A black and white photograph of a large crowd at the Woodstock festival. In the foreground, a man is playing a drum. The crowd is dense and diverse, with many people looking towards the camera or the stage. The overall atmosphere is one of a large-scale music event.

# HENRY

The Official  
Photographer of  
Woodstock

# DILTZ!

BY IVOR LEVENE • PHOTOS BY HENRY DILTZ

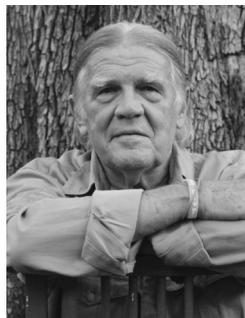
THE HIGHLY REGARDED ROCK PHOTOGRAPHER RELIVES HIS  
WOODSTOCK EXPERIENCE FOR **GOLDMINE**.

**W**oodstock is the most documented concert in history. We've seen images or film of the concert, but there was only one person who completely documented the entire event, from the selection of the site, to the building of the stage, right through to the end, where Max Yasgur's farm resembled a cross between a campground and a battlefield. That singular person is acclaimed photographer Henry Diltz. Henry has always been an unofficial spokesperson of Woodstock, and who could be more perfectly placed to do so? This is a man who views things through a viewfinder, both figuratively and literally. "I'm constantly composing frames, I did it then, and I still do it now. I see things and I think, 'Wow, wouldn't this make a great photo?' I'd just like to frame this moment up and preserve it." He has hundreds of images of this seminal concert, many of them burned into the consciousness of the Woodstock generation, and the generations that followed. Who can forget those iconic shots of the gig, the audience, the entire happening? Henry was the *official* photographer there, so he saw things that nobody else saw, and he documented all of it.

Working with Henry Diltz is like stepping into a song from the '60s, a song filled with peace and love. Not because it takes place during the days of peace and love, but because it's what Henry is all about, to this day. In fact, he embodies the very thing that the Woodstock generation espoused. The decades that have followed Woodstock have not tarnished his outlook on life or love. Henry is a kind, caring soul, and he is a living connection to the '60s. It is perhaps this reason that he is so closely associated with the era.

Henry lives in an unassuming pocket of Los Angeles with a name that sounds like something out of a Rockwell painting; Valley Village. It conjures up a vision of pastoral fields, with eternal sunshine. Well, there aren't too many fields to be had in Los Angeles, but there is the sun. It is a kind of idyllic neighborhood though, lined by mid-century bungalows, in a neighborhood that's almost something out of Mayberry. This place even has its own clean-as-apple-pie parade on the Fourth of July. There are no curbs; the houses just meld into the street. When you enter into Henry's house, which is really his "studio" (his "house" house is a few doors down), there's no mistaking you're in his office. Every single surface is dedicated to his art. Calling it simply "photography" would be selling it short. Henry Diltz has made an indelible mark on this planet.

There are bottles of wine bearing the wise visage of David Crosby, there are small stacks of pocket-shooter cameras, there is a wall consisting entirely of slide drawers, with small Hot Wheels cars sitting on the little shelf that each row of slide boxes creates. You aren't stepping into somebody's home; you're stepping into a photograph—a living, breathing photo. "I love to document things. I've never stopped shooting. I shoot about a hundred or so photos every day." As Henry explains, "I'm a Virgo, so I love to compartmentalize things, and the camera has really helped me to do that. I have lists of different types of things I love to shoot, it's not all just about rock stars and Woodstock for me." So there is a less-famous side to Henry Diltz. That's not to say that he has a hidden side, far from it. Everything he says or does is very much out in the open. His life is, and has always been, lived in this manner. He continues further: "I will shoot shapes, like a shape that forms a heart. I like to shoot city crests, like the ones you see on fire trucks or cop cars. I shoot fire hydrants, manhole covers, people and places. I've never run out of things to shoot and I never will."



**HENRY DILTZ**

Henry spoke very matter-of-factly about giving negatives and proof sheets to Woodstock co-creator Michael Lang, without worrying about whether he'd see them back again. Again, Henry embodies the optimism and trust that his generation tried so desperately to bring forth, for his and future generations. For *Goldmine*, he sent over a half-dozen contact sheets from Woodstock. Once you get over the fact that you're peering into history through rose-colored lenses, and looking at the most significant youth-oriented event to ever happen, you realize that you've just become part of the circle. It's an ethereal experience to say the least; you feel that same trust that Henry described between himself and Lang. It's through this experience, and a few past ones with Henry, that you fully come to understand and relate to what his generation was trying to do.

Talk about walking the walk and talking the talk.

**GOLDMINE:** *Let's start at you getting the call from Chip Monck (lighting director and master of ceremonies) to come and shoot Woodstock. What was your reaction when you when you got the call?*

**HENRY DILTZ:** I thought it was great! I was up in my kitchen in Laurel Canyon when the phone rang and Chip Monck said, "Hey, we're having a big concert out here this summer and you should be out here!" I said, "Well, I don't know those people. I don't know how to get a pass or anything." So he said, "I'll talk to the producer." The next

day, Michael Lang called, and he's a man of few words. He said, "Chip says we need you. I'm going to send you an airline ticket and five hundred dollars." Click! That was pretty much it. So I was very excited.

I was 31 years old and I'd been shooting a lot of people. I'd just done that Crosby Stills and Nash cover, and they were gonna be playing there and I was a photographer for hire. I didn't have any kids yet. I wasn't married yet, living up in Laurel Canyon, and I was ready for any kind of an adventure and that sounded great, not having any notion or inkling of what it would be.

**GM:** *You flew out there a couple of weeks before the concert, why did you go out so early?*

**HD:** I thought I could document the building up of the event. I knew they were building a stage, and the stage had been moved from one township to another, and they had to find a replacement location, and they found Yasgur's farm at the last minute. They got voted out of the town by the town council, they didn't want all those "damn dirty hippies" all over their lawns. This was after they had already started building the stage, and all of a sudden they were told, "You guys are out." So they got in the car and drove around looking for a spot, and miraculously saw that great field, looking like a natural amphitheater.

They had three weeks to build the stage, and by the time I got there they had a big deck built at the bottom of this grassy hillside. I think Michael Lang and Chip Monck also wanted as much documented as possible, so documenting every aspect of the event was something we all wanted. I was very excited to go, it's always an adventure to go to some kind of a happening and document it. I lived for that. I'd done Monterey Pop, the Miami Pop Festival, and plenty of concerts, so I knew what it was about.

**GM:** *Tell me about the building of the site.*

**HD:** Alfalfa blowing in the wind while they were building that that big



**Henry Diltz explains: "Michael Lang (producer) and Chip Monck (lighting director and MC) and Lisa Law of the New Mexico Hogfarm, who were there to oversee camping and hippie security—and they helped in so many more ways (feeding the masses, acid casualties, communications and connecting people). The three of them are standing at the back of the stage."**

plywood platform, right at the bottom of that hill. It was like building a battleship. All these hippies with their shirts off, long-haired guys, all sun-tanned, sawing and hammering and carrying wood. It was a bustle of stuff. I spent time with Steve Cohen; he was the head of the carpenters up there doing all the building. Mel Lawrence was in charge of the grounds, he was a really good friend of mine who I used to come to on my slide shows and stuff. Some of these people, I knew them from other concerts—the crew guys and the people that did sound and lights, they did a lot of major concerts.

**GM:** *In the two weeks that you were there, other than documenting the building of the stage, what else did you do to fill your time?*

**HD:** I was staying in a little boardinghouse down the road. There was a little country road that ran behind the stage. If you were walking off the back of the stage, you'd turn right, go down a couple of miles and there was the city of White Lake, and there was my little boardinghouse. There were maybe six rooms in the house and people working on the festival were there. I think some artists, people that were painting backdrops and signs and things would stay in there. I had a rented station wagon, so every morning I would just get up and get some coffee, get some breakfast, get in the station wagon and drive down the road five minutes. Then I'd be there at the stage. I'd park my car in the vacant lot behind where they were building the stage. The platform that they were building was like a big aircraft carrier in a sea of alfalfa.

Then there was the Hog Farm just over the hill where they were preparing campgrounds and entertaining themselves and feeding themselves. And then there was the office, you know where the phones were and the desks were. I had friends that were in that office and so all day long I was just going to those places.

**GM:** *So that pretty well filled up your whole day?*

**HD:** Yeah, it kind of did, you know. I didn't start at 6:00 in the morning, knowing my habits it was probably 10:00 or 11:00 by the time I got out there. There was a lot to photograph and a lot to hang. There was a film crew there, and I haven't ever seen their film. It was an English guy and an American guy and I don't remember their names but they were driving around for a few days and I kind of hung out with them. I'd go swimming in the lake with the Hog Farm hippies, everybody would go skinny-dipping in the lake. I did that a few days. I eventually met people in the hog farm. There was a girl that I really thought was cute and I'd try to wander over there a couple times a day to see what she was doing. A couple of times she was on acid when I got there, her eyes overly big, and this was all before any people were there.

I know I've said it before but it really was like being at summer camp in upstate New York. I actually went to summer camp in upstate New York, Hawkeye trail camps. I don't remember the name of the lake but it was around that area, when I was in elementary school in what would have been the late '40s, probably '45 or '46. So here I was in upstate New York and I had no particular job nor anybody to supervise me. It was up to me to document what was going on, but that's what I do, automatically. I love watching people doing things and documenting.

It's fun to frame up stuff when you have people doing things, you have a lot of things you could frame. So for me that was the fun of taking all those pictures before the show started, a guy hammering or sawing, a guy with his shirt off, one of the hippie girls bringing sandwiches and tea. I remember one shot that was taken in kind of a yurt made out of plastic, and the girls from the Hog Farm were chopping cabbage, about six or eight of them around a table, all chopping cabbage. I thought, "Wow! That was a great shot. I feel like I'm in *National Geographic* or something now."

**GM:** How much has the public seen of these photos? Your photos of Woodstock that weren't about the actual show?

**HD:** I have two or three hundred pictures that tell the story, but a whole lot of my very best pictures got lost by *Life* magazine. Probably a hundred to a couple of hundred maybe. Being the official photographer, one of the first things I had to do right after the festival was to go into New York City, develop all the film with the PR lady from the festival and take it to *Life* magazine, because they were going to do a special edition, which they did. We went right from the photo lab to *Life* magazine and the editor sat there with a glass, looking at the slides, opening the boxes. I hadn't even looked at them yet. And he was looking at them and making a little pile over here of the ones he wanted to keep and there were a couple of piles, several inches high. So probably a couple hundred pictures. And they said, "We'd like to keep these and pick some out to use in the magazine." I thought, "Great! *Life* magazine? Are you kidding?" And I didn't have my name stamp. I think I had one by then but not in my pocket at Woodstock. I lived in L.A. so I didn't bring that. So none of them had my name on them. They used three full page pictures in *Life* magazine, one of Grace Slick, one of David Crosby and one of Sly Stone. So that was great. And they returned those three to me and it even had a file number on it.

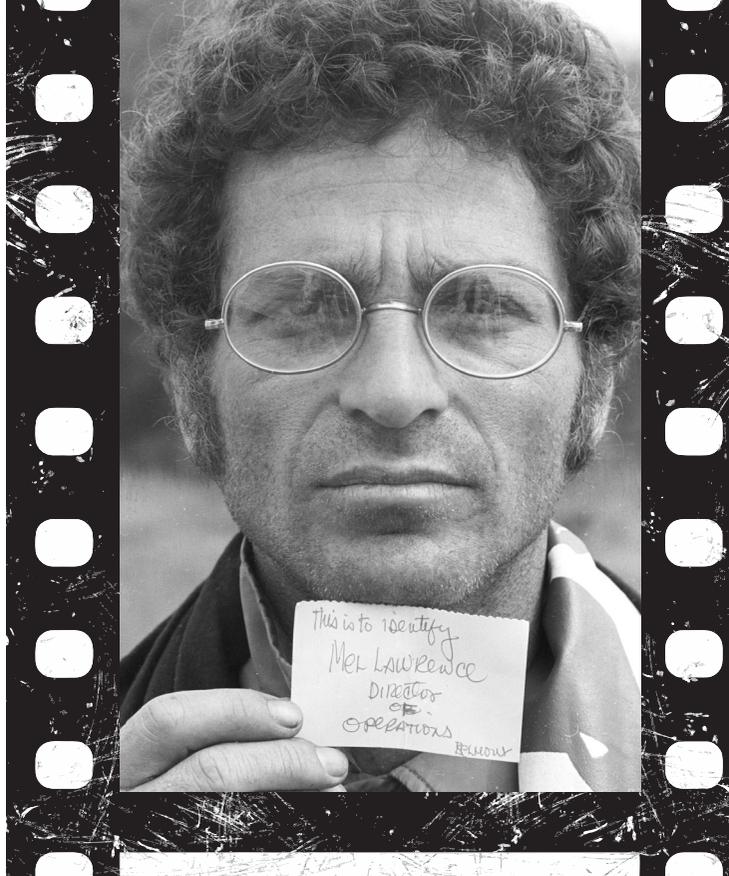
And in subsequent years I've called Time *Life* a number of times and given them that number, asking them if they could find the slides. They say, "No, we did look and the only Woodstock pictures we have, have the stamps of our photographers." They had several guys out there shooting, famous *Life* photographers. Then somebody told me that every summer, interns come from the University of Missouri and work at *Life* magazine, and it was sort of known that they kind of pocket some stuff. I don't know if it's known to everybody but somebody did tell me that that happens and probably their idea was that somebody probably found them with no name on them and took them. Up to this day I think, somewhere somebody has them in a drawer.

The black and white was all developed at ModernAge photo lab in New York City, and it was there that other people who worked on the festival could go in there to order prints. At one point someone from the University of Florida who worked on the grounds at Woodstock got the photo lab to send them fourteen rolls of my negatives. I know because on one of the envelopes it says, "14 rolls sent to University of Miami." Nobody's name, just the date. This was about a month or two after Woodstock, and the lab sent them. I didn't know this until a year later. I've called the University of Miami. They can't find them, they don't know who took them. You know, a lot of people that aren't there anymore and it's crazy, but they got out in the world. But hey, I'm happy with what I have; I have a pretty good representation. I would love to see the ones that got away. And I'm sure I would recognize them, even though I've never seen them.

Michael Lang said years later, "I have these proof sheets and I think that the proof sheets are to those negs that got lost. So technically speaking we can drum scan at least, blow an 8x10 up, but you know, it's nothing that important really. I think I have only one great picture of Jimi. I know I had two; I had one of him giving a peace sign to the crowd from the side. I think I sent it to some guy to make a print a long time ago.

**GM:** How did you manage to endure a concert of that length, and keep your composure to still shoot it?

**HD:** Well, the first night I got to go back to my little house down the road. But the second night and the third night was Saturday night and



**Diltz:** "This is a close-up portrait of Mel Lawrence, my closest old friend at Woodstock. He was in charge of all the grounds and the paper is his ID."

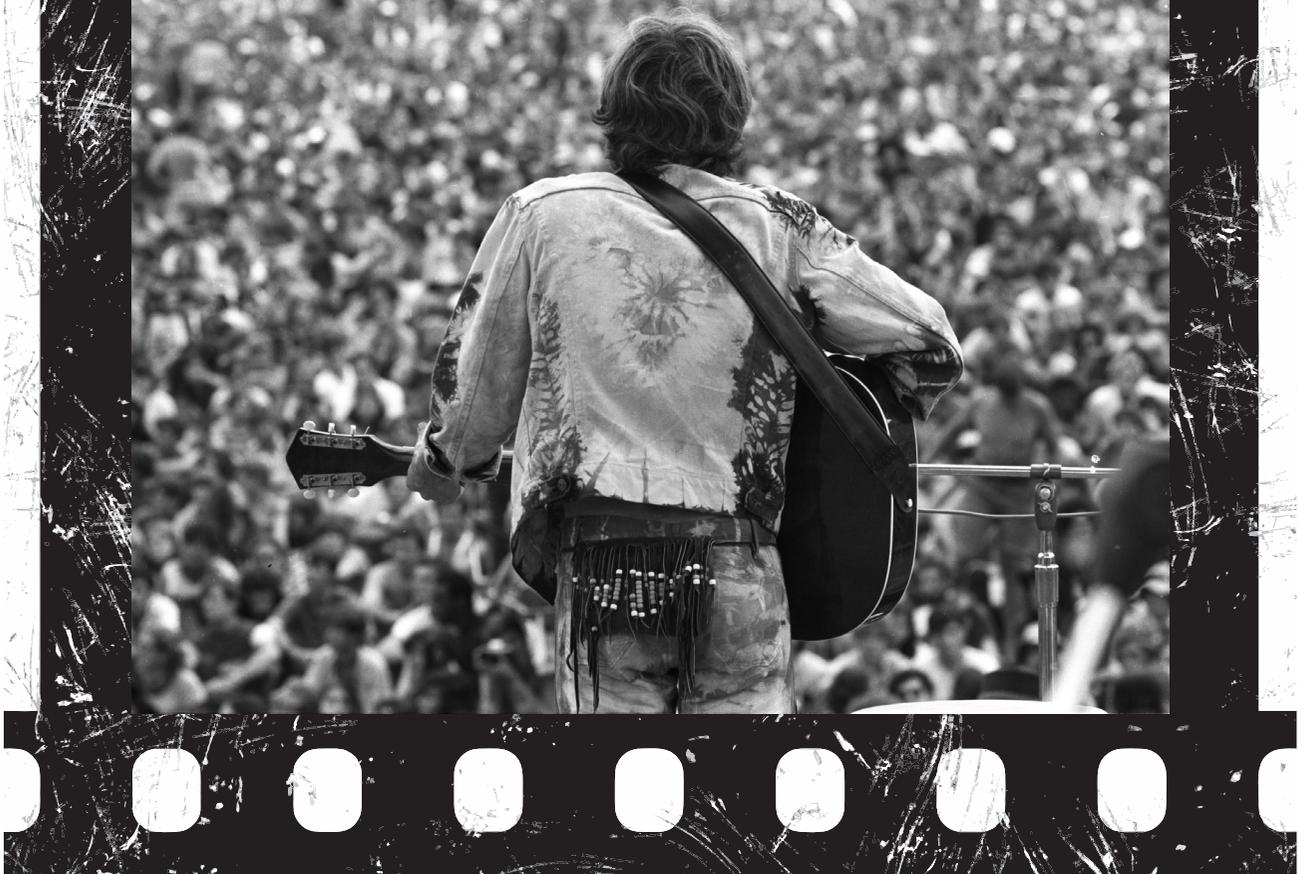
Sunday night and then when Jimi played Monday morning, I slept in the back of a station wagon parked behind the stage. I couldn't drive down that road anymore because cars had parked on either side of that country road and there was no room for a car to go down the middle, just room for two or three people to walk through. So it was a constant line of people walking up and down between those cars. There was no way I could drive home after the first afternoon. I slept in the back of my station wagon; I could stretch out.

**GM:** Did you say you slept during Jimi's set in the morning?

**HD:** No, but I but I woke up to hear Chip Monck say, "Ladies and gentlemen, Jimi Hendrix" and I leaped out of the car. I know I heard that because there'd been a little time of silence before that. I don't remember exactly, I'd gone to bed I guess, maybe when it was still dark and probably got an hour's sleep or something. I'm not sure how that timing worked, like who was on right before him and what time was that? I'll ask Chip Monck or Michael when I see them because that's kind of an interesting question. But I do remember jumping up from my nap and grabbing my cameras and running out there just as they actually walked out on stage. You know I just went up the back stairs and I was right there. At the edge of the stage looking across the stage at Jimi, from right behind the amps.

**GM:** So you weren't shooting from the front like all the other photographers, you were shooting from the side stage. When you watch the movie, it looks like it would have been a difficult shoot, with that high stage. Did shooting this show differ from any of the other concerts you'd shot?

**HD:** Not really. The show was like a regular concert. You're trying to get either a group shot or an individual shot from the waist up, showing the guitar, or waiting for that right moment, like when a person makes a face,



**Diltz:** "John Sebastian, a close-up from behind in his tie-dyes, as he sings to the crowd before him, 400,000 strong."

opens their mouth, smiles, or something. I just kept framing it up the way I wanted it, just waiting for that moment.

Jim Marshall was on the stage, after the first Saturday afternoon I think, and he said, "Look at this new 500mm lens I got from Nikon!" It was huge. Big as a saucer, really big and fat and long, a huge lens. And this was 1969; you know they're better now. I said, "Wow, can I try it?" And he said, "Go ahead, put it on." We were just squatting somewhere in the backstage area behind the amps and I put it on between acts. When I lifted this thing up to my face finally, I looked and there was Grace Slick, about 20 feet away from me. I just zeroed in on her face and it completely filled the frame with this lens. I just shot the one photo, and that was the one that *Life* magazine used. So that's what it was like, shooting on stage.

**GM:** Had you already met Jim Marshall prior to Woodstock?

**HD:** I'd already met him at Monterey Pop and a couple of other places. I knew him to be the "San Francisco" and "The Grateful Dead" photographer. He was a few years older than me and he'd been shooting a few years longer. Jim Marshall was my guru. He called me one day and said, in a barking voice, "Henry! It's Jim!" I said, "Jim who?" and he said, "What do you mean? It's your f\*\*king guru!"

**GM:** Tell me about interactions between musicians in the backstage area.

**HD:** Well, in the daytime you could photograph the musicians that were hanging out on stage, like John Sebastian and the Jefferson Airplane. They were totally hanging out all afternoon on one side of the stage. Bill Graham was there. They were sitting there listening, watching, sort of behind the amps but off to the side where they could look out and see the crowd.

In the daytime, that was great. I took a lot of pictures of Grace Slick

and the drummer's cute blonde girlfriend who's my friend, Sally Mann. She was sitting right next to Grace Slick, and the juxtaposition of her blonde hair and Grace's black hair. Sally was wearing a kind of a red vest and Grace was wearing white, and it made for such a powerful color combination, that was definitely something to frame. Two people sitting is perfect for a horizontal picture.

**GM:** Is there anything that we haven't seen that you documented?

**HD:** Maybe John Fogerty.

**GM:** What about Neil Young? If you watch the movie, you wouldn't even know that he was part of the CSN set.

**HD:** Well, with Neil Young, the one time I had left the stage, I decided to walk up to the top of the hill through all those people. It took about half an hour to get up to the top, I wanted to take a picture looking down at the stage, kind of across the crowd just at that magic hour. And then I heard Chip's voice again, and he was introducing Crosby, Stills and Nash. I immediately thought, "Oh shit, I'm at the back of 400,000 people!" Of course there were maybe only 100,000 thick (at that time), whatever it was. I didn't have time to walk around. I had to go straight through the crowd. There were people on blankets and stuff and you could wind your way around. I managed to get up on stage but I missed several songs, maybe half the set. I have a couple of slides of Neil; there's also a proof sheet. There's probably stuff I haven't used on it.

**GM:** I'm sure all of our readers would like to see that. Was Neil absent from the film because he insisted that he not be filmed? That seems to be the legend that's been spun all of these years.

**HD:** It was really because his manager wouldn't allow them to use him in the movie.

**GM:** Did you see any antics by Keith Moon?

**HD:** Not by Keith Moon, but by Pete Townshend. I was standing right behind Keith Moon, just like behind the amps. They were right in the front of the amps, being introduced to the audience. Abbie Hoffman ran out there with no shirt on, grabbed the mic from whoever was introducing The Who and started yelling, "Remember the Chicago Seven!"

Pete Townshend picked up his guitar, turned it over, like a soldier doing one of those "present arms" drills and just hit Abbie Hoffman in the back of the neck with it and then Hoffman ran off the stage. Townshend did this with almost a military precision, like, "Get the f\*\*k out of here, this is our stage!"

In subsequent years, Abbie Hoffman said, "That never happened! If that happened, show me the picture." It happened so fast, I didn't get a shot off, but if I had had the camera up to my eye, I would have gotten it. But I was standing right there. It happened.

**GM:** What about your interactions with the other photographers? With you being the "official" Woodstock photographer, were there any contentious incidents between you and the "non-official" people?

**HD:** No, not really, except for maybe one minor incident. The photographers were all down the pit looking straight up at the stage. If you were standing on the catwalk, your chest was against the stage. I remember I would go out there to shoot the night groups like The Who and Sly and the Family Stone and always one of the film crew people would say, "You know, this is only for the film crew, you can't be out here!" I would say, "Oh no, I'm working for Michael Lang and I can go anywhere I want!" They would gruffly reply, "No you can't. You have to get out." That went on a few times, but nothing major. There were no blows or anything.

**GM:** So you weren't going to be deterred, were you?

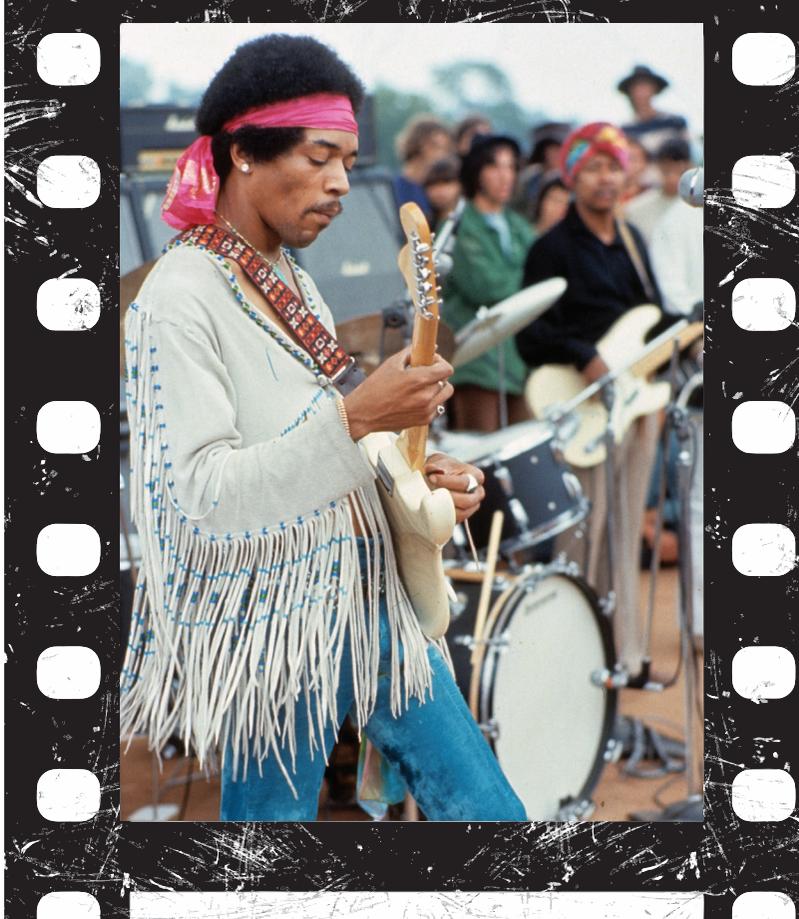
**HD:** No. I stayed out there. I did have an all-access pass you know. I don't like to be pushy or pull rank. In fact, my whole thing is to sort of lay back and just watch like the way a tiger likes to sit on the top of a hill and watch all the other animals. The tiger is my Chinese animal. I think of it as kind of like just hiding in plain sight. I don't put out any vibes, I just kind of calmly and quietly take a picture, intruding as little as possible, that's the aim.

**GM:** Did you find yourself torn between shooting the concert or just enjoying it?

**HD:** You know, that's a good question. I love music, I'm a musician. I love that part of it. The music is flowing through me. I'm really looking through the camera and thinking with my eyes while my body is drinking in the music. Let's say I go to a Neil Young concert. People will ask me, "What songs did he play?" Well, you know, I didn't write the set list down. I can think of a couple of songs he had to have played, but I don't absorb those kinds of details. If I were a journalist or a different sign of animal, maybe I would.

**GM:** Did you come close to running out of film while you were up there? With the roads being blocked and the location out in the country, you would have had a hard time finding new film.

**HD:** I didn't run out, no, but I think I had to be a little judicious. It



**Diltz:** "Jimi Hendrix on Monday morning when he surprised us all by playing *The Star Spangled Banner*."

wasn't like today when you can shoot 500 photos in no time and have it all stored on a memory stick, or see the images as you're shooting. Back then, on a big day, you'd shoot maybe 10 rolls of film, at a large festival like Woodstock you might shoot 15 or 20.

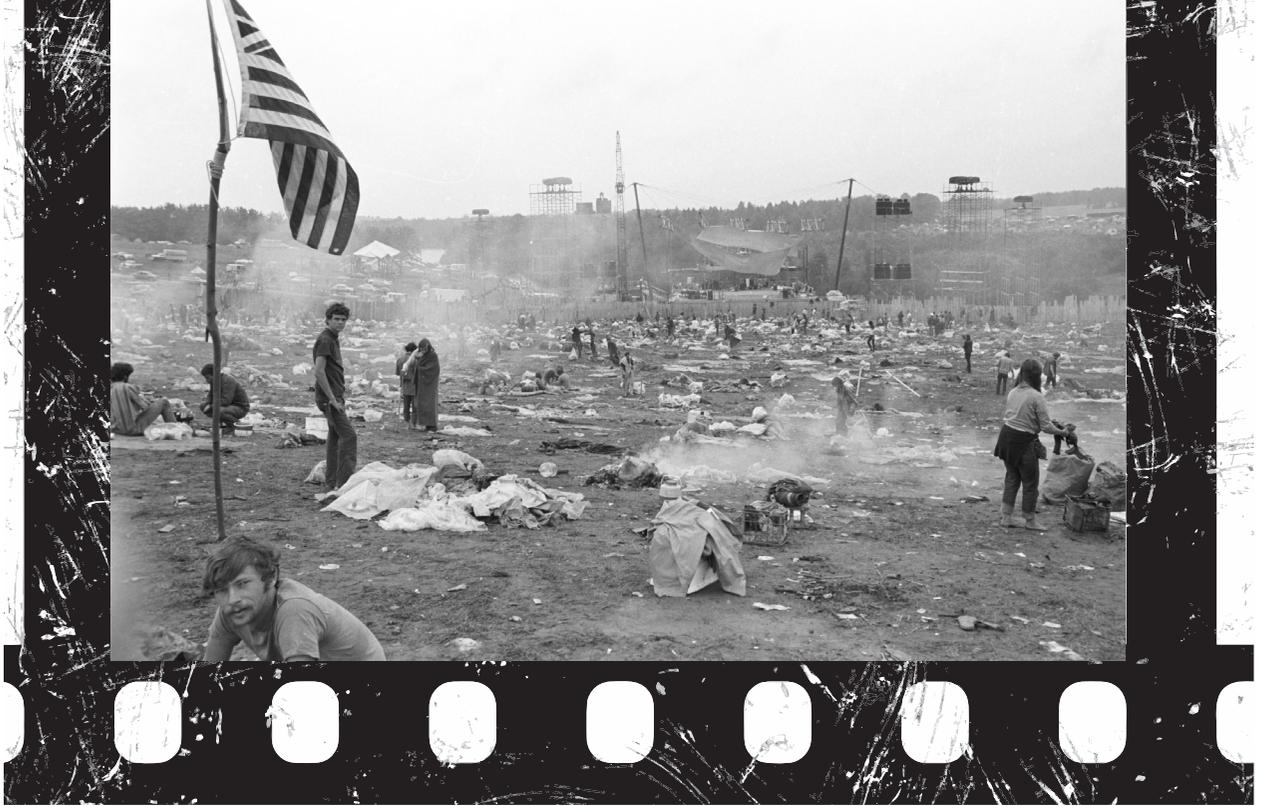
**GM:** How many rolls did you pack with you when you left Los Angeles for the show?

**HD:** I left with a couple of packs of film, which would have been about 60 rolls. I'm sure I had to shoot that many. Maybe I had three of those packs, I'm not sure. I might have given Jim Marshall a box or two.

**GM:** Was the show more than you expected? Over 50 years, this has been built up in people's minds to be the concert to end all concerts.

**HD:** Well, sure it turned out to be an amazing thing; it was an important thing. It became a very famous thing because first of all it was free. More people showed up than were expected and they hadn't had time to build the fences. So suddenly there was this huge group of people. We didn't realize how huge it all was until Saturday when somebody brought a *New York Times* newspaper. We all gathered around, looking at this paper with a huge aerial shot of the stage and the whole crowd and a part of the woods. They were saying how all the roads and freeways were closed. We didn't know that. We were just stuck there, having a big adventure.

As Wavy Gravy said from the stage, "Wow. We didn't know there were this many of us!" We never knew there were that many of us. We were all peace and love hippies. We were the generation of "let's not make war and let's be brothers." I meant it, we all meant it. We all were of a like mind. I always say, it was all right because of Michael Lang's energy and his aura. All day long people would keep running up to



**Diltz:** "The field after the music ended Monday morning, with a flag somebody stuck there, people starting to deal with the cleanup, and soggy blankets and wet sleeping bags the crowd left behind. This is one of the photos that looked like one of Mathew Brady's Civil War prints of the aftermath of a battlefield."

him with their problems. He'd be sitting on his motorcycle and they'd run up to him and say, "Michael, such and such isn't working" or "This didn't come out or that didn't happen," and he would just smile and say, "OK, we'll take care of it. Thanks." He was very calm, he never acted like, "What? Oh my God! Are you kidding me?"

**GM:** *Anybody on his crew that was like that, or were they all laid back?*

**HD:** A few people may have been "moved" around a little bit more, but not Michael. He was just like the calm at the center of the hurricane. To him, he had a wonderful vision of what it was going to be and he held on to that vision. And by golly, it was really three days of peace and music. There were no fights, no incidents, nobody mugging anybody or raping anybody, nothing bad happened. How wonderful that people could get together and just listen to the music and have this complete feeling of brotherhood and sisterhood.

**GM:** *It's too bad that Altamont had to happen so close to Woodstock; it almost overshadowed that whole feeling, didn't it?*

**HD:** Well, you hire the Hells Angels and pay them with beer, you're asking for trouble. That turned out to be kind of the end of the great hippie era, and then ... Manson (family) kill a bunch of people. Stupid people on drugs, not getting the message of love. That was so awful. It was kind of the end of a certain feeling in the air. Before that, you'd see someone hitchhiking in Laurel Canyon and you'd automatically stop and give them a lift, but after Charlie Manson came on the scene, you weren't so liable to stop and pick a stranger up. He had introduced that thought in the air, at least for a while.

**GM:** *How long did it take you to decompress when you got back, or did you have to decompress at all?*

**HD:** No, not at all. I mean, it's taken on some weight over the years;

it's almost mythological now, isn't it? You know, Woodstock, Camelot, Laurel Canyon. It was more like, "Wow, that was amazing, what a great time, what a great adventure!" It's stayed with me for quite a while.

**GM:** *What do you think of the efforts to re-create it, both past and future? Apparently there are now two separate concerts planned.*

**HD:** It'll be the fourth time. 1969, 1994, 1999 and now 2019... and those were all great! They're having one at Bethel, which is the place where they've built a shrine and a little auditorium that can hold 15,000 people. Michael Lang's hoping to do his in upstate New York at Watkins Glen. Remember, this will be his fourth one in upstate New York; he's really good at doing it. There was a problem with the backers. They disagreed about something and wanted to pull their money out, so there was a court case and Michael won. Right now, it's kind of a race against time.

**GM:** *It sounds almost reminiscent of the original show in 1969. Are you going to shoot the upcoming 50th anniversary show?*

**HD:** Oh yeah. I already called Michael Lang and asked him, "Can I be your photographer?"

**GM:** *Did you ever think that this would loom so largely in the consciousness of pop culture?*

**HD:** Nobody knew it was going to be all this. I was thinking, because I had so many calls from people who wanted to talk about Woodstock, that if I had known it was going to turn out to be like this I probably wouldn't have gone! No, not really. I laughed when I thought that because I'm almost being besieged by it, it's been growing in the last month or two. People are calling me, wanting to get pictures or get interviews. ●

*Henry Diltz photos can be viewed at [www.henyrdiltz.com](http://www.henyrdiltz.com) or through his representation at [www.morrisonhotelgallery.com](http://www.morrisonhotelgallery.com).*