Liner Notes: 1967

Song of the Year: “To Sir With Love” by Lulu

Number of U. S. soldiers in Vietnam at year’s end: 485,600

Number of men drafted into service: 228,263

*Billboard* Chart Sweep for 1967

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nzjgh8eAES0>

Many observers dubbed 1967 the “Summer of Love,” but it was anything but, in consideration of the full-scale race riots breaking out in Tampa, Newark, Minneapolis, Milwaukee and places in between. The nation needed a heavy dose of “R-E-S-P-E-C- T,” but in effect The Doors and others were telling us to “set the night on fire.”

By 1967, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. had begun to speak out in opposition to the war in Vietnam. So too did world heavyweight champion Muhammad Ali: “I ain’t got no quarrel with them Viet Cong,” Ali insisted, subjecting himself to derision and ridicule — and ultimately to being stripped of his boxing crown.

Seismic changes were occurring, almost daily. A “counter-culture” had emerged, one that challenged the government, societal norms and authority at every step. You could see it in the violent October protests at the University of Wisconsin—Madison in opposition to recruiters of the Dow Chemical Company, makers of napalm (a mixture of a gelling agent and either gasoline or a similar fuel that was used in Vietnam primarily as an anti-personnel weapon since it sticks to skin and causes severe burns when on fire). And you could hear it in the music, whether at the Monterey Pop Festival that summer or on the iconic album by The Beatles which debuted that June. *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band* would transform the musical landscape, and pop music would never be the same again.

Nevertheless, radio’s Top 40 playlist persevered, allowing groups like The Buckinghams, The Box Tops, The Turtles and The Monkees to enjoy a week or two atop the 1967 charts. Motown was still going strong, and outliers like Bobbie Gentry (“Ode to Billy Joe”) and Lulu (“To Sir With Love”) also got a toehold in the charts. But radio was beginning to lose its stranglehold on the counter-culture’s taste in music. The Beatles’ album demonstrated that. So too did albums by The Doors and Jimi Hendrix, among others, which interpreted the meaning of the time for an idealistic and confused generation hoping to find a path toward a better world.

The war in Vietnam was expanding daily, and U. S. leaders were hopeful. The commander of military forces in Vietnam, General [William Westmoreland](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Westmoreland), told a gathering of news reporters in November that he was “… absolutely certain that whereas in 1965 the enemy was winning, today he is certainly losing.”

And while an array of pro-war music was readily available (“Wish You Were Here With Me” by the Fawns, et al), other voices with a radically different point of view were emerging. “Saigon Bride” by Joan Baez, “Kill for Peace” by the Fugs and “I Feel-Like-I’m-Fixin’-to Die Rag” by Country Joe and the Fish were rattling the standards of patriotic acceptance and decorum.

Things came to a head that fall when peace activist Pete Seeger was invited by the Smothers Brothers to appear on their highly rated CBS television program to sing his song “Waist Deep in the Big Muddy.” Because the song appeared to be a thinly veiled critique of President Johnson’s policy in Vietnam, CBS censors had Seeger’s performance removed from the show. The Smothers Brothers’ protests and negative publicity prompted CBS to relent, and, eventually, Pete Seeger was on stage, reminding the American public that *“We’re waist deep in the Big Muddy and the big fool says to push on.”*

* [*Doug Bradley*](http://origin.kcts9.org/vietnam-war-timeline/about.html)