

All My Heroes Are Dying - Paul Kantner

What a gorgeous day today and another scheduled for tomorrow. Looks like we've turned the corner on Winter, at least until we get our customary blizzard in late March. Just when you think it's safe to start doing some gardening, Mother Nature will throw you a curve. She just wants to let you know who's in charge, I guess.

Another force to be reckoned with is Father Time, although he seems much more capricious in his choosing than Mother Nature. I found out today that Paul Kantner, one of the founders of the Jefferson Airplane has died. He was 74, which is a young man from where I'm standing. I know we all joke about how the "devil may care" life style of rock and rollers put's them on a fast track to the Pearly Gates, but Kantner was a proponent of a clean lifestyle. At least by the standards of the rockers of the sixties.

I guess everyone has heard of the 27 club, stars who died when they were 27. There is a preponderance of 27 club members who were contemporaries of Kantner. Brian Jones, Jimi Hendrix, Jim Morrison and Janis Joplin all died at age 27. While Kantner experimented with the mild altering drugs of the time, he drew the line at the debilitating drugs. He is quoted as saying, "**Cocaine, particularly, is a bummer. It's a noxious drug that turns people into jerks. And alcohol is probably the worst drug of all. As you get older and accomplish more things in life in general, you realize that drugs don't help, particularly if you abuse them.**" Kantner seemed to be more concerned with continuing to perform as long as he could, rather than becoming a "shooting star". Kantner was still touring with the band in 2015 for their 50th anniversary. Amazing.

I know that my first exposure to the **Airplane** was back in 1967 with the "**Surrealistic Pillow**" album. Back in the '60's we would typically buy an album to get the one song they played on the radio to promote the album. If there were two songs on an album you liked, it was an exception. There were a few groups that delivered on every cut, **The Beatles, The Stones, Crosby Stills and Nash**. Now there was this weirdo group from out on the "Left coast" that was producing sounds like we'd never heard before. "**White Rabbit**" was the reason you bought the album, but there was so much more. "**Surrealistic Pillow**" delivered on every cut and in a variety of styles. One of the songs on the album, "**Embryonic Journey**", is still played as background music for PBS shows. This is fifty years later, and we're not talking about classical

music, we're talking about mind blowing San Francisco sound rock and roll.

The '60's are a hard time to try to define. 1967 to 1970 were particularly difficult times in America's history. While we were killing innocents in Southeast Asia, we were also killing our heroes at home. Bobby Kennedy and Martin Luther King were both killed in 1968. The Chicago Democratic convention was a study in revolution played out on the evening news. Thousands of kids faced off against the police of Chicago to demand a voice. Thousands of kids all over the country were standing up and demanding an end to the war and a voice in our politics.

Does art imitate life, or does life imitate art? The classic question, and as a teenager in the period, I can't truly answer. Did the music of the Airplane shape my opinions of the world? Of course. But, did the times shape the music of the Airplane? Were musicians and song writers like Paul Kantner just more sensitive to the times and better able to articulate their feelings than the rest of us? I'm sure this is true. In any event, the music of the Jefferson Airplane gave voice to the feelings of millions of young period of the time. We all will remember Paul Kantner fondly, even though he was a hippie. Tongue firmly in cheek.

Give a listen: