Liner Notes: 1969

Song of the Year: “Sugar, Sugar” by The Archies

Number of U. S. soldiers in Vietnam at year’s end: 475,200

Number of men drafted into service: 283,586

*Billboard* Chart Sweep for 1969

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

Early in 1969, Marvin Gaye hinted that if you wanted to know something important it could be “heard through the grapevine.” “*Oh, I’m just about to lose my mind,”* Gaye shouts in the song, and I for one couldn’t have agreed more. That’s because at the time I was about to graduate from college, thereby losing my student deferment. My next stop? Jail, Canada or the United States Army.

Back and forth I went wrestling with that life-altering decision, much like my 27 million draft-eligible Baby Boomer peers. To go or not to go? To stay or to serve? To participate or protest?

The radio soundtrack wasn’t helping matters. Top 40 stations were airing pabulum like “Dizzy” by Tommy Roe and “The Love Theme From *Romeo and Juliet*” by Henry Mancini. Luckily, FM stations were emerging, and FM disc jockeys were taking greater liberties with established practices by playing several songs in a row before going to a commercial break or airing album tracks that exceeded ten minutes in length. That’s where you’d find Cream, Blue Cheer, Vanilla Fudge and Quicksilver Messenger Service.

Yet it was the “Age of Aquarius.” Neil Armstrong walked on the moon; President Richard Nixon had “a secret plan to end the war”; Teddy Kennedy crashed in Chappaquiddick; gay clubbers rioted at the Stonewall Inn in Greenwich Village; North Vietnam’s Hồ Chí Minh died; Charles Manson and his followers went on a killing spree; The Beatles released *Abbey Road*; and hundreds of thousands of anti-war protestors demonstrated in the nation’s capital in October and November.

The war in Vietnam continued to produce disasters like the Battle of Hamburger Hill, and soon we’d learn of horrifying atrocities like the My Lai Massacre. Meanwhile, guys like me — in fact, every male aged 19 to 26 at that time — were holding our breath as the first-ever draft lottery is held on December 1 to determine the order in which men with birth dates between 1944 and 1950 would be called to report for military induction in 1970. The day after my birthday was the last number drawn. My June 7 birthday? Number 85. My present? An all-expenses paid trip to Vietnam.

Maybe that’s why “Leaving on a Jet Plane” by Peter, Paul & Mary cast a spell on me. Honest. Poignant. Sad. The line *“Don’t know when I’ll be back again*” brought me to tears. What if I was sent to Vietnam? How would I cope? Would I come back? Who should I believe?

Certainly not the fabricated, studio-produced song “Sugar, Sugar,” which was the top track of 1969. The group that recorded the song, The Archies, didn’t exist. The whole damned thing was counterfeit, much like everything else at the time. And my time was up …

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