

**“So Long, Mom... I’m off to drop the bomb” by Tom Lehrer**

[Tom Lehrer](#) used to be a song-writer, satirist and mathematician, teaching at the University of California, Santa Cruz. He had a career as a satirist during the 1950s and 1960s, commenting certain leading issues of his time, and many of his songs like “Who’s next” about nuclear proliferation or “Pollution” are still topical. He gave up performing out of a growing lack of interest, but also noted that the Vietnam war made it harder to joke about things. He once remarked that “Political satire became obsolete when [Henry Kissinger](#) was awarded the Nobel Peace prize”.<sup>1</sup> Given Kissinger’s involvement in covert bombing in Cambodia during the Vietnam war, support for the coup in Chile in 1973, etc. this award has always been very controversial.

Watch Lehrer singing the song here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yrbv40ENU\\_o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yrbv40ENU_o)

He starts by introducing the song.

“You know, every great war produces its great hit songs. And after each war, we like to gather around the piano or the guitar and play these songs. We enjoy the songs, because they remind us of how much we enjoyed the war.

“Now, World War III is almost upon us, as you know, by popular demand, it seems. And it occurred to me that if any songs are going to come out of World War III, we’d better start writing them now. So I have one here.

“This is a song that some of the boys will have sung to their mothers, as they will have gone bravely off to World War III.

There’s one reference here that I should explain. There’s a reference to our leading television news commentators – [Chet Huntley and David Brinkley](#). I feel that this is appropriate because, as you know, World War III will be the first World War to be seen on television, and uh...I certainly hope that we will all have color television by then.”

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| <p>So long, mom,<br/>I'm off to drop the bomb,<br/>So don't wait up for me.<br/>But while you <b>swelter</b><br/>Down there in your <b>shelter</b>,<br/>You can see me<br/>On your TV.</p> <p>While we're attacking frontally,<br/>Watch brinkally and huntally,<br/>Describing contrapuntally<br/>The cities we have lost.<br/>No need for you to miss a<br/>minute<br/>Of the agonizing holocaust.<br/>(yeah!)</p> <p>Little Johnny Jones he was a US<br/>pilot,<br/>And no <b>shrinking vi'let</b> was he.<br/>He was mighty proud when<br/>World War three was declared,<br/>He wasn't scared,<br/><b>No siree!</b></p> | <p>Swelter=to be very hot<br/>Shelter= a place of protection</p> <p>Contrapuntal= music with two or more tunes played at the same time</p> <p>Shrinking violet= an exaggeratedly shy person</p> <p>No siree= no sir</p> | <p>And this is what he said on<br/>His way to Armageddon:</p> <p>So long, mom,<br/>I'm off to drop the bomb,<br/>So don't wait up for me.<br/>But though I may <b>roam</b>,<br/>I'll come back to my home,<br/>Although it may be<br/>A pile of debris.</p> <p>Remember, Mommy,<br/>I'm off to get a <b>commie</b>,<br/>So send me a salami,<br/>And try to smile somehow.<br/>I'll look for you when the war is over,<br/>An hour and a half from now!</p> | <p>Roam = to travel with no aim</p> <p>Commie= communist</p> |
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<sup>1</sup> Todd S. Purdom, “When Kissinger won the Nobel peace prize, satire died”, *The Guardian*, 31 July 2000.