

# Woodstock

Marilyn Werbe

1970

A recent film critic termed *Woodstock* “a beautifully filmed record of rampant happiness,” which indeed it is. Michael Wadleigh’s 3-hour phenomenon is filled with enough visual and audio excitement to thrill an audience of heads and turn on all the straights.

Split-screen shots present everything from different views of the same entertainer, to different views of the whole stage, simultaneously, while colored filters instantly change the mood and dazzle the eye.

While bathed in visual riches, the viewer is bombarded from all sides with a torrent of music. The audio system surrounds the audience, reproducing as true and beautiful sound available to the human ear. The music is LOUD, but how else can you listen to Joe Cocker or Sly & the Family Stone? You may begin to feel as if you are drowning in the sounds of Richie Havens or Jimi Hendrix, but relax and dig it cause its a mellow way to go!

But let’s get back to that theme of “rampant Happiness” and see what this picture is all about. For 3 days during the summer of ’69 about half-a-million people got together on 600 acres of farmland near Bethel, New York to watch a music festival.

Because twice as many people as expected showed up, all facilities became deluged and the whole situation would have become a disaster area if not for the friendship and cooperation of the individuals involved. The surrounding townspeople and even the army came across with food and medical assistance to be shared.

Despite the rain and crowded conditions on all fronts, everyone got fed, had a place to sleep and a river to bathe in.

Dope of all kinds was plentiful and shared, bad trips were administered to, and a baby was even born there. There were no cops, everyone stayed high and happy, and even the toilet-cleaners kept smiling

But once you are outside the theater, away from the flood of beautiful sounds which blocked out any other reality, you become suddenly aware of an underlying dishonesty about this rampant happiness. It begins with the realization that those smiling freaks who produced and promoted the Woodstock Festival are bullshit phonies. Those Capitalists in mod attire did not open up the gates and declare the festival “free to all” out of the goodness of their hearts or because their minds were blown by all the love and peace vibes flowing around them, as they said in the film. They fucking well HAD to open the gates or the crowds would have run right over them anyway. And besides, they knew they’d make their investment back 5-fold with this film that you will all pay \$4 a head to see.

And remember when Abbie Hoffman jumped on stage to remind people that John Sinclair needed defense money and the Who’s Peter Townsend cracked him on the head with his guitar? I guess there’s no room for politics in a festival of peace and love because the producers of the film deleted that portion from The Who’s set.

And what about all those smiling, happy, self-styled freaks who made up the hordes at Woodstock? There are those who would have us believe they represent a Nation—this new love/peace generation you see up there on the silver screen, skinny-dipping and getting high. But what I saw in those smiling faces is alienated youth who want desperately to love and be happy but have to get totally removed from the reality of our country and this world to do it. Woodstock had to be loud enough and far away enough to block out all the sounds and sights of our filthy cities in order for those freaks to be completely submerged in nothing but “peace” and “love.”

Too bad all those young factory workers and welfare mothers couldn't get far enough away from the deadening reality of their days to cop a little of that peace and love. Too bad they won't even be able to dig it on the screen. They can't afford \$4 a head to block out reality for 3 hours.

# fifth Estate

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