

Morning After at Bethel

Now that Bethel has shrunk back to the dimensions of a Catskill village and most of the 300,000 young people who made it a "scene" have returned to their homes, the rock festival begins to take on the quality of a social phenomenon, comparable to the Tulipmania or the Children's Crusade. And in spite of the prevalence of drugs—sales were made openly, and "you could get stoned just sitting there breathing," a student gleefully reported—it was essentially a phenomenon of innocence.

The music itself was surely a prime attraction. Where else could aficionados of rock expect to hear in one place Sly and the Family Stone, Creedence Clearwater Revival, Jefferson Airplane and all those other lineal descendants of the primeval Beatles?

Yet it is hardly credible that they should have turned out in such vast numbers and endured, patiently and in good humor, the discomforts of mud, rain, hunger and thirst solely to hear bands they could hear on recordings in the comfort of home. They came, it seems, to enjoy their own society, free to exult in a life style that is its own declaration of independence. To such a purpose a little hardship could only be an added attraction.

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Five thousand people were treated for injuries, illness and an excess of drugs. One hundred arrests were made on drug charges. And for three days traffic was tied in knots—for most of the rebels against the consumers' society have cars.

By adult standards the occasion was clearly a disaster, an outrageous upset of all normal patterns. Yet the young people's conduct, in the end, earned them a salute from Monticello's police chief as "the most courteous, considerate and well-behaved group of kids" he had ever dealt with.

Perhaps it was just the communal discomfort, that whiff of danger, that they needed to feel united and at peace. For comrades-in-rock, like comrades-in-arms, need great days to remember and embroider. With Henry the Fifth they could say at Bethel, "He that outlives this day, and comes safe home, will stand a-tiptoe when this day is nam'd."

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