

A Little War Music: The Songs of Vince Gabriel, Jason Moon, and Emily Yates

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Despite Groucho Marx's quip that "military justice is to justice what military music is to music" (giving rise to the title of Robert Sherrill's 1970 book), music and the military and combat have a long history. In his essay, "The Music of War," William R. Trotter points out that "[m]usic has been an integral part of warfare and the soldier's life since the dawn of history."¹ He traces the development of music in a martial context to the Old Testament, to Greece and Rome, the Crusades, our Revolutionary War, and to Korea and Vietnam. Rams' horns, fifes, drums, bagpipes, and trumpets have been integral to combat, used to communicate or propel the soldiers forward. The Viet Cong used whistles and bugles during attacks, adding to the chaos and what John Keegan in *The Face of Battle* calls the "sound-storm" of battle (p. 142). Although it is hard to imagine music as such being utilized in modern warfare, Keegan quotes Thucydides regarding the battle of Mantinea in 418 B.C.: "the Lacedaemonians [advanced] slowly and to the music of many flute-players . . . [which is meant to make the troops] advance slowly, stepping in time, without breaking their order . . ." (p. 167). In this case music is not intended to arouse the martial spirit but to maintain discipline and prevent chaos at "the moment of engaging" (p. 67). Keegan, in his discussion of the Battle of Waterloo some twenty-two hundred years later, writes, "there was piping in the [battle formation] squares of the Scottish tradition. The 71st played and replayed 'Hey, Johnnie Cope' and Piper McKay of the 79th stepped outside the square under French fire to play '*Cogadh na sith*'" (p. 141), thus inspiring the troops to surge forward. The former refers

to a 1745 Scottish battle, while the latter, translated as "War or Peace," purportedly has medieval roots.² Military marches like *The Marines' Hymn* express the guiding principles of the Corps and attest to the bravery and pride of Marines and the commitment to take up the battle wherever they are called: "We fight our country's battles / In the air, on land, and sea; / First to fight for right and freedom / And to keep our honor clean" Their sister services also have rousing songs: *Anchors Aweigh*, *Wild Blue Yonder*, *The Army Goes Rolling Along* (some lyrics have been updated to reflect new realities). The songs also represent one's personal and group identity as a Marine (or seaman or airman or soldier) and reflect the basic tenets of their particular branch.

Although many poems of the Civil War era discuss the presence of death, the songs take a more sanguine view. Music was integral to both the battlefield and the home front. This became apparent in the Civil War "when soldiers North and South marched off to war, they took with them a love of song that transcended the political and philosophical divide between them. Music passed the time; it entertained and comforted; it brought back memories of home and family; it strengthened the bonds between comrades and helped to forge new ones. And, in the case of the Confederacy, it helped create the sense of national identity and unity so necessary to a fledgling nation."³ There were camp songs and marching songs, all engendering a patriotic spirit. For the South, "The Bonnie Blue Flag" (Harry McCarthy, 1861) creates a sense of solidarity against the Northern oppressor:

But now, when Northern treachery
Attempts our rights to mar,
We hoist on high the Bonnie Blue Flag
That bears a single star.

The North's "Battle Cry of Freedom" (George F. Root, 1861) takes, of course, the opposite point of view from "Bonnie Blue Flag":

The Union forever,
Hurrah! boys, hurrah!
Down with the traitors,
Up with the stars; . . .

Root also wrote in 1861 "The First Gun is Fired: May God Protect the Right," clearly calling forth the rousing patriotic emotions of the Northern public. The song casts the North as "the glorious Union our fathers have made" and the South as "trait'rous foes" and appeals to "the bounding hearts of the patriot throng" to "firmly take their stand." Root implies that the Northern cause is linked to Christianity in the song's chorus:

Arise! arise! arise!
And gird ye for the fight,
And let our watchword ever be,
"May God protect the right!"

"The Battle Hymn of the Republic" (Julia Ward Howe, 1861) was the most popular song of the era, adding religion to the Union cause:

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored
He hath loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift sword
His truth is marching on . . .

"When Johnny Comes Marching Home" (Patrick Gilmore, 1863) looks ahead to the triumphant return of the Union troops after victory against the Southern traitors: "The

village lads and lassies say / With roses they will strew the way, / . . . The laurel wreath is ready now / To place upon his loyal brow / And we'll all feel gay when Johnny comes marching home.” In today’s formulation the songs of both sides “demonize” the enemy and solidify the righteousness of the cause.

George M. Cohan’s 1917 “Over There” declares that “the Yanks are coming” so our allies can breathe a sigh of relief and our enemies can start quaking. The young American male has to do his part, join up, “Make your Daddy glad to have had such a lad . . . Make your Mother proud of you / And the old red-white-and-blue.” “Wake Up, America” (George Graff, Jr., 1916) calls upon the great heroes of American history, like Washington and Lincoln (and Custer!) to make a call for action if necessary. The song suggests that if we don’t take up the challenge of going to war we will betray our history: “Must we be laughed at, America, / while our swords turn weak with rust? / Is the blood of our fathers wasted? / And how have we treated their trust?” Both songs celebrate the power of America and call upon the citizenry to rally around our glorious past and noble flag. There is no hint of the darker side of war. However, that may be due to the belief that America is an exceptional nation with an exceptional history, and most worthy of receiving God’s approbation. After America entered the war, though, the tone changed somewhat with such songs as “In Flanders Field.” It was originally a poem written in 1915 by John McCrae, a Canadian Army doctor, and adapted into a song in 1917 by Charles Ives as part of his *Three Songs of War*. Ives was somewhat conflicted about the war, and that tension is evident in the poem and the song. A recently killed soldier speaks for other dead, who until their deaths in war “lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow, / Loved and were loved” and now implores the living not to betray the cause:

Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from falling hands we throw,
The torch; be yours to hold it high
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, . . .

There is sadness about the deaths but also the spirit to continue the battle. Another song that blends the painful departure with the necessity of going to war is "Send Me Away With a Smile" (Louis Weslyn, 1917). The departing soldier tells his "little girl" that he must be off to war ("You would not have me stay behind!") and asks her to brush away her tears and send him off with a smile, and "give me words of cheer" even though he may not return.

French songs of the era reflected two poles in a not unusual schizophrenic manner: the homefront and the battlefield. Robert Soucy, in his review of Charles Rearick's *The French in Love and War* (1997), notes,

One of the most popular songs of the war was 'Quand Madelon,' about soldiers flirting with a lovely young waitress in a country tavern. What was distinctive was the song's lack of bawdiness (Madelon does not give her body to any of these men) at a time when many soldier-created songs were full of explicit sexual references and when brothels just behind the front lines were staffed by prostitutes 'doing' fifty to sixty men a day. 'Quand Madelon' appealed to another side of these men, to their desire to return after the war to a housewife not a harlot, to an old-fashioned 'girl' who was virtuous, comforting, and subordinate.⁴

Madelon represents the idealistically-desired "pure" woman waiting at home.

"Sing Me to Sleep," a trench song of the Canadian Expeditionary Force, takes a more sardonic view and expresses the reality of war:

Sing me to sleep where bullets fall,
Let me forget the war and all;
Damp is my dug-out, cold my feet,
Nothing but bully and biscuits to eat.
Over the sandbags helmets you'll find
Corpses in front and corpses behind.

(One of the songs on the 2017 album *Sleepless* by I Saw Daylight reprises the title of the trench song with new but related lyrics: "Sing me to sleep, remove the chaos in me, breathe, the war continues / Send me to hell, there is nowhere else I feel safe / Sing me to sleep, the war continues . . .").

"Hanging on the Old Barbed Wire" has a bitter tone toward those seen as avoiding peril and indeed disregarding the war altogether. While the NCOs and "brass hats" hide and the politicians live their lives in comfort, the "grunts," the "buckshee privates" and the "squaddies" have to pay the price of the war with their deaths on the wire: "The company sergeant . . . He's laying on the latrine floor / The quarter master . . . / Miles and miles behind the lines. / The sergeant-major . . . / Thieving all the squaddies' rum. / The buckshee private . . . / Buried in a deep shell hole. / The C.O. . . . Down in a deep dugout. / The brass hats . . . / Drinking claret at Brigade HQ. / The politicians . . . / Drinking brandy at the House of Commons bar. / The whole battalion . . . / Hanging on the old barbed wire." Claggett Wilson's circa 1919 painting, *Dance of Death*, can be seen as a visual analogue to troops "hanging on the old barbed wire."

On October 17, 1934, 15 years after he returned from service in World War I, John Bray recorded "Trench Blues" for John Avery Lomax (father of Alan Lomax) in Amelia, Louisiana. Bray served in France, although he said in an interview with Lomax that "[t]hey didn't give me a gun. All the weapons I ever had was my guitar, a shovel, and a mop." At the start of the song Bray travels to France, but says that he "was worryin' with those submarines," a possible reference to the sinking of the Lusitania in May of 1915. In the next stanzas he tells of his war experiences, at first in the trenches, and then on to Belgium and Berlin. At the end of the song, about the journey back to the States, he sings, "Whistle's blowin', big bell sadly tones / Lord many a soldier, Lord, is dead and gone / Many a soldier, Lord, is dead and gone / Hey, hey hey hey."

The satiric (and bawdy) vein mined in such songs as "Three German Officers Crossed the Rhine," which was sung to the tune of "Mademoiselle from Armentieres." In the song (other versions have been bowdlerized) the three arrive at an inn and ask the innkeeper if he has a daughter "with lily-white tits and golden hair?" She presents herself and apparently goes willingly with them. The officers "shagged her in they shagged her out, parlez-vous. / They shagged her up her water-spout, parlez-vous." Nine months later she gives birth to a "little fat Prussian" who "grew and grew, parlez-vous. / He fucked the cat and the donkey too, parlez-vous. / The fat little Prussian he went to hell, parlez-vous. / He fucked the devil and his wife as well, parlez-vous." The song ridicules the "morality" of the enemy and also has the purpose of relieving tension through mockery and the expression of "taboo" words.

There is also a variety of World War II songs. "Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition" (Frank Loesser, 1942) is based on a true event although in the song the "sky pilot" (the real-life Chaplain Forgy) did not actually man the guns but gave moral support to the men bringing ammunition to the gunners. The broader point of the song is that because of steadfastness in

the face of attack "we'll all stay free." Further, in battle there is no time to mull over the political niceties of what may be right or wrong. Rather, action is required:

Praise the Lord and swing into position

Can't afford to be a politician

Praise the Lord, we're all between perdition

And the deep blue sea

As in "Send Me Away With a Smile" mentioned above, the sadness about death is tempered by the need to go to war. In "Soldier's Last Letter" (Redd Stewart and Ernest Tubb, 1944) the tone is at first joyful as the mother receives a letter from her son overseas. The son tells of his love for his mother and mentions that "the captain just gave us our orders / And Mom, we will carry them through." As the song continues the tone shifts as the mother realizes that her son is dead, and at the close she prays for all soldiers "fighting tonight / And dear God keep America free."

The satiric and bawdy tradition was also maintained. Spike Jones and His City Slickers' 1942 "Der Fuehrer's Face" takes the point of view of a "loyal" German: "When der fuehrer says we is de master race / We heil heil right in der fueher's face." Although flat on the page, in performance the lyrics were accompanied by "Bronx cheers" at each "heil heil" and a jaunty cacophony of oompah music with kazoo and trombone. (Jones and company made a short video of the song and a year later Walt Disney created a longer cartoon version of the song featuring Daffy Duck. The intent is to "reduce" Hitler, Goebbels, and Goering to ludicrous caricatures. One could argue that, although the song can be heard as a humorous morale booster, it also underestimates the threat of the enemy).

Max Sparber argues that with the sexual availability and loose morals attributed to European women, and the prevalence of prostitutes,

American G.I.s spent their furloughs drinking in European brothels while singing songs with titles like Cemetery Sue [sic]. ("They say a hard man is always good to find. / If he's three days dead then Sue don't mind. / Ask her what she wants and she'll say / she'll have a dose of rigor mortis from a fresh cadaver.")⁵

A widespread song with various lyrics and popularized by "British and Commonwealth troops in World War II was "'Fuck 'em All'". This was popular among Royal Air Force personnel in the 1920s on the North West Frontier of India and may have originated there. The British Royal Navy and the U.S. Marines added new verses, as did an unnamed G.I.:

Just think of the boys at the front,
No beer, no whisky, no cunt;
They sit in their trenches
And think of their wenches,
So cheer up, my boys, fuck 'em all!⁶

"Lili Marlene" is renowned as the most popular song in World War II. Based on a poem written by a German soldier in World War I, Hans Leip, in 1936 the poem was set to music and in 1940 it was recorded by singer Lale Andersen with the title "The Girl Under the Lantern." In 1941, Rommel reportedly requested that the song be played nightly on Radio Belgrade. An English-language translation was done in 1944 and "The British Eighth Army adopted the song. The song was sung in military hospitals and played over loud speakers, along with war propaganda across the frontlines, in both directions." The English version is more romanticized than the German but, be that as it may, the song made the charts well after the war in the United

States, Germany, and Japan, and has been translated into more than forty-eight languages. "Lili Marlene" reflects "the haunting melody, the lyrical wording and cadence, and the universal theme of abiding love and the perils of youth in a time of war."⁷

In the Vietnam era music became a lifeline in-country and when veterans returned home. As Doug Bradley and Craig Werner show in *We Gotta Get Outta This Place* and Lee Andresen in *Battle Notes*, impromptu "concerts" among personnel and the ubiquitous tape players and radios provided relief from the fear, death, and destruction that were daily realities. Upon return to "the world" music also provided possibilities for healing. Bradley and Werner note that "Music was the key to survival and a path to healing. . . ."⁸ Joseph Tusso's *Singing the Vietnam Blues: Songs of the Air Force in Southeast Asia* chronicles the variety of "occupational" songs created by flyers, both humorous and dark. Where Barry Sadler's very popular (five weeks at Billboard's number one) "Ballad of the Green Berets" (1966) honors the "fearless men" and the "brave men" of the Green Berets and declares that they are "America's best." "The Ballad of the Green Brassiere" is a "sardonic tribute to a 'friendly' Vietnamese girl." She is killed by a VC shell and all that is left of her is her green brassiere. "The Ballad of the PIO" sarcastically commemorates the Public Information Officer: "Fighting men may pass him by / And when they ask 'Who was that guy?' / 'I dunno, it's hard to say, / What the hell, just let him lay.'"⁹ Other Air Force songs recount heroic deeds while others recognized the omnipresence of death. Songs recognized death but also provided relief from the tension.

The most comprehensive story of music related to Vietnam is the two-volume 13-CD collection, . . . *Next Stop is Vietnam: The War on Record, 1961-2008*. Although the overwhelming majority of songs could be labeled "protest songs" there are others that take a more patriotic stance or are "neutral," but which had an impact on the troops (like Nancy

Sinatra's "These Boots Are Made for Walkin'") as they were able to apply lyrics to the specifics of their situation. The Animals' "We Gotta Get Out of This Place," the G.I.'s "national anthem," was not written about Vietnam but took on a meaning of survival and getting out alive. Similarly, Creedence Clearwater's "Run Through the Jungle" [1970] was not about the jungles of Vietnam but expressed John Fogerty's attitude toward the proliferation of guns. He had a different take in 2015 as he wrote that an armed citizenry might act as a deterrent to "those who would try to seize the country for their own ends". CDs 12 and 13 are by veterans with songs about memories and the aftermath of the war, like Agent Orange and PTSD, many with an undertone of anger at the government and a country that turned its back on veterans. In "Agent Orange Song" (written by Muriel Hogan, with the title of "Paul Reutershan") Country Joe McDonald sings (1987): "This Agent Orange from Vietnam, / We carry it with us, still; / It stays inside for years and years, / Before it starts to kill." Jim Wachtendonk, in "The Claymore Polka" (1985), sings (lightheartedly?) of putting a Claymore mine in your toilet. Steve Maxner, in his commentary on his song "Walking Time Bomb" (1987), notes, "Holding a veteran accountable for not winning in Vietnam might indeed cause one of them to explode all over you."¹⁰ The effect of all the songs, and the accompanying book of essays, photographs, reminiscences, and background on each song, provides a forty-plus year sound track of American society and the war.¹¹

Of course, protest songs are as much about war as are songs about the war experience. Bob Dylan's 1963 "Masters of War" was about the Cold War but its meaning is easily expanded to the anger and hatred felt toward politicians and arms makers who profit from their weapons. That the song has been recorded by Odetta, Pearl Jam, Scott Amendola and Carla Bozulich, and Anika shows the lyrics' continued relevance through the decades. The song has been covered as recently as 2017 by saxophonist Charles Lloyd, who connected it to the Trump inauguration.

Phil Ochs' songs chronicled the 1960s, sometimes with humor, often with bitter irony: "Talking Vietnam" (1964), "Draft Dodger Rag" (1965), "White Boots Marching in a Yellow Land" (1968). The Doors' "Unknown Soldier" was released in 1968 at the height of the war. Jim Morrison has said that he didn't want the song to specifically relate to Vietnam, but it was meant to be more universal. However, references in the song seem to point to Vietnam, while the official video includes war scenes. Creedence's "Fortunate Son" (1969) attacks the phony patriotism of those who send others' sons to war. Astoundingly, the song has been remade over fifty—fifty!!—times, as late as 2020, a testimony to its relevance half a century later. Edwin Starr, in "War" (1969), sings that war is good for "absolutely nothing." Marvin Gaye's "What's Going On?" (1971) was a response to the Vietnam War, racism, homelessness, and police brutality and plaintively called for love to "conquer hate." Gaye's brother Frankie served in Vietnam and his letters home influenced the anti-war thread in the song. Barry McGuire's 1965 "Eve of Destruction" doesn't particularly reference the Vietnam War but speaks to racial injustice, nuclear war, and the "disintegration" of the "whole world"; that same year "Dawn of Correction" was a response to McGuire's song, although one of the writers, John Medora, stated later that the song was not pro-war but pro-America and that because of the times the song was misunderstood.

Taking a more sardonically humorous tone Country Joe and the Fish's "The Fish Cheer / I-Feel-Like-I'm-Fixin'-to-Die" (1967) skewers war profiteering, blind patriotism, and the careerism of senior officers. The song ends with this twist: "And you can be the first ones on your block / To have your boy come home in a box." Country Joe's 1971 album *War War War* puts nine of Robert Service's poems to music. The final cut, perhaps the most powerful, "The March of the

Dead," was written about the Boer War, but like many of the other songs noted above, the imagery and meaning can apply to all twentieth-century (and twenty-first) wars.

In the early to mid-1980s, seven to ten years after the fall of Saigon, some notable songs dealt with the difficulties Vietnam veterans faced when they returned from the war. The songs may have had an anti-war subtext but were more concerned with veterans' experiences at home and continued a thread seen in some poems by World War II veterans and were also precursors to poems and songs by Iraq and Afghanistan veterans. Charlie Daniels' "Still in Saigon" (1982) is written in the first-person in the voice of a veteran who has been home for 10 years. He is plagued by nightmares and flashbacks and torn between three worlds: the way he is seen by others, his actual existence, and the "Saigon" in his mind: "That's been ten long years ago and time has gone on by. / But now and then I catch myself / Eyes searchin' through the sky / .All the sounds of long ago will be forever in my head. / Mingled with the wounded's cries and the silence of the dead . . ." The technique of first-person narration to show the aftereffects of war is also used by Huey Lewis and the News in their 1983 "Walking on a Thin Line." The song tells the story of "the boy next door" who serves in Vietnam but returns to face society's misunderstanding and his resultant alienation. Society expects him to simply forget what he has experienced ("It's over now or so they say / Well, sometimes, it don't work out that way . . ."), but he is "Blinded by a memory / Afraid of what it might do to me." Paul Hardcastle's "19" (1985, and later versions) is a hybrid "song" in which very little is actually sung; it is more of a techno-rap synthesizer-driven pulsating beat of sampled narration (by TV announcer Peter Thomas and veterans), occasional female chorus, crowd noise, and a bugle call. The "lyrics" include repetition of "destruction," "war," and "19" (referring to the supposed average age of the soldier in Vietnam; that it was 22 doesn't really affect the meaning of the song) and focus on the fallout

from the war: "Many vets complain of alienation, rage, or guilt / Some succumb to suicidal thoughts / Eight to ten years after coming home almost eight-hundred-thousand men are / Still fighting the Vietnam War."¹² After the Battle of Hue, depicted in *Full Metal Jacket* (1987), the troops march away singing the Mickey Mouse Club theme song. It is both ironic, contrasting the innocence of the song and the TV program with the horror of war, but also in a way comforting, as the song suggests childhood and home. R.E.M.'s "Orange Crush" (1988) developed from the stories Michael Stipe heard from his Vietnam veteran father. An earlier unreleased song, "Body Count" also references the war.

The songs noted above were not written by Vietnam veterans but, as the effects of the war began to filter into society at large, the artists, following Pound's dictum that they are "the antennae of the race," showed a knowledge of and sensitivity to problems that others failed, or chose not, to see. These concerns were also evident in such films as *Ashes and Embers* (1982), written and directed by Haile Gerima. Using jump cuts and a staccato soundtrack the film follows Vietnam veteran Ned Charles who, for seven years after his discharge, has yet to overcome a sense of cynicism, dislocation and alienation. His personal relationships are in disarray and religion has failed him. Only his aged grandmother can offer some sense of a meaningful post-war existence. Other artwork focused on these issues and a host of others. Vets faced not just psychological but physical debilitation as well. Wendy Watriss' photographic series *The Implications of Agent Orange* (1982) brought this virtually unknown problem to the fore. Also in the 1980s, artists Luis Camnitzer and William T. Wiley created works referencing the poisonous effects of Agent Orange. Rachael Romero's 1984 painting *He Who Feels It Knows It* depicts in close-up a veteran's face with the "thousand-yard stare," representing the emotional dissociation from war trauma. Her work thematically follows Harvey Dunn's 1918 *The Sentry*,

Claggett Wilson's circa 1919 *Runner Through the Barrage, Bois de Belleau, Chateau-Thierry Sector; His Arm Shot Away, His Mind Gone*, and Tom Lea's 1945 painting of a World War II soldier on Peleliu *The Two-Thousand Yard Stare*. Sue Coe's 1986 *War Train* depicts a darkened subway tunnel (Hell?) populated by frantic, tortured semi-skeletal "commuters" (veterans?), with one seemingly gushing blood from a severed wrist and another with a missing leg. In the foreground is a veteran with a sign that reads, "Please Help Me I am a Vietnam Vet. I have no home and no job. GOD BLESS YOU." On the wall above the crowd are three posters: one is a cover of *Newsweek* picturing General Westmoreland; a recruiting poster stating "Join the Marines" (although the single face shows more apprehension than clean-cut patriotism); the third urges that "Real Men Join the Army," while an emaciated face with a skull behind it stares out. The arts are not merely self-expressive but in this case also revelatory and prophetic. This suggests that wars never end for the participants, despite dates and official proclamations. Relatedly, the outpouring of films and literature in the late 1920s and early 1930s after World War I indicates that it might take a decade or more for the war experience to gain some semblance of clarity.

War songs can also be found in unexpected places. One would not think that Iron Maiden would have an historical perspective but their 2003 song, "Paschendale," recreates the horror of trench warfare (the jacket cover art is reminiscent of Otto Dix's work), while "The Trooper" (1983) references The Charge of the Light Brigade. Black Sabbath's "War Pigs" (1970), clearly about the Vietnam War, condemns the war machine and holds out hope that there will be a day of judgment when the war profiteers will be "begging mercy for their sins." Freda Payne, singer of the disco hit "Band of Gold," recorded "Bring the Boys Home" (1971). Roger Waters of Pink Floyd has numerous anti-war songs, with lyrics running from the sarcastic to the

angrily mournful. "The Bravery of Being Out of Range" (1992) describes an old veteran who "can't abide change" and still plays at being a soldier in love with his weapons. The second half of the song references the start of the Gulf War with these verses: "Two more shots / And two more beers / Sir, turn up the TV sound / The war has started on the ground / Just love those laser guided bombs" The song ends with the repetition of the title, connoting that the warmongers love to see death and destruction when they are "3,000 miles away" and can't be harmed themselves. The bodies on the ground are merely abstract entities seen on television through the lens of the missiles.

"When the Tigers Broke Free," released in 1982, describes the death of his father, Eric, at the Anzio beachhead. Much later Waters finds a letter to his mother from King George regarding Eric's death, "signed" with seeming indifference: "And my eyes still grow damp to remember / His Majesty signed / With his own rubber stamp. . . ." The Beastie Boys, perhaps best known for "(You Gotta) Fight for Your Right (To Party!)" also wrote "In a World Gone Mad" (2003). The song (with attendant video), done in rap style (with some forced rhymes), attacks George Bush, oil companies, and war profiteering. The 2008 album by Warbringer, *War Without End*, is a virtually updated "Eve of Destruction" with such songs as "Total War," "Combat Shock," and "Instruments of Torture."

From the 1990s into the 2000s numerous songs, usually country music, take a patriotic view. One of the most popular is Lee Greenwood's 1984 "God Bless the U.S.A." It got new life during the Gulf War, after September 11, and in 2003 after the invasion of Iraq, and was re-recorded as "God Bless the U.S.A. 2003." "Courtesy of the Red, White, and Blue (The Angry American)" by Toby Keith (2002) references his veteran father's death, 9 / 11, and the

subsequent war in Afghanistan. His 2003 "American Soldier" has a less angry tone and is more about a soldier's commitment and devotion to service:

And I will always do my duty

No matter what the price

I've counted up the cost

I know the sacrifice . . .

Tim McGraw's "If You're Reading This" (2007) takes the form of a soldier's letter to his wife, a letter sent only if he does not return from combat. He expresses some sorrow about not being able to see his daughter born but also tells his wife that he has no regrets for his service:

Just remember this

I'm in a better place

Where soldiers live in peace

And angels sing amazing grace

While country music was more patriotic-minded, rock music remains the venue for protest. The Rolling Stones' "Highwire" (1991) attacks war profiteering at the expense of the combat soldier. John Fogerty's 2007 "I Can't Take it No More" is angry about governmental lies, while his "Déjà vu (All Over Again)" (2004) makes a comparison between Vietnam and Iraq:

Day by day I hear the voices rising

Started with a whisper like it did before

Day by day we count the dead and dying

Ship the bodies home while the networks all keep score

Robert Cray is best-known for blues songs which plumb such themes as relationships, infidelity, love, lust, and sex. However, he has recorded a few songs which touch on social

issues, such as homelessness ("Night Patrol," 1988) and the anti-Trump "This Man" (2020).

"Twenty" (2006) tells of a disillusioned soldier who realizes that what he signed up for is at odds with the reality that he discovers:

They call this a war on terror
I see a lot of civilians dying
Mothers, sons, fathers and daughters
Not to mention some friends of mine
Some friends of mine

"Hero of War" (2008), by Rise Against, similar to "Twenty," is the story of an idealistic recruit who joins up to see the world and become a hero. When he comes home his family will be "damn proud" of him, and he'll "carry this flag / To the grave if I must / Cause it's a flag that I love / And a flag that I trust." However, his experiences in war are the opposite of what he imagined. He sees crying children, torture of so-called enemies, and the blood of innocents on his hands. When he comes home his family only see the "medals and scars," not the psychological injuries he suffers.

Neil Young's "Shock and Awe" (2006) is a lament for the dead and the living who suffer:

Thousands of children scarred for life
Millions of tears for a soldier's wife
Both sides are losing now
Heaven takes them in
Thousands of children scarred for life

Apart from Vietnam-era veterans Country Joe McDonald and John Fogerty, none of the "pro" or "con" songs noted above were written or performed by veterans. However, upon return home,

Iraq and Afghanistan War veterans turned to music as a way to express to the civilian world their experiences “over there” and what they were facing back home. Many of these songs have a decidedly therapeutic dimension and carry on a tradition of using music in a healing context that stretches back to World War I. Margaret Anderton established a program in musicotherapy at Columbia University in 1919, and “Harriet Ayer Seymour, who established the National Foundation of Musical Therapy, also provided music therapy services to war veterans during World War I. . . .”¹³

After World War II the War Department established music therapy programs for veterans in technical bulletin 187 (TB MED 187), issued July 26, 1945, *Music in Reconditioning in ASF Convalescent and General Hospitals*. One of its central tenets is that “music should be provided along with other activities offered to patients because it is one of the most effective vehicles for bringing a group together, for releasing the emotions, and for creating a spirit of fellowship and esprit de corps.” The bulletin goes on to state that an “individual performer” will have “an opportunity for self-expression, accomplishment, and satisfaction.” Even the non-musician’s “interests are broadened and his sense of well-being is generally increased.” The War Department recognized that some returning servicemen suffered from “battle fatigue” and that music could be a resource for healing.¹⁴

Current veterans may make music under the auspices of the VA or through related programs, while others follow their own star. Soldier Hard (Jeff Barillo), from Vallejo, California, joined the Army at 19 and was deployed to Iraq. He left the service but returned in 2004 and was re-deployed to Iraq. After permanently returning to civilian life he founded the non-profit RedCon-1 Music Group in order to produce and market his music, releasing nearly twenty albums since 2001. He also creates videos to accompany his songs. His efforts have expanded

to produce the songs of other veterans. Barillo sees his mission to use music to help veterans. He extols the use of music as a therapeutic tool in order to process the experience of war.

In the song "Red Flags" from his 2013 album *Group Therapy*, Barillo uses the hip-hop genre to discuss the effects of war. He tells the all-too-common story of veterans who return home changed and affected by PTSD and TBI and who lose the battle to live. Barillo demands that we see the warning signs, the red flags:

And you can see 'em there shining bright
All you gotta do is stop and open eyes
It's loud, and you can even hear em
All you gotta do is stop and pay attention
You see the red flags

Other albums include *Light Up the Darkness* (2015) and *Bloodlines* (2019). A single, "Gold Star Kids," is about sons and daughters who lost a parent in war and reminds us that the effects of war have an impact on families that have to deal with that loss.¹⁵

Donnie Isaacs joined the Army at 17 years old and is a combat veteran of Afghanistan, finishing his tour as a sergeant major in 2008 after a nearly thirty-year career. After he returned from deployment, still in the Army, some unresolved issues from the war led him to alcohol and depression. He eventually sought help at the Warrior Transition Unit (WTU). As he was playing music at open mic nights he learned about CAMMO (Center for American Military Music Opportunities), based at Fort Belvoir. He eventually recorded some singles and then released his five-song country EP *Duffle Bags* in 2019 with the assistance of CAMMO.¹⁶ For him, the duffle bag represents the things veterans carry to war and also what they carry on return. In the title song (co-written with fellow veteran L.G. Richardson) he is bound for war: "These duffle

bags are too damn heavy / It's so early I don't know my name / There's ten buses waiting / I hope they don't take me to my grave."¹⁷ His mother prays for him and his brother thinks he's crazy to go. As the song progresses he sings about the commitment of those in the military to stand and fight for our freedom. The other four songs on the EP talk more about relationships, failed and successful. He sees his music as a way of working through his issues and as a message to other veterans to seek help and to see that they are not alone. He realizes that he has "lifelong demons" but says that he wants to "share the fact that you can overcome those demons" and "tell a story that I understand what you're going through and there is hope, there is light. . . . share your story and I'll share my story and we'll both get better."¹⁸

In 2012 musician Darden Smith and Mary Judd founded the Songwriting With: Soldiers (SW:S) workshop as a way of bringing together civilian songwriters, active duty personnel, and veterans to create songs. Spouses also participate and many write their own or co-write songs with their partner in order to express what they have experienced when a loved one returns from war a different person. Each participant is paired with a professional songwriter. The process begins with the participant telling their story and the songwriter asking for clarification or expansion. As the story becomes more detailed, and as certain words, phrases or images arise, they go into the song. He notes, "what we found was the collaboration process, with songs in particular, is very cathartic...and allows people to step across a border that they didn't know was there."¹⁹ The songs are recorded on CD and offered for sale as a donation to support SW:S.

Guitars for Vets (G4V) was co-founded in 2007 by Patrick Nettesheim and Dan Van Buskirk. Since its inception G4V has provided, without charge, some 40,000 lessons and 4,000 guitars to veterans through 110 regional chapters in 40 states. G4V believes that

“the healing power of music therapy helps soldiers cope. That’s why we provide veterans with guitars and a forum to learn how to play. . . . More simply, playing a guitar can help veterans safely connect with their surroundings and other people.” They have documented a reduction in stress-related issues, and have seen some of their “graduates” go on to become performers and instructors in the program.²⁰

Barillo, Isaacs, the musicians sponsored by CAMMO or other workshops, and the dozens if not hundreds of veterans creating music in diverse styles, from hip-hop to rock to folk, have one thing in common: telling their stories through music and song not only helps them but also their fellow veterans. They see their songs as inspirational in the sense that no veteran is alone. Music can restore connection, create community, and build bridges between veterans and civilians. There is also an educational dimension to their songs, as the civilian can hopefully come to learn about the issues that veterans face and to recognize the “red flags” and to feel the weight of the “duffle bags.”

Vince Gabriel has been making music since his high school days in New Jersey. Born in South Amboy on September 16, 1947, he learned the guitar after his father brought one home. Influenced by the rock music of the early and mid-1960s, The Rolling Stones in particular, Gabriel played in rock bands in and after graduating high school. He was drafted in 1967, completed basic training, and deployed as infantry, 11 Bravo Vietnam, in January 1968, arriving just before the start of the Tet Offensive. He soon found himself in the jungle, engaging in his first firefight after only a few weeks in country. He bought a beat-up guitar, and a photo from 1968 shows him in his helmet, cradling it, M60 style. He notes, though, that he never took the guitar on patrol but that it traveled with him to base camps, where he would play with some other guitarists when he was out of the bush.

He kept playing music when he returned stateside in 1969. He lived for a time in Connecticut, California, and Massachusetts, playing in clubs, working with “name” artists, and becoming more serious about his music. After moving permanently to Maine in the 1990s, he rejuvenated his Blind Albert persona from the 1970s and formed the Blind Albert Band. His *nom de musique* came about some three decades ago while he was working on blues songwriting and performing project and needed to come up with a “bluesy-sounding” name for the project. His middle name is Albert so he decided on Blind Albert. When he moved to Maine from Massachusetts he put a new band together and needed a name for it. He resurrected the name and is now known more familiarly as Blind Albert rather than Vince Gabriel.

In 2000 he released the CD *11 Bravo Vietnam*, which chronicles his war and post-war experiences. Liner notes dedicate the CD to his brothers-in-arms Howard Spitzer, Richard Gibson (“Spitzer and The Winemaker”), Nicholas Saunders, Robert Caplan and “all those who gave the ultimate sacrifice and to all veterans who served.” Gabriel calls *11 Bravo Vietnam* an audio documentary and an attempt to give the listener an idea of what it was like to be in Vietnam. The songs span the time he got his draft card and notice to report, his combat experience, and his return home. Each song is attached to whatever he was going through at the time. He believes that music can be a soothing method of dealing with experience, but many (most) of the songs are not soothing. He says that “the Vietnam CD is definitely a story. A true story.” The album served as the foundation for a documentary he created a few years later, *11 Bravo Vietnam—A Soldier’s Story*, which he calls “a virtual scrapbook of one young man’s experience in combat from the day he receives word of his induction to his homecoming.”²¹ The documentary evolved from a radio interview about the music scene in Maine. During the course of the interview, the subject turned to Vietnam, and it was eventually called “Vietnam

Blues." The interview was sent to a few radio stations, and was eventually picked up by NPR for the Sound Print program.²² Because of the broadcast, he put a live performance together based on the songs on the Vietnam CD. Gabriel had notebooks full of recollections of his Vietnam experiences. When he started to put his live performance together, he took parts of what he wrote that were connected to the songs and had a narrator narrate each portion. The songs were only about three or four minutes long, and the live performance alternated between the songs and the narration. He then decided to put together a documentary. The documentary is a "visualization" of the CD.

The song "Draft Card" is emblematic of his irrevocable life change, happening virtually overnight, from playing music in California after high school to receiving his induction notice and going to basic and infantry training. "Spitzer and the Winemaker" is a first-person account of an episode in which Gabriel is rotated off point with Spitzer taking the lead with Gibson. As they move out, with Spitzer and Gibson a hundred or so yards ahead, the patrol hears an explosion. They learn that Spitzer and Gibson walked into a minefield, with Spitzer killed and Gibson wounded. In the song he asks, "Why am I here and his name is on the wall?" and poses some reasons: luck, skill, karma, God, but then says, "nah." He is left with an unanswerable question, but realizes that a random decision was the difference between life and death.

"Homeward Flight" is an instrumental; words aren't needed to express the relief of riding home on the "freedom bird." The album concludes with the plaintive feel of "Beneath the Shelter" and the relentless bass line of "Shellshock—PTSD" (included on CD 13 of . . . *Next Stop is Vietnam*). In the former, Gabriel takes on the persona of a homeless veteran telling his story. He says that "I died inside but kept on living." He realizes that there will be "no more parades with ticker tape or marching bands" and that in society's eyes "I'm just a wino." In the latter

Gabriel describes the personal effects of the war: his divorce, the inner demons, the reliance on “weed and whiskey” in order to get through the day. He sings in the refrain that “the war never ends for the soldier, you come home and it all just begins.” The song reflects on the experiences of many veterans not just of Vietnam but also Iraq and Afghanistan. It was the last song he wrote for the CD, almost three decades after he returned from Vietnam. The song completes the cycle of home / war / home that forms the structure of the CD.

He feels that his music has some relevance to vets returning today. He realizes that the wars are different, but sees a similarity in that, regardless of jungle or desert, the veteran was still in combat. The place doesn’t matter; it was combat. He also believes that the problems that the vet is affected by after return were similar, such as anxiety, panic attacks, depression, and suicides from PTSD. “A bullet can still kill you. That isn't any different,” he says.

In 2002 he released an eight-cut CD entitled *Boyish Man* (playing off Muddy Waters’ 1955 song “Mannish Boy”), on which he played guitar, harmonica, and percussion, as well as doing the back-up vocals. The album is more straight-ahead rock and blues with no ostensible references to his military service. Gabriel, at 72, continues to write songs, and performs solo and with his band. He has his own recording studio where he produces the albums of other musicians.²³

Jason Moon has been writing and performing for over 20 years and his work has evolved markedly over that time. When he began, while still in high school, he was influenced by John Prine and by local songwriters Jason Eklund and Little Rev. But he counts Bob Dylan as his primary influence, who showed him that words and music could have a powerful effect. He started writing songs to express emotions, and they became like a musical diary. He started

learning music and writing songs for self-entertainment, then got into singing to heal his own life trauma.²⁴

Moon served in Iraq with a combat engineering battalion. When he returned to the States in 2004, he was eventually diagnosed by VA psychologists with depression, insomnia, and adjustment disorder. Despite medication his condition worsened, leading to a suicide attempt in 2008, which resulted in a diagnosis of PTSD. The diagnosis led to his creative resurgence, and he began to use music to heal himself from more serious war trauma. Now his songs have become a tool to help others have a catharsis from hearing his / her story in a song. The songs are a release from trauma and promote healing, self-discovery, transformation, and truth in terms of looking at the human experience.

His first album, *Naked Under All of These Clothes*, came out in 1996. One of the songs, "American Dream," was an expression of anger at society and the plight of the underclass. *Poverty*, his second album, was released in 2006, after he returned from Iraq. "Catch a Ride" has a satirical edge to it. "St. Thomas Blues" is about disconnection and alienation. "Let's Be Passive" is an attack on complacency.

Moon is one of seven participants in Oliver Morel's 2009 film, *On the Bridge*, which features current veterans telling their stories of war and post-war life. Toward the end of the film he sings "Hold On." It's about holding on for one more day. He had been working on finishing the song a few weeks before he attempted suicide. He feels that that song has an impact beyond veterans because it's not specifically about PTSD; it's about depression and sadness and suicidal ideation. He believes that the song has helped people understand they're not alone.²⁵

Moon's breakthrough CD is *Trying to Find My Way Home* (2010). The genesis of the album is his work with Morel on the documentary. Moon says that Morel "encouraged me to work on these songs that I'd begun when I returned from the war but had been unable to finish." As the title suggests, the album expresses Moon's attempt to regain a sense of "home." However, the return is problematic due to feeling disconnected and alienated, as the title track indicates: "The child inside me is long dead and gone / Somewhere between lost and alone . . . It's hard to fight an enemy that lives inside your head. . . ." "Alone With Me Tonight" continues the theme of the inability to reconnect to others and to society. He recalls "the mystery and marvel of a smile on a face" but this has been replaced by "broken dreams and empty bottles." All he sees are ghosts. "Happy To Be Home" takes a bitterly ironic tone when he writes that "all this welcome home, we're so proud of you, good job bullshit is wearing thin." "Thank you for your service" from well-meaning civilians only goes so far until the phrase becomes an empty cliché. Other songs discuss his psychological numbness and need to self-medicate. The album ends on a cautiously hopeful note. Although the effects of PTSD are overwhelming he tells himself to "hold on" as there is always the chance that tomorrow, or the next week, or the next month, will bring him relief.²⁶

As Moon's music developed, it became more optimistic. Although *Love & Life* (2014) reveals some of the same themes as the earlier work, there are more hopeful signs. While the title track and "Railroad Song" touch on loneliness and alienation, in "My Child, My Boy, My Son" Moon finds joy in the fatherly role, giving his son "life advice" to help guide him through life's ups and downs: "Now what can I say except, somewhere along the way, / You may find yourself on a road that you had never known. / And this road may be rough, and this road may be long, /

So keep with you always in your heart this song." "Family Song" tells the story of his family when he was growing up and the importance of home and family to him today.

His newest album, his fourth solo CD, is entitled *The Wolf I Fed* (2020). Again, there are undertones of isolation and loss but out of those arise a growing sense of hope and reconnection. In "Wisdom of the Wound" Moon writes that because of the war "that person I once was, is now a distant memory." The memories of his war experience "brought him to his knees." However, the song takes a positive turn when he realizes that in order to be free from the burden of the past he (and by extension, all veterans) has to tell his story, and that civilians need to listen: "And if you share our story then our healing can begin. / Now the next chapter can begin." That healing from trauma can emerge from sharing one's story and starting a "new chapter" is seen in other songs on the album. In "You Didn't Say Goodbye," Moon looks back from a twenty-year vantage point at a failed relationship. For most of the song he is wistful and rueful, writing "sometimes late at night I still hang my head and cry, when I think back on the day that you didn't say goodbye." However, as the song ends, Moon is happy that the relationship ended because he is happy with a wife and family. "The Sweetest Little Thing" is a whimsical lullaby to his daughter, revealing his joy in getting her to sleep. This album integrates his military experience with his post-war life of family and fatherhood. It was not released through Warrior Songs, but on his own label, Full Moon Music. He was trying to understand how his work with veterans and how his personal life are separate but also intersect. The CD represents his journey from a poor kid who had to join the Army to a nationally-recognized veterans' suicide prevention advocate.

Another aspect of Moon's healing journey is *7 Things You Never Say to a Veteran*, a live presentation in which he uses songs and narration to discuss PTSD.²⁷ Having given over 200

presentations from 2010 to 2015, Moon made a video of a 2016 performance at a prison health care conference in Wisconsin. About *7 Things You Never Say to a Veteran*, he writes on the back cover of the CD case that because he is “unable to keep up with the ongoing requests to give this presentation, I offer this DVD with the hope that it will serve to equally inspire and educate. PTSD is not a weakness, you are not alone, and we do not leave our wounded behind.” In the film he tells his story as a way of educating the civilian audience about his post-war experiences and subsequent diagnosis of PTSD. Using his songs from *Trying to Find My Way Home* as a counterpoint, he tells of his cycle of depression and drinking, isolation, and inability to sleep. He discusses the physical and psychological effects of trauma generally, and war trauma in particular, which led to his suicide attempt in 2008, which he says was an attempt to “eliminate the threat. I am the threat.” The film ends with seven statements that the well-meaning civilian should not say, with six points that are helpful. His overall message is to share the burden and share the story as a way to heal oneself.²⁸

Apart from his own music, Moon founded Warrior Songs with the goal of using music to help veterans integrate and transform their military experiences into song. To date Warrior Songs has produced three CDs. The first, *If You Have to Ask . . .* (2016), features fourteen cuts by Army, Air Force, and Marine veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan, with a little help from Vietnam veterans Raymond Cocks and Jim Wachtendonk.

The second CD, *Women at War* (2018), contains fifteen cuts by a variety of women veterans. He was hearing stories from women about being passed over for promotions and not being respected. Stories of MST and sexual assault, being assaulted, being harassed, and being punished for reporting were also common. Moon realized that these stories were worse than people imagined. He decided to do the CD as a way of addressing these problems.

In addition to producing CDs, he facilitates retreats in which he helps veterans transform their trauma into songs through a group collaborative process. As a facilitator he will listen to their stories and then brainstorm words and phrases about who they were before they were traumatized and who they are afterward. He takes the words and what he has heard in the testimonies of their trauma and creates a story, an arc, using everyone's words, and crafts that into a song. For example, in a recent retreat, he developed a four and a half minute song, "See Me," from many hours listening to thirteen women who were recovering from military rape trauma. He distills their 100 years of collective trauma and wisdom into four and a half minutes of raw truth.

Moon believes that song or art or poetry can transform trauma into something that is less painful to express. His philosophy is that the trauma that is caused by the military is so outside ordinary experience that it is difficult, if not impossible, for the average person to grasp. Trauma is beyond normal comprehension and therefore beyond normal verbalization through standard language because it is outside of the contextual norms of society. The veteran is forced to carry it internally. He maintains that the arts provide a way to bridge the gap between un verbalized emotions and the civilian community. Veterans who have had traumas beyond explanation have to carry that alone. Beyond his songs about veterans and the military, many also speak to the civilian experiencing insomnia, depression, or sadness. His songs provide a medium to represent their experience.

The third Warrior Songs CD, featuring the music of Vietnam vets, is now released. Further in the future he plans on a volume 4 with veterans of color, and hopes to do one with Native American veterans. The overall goal is to do ten volumes. He hopes that the CDs illustrate that the arts, music in particular, can be an agency for healing trauma.²⁹

In addition to her songwriting and performing as a self-proclaimed “eventual ukulele superstar” Emily Yates is a photographer, essayist, and poet. Her photographic subjects run from “Food” to “Faces” to “Nature” to “War.” The latter photographs document scenes from her time in Iraq, like “On Patrol” and “Perimeter Secured,” as well as scenes with children, often with soldiers.³⁰ Her writing explores a variety of themes. In “A Veteran’s Affair: How Dealing With the VA is Like Dating a Douchebag” (2016)³¹, she uses humor to highlight a serious issue. “Unfortunately, because only one percent (roughly) of Americans serve in the military at any given time, there’s a massive cognitive disconnect between veterans and, as we lovingly call the rest of the population, civilians. But there is hope for us yet to bridge the communication divide.” In the essay she points out the multiple ways that the VA falls short of expectations. In her essays as well as her songs she often uses humor to express her concerns, and utilizes juxtapositions of joy and disillusionment, humor and aggression, and gentleness and vulgarity to communicate those concerns, whether they be about the VA, the precariousness of freedom, sexuality, the military, certain personality types, or how “not to be a dick.”

Two essays for *Truthout* also express these concerns. In “American Propagander: Six Ways Paul Rieckhoff’s ‘American Sniper’ Column Deeply Bothers This US Veteran” (2015), Yates presents a scathing critique of Rieckhoff’s praise of Eastwood’s film. She feels that in his discussion of the film Rieckhoff exploits veterans and ignores the complexity of the war. In her view, he ignores the real story of the war, such as PTSD and veteran suicides (although to be fair, Kyle’s PTSD is depicted), and the complexity of American involvement. She ends her essay, “All of these points illustrate the larger issue that when veterans’ traumatic experiences are exploited as freely by veterans themselves as they are by the powerful few who send us to war, it’s a sign that we ourselves have internalized the destructive system that our bodies were used to

support.” In another essay, “Who Am I, Really?: The Identity Crisis of the Woman Veteran Returning Home” (2013), she describes the psychological split she and other women face trying to “recalibrate” their lives and “relearn” how to be a civilian. “I’m referring to the particularly awkward division between women veterans and women who have never been in the military – the division that leads to women like me getting out of the Army and finding it nearly impossible to relate to 99% of other American women.”³²

One of her poems, “I Am the Savage,” reflects on her war experience. She writes about the “rubble beside the Tigris river” and troops entering Iraqi homes, instilling fear in the citizens. But the military power she observes, wielded against ordinary citizens, is the source of her dejection:

My job is to tell the story of victory–
victory!
Victory?
But I am defeated

Another poem, “Yellow Ribbon” (also a song and video), is critical of civilians who refuse to see the reality of war, believing that a yellow ribbon on their cars and the formulaic “thank you for your service” excuse them from complicity. She feels that civilians are willfully blind to what is being done in their name, and are content to follow the trappings of patriotism. She writes “But you can’t bring back the dead by throwing a parade.” The poem closes: “Don’t make me your hero, just lend me your ear / Oh, and wipe the tears I cry / While I apologize for that goddamn yellow ribbon on your car.”³³

Yates joined the Army at age 19, spent six years in the service, from 2002 until her “release,” as she puts it, in 2008, finishing as an E-4, having served two deployments to Iraq in

2005-06 and 2007-08. She calls herself a former “public affairs minion, writing heartwarming news stories about the Iraq War to help build fellow soldiers’ morale.”³⁴ She worked under David Abrams (author of the novels *Fobbit* and *Brave Deeds*), and as “the only snarky female specialist in his unit” she sees some of herself in the character of Carnicle. She says that she wishes to “use my experience in the military to make my civilian life richer . . . [and] help those who are struggling.”³⁵

Yates is best known for her music. In 2012 she released *I’ve Got Your Folk Songs Right Here* and in 2014 *Folk in Your Face*. She also released a children’s album under the *nom de musique* Fancy von Pancerton. In *I’ve Got Your Folk Songs Right Here* there is a humorous dimension to “Plant Some Weed,” where growing marijuana is a better economic choice than working at McDonald’s or taking tickets at a movie theater. “In Your Mind” and “Shut Yer Face” criticize ego-centric males who believe that they are “the best and the brightest / Your teeth are the whitest / Except that it’s all in your mind.” “Foreign Policy Folk Song” is reminiscent of Phil Ochs and protest songs of the 1960s placed in a contemporary context:

Just bomb their country

Just bomb their fucking country

Kill all of their children and destroy their infrastructure

Just bomb their country, put holes in all their history

Then take all of their resources and bomb, bomb, bomb, bomb their country.

Folk in Your Face echoes many of the themes of the first album. There is the whimsical, upbeat “Porn!” (“Everyone likes porn!”) and the more serious “Just a Little Cog,” in which she declares that she will no longer be a cog in anyone else’s wheel, whether it be in a relationship

or the military: "I was just a little soldier in your war / I'm not fighting anymore / I'm no longer just a cog in your machine."

One of her strongest songs is "You're the Enemy," released on the 2018 *Women At War: Warrior Songs Vol. 2*, as a response to the prevalence of Military Sexual Trauma (MST) and her own assault, which she did not report "because I knew the investigation, if one even happened, would be even more demoralizing than being assaulted by people I knew." She is especially demoralized that there is no escape from the situation. She sees her attacker daily and the supposed trust within a unit is meaningless:

I was trained to fight,
To kill and to die
But never thought that I'd be fighting
Someone on my side³⁶

Yates has made numerous music videos, some of performances and others more illustrative of the songs. "Yellow Ribbon"³⁷ (noted above) is set in front of a recruiting station, with Yates playing a banjo. The more-active "Land of the Free"³⁸ (released July 4, 2017) is in "honor of those for whom this is not the 'Land of the Free.'" It is an attack on corporate greed, consumerism, militarism, and any force that restricts personal freedom. As Yates skips through Boulder's streets draped in an American flag, she sings, "you'll be convicted for your convictions" and "you'll be tried for tryin' to speak the truth." The video ends with Yates bound with duct tape with a strip of tape over her mouth. On the strip is written "patriot," suggesting that in the current political climate the real patriots, the truth-tellers, have to be silenced and held in check.

What Emily Yates says about her work could also be applied to Vince Gabriel and Jason Moon: "Through my art, I express my many opinions and observations, casually brushing aside

social stigma in the interest of breaking down communication barriers and shining light on the many ties that bind humans together.”³⁹

Not to be hyperbolic, but war music is as old as war itself. From the music that accompanied soldiers into battle, to songs that are witnesses to experience, to songs that heal, to songs that educate, to songs of protest and patriotism, expressed in the genres of country, rock, folk, jazz, blues, reggae and rap, from the serious to the sarcastic and cynical, war music (and writing and film, for that matter) tells us at least as much, if not more, about the “totality of war,” the going, there, and back, than official documents. Gabriel, Moon, and Yates, along with a myriad of others, reflect these three phases of war, and their songs are not all that different from the types of songs Siegfried Sassoon references in his 1918 poem, “The Song-Books of War,” “Savage and jaunty, fierce and strong; . . . the angry marching rhymes / Of blind regret and haggard mirth”

Larry Abbott writes frequently about veterans' poetry, photography, painting, music, and filmmaking. He has published essays and interviews in *The Journal of Veterans Studies*, *The Journal of Military and Veterans Health*, *The Wrath-Bearing Tree*, *The War Horse*, and *WLA*. He holds a Master's degree in Cinema Studies from New York University and a Master of Letters degree in American Literature from the Bread Loaf School of English. Abbott discusses the artistic works of veterans on his website artsofwarandhome.net.

Notes

¹ Trotter, William. "The Music of War." *Military History*, June, 2005, p. 58.

² Keegan, John. *The Face of Battle*. New York: Vintage Books, 1977, pp. 142, 67, 141. Somewhat analogously, U.S. forces used "death sounds" in Vietnam, like "Operation Wandering Soul," to encourage North Vietnamese troops to return home. Of course, the "battle cry" and yells of "charge!" contributed to the soundscape of the battlefield.

³ "Music of the 1860s: Patriotic Songs of the Era." American Battlefield Trust. www.battlefields.org/learn/articles/music-1860s

⁴ Robert J. Soucy, www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=1793

⁵ Max Sparber, "In Praise of the Bawdy Ballad," drunkard.com/09_02_bawdy_ballad/

⁶ Les Cleveland, "Soldiers' Songs: The Folklore of the Powerless," faculty.buffalostate.edu/fishlm/folksongs/les01.htm

⁷ Jerry Gilreath, "On Understanding the World War II German War Song Lili Marlene," 280th-usasa-berlin.com/BA%20002%20101%20Lili%20Marlene.html.

⁸ Bradley, Douglas, and Werner, Craig. *We Gotta Get Outta This Place*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2015, p. 2.

⁹ Tusso, Joseph. *Singing the Vietnam Blues: Songs of the Air Force in Southeast Asia*. College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1990, pp. 38-39.

¹⁰ Keesing, Hugo. . . . *Next Stop is Vietnam: The War on Record, 1961-2008*. Hamburg, Germany: Bear Family Records, 2010, p. 236.

¹¹ As noted above, some songs are re-contextualized where original meanings are reassigned. For example, the Doors' 11-minute song "The End," featured at the beginning of *Apocalypse Now*, was not about the war but began as Jim Morrison's farewell to a girlfriend and evolved during the band's performances at the Whiskey a Go Go (see www.songfacts.com/facts/the-doors/the-end). Kilgore blasts *Ride of the Valkyries* from his helicopter on the approach to the village (so Lance can surf because it "Scares the hell out of the slopes." In *Full Metal Jacket*, Stanley Kubrick utilizes a few songs of the 1960s as part of the sound track. At first listen some of the choices might seem strange, but as Kubrick explained in a *Rolling Stone* interview with Tim Cahill:

So let's talk about the music in Full Metal Jacket. I was surprised by some of the choices, stuff like "These Boots Are Made for Walkin'," by Nancy Sinatra. What does that song mean?

It was the music of the period. The Tet offensive was in '68. Unless we were careless, none of the music is post-'68.

I'm not saying it's anachronistic. It's just that the music that occurs to me in that context is more, oh, Jimi Hendrix, Jim Morrison.

The music really depended on the scene. We checked through Billboard's list of Top 100 hits for each year from 1962 to 1968.

We were looking for interesting material that played well with a scene. We tried a lot of songs. Sometimes the dynamic range of the music was too great, and we couldn't work in dialogue. The music has to come up under speech at some point, and if all you hear is the bass, it's not going to work in the context of the movie. Why? Don't you like "These Boots Are Made for Walkin'?"

Of the music in the film, I'd have to say I'm more partial to Sam the Sham's "Wooly Bully," which is one of the great party records of all time. And "Surfin' Bird."

An amazing piece, isn't it?

"Surfin' Bird" comes in during the aftermath of a battle, as the marines are passing a medevac helicopter. The scene reminded me of Dr. Strangelove, where the plane is being refueled in midair with that long, suggestive tube, and the music in the background is "Try a Little Tenderness." Or the cosmic waltz in 2001, where the spacecraft is slowly cartwheeling through space in time to "The Blue Danube." And now you have the chopper and the "Bird."

What I love about the music in that scene is that it suggests post combat euphoria -- which you see in the marine's face when he fires at the men running out of the building: he misses the first four, waits a beat, then hits the next two. And that great look on his face, that look of euphoric pleasure, the pleasure one has read described in so many accounts of combat. So he's got this look on his face, and suddenly the music starts and the tanks are rolling and the marines are mopping up. The choices weren't arbitrary.

For the complete interview about *Full Metal Jacket* and Kubrick's career see: www.rollingstone.com/movies/movie-news/the-rolling-stone-interview-stanley-kubrick-in-1987-90904/

¹² For a fuller discussion of "19" see: [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/19_\(song\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/19_(song))

¹³ Bronson, Hannah, Vaudreuil, Rebecca, and Bradt, Joke. "Music Therapy Treatment of Active Duty Military: An Overview of Intensive Outpatient and Longitudinal Care Programs." *Music Therapy Perspectives*, Vol. 36, Issue 2, Fall 2018, p.1. academic.oup.com/mtp/article/36/2/195/4945362/ doi.org/10.1093/mtp/miy006

¹⁴ *Music in Reconditioning in ASF Convalescent and General Hospitals*, July 26, 1945, in technical bulletin 187 (TB MED 187), p. 1. mountainscholar.org/bitstream/handle/10217/184765/MMTA01612.pdf?sequence=4&isAllowed=y

¹⁵ See www.redcon1musicgroup.com/ ; veteransocialjustice.wordpress.com/soldier-hard/ ; www.youtube.com/user/soldierhard1/videos

¹⁶ Griffin, Mary Therese. "Program helps Soldiers recover, overcome with music." *U.S. Army*. September 30, 2019. www.army.mil/article/227800/ program_helps_soldiers_recover_overcome_with_music

¹⁷ "Duffle Bags" music video: www.youtube.com/watch?v=tw1kl9_W2_A

¹⁸ CAMMO workshop video, March 9, 2019: www.youtube.com/watch?v=mZBgPChB-e8

¹⁹ 2015 www.pbs.org/video/klru-tv-their-words-songwriting-soldiers-episode/ ; also available through PBS Passport www.pbs.org/show/songwriting-soldiers/ ; see also www.songwritingwithsoldiers.org/about-us/

²⁰ guitars4vets.org/

²¹ *11 Bravo Vietnam*. 2011, vimeo.com/31821165; www.youtube.com/watch?v=JKSA0TrxCQw

²² National Public Radio Soundprint. "Vietnam Blues," produced by Christina Antolini, December, 2004, aired January 2005, beta.prx.org/stories/3436

²³ For recordings see www.reverbnation.com/vietnamcombatveteranblindalbert/songs

²⁴ See jasoneklund.com/ and www.lilrev.com/

²⁵ Olivier Morel, *On The Bridge* (www3.nd.edu/~omorel/jason.html)

²⁶ Liner notes, *Trying to Find My Way Home*, Full Moon Music, 2010; all lyrics quoted from fullmoonmusic.org

²⁷ *7 Things You Never Say to a Veteran*, 2016, produced by Julie Olson, distributed through warriorsongs.org.

²⁸ For example, see Edward Tick, *War in the Soul: Healing Our Nations Veterans from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder* (2005) and *Warrior's Return: Restoring the Soul After War* (2014).

²⁹ www.warriorsongs.org; info@warriorsongs.org; jasonmoon.org; fullmoonmusic.org; the new CD featuring Vietnam veterans in collaboration with professional songwriters and musicians is entitled *The Last Thing We Ever Do* and is free to vets. Contact Warrior Songs at the above web site. For a review and discussion with some of the participants on the CD see Larry Abbott, *The Wrath-Bearing Tree*, August 2021 (issue 055, www.wrath-bearingtree.com/non-fiction/).

³⁰ emilyyatesphotography.com/

³¹ brokeasstuart.com/2016/02/08/a-veterans-affair-how-dealing-with-the-va-is-like-dating-a-douchebag/

³² truthout.org/authors/emily-yates/ ; this site includes additional essays.

³³ www.warriorwriters.org/artists/emily.html#Yates

³⁴ emilyyatesmusic.com/bio/

³⁵ www.warriorwriters.org/artists/emily.html

³⁶ emilyyatesmusic.com/page/2/

³⁷ "Yellow Ribbon" video: www.youtube.com/watch?v=t0LKRKwXfkU&list=PLVUGEBv3-a7ObBraTcprXx7NQfkQ9YLKW&index=7&t=0s

³⁸ "Land of the Free" video: www.youtube.com/watch?v=8hP66cF1vGA&list=PLVUGEBv3-a7ObBraTcprXx7NQfkQ9YLKW&index=4

³⁹ www.warriorwriters.org/artists/emily.html