



From far left: Kiri Te Kanawa arriving in London in 1966; young people embrace rock 'n' roll; the *Listener* welcomed television.

“We were bulletproof”



The sixties have turned 60. Performing arts academic Ian Chapman tells the *Listener* why the decade was pivotal in New Zealand's evolution.

How did the sixties shape who we are now, and the country we've become?
To me, the events and innovations of the 1960s greatly diminished our historical isolation. Television, in particular, brought the rest of the world to us in a way we'd never known before, while rock 'n' roll (albeit having started in the 1950s) gave an entire generation of Kiwi youth a focus and a voice along new aspirations and desires. No longer did we seek to become carbon copies of our parents. Compared to the stability and even staidness of the 1950s, it was an era of colour, awakening, experimentation, possibility and a nascent but burgeoning confidence in who and what we were. Wonderfully, we started seeing ourselves no longer as some far-off “mini Britain”, but as our own unique South Pacific entity. I regard it as the birth of what we are today and I see much of the 1960s as a direct reaction to

the conservatism of the previous decade.

They really were a different time. Your book points out that the last NZ commercial whaling company quit as late as 1964, harpooning their final whale off the coast of Kaikōura. Also in the decade we abolished the death penalty (by only 41 votes to 30), moved from pounds to dollars, reintroduced mass vaccination for polio after seven people died, and the first woman juror served in a trial.
Yup. A very different time to now, that's for sure. But just like today, it was a decade full of BIG issues and events. Different ones, for sure, but still issues of immense magnitude.

The food and coffee were awful, right? And only one TV channel.
Yes, maybe the coffee was bad. I wouldn't say the food was awful, exactly, but it

certainly was limited in scope. A shrimp cocktail, for instance, could evoke gasps of incredulity and excitement. And my dad was still very partial to a lard sandwich. Cholesterol was a thing of the future. Like quiche. Yes, just the one TV channel. And people actually watched TV back then. A cynic would go so far as to say that despite the limitations of single-channel TV it was still better back then than it is now. No bloody reality TV shows, at least.

It was quieter, too, wasn't it? NZ had half as many people, far fewer cars, Auckland's population was 380,000. It was less equal in gender and race, less diverse, less interesting, though social mobility is probably less now and income equality higher. We were (in theory) a lot more religious.
It sure was quieter. No doubt about it. Yes, religion held far more sway than it does

now. And yes, we were far less diverse. Definitely, matters of race, gender and sexuality were big issues. Of course, we still have a long way to go, but thank goodness we've come as far as we have in such regards. Not everything about the sixties was hunky-dory by any means.

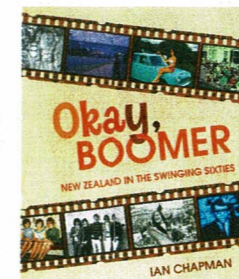
If you didn't like the Beatles or Dylan, what was there to listen to?

The Rolling Stones. And Max Merritt. The Chicks, Dinah Lee, Ray Columbus – too many wonderful New Zealand artists to mention. Given that Merritt has just died, I'm particularly pleased to have featured my interview with him in the book. To my knowledge, it was pretty much the last interview he gave. What a delightful inspiring man and a true rock 'n' roll pioneer. And so in love with the 1960s. In his own words, “We were bulletproof. Nothing could stop us!”

Marching – why did we take to it so keenly?

It provided a comforting discipline, a fine spectacle, competitiveness, and a safe and enjoyable form of exercise for girls and young women. Above all, in

talking to the two wonderful marchers who contributed to the book, Jan and Shona, it provided comradeship and friendship that endure to this day.



Given everything was less live then, was the moon landing a big event in NZ?
Hell, yes – the biggest. The country stood still. We were sci-fi and moon race-mad, bred on *Flash Gordon*. Through the lens provided by David Bowie's *Space Oddity* and with the still-new magic of television, we all

fantasised about what it would be like to be Major Tom or Neil Armstrong. It was the day science fiction became science fact. There was nothing bigger. ■

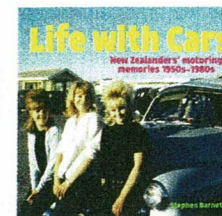
OKAY, BOOMER: New Zealand in the Swinging Sixties. by Ian Chapman (Bateman, \$39.99)

CONTRIBUTORS

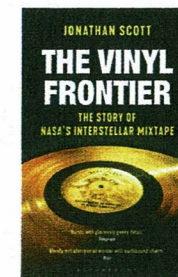
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Short cuts

For good and ill, New Zealanders' lives have revolved around cars. Those nostalgic for the cars of their youth will enjoy Stephen Barnett's **LIFE WITH CARS: NEW ZEALANDERS' MOTORING MEMORIES 1950s-1980s** (Oratia, \$49.99). Here, we pose proudly beside Vauxhalls and Zephyrs and RX3s, Mark VII Jags, Valiants and Anglias. Cars were older then, largely because it was difficult for people to get access to overseas funds to buy them. They were also expensive and scarce: people often had to fix and bog them themselves, Barnett writes; they were far more “part of the family”.



Title of the year goes to an account of the “golden disk” stuck to the sides of the Voyager spacecraft which zipped past our giant outer planets and into deep space, **THE VINYL FRONTIER: The Story of Nasa's Interstellar Mixtape** (Bloomsbury, \$32.99). The gold-plated copper disk's contents, decided by Carl Sagan et al in 1977, included dozens of images and sounds of nature, music and greetings in 55 languages. Jonathan Scott ferreted out the minutest details of this friendly calling-card to aliens and tracked down everyone left from the project. “Bursts with gloriously geeky detail,” said the *Telegraph*.



Don DeLillo's latest, **THE SILENCE** (Scribner, \$29.99, out November 10), is making noise. “In it, humans deprived of technology resign themselves to death, and not just to individual death but to cultural death, the end of the world, the end of time,” said the *New York Times Book Review*. The *Guardian* raved: “DeLillo is a master stylist, and not a word goes to waste.” Though the *Independent* noted: “Six months into an era of lockdown, where mass anxiety about ‘what is happening’ is the new normal, *The Silence* is a tough read.” ■

