

Promoter Baffled That Festival Drew Such a Big Crowd

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BETHEL, N. Y., Aug. 16—

The man at the head of it all surveyed the scene at the Woodstock Music and Art Fair and Aquarian Exposition tonight and expressed a certain bafflement that it had become a lodestar strong enough to draw 300,000 people.

It was, he said, "a little nightmarish for us, actually." John P. Roberts, the 24-year-old president of Woodstock Ventures, promoter of the event, said that he did not know "why this had picked up so much steam."

Even with ticket sales that went over \$1.3-million, he pronounced the fair a financial "disaster."

All calculations and hiring of staff had been geared for up to 100,000 people a day. As triple that number appeared, the entire ticket-selling, ticket-taking setup broke down. Thousands of people streamed in without paying the \$7 admission.

Mr. Roberts, the well-to-do son of a New Jersey family in the proprietary drug and cosmetic business, said the fair was "designed, conceived and operated by young people, all 26 years old and under."

He is a partner in a tiny investment firm called Challenge International, Limited, which functions in a portion of his Manhattan apartment. He and Joel Rosenman, 26, formed the firm in the spring of 1967, pooling their capital. Their plan was to specialize in the entertainment field.

The theme of the fair was "three days of peace and music," but it turned out to be rather "scary," Mr. Roberts said. "If we had any inkling that there was going to be this kind of attendance, we cer-

tainly would not have gone ahead."

The term Aquarian refers in part to the song in the rock musical "Hair" that celebrates the dawning of the "Age of Aquarius"—a time of love and peace—and also to the eleventh sign of the Zodiac.

There was a business, and also a sociological, purpose to the event, Mr. Roberts said. "I had felt for a long time that the polarization of the generations is a very serious threat to our society, and we felt that a cultural exposition created by youth could be of inestimable value in bridging that gap."

Would there be another massive outdoor music and art fair? "No, I don't think so," Mr. Roberts said. "We've had a very adverse situation up here."

The idea for the festival that became a phenomenon budded in the minds of two partners in Woodstock Ventures, which was formed last February. They are Michael Lang, 24, and Arthur Kornfeld, 26.

In a Rustic Setting

"Ours was going to be in the country," Mr. Roberts explained. "It was going to be away from the urban and suburban areas in a very rustic setting with a lot of room, grass, trees, lakes. It was going to be a youth cultural exposition and that is where the culture of this generation expresses itself more naturally."

Word of it first went out in mid-April when Woodstock Ventures placed a few spot announcements on WNEW-FM here and on a station in Boston.

Radio was the chief mode of advertising used, with the campaign concentrated in the Eastern Seaboard from Boston to Washington. There was advertising on the West Coast, also.

Less than \$200,000 was spent on advertising, but "we got a tremendous amount of excitement and speculation on the radio stations when disk jockeys talked it up in the last couple of months," Mr. Roberts said.

At the peak, "We sold 65,000

tickets a day, and we were prepared to handle 100,000 people a day at the fair," he said. "We had anticipated making our money back at the gate."

The staff of the fair, which had been about 200 people earlier in the year, increased to about 750 this weekend, Mr. Roberts said, "and we were terribly short-handed."

"Something had to give," he went on, "and the first thing that gave was the money and ticket collection. Our gates were not particularly impassable, in keeping with the spirit of the festival. And our security men were needed elsewhere, so we had nobody to guard the gate and the people just came on in."

Advance ticket sales of \$1.3-million and first-day sales of \$140,000 brought the total income to less than \$1.5-million. Mr. Roberts said that the expenses would run close to \$2-million. "Financially speaking, of course, the festival is a disaster," he said.

For young people all over the nation, coming to the fair had somehow become the "in" thing to do, and tens of thousands of them came to Bethel as though on a pilgrimage.

"I think people who have some money want to offer themselves up for something that is socially significant," Mr. Roberts said of himself and Mr. Rosenman. "We were sort of at loose ends, and when the idea for this exposition was presented to us we pretty much jumped at it."

The young bachelor investor, born in New York City, was graduated from the University of Pennsylvania in 1966 as a history major. He "had some hope of being a writer" but he found that he was "not the master of syntax" he had thought, and so he turned to investing in the entertainment field.

"Have you any idea of what you would like to do in the next 5 or 10 years?" he was asked.

"Rest," he said.