

Monterey Pop

Dennis Raymond

1969

D.A. Pennebaker's endlessly fascinating film, "Monterey Pop," gives us Gracie Slick & The Jefferson Airplane, The Who, Simon & Garfunkle, Janis Joplin, Hugh Masekela, Eric Burdon & The Animals, Otis Redding, The Mamas & the Papas, Canned Heat, Country Joe & the Fish, and many, many others all on one sensational single-bill; something that Uncle Russ would never do without charging around \$50 a head.

We see these great performers in their natural environment—the Monterey International Pop Festival—and as one youthful participant summed it up, "It's like Christmas and Easter and your birthday all at one time, and you can feel the vibrations going everywhere."

Indeed you can. Those vibrations bounce off the screen onto the theater seats, and the audiences just seem to gobble it up. It's a unique, thrilling experience to be watching a movie that the audience enjoys and responds to as one mind.

Ravi Shankar is electrifying, but it is Jimi Hendrix who walks off with the picture in a highly comic-erotic sequence where he copulates with his guitar while wailing "Wild Thing" (remember that one?). For an encore, Jimi stomps that guitar to a pulp, and it's kind'a cute, but I thought that sort of thing went out with the discotheque scene in "Blow Up." Pennebaker has enhanced the music with some fine visual correlatives (the Otis Redding number is especially striking) and his editing is exceptionally crisp and sharp. But somehow, his work doesn't provide us with the depth and insights we'd like to encounter in a pop documentary of this sort.

"Monterey Pop" could have been so much more, but even in its own shallow manner, it is so much more expressive of what it means to be young today that it makes fancy junk like "Joanna" look about as hip as "Guess Who's Coming To Dinner?". I suggest you try it, just for fun.

On the same program with "Monterey Pop" is a hysterical little short entitled "Chiefs," a supposedly "straight" documentary on the Annual Police Chiefs' Convention in Honolulu. It is the most anti-fascist movie I've ever seen.

Oddly enough, in his review for *The Detroit News*, A.L. McClain decided that "Chiefs" was part of "Monterey Pop.":

"Monterey Pop" opens in Honolulu, which indicates how the documentary loses its way from the start. What follows is almost 15 minutes of propaganda depicting a police convention dealing with how to curb violence.

Then to Monterey where the flower children preach love and tolerance. The contrast is neither subtle nor believable. It is easy to preach passivity when you are without responsibilities.

Even if we don't agree on what is good or bad, right or wrong in a film, one at least expects his fellow film critics to stay awake during the movie.

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