Five Songs That Changed the World

The Vietnam War took place between the years of 1955 and 1975. During this time period many countries faced all different kinds of social upheaval like gender equality, civil rights, war protest, and the youth movement. Although there were many types of upheavals at various points throughout the 1960s, the Vietnam War remained an ongoing hardship for Vietnamese and Americans. Musicians gave hope, and enlightened many through the releases of their topical songs during the war. This paper will discuss five songs that reflect social attitudes toward the Vietnam War. Each of these songs and their release were unique to their time period. “Blowin’ in the Wind,” “We Gotta Get out of This Place,” “I Got You (I Feel Good), Draft Dodger Rag,” and “Mr. Lonely” were all songs released between the years of 1962 through 1975. The songs each have their own individual meaning, but all give a good image of what soldiers, families, and Americans faced during the war and the time period in which these five songs were popular.

Blowin’ in the Wind was written by Bob Dylan and released in 1962. The song has been labeled a protest song containing multiple rhetorical questions about peace, war and freedom (“Blowin’ in the Wind”). Many believe that the song is spiritual and that is one of the songs Dylan incorporated his own style of Biblical rhetoric into. Although there were many songs that were released at the same time that captured the impact of the Vietnam War, this song has also been described as especially relevant to the civil rights movement. It brought the African Americans frustrations and aspirations to light. This song can be applied to almost any freedom issue and is the song that Dylan is still most known for. The main instrument is Dylan’s recording is a guitar, and his voice is clear and makes the lyrics easily understandable (“Blowin’ in the Wind”).

Furthermore, the song We Gotta Get out of This Place was released in the U.S. in 1965. The song was written by Barry Mann and Cynthia Weli. It was a hit single by The Animals and after it’s release it became an iconic song and was very popular among the United States Armed Forces GIs during the Vietnam War. The song was ranked number 233 on Rolling Stone’s The 500 Greatest Songs of All Time list, and it is also in The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame’s 500 Songs that Shaped Rock and Roll list. Mann and Cynthia wrote and recorded the song as a demo that was intended for The Righteous Brothers, but ended up in the hands of The Animal’s producer. The Animals recorded the song before Mann could, but The Animal's version was a little reordered and reworded compared to the demo. Some of the lyrics of the song were seen as fitting for groups in the industrial and working class societies. The song contained a bass lead, but featured one singer typically known for his raw and fierce vocals. The song was concerned with the social upheaval of war issues because of its popularity among soldiers and others during the war.

I Got You (I Feel Good) was released in 1965 and was written by singer James Brown. It was his highest charting song and best known recording. It features a brass-heavy instrument and has twelve-bar blues. The song has made several appearances in film and television. Brown is singing about how he feels good, “now that he has the one he loves(I Got You (I Feel Good).” The song is very catchy, and is an upbeat song that could be uplifting to some listeners. During the time the song was released there were a lot of political and social events occuring. This song allowed everyone to ‘feel good’ even if it was just while they were listening to the song. It does not really contain a background for any particular social upheaval, but does reflect some youth movement issues. However, the song was and is still seen as a motivating song to feel good.

The song Draft Dodger Rag was an anthem of the anti-Vietnam War movement (“Draft Dodger Rag”). The song was written by Phil Ochs who was known as a U.S. protest singer in the 1960s. He was commonly harsh on the American military industrial complex. The song is about a content young man who has been drafted, but when he reports for duty he has a whole list of reasons why he cannot serve. Some of these reasons include: allergies and asthma, addiction to multiple drugs, back pain, poor vision, and college enrollment. To wrap up the song, the young man tells the sergeant that he went first to volunteer for “a war without blood or gore.” The song sounds like an old country folk song. The main instrument is a guitar and the song is sung solo. Towards the end of the song, the singer’s voice gets faster and more eager. The sound and singer’s voice of the song, give it a protest theme.

The last song to be discussed is Mr. Lonely written by Bobby Vinton. He began writing the song while serving in the Army. The song is about a soldier overseas who has no communication at home. His recording was released just as the Vietnam War was escalating. Many soldiers were experiencing the same lack of communication and loned for someone to talk to. The song had pretty good success spending 15 weeks on the *Billboard* Hot 100 (“Mr. Lonely (Bobby Vinton Song).”The sound of the song is very emotional. His voice shifts ranges to emphasize certain lyrics which catches listeners attention drawing them to the meaning of the song. The instruments used seemed to be a piano, and maybe a violin. This song fits the anti-war movement.

In conclusion, all of these songs have had an impact on their times. The song I believe had the greatest impact on its time emotionally was I Got You (I Feel Good) by James Brown. The song was a source of happiness when there were many protests and frustrations from the Vietnam War. It might not have been the most impactful song topically, because there were many anti-war movements and songs of loss about the war that were prominent. I just feel that Brown’s song was significant in a time when people needed something to get happy about. When I listen to this song it makes me just want to drop and start dancing. The years all of the songs discussed in the paper were released were trying times for America and many other countries. Music became an escape and a way for many to release what they were feeling. All five songs had much impact, and gave listeners something to relate, dance, and mourn to.

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