

Peace Songs and the 'Voice of Youth'



Peace songs and the voice of youth

The origins of protest songs.....

Throughout history there have been protests against war in poetry, art and in song and still have a powerful message for today, for war is still going on. Even ordinary people protested, some of them bravely refusing to fight and being branded as cowards. Most young men though followed the instructions of their King and Country, and despite their fears, went into battle and many lost their lives before they reached adulthood.

Who Writes Peace Songs?.....

Most Peace Songs today are written and sung by young writers inspired by modern thoughts and ideas and those moved by injustice. Their songs have the power to connect people with different religious beliefs from different communities and from other countries. Our young are the people who are called up to fight for their country whether they believe in armed combat or not. It is our youth who take the burden of war on their shoulders and in doing so are most at risk of losing their lives.

The Anti War Movement.....

It was in the 60's that young people found their voice and began to question the decisions taken by parents and political leaders. The songs of the 60's were not just about Sex, Drugs and Rock and Roll. Many pop stars began to write anti war songs and their records had a powerful influence on teenagers.

When the American President at the time, *President Johnson*, began the bombing campaign during the Vietnam War against Northern Vietnam in 1965, the young American soldiers began to question the reasons for the War. Ordinary people witnessed the horrors of the war every night in news bulletins as the media coverage was extensive. Once the draft was introduced college and university students all around the USA began to protest against the war. There were rallies and marches and celebrities and musicians took up the protest. Concerts were organized and starred the most gifted of artists. These artists wrote their own peace songs and they became anthems for the *peace movement*.

Peace Songs of the 60's.....

John was one of many artists who have written songs about peace and war. As long as there are wars being fought there will be songs of protest. *Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, Cat Stevens, Simon and Garfunkle, Leonard Cohen, Joni Mitchel* all wrote songs about peace and protest and their songs are still powerful and carry a message for all to listen to.

As early as 1962 *Pete Seeger* wrote, *Turn, Turn Turn* recorded by the *Byrds* in 1965. He also wrote *Bring Them Home* for the soldiers in Vietnam. He resurrected this song years later as a tribute to the soldiers fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan. *Bob Dylan* in 1963 wrote, *Blowing in the Wind*, recorded by *Joan Baez*. He also wrote and had a hit with *Peace Train*. *Donovan* had a hit with *Universal Soldier*. *Joan Baez* had another hit in 1964, *With God On His Side*, a song which protested against the claim that war is justified. This was followed by another hit *Where Have all the Flowers Gone?*

John Lennon felt passionately about the *Peace Movement*. He protested as early as 1964, commenting when the Beatles were awarded their MBE (Members of the British Empire Awards) that, '*they usually give these medals for killing people in war, we got it for entertaining, we deserve it more!*' However John became an Anti War and Civil Rights Activist when he married Yoko Ono and staged his '*Bed Ins*'. It was in 1969 that John recorded his first Peace Song, *Give Peace A Chance* and spoke up against the *Vietnam War*. In 1970 John released *Power to the People* and *Working Class Hero* followed in 1971 by *Imagine* was released and was recognized by Amnesty International as their Anthem. Christmas of that year, John released *Happy Christmas (War is Over)*

The Power of the Celebrity

John chose to use his super stardom to promote Peace. Many celebrities have followed in his footsteps. Pop Stars have joined forces to raise awareness of poverty, injustice, and victims of war.

In 1984, after seeing a BBC news report from famine stricken Ethiopia, Bob Geldof was so moved he enlisted the help of his fellow pop stars to raise millions of pounds. He enlisted the help of Midge Ure from Ultravox and produced a charity record, '*Do They Know It's Christmas*', which went straight to the top of the charts and sold over 1 million copies in the first week and 3 million copies in five weeks.

The following year Bob Geldof organized a massive concert, *Live Aid*, which took place at Wembley Stadium, attended by over 72,000 young fans and simultaneously at J.F.Kennedy Stadium in Philadelphia attended by 99,000 fans. The concert was televised and watched by 2 billion viewers. The final amount raised was the staggering 150 million pounds.

Classroom Activities

History and Literacy

1. Ask the students to ask their parents and grandparents if they have any old records from the 60's by the artists mentioned in this pack. Listen to the songs and the messages conveyed. Ask the students if the words of the songs are powerful enough to influence them.

Music

2. Listen to John Lennon's peace songs and compare these with songs about peace that are being written today. Are subjects and lyrics similar?

Literacy and Music

3. Working in groups, ask your students to write a peace song or an anti war song. Think about the lyrics, what melody would you use and how this would affect the meaning? Perform the songs using instruments that help to convey the meaning and create a mood.

Citizenship and Literacy

4. Discuss the most effective method of protest in today's climate. Do today's politicians listen to anti war protestors? Can songs influence political opinion? Do marches and protests have any effect on those in power? Look at recent events in the news and discuss coverage that has been recorded – is it biased depending on where it has come from? Is it a fair representation of both sides of those involved?

History and Literacy

5. Collect newspaper and magazine articles reporting wars today and compare them to historic reports of wars of yesterday.

Art

6. Design and create a Peace Poster. Think about the imagery that you would use and what symbols mean to different people and beliefs. What type of text would you use and what language would you use? What message do you want to give out? Does colour have an effect on the meaning? Look artists such as Picasso - he did a series of propaganda posters during The War that provoked a lot of attention from the media and the public.