

The Woodstock Nation

Joyce

1969

WHITE LAKE, N.Y. (Good Times/UPS) —The Woodstock Festival was a huge nonviolent explosion of people and music. *The New York Times* called it a nightmare but it was more of a fantastic dream. True, there were low scenes—three accidental deaths, the drug freakouts, the rain, the garbage and the strong scent of shit. But there were no fences and no riots, and the Fair was less of a disaster than the straight media made it seem.

The festival producers had expected at most about 200,000 people. Instead by Saturday over 400,000 had flooded into Bethel, making it overnight the third largest city in upper-state New York.

The music men had hoped for huge profits, but it just didn't happen. The new culture had finally come back to its own people. No one collected tickets, everyone had a place to sleep under the stars, food was distributed free, and the ripoff incentives were down. Confrontations were avoided wherever possible.

A large number of NYPD had been recalled the day before the festival began. The few that remained were relatively cool. Dressed in scarlet tee-shirts with the Woodstock emblem (guitar and dove) on the back, the cops played the part of Peace Service Corps. No arrests were permitted on the site. Their only acts were to direct the freakouts to free medical centers and to keep the kids off the fence in front of the stage.

The State Police were not as cordial. Outside the festival area they managed to drag nearly 150 persons from their cars and conduct illegal searches. Anyone found holding was busted, fingerprinted, photographed, fined \$10 and released.

When it wasn't raining, 70,000 freaks filled the hill. The music covered everyone. Friday's show stopped halfway through when it began to rain, but on Saturday the groups played for 15 hours. Abbie Hoffman unexpectedly appeared during the Who's set. He was tripping on acid and apparently pissed at the low level of political consciousness at the Fair. He began an appeal for bail funds for John Sinclair, but before he could finish Peter Townshend whacked him over the head with his guitar and yelled "No motherfucker gets on my stage." Pete played a few notes more, then added "The next fucker that crosses my stage will get killed." He then kicked a cameraman in the ass.

On Sunday afternoon the rains poured for about two hours. People stayed on the hill because there was nowhere else to go. Spirits soared when Baez and then Country Joe appeared. Sunday's set lasted till Monday morning, and ended with Jimi Hendrix at 10 a.m.

Behind the performers' site and the plastic concession stands were woods that held a tiny Renaissance Fair. Dealers hawked their dope at the crossroads of Groovy and Gentle Way. Mescaline, grass, pure acid were plentiful.

Near the woods were Movement City and the Hog Farm. At Movement City the producers had the foresight to include scenes that Wild West was too timid to touch. Booths were provided for the underground press, SDS, Women's Liberation, Meher Baba. Even the White Panthers were able to appeal openly for a bail fund for John Sinclair.

But few of the crowd showed any interest. Many fell on further down the hill to the Hog Farm, which was Movement City in action. The Hog Farm fed thousands of people and gave medical aid. They offered help to anyone on a bad trip. They set up a free stage where the Quarry played, and where at dawn Christopher Tree gave his Spontaneous Sound concerts.

It was a good trip, despite adverse reports in the straight press. People in town were surprisingly helpful. Max Yagur, owner of the farm on which the fair was held, reportedly dug the whole trip and invited everyone back next year.

Related

See Woodstock ad and poster, FE #84, July 24-August 6, 1969.

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