

Vietnam War Era Music

An era of music that can arguably be considered as the golden age of music coincided with the years that encompassed the Vietnam War. Roughly a quarter to a third of this era's music was dedicated directly in some manner to the war itself. Some songs regarding the war did not necessarily protest the war, but did not openly support it either. The songs that did support the war were more popular at the beginning of the war. As support for the war eroded, the songs that protested the war became in vogue. Much of today's most celebrated classic rock can be traced to this chapter in time.

The 1970 release *Ohio*, by Crosby, Stills, Nash, & Young, instantly became a notorious anthem among the American counterculture. It was a tribute to the victims of the Kent State massacre during a protest of the Vietnam War.

The Ballad of the Green Berets, by Sgt. Barry Sadler, was contrast to the more common songs that protested the war in Vietnam. In 1966, this patriotic celebration of the U.S. Special Forces held the number one spot on the U.S. Billboard's chart for five straight weeks.

The 1965 recording *Eve of Destruction*, by Barry McGuire, was an instant hit protest song. The song hit number one on the U.S. Billboard Hot 100.

Hello Vietnam, recorded in 1965 by Johnny Wright, was another song that found success in support of the Vietnam War effort. This classic country tune enjoyed twenty weeks on the U.S. Billboard Hot Country Singles chart, with three weeks at number one.

War, released by Edwin Starr, was a hard-driving R&B-based song that struck a nerve in 1970. This number one hit spoke out vehemently against African-American casualties of the Vietnam conflict.

Time Has Come Today, by The Chambers Brothers, did not openly protest the war in Vietnam, but is synonymous with the Vietnam War era. In 1967, this song encouraged people to look past the struggles of society with lyrics such as: "Might get burned up by the sun, but I've had my fun."

Fortunate Son, by Creedence Clearwater Revival, was a proud proclamation, in 1969, for the children of lower income families during the 60s. This class of society made up the majority of America's warrior population in Vietnam.

In 1967, Buffalo Springfield released a memorable song entitled *For What it's Worth*. Although this song is often mistaken as an anti-war song, it soon became heralded as a protest song anyway by the American counterculture. It was initially inspired by the 1966 Sunset Strip riots.

The Beatles released a number of songs that did not openly protest the war in Vietnam, but in 1969, John Lennon released a boisterous anthem that demanded the opposite of war. *Give Peace a Chance* is perhaps the most unforgettable and most popular chant for peace ever.

Of all Vietnam War era music, none of it paints a clearer, more articulate image of the war than *Machine Gun* by Jimi Hendrix. Without a doubt, this piece is the most realistic representation of the war. Released in 1970, *Machine Gun* places the listener within the trenches of the enigmatic jungles of Vietnam. Haunting tones and melancholic vocals immerse the audience along extended marches across the vast, mysterious landscape, under the dead of night. Rapid fire drum beats and pulsating bass rhythms invoke spirits from the chaotic firefights. Rather than openly protest the war, *Machine Gun* pays homage to the soldiers who fought, died, and suffered throughout this emotionally grueling conflict. Artistically, this composition of the era is second to none.