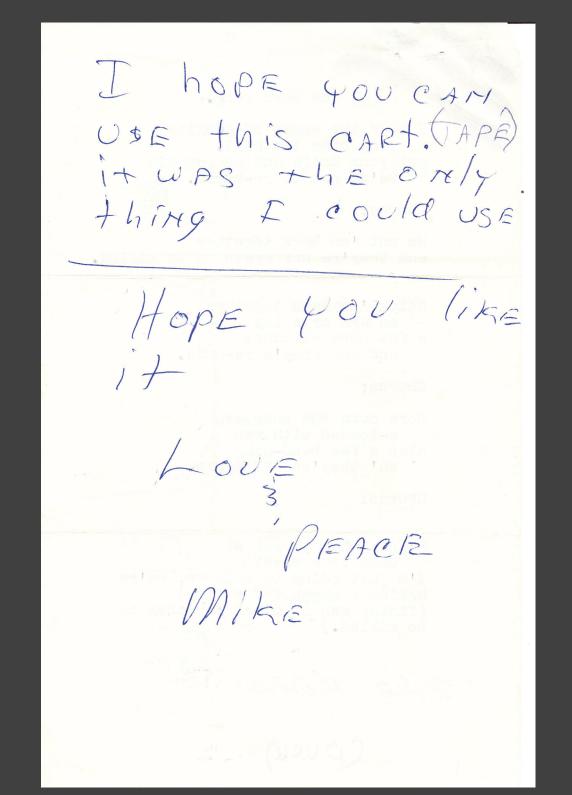
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Songs & Rights

In 1969 Michael Altman, son of Robert Altman, wrote the lyrics to the theme from $M^*A^*S^*H$ when he was only 14 years old. An original draft for the lyrics signed by him is in the Altman Archive. The song's music was written by veteran songwriter Johnny Mandel. In an interview in the 1980s, the director said that his son had made more than a million dollars in royalties for the song, while his fee for directing the hit film had been \$70,000. Given the popularity of the television show $M^*A^*S^*H$ which used this song as their theme, the large and continuing royalties payments are not surprising. In the American Film Institute's "100 Years ... 100 Songs" it is ranked #66. The archive has legal documents from 1994 showing Altman buying the rights from his son, after months of correspondence and draft agreements.

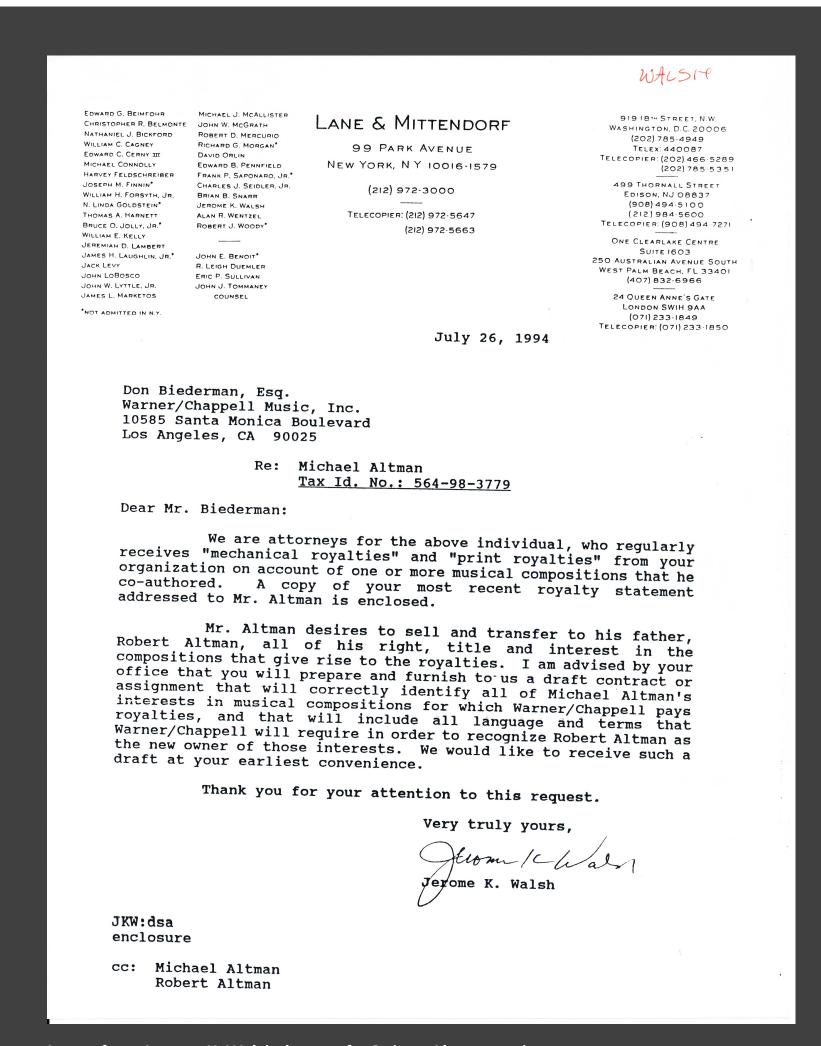




M*A*S*H Song (Suicide is Painless)

Through early morning fog I see
Visions of the things to be
The pains that are withheld for me
I realize and I can see...
[chorus]

That suicide is painless,
It brings on many changes,
And I can take or leave it if I please.

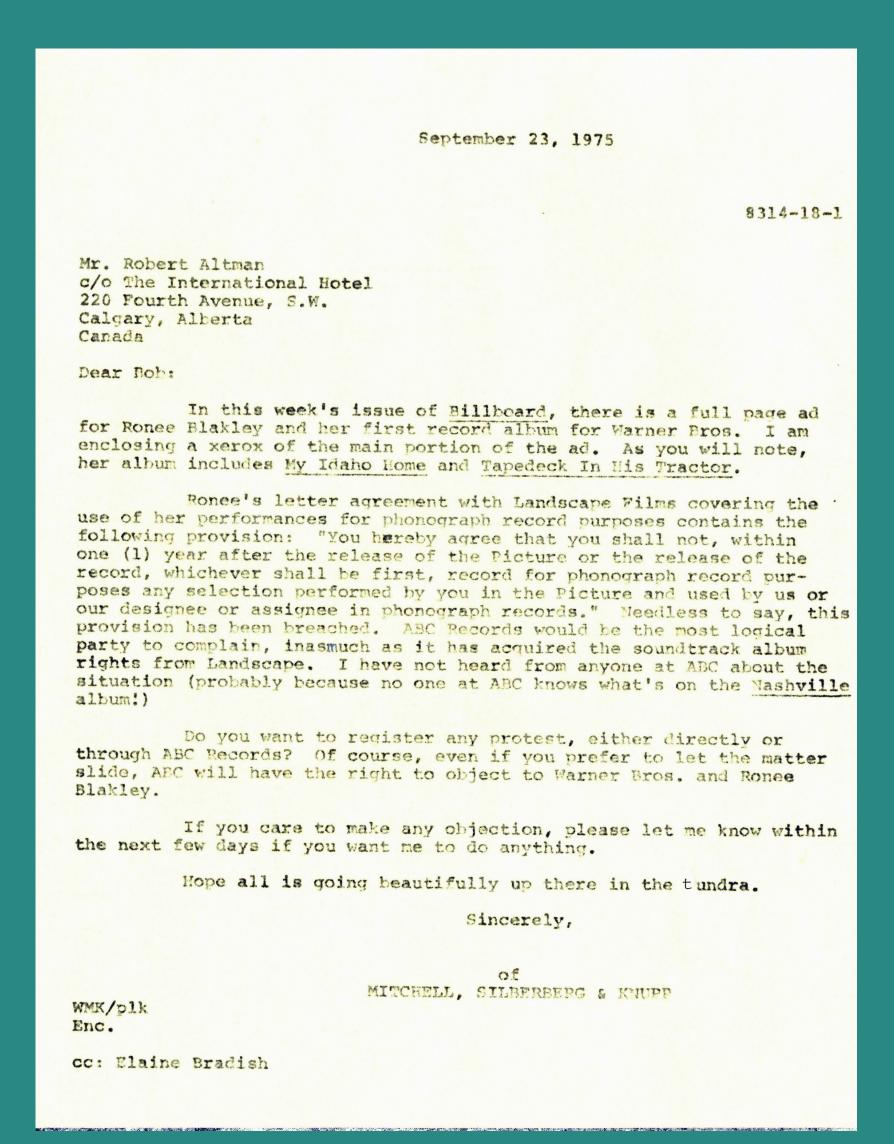


Letter from Jerome K. Walsh, lawyer for Robert Altman and his son Michael, to Don Biederman of Warner/Chappell Music, July 26, 1994, asking for a document listing the sources of Michael's royalties so that ownership can be reassigned to Robert Altman.

After Ronee Blakley starred as Altman's fragile country singer Barbara Jean in *Nashville*, she released an album within that same year featuring several songs she wrote, composed, and performed from the film. This violated the contract between Blakley and the film company, which spiraled into a series of lawsuits that extended from 1975 to 2005.



Ronee Blakley sings to a crowd as Barbara Jean in Altman's hit *Nashville*.



Typed letter from the legal firm of Mitchell, Silberberg & Knupp to Robert Altman, September 23, 1975, alerting Altman that Blakley has violated her contract not to record any songs from *Nashville* within one year of the film's release.