



JUST FOR THE RECORD

by Dennis Barker



Country Joe & the Fish: *I feel like I'm fixin' to die rag*

"Yeah, come on all of you, big strong men, Uncle Sam needs your help again. He's got himself in a terrible jam way down yonder in Vietnam"..... Joseph Allen McDonald

In February 1965, with the words *"I've had enough of this"*, Lyndon Johnson began bombing operations in Vietnam, followed in March, with the first US combat troops (3500 Marines) arriving to protect the airbase at Da nang. America had embarked on a course that would sacrifice over 58,000 of her son's, divide generations, shred the social fabric, and forever stain America's confidence and psyche.

"And it's one, two, three, what are we fighting for?" The question came from Country Joe McDonald and the Fish, a loose knit band that had been entertaining at war demonstrations on the Berkley campus and had put together a self produced EP recording, containing the original *"Fixin' to die rag"*, along with *"Superbird"*, a satire savaging President Lyndon Johnson. I have to admit, this ain't Dylan. There's nothing subtle here. McDonald slashes at the war, using slick humor to put blame on almost everyone. Politicians, mom, dad, the US Military and wall street are easy targets for his sarcasm. Re-released in 1967 on their second album (titled for the song) the record garnered a fair amount of fans and air play, but with it's calliope & whistle sounds the whole thing just seem silly & slapstick. I can't say I like the original recording much. But, as will happen, the world rotated, and in 1969, County Joe found himself pushed onto stage with an acoustic guitar, during 3 Days of Peace & Music, at Yasgur's farm.

Well, come on mothers throughout the land, pack your boys off to Vietnam. Come on fathers, don't hesitate, send 'em off before it's too late. Be the first one on your block, to have your boy come home in a box.

It just seemed more significant without the circus music. The familiar f.i.s.h. cheer morphed into the more vulgar and belligerent f__k, as half a million kids sat on the wet ground and sang along. It was as if they recognized that this is what they had come for. When the **Woodstock** movie came out in 1970, Country Joes' performance of *"I feel like I'm fixin' to die"* was in the middle of the film, with a bouncing ball following the lyrics. Context is everything. What two recordings, radio play and countless performances couldn't do, the film instantly accomplished. It brought the band's anti-war message to young people in movie theaters all over the world. The corny calliope version never existed, only the live **Woodstock** performance mattered. It was remarkable. Suddenly a five year old song was on everyone's lips, and the peace movement had its latest anti-war anthem. Country Joe played a 9 song set that afternoon, and another set with the Fish the next day, and their performance enshrined the band into the musical pantheon of the 1960's.

During the 1970's Joe toured as a solo act and supported anti war demonstrations in Europe and around the United States. On April 23 1971, Country Joe McDonald played at a Vietnam war protest on the steps of the Capitol building in Washington DC. It was déjà vu. In what turned out to be one of the largest war protests of the Nixon administration, 250,000 protesters sat on the ground, and sang along with Joe, as he played *"I feel like I'm fixin' to die rag"*.

If you want to catch up with Country Joe , you can visit his website at: <http://www.countryjoe.com>

Country Joe & The Fish: I feel like I'm fixin' to die rag

Label: Vanguard #79266 (U.S. RELEASE - 1967)

Goldmine Record Album Price Guide, values original copies of *I feel like I'm fixin' to die*, in near mint condition, with original cover & sleeve, at \$20.00

If you want hear the original recording, and see the Woodstock performance, give them a listen, visit our website at:

<http://newcenturycollector.com/records>