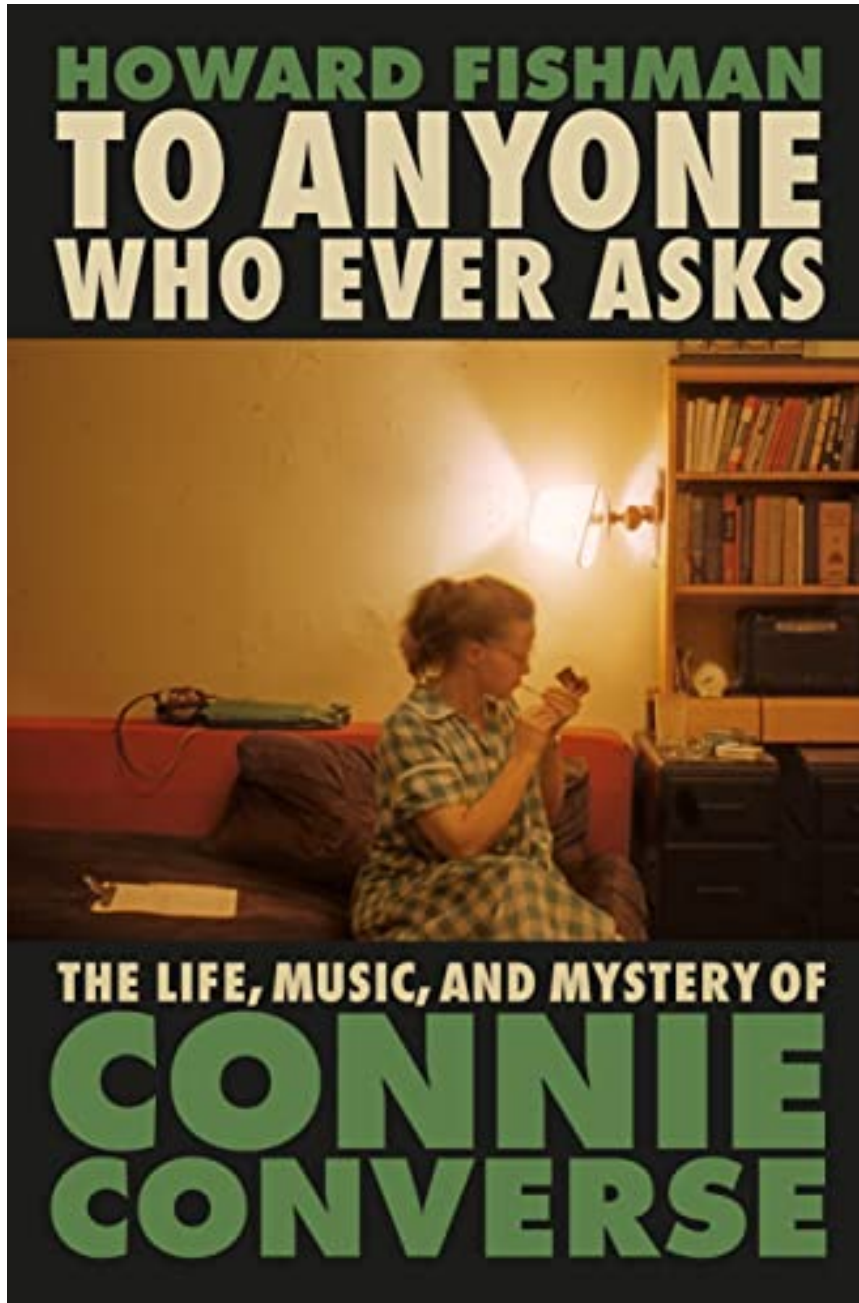


# To Anyone Who Ever Asks: The Life, Music, and Mystery of Connie Converse

Howard Fishman. Dutton, \$30 (560p) ISBN 978-0-593-18736-4



Musician Fishman debuts with a rich biography of Elizabeth “Connie” Converse, an outsider folk singer-songwriter who lingered on the fringe of fame before disappearing in 1974 at age 50, four decades before the first official release of her home recordings earned her a cult following. Born in 1924 to conservative Baptist parents, Converse suffered through a restrictive upbringing in Concord, N.H., before moving to New York City in the 1940s, where she ran in a social circle for

whom she would play at house parties. Fishman's perceptive analysis of Converse's songs illuminates their artistic and autobiographical influences, with the most attention paid to how the sexual liberation implied in such songs as "Roving Woman" may have been inspired by her affairs, contrasting with her reputation as an awkward loner. Fishman's research is nothing short of remarkable; extensive interviews with friends, family, and coworkers blend with excerpts from Converse's correspondence to chart her depression after reaching midlife and failing to make a name for herself in Manhattan, and though her fate remains a mystery, letters she sent before she disappeared suggest she either died by suicide or made a new start somewhere. The scrupulous detail sometimes slows the pace, but Fishman succeeds wildly in uncovering the anguish and beauty in Converse's bewildering story. This should earn Converse some new fans. *(May)*