

# Woodstock Fair's Staff Parting In Dispute Over Future Control

## Split of Organizers Reflects Difference of Ideas Among Entrepreneurs on Mining the Youth 'Underground'

By BARNARD L. COLLIER

The four young men who created the Woodstock Music and Arts Festival that lured more than 300,000 rock and folk fans to the alfalfa fields of tiny Bethel, N. Y., last month are splitting up.

"Our breakup is a matter of different philosophies," said John Roberts, the 24-year-old heir to a drugstore products fortune. His personal funds have been pledged to bankers to secure enough loans to pay off the \$1.3-million the corporation owes and fight dozens of expected lawsuits.

Details of the split are still being negotiated among the four partners and their lawyers. As things stand now, however, Mr. Roberts and Joel Rosenman, a 26-year-old Yale Law School graduate, will retain control of the Woodstock Ventures Corporation and whatever assets it has left.

### Lang Tries for Control

Michael Lang, a baby-faced promoter with a Shirley Temple hairdo, who at 24 years old is an underground hero because Woodstock was his dream first, and Artie Kornfeld, his 26-year-old friend, will attempt to buy the corporation if they can raise enough money.

In the aftermath of Woodstock, as the euphoria of the "three days of peace and music" dies out, the tales of the problems, the bickering, the power struggles and the diverse philosophies of the four young businessmen are coming out.

They serve to explain a good deal about the people and corporations who are deeply involved in selling to the vast, affluent and mercurial market of young people who caused such a massive crush in the Catskills.

"Maybe the best way to define the Underground Industrial Complex," Mr. Rosenman said, "is materialistic people of the underground trying to make money off of a generation of underground kids who feel they aren't materialistic."

Up until the last few years those trying to exploit the youth market have relied on the traditional selling methods of Establishment companies.

Woodstock was the most monumental failure in the history of the underground if one measures it in financial terms. But it was a failure caused for the most part by too much success on the artistic side.

Essentially, the 31 rock and folk groups, the bucolic mountain setting, the proximity to New York City, and \$200,000 worth of publicity and advertising in both underground and Establishment media resulted in the unexpected turnout of youth that overwhelmed the festival promoters.

No tickets were sold after the first few hours of the first day. Those sales, plus about \$1.2-million in advance sales, were all the box office there was. Woodstock was then a free party hosted by Mr. Lang using Mr. Roberts's lengthy line of credit at the bank.

### Criticism Is Muted

Despite the fact that the four stockholders in the corporation have divided and are now vying for control of Woodstock Ventures' assets—a movie of the festival, T-shirts with Woodstock's dove and guitar fret printed on them, program books, posters—they try not to criticize one another too much.

Mr. Roberts says of Mr. Lang:

"Michael is a hippie who keeps one foot in the financial world at all times. He wants to do things to keep those little hippies of his happy and that's part of the reason Woodstock was successful in terms of getting the crowd it did. He needs to keep up that front to get the kids to back him, and he's great at that."

Mr. Lang's contacts in the financial world range from the wealthy owner of a record company and a millionaire agent for a rock group to Bernard Cornfeld of Investors Overseas Services in Switzerland. He is trying to get those backers to put up nearly \$2-million to buy the corporation so he can run another festival with the Woodstock name next summer. Be-

cause of the delicacy of negotiations his contacts do not wish to be identified.

But aside from paying off the festival's debts, Mr. Roberts, too, is considering new festival ideas using the Woodstock name.

He and his staff are discussing possible new sites and trying to figure out how to keep the crowd at another Woodstock venture down to manageable and profitable size.

Among his problems in planning a new festival is one that confronts underground entrepreneurs: what will the kids want a month, two months or three months from now?

"We are arguing about whether or not kids will turn out for another festival because of the 'heavy' music acts, the site, the cultural things like arts and crafts, the dope, or the feeling of togetherness that Woodstock has created," Mr. Rosenman said. "We have serious disagreements about it. And I don't think anybody actually knows the answer."

Several large Establishment-oriented corporations and Wall Street investment firms are interested in cashing in on the youth market that Woodstock so dramatically proved exists.

### 'Youth Consultants' Hired

These firms are hiring highly paid "youth consultants" to advise them on forthcoming trends that percolate from the deepest underground to what John Morris, 30, who was in charge of the festival production, calls "the silk-shirt hippie types from Forest Hills who do so much of the buying."

What makes the alliance between unlikely people like Mr. Roberts—who does not look at all like a hippie—and Mr. Lang—who eschews shoes, shirts and barbers (but who likes chauffeured Cadillacs and overseas jet travel and plunges in the stock market)—is the belief on the part of many "straight" investors that the youth market is virtually inscrutable to those who aren't "into the real underground."

The problems that plagued the relationship between Mr. Roberts's side of the Woodstock venture and Mr. Lang's side before, during and after the festival reflect the difficulties in merging the ideas of "making money off the kids" and trying to let the kids believe that a rock festival, for example, is, as Mr. Kornfeld likes to put it, "a groovy meeting of the tribes, a part of the revolution."

That the two ideas can be combined to make black ink in the account books has not yet been conclusively proven. But Mr. Roberts says he is willing to risk trying again.

### Selling to the Kids

"There is nothing magic or mysterious," he says, "about selling to the kids. You make it as attractive as possible. You have to realize that the kids don't like a hard sell. You can't go to them yelling. 'Get your program here!'"

"You have to have a guy in funky clothes to shuffle up and say, 'Hey, man, how about a program.' You just use a different hype—selling pitch. You just have to avoid turning them off."

But Mr. Morris, who has produced his own successful rock concerts in New York and Europe, responded to Mr. Roberts's idea:

"Kids don't buy programs for most things. You can't hype kids into buying things they don't want, even with people in funky clothes soft-selling them. This generation of kids are different. They hate hype."

And so the philosophical differences among the underground entrepreneurs go on.