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During the glory days of great open-air Rock Festivals in the late '60s, millions of people assembled at hundreds of *landmark* gatherings. But throughout history mass-gatherings have attended the rituals of mankind. From religious revivals to political conventions to sporting events - societies have expressed their concerns and sought entertainment within the spectacle of mass participation. And although musical celebrations have attracted large crowds to everything from medieval faires to bluegrass jamborees, it wasn't until the dawn of the Rock Festival that music itself could lure great numbers to convene in a manner alien to prevailing customs of Western civilization. The behavior of kids at '60s festivals was at odds with the conduct of their parents, because the *message* transmitted through Rock is at odds with beliefs underlying Western life.

At the heart of Rock 'n' Roll is the beat of Rhythm 'n' Blues. R&B is a slicked-up, *citified* version of the old rural Blues - a music with links to ancient African tribal religions. Before being imported to the West, the "Blues Beat" was a focal point for native dance rites of *possession*. Entranced by rhythm, the ancestors of Rock 'n' Roll *communed* with *loas*. African animism holds loas as intermediary spiritual "bridges" between man and God. Loas are the sub-deity messenger-gods of possession, connecting humanity with the ways of nature. In frenzy with the drums, loas, as multiple expressions of God, are invoked to *flow through* a dancer caught up in physical/spiritual rapture. Such Man/God unity produces supernatural effects in the possessed.

But the biblical base of Western life imposes a *duality* between mind and body; spiritual realms *oppose* physical life. Only in the Garden of Eden are there no opposites. Time is non-existent, past and future are unknown in the eternal Now of Paradise. Man and woman are indistinguishably *one* with God.

This bliss was shattered when Adam ate forbidden fruit. Mortal life begins with the disobedience of Eve. *Original Sin* revealed the forbidden knowledge of opposites. For this infraction God cast man out of Eden into the illusional realm of *time*: past and present, then and now, life and death. Separated from God, *alien* to nature, Adam and Eve were transfixed by their differences and covered themselves in *shame*.

Their "fall" from Paradise was enacted when *bodies* consumed the fruit, therefore "denying the flesh" is decreed "biblical virtue". This is our Western "Fall of Nature" model, designating all impulsive acts as sinful: physical desires require resistance and correction because lust is the *enemy* of spiritual piety. Codified in Western Creation myths is this eternal struggle to control and pacify *earthly* urges. In exile from Eden, the *mind* of mankind wages war with the body. All of our attitudes have been colored by "fallen man", holding notions to atone for worldly want.

But such biblical myths were alien to the African forefathers of Rock. Their possession dance rhythms inspire a union of realms: nature as divinity. Loas are revealers of a "naturally divine" unity. God inhabits, and is *inhabited*, through the trance of dance. In *bodily* abandon ecstatic dancers *become* God, and this is induced with music of hypnotic rhythms. Rock's Blues Beat originated in these rites. *Possession* is the "message" of Rock, a message at odds with Fall of Nature ways, it implies celebration of the body, *with* the body. Biblical establishments crusade against vile *nature-men* condemned for secular pursuits, Vatican prescribes abstinence as the price of salvation.

But tribal rites imported with African slaves preserved ancient ways of jungle frenzy. Pagans appeared on the Mississippi Delta and showed primitive Christians how to unite spirit with flesh. Authorities, abhorring the practice, immediately decreed a "sacred drum" ban and outlawed the loa dance. To compensate for these lost techniques, slaves created *Blues*. Blues vented overflowing animist instinct stifled by Puritan prohibitions on possession. This is music about the *beat*, the beat that inspires the *dance*. So instead of the tribal Voodoo dance, communion with loas became encoded in the performance of Blues. What the drums once conveyed during communal rites now was preserved by individual players. The message survived. Blues remains America's most original and influential artform. In its improvised rhythmic interplay, *abandon* lives on and dancers ride the loa still.

When the possession beat went electric, the stage was set for Rock 'n' Roll. In 1956, mass markets throughout the West channeled *Africa* through Elvis. Rhythm 'n' Blues hit the mainstream, causing a collision of *Natural* impulses with Fall of Nature ways. Western emphasis of spiritual over physical collapsed into carnal snake dance. Body-music Blues urged clergy to boogie as Africa battled the Vatican. Puritan establishments were reviled by the pelvic paganisms of Elvis and his tribe. Rock 'n' Roll made the young get funky with rhythms to rekindle possession frenzy. Like pre-Christian heathens in dance-trance abandon, Euro-American nature-men once again were "living cathedrals", receptive of intoxicating spirits.

In the words of Little Richard, Rock 'n' Roll is "*the healing music, the music that makes the blind see; the lame, deaf, and dumb - hear, walk, and talk.*" Songs encoded with Africa's rhythmic metaphysics enacted subliminal relief for sexually uptight Westerners. A drum beat could heal Original Sin and soothe *Spiritual Blues*. Sons and daughters of Victorian rigidity couldn't get enough. In the decade following their first dose of Elvis, a Rock 'n' Roll tidal wave climaxed in *Sabbats*. After centuries of biblical prohibition, again the tribes mass-danced.

"*The establishment has set up the Ten Commandments for us saying don't, don't, don't,*" Jimi Hendrix told his generation, "*Then all of a sudden kids come along with a different set of brain cells and the establishment doesn't know what to do. The walls are crumbling and the establishment doesn't want to let go. We're trying to save the kids, to create a buffer between young and old. Our music is shock therapy to help them realize a little more of what their goals should be. The background of our music is a Spiritual Blues thing.*"

A bursting-at-the-seams population of teens, born to the post-war Baby Boom and weaned on Rock 'n' Roll, ripened into a culture connected with antiquity. Like Paleolithic shamans who talked to the animals, Western youth tuned in to Rock's underground lineage of poets and yogin, healers and singers,

seers, witches and sorcerers. By fixating on the beat, instincts were activated that set them all on a path to become *fully* human. Festivities began in the Haight-Ashbury ballrooms of San Francisco.

Since California Gold Rush days, the Barbary Coast maintained a "permissive" history. Tolerance for alternative lifestyles drew West the refugees from mainstream repression. As a home to the '50s beatniks and neighbor to Berkeley's Free Speech Movement, San Francisco reigned as the cradle of American counter-culture.

Conditions there were ideal for people to come together in acts of public theater. Rallying around music-magic, drop-outs from Western ways empathized with Hindu, Voodoo, and Zen Buddhist beliefs. The back-to-the-land *animism* of Native Americans resonated like fresh air in a mausoleum. The Bay Area's first generation of white rockers found common ground with cultures of color. Kids who had boogied to the beat all of their lives were ripe to transfer allegiance to non-Western ways. They felt betrayed by their parents' legacy of befouling nature. As the ranks came of age, a majority abhorred war, especially Vietnam selective service. A racially lopsided draft had black men shooting yellow men to enrich white men on land looted from red men. The establishment travelled in patterns of fear and greed. It was up to the young to lead lost elders back to the *healing ways* of Nature.

An energetic burst triggered by Rock sparked environmental concerns in time to save the Earth. Everything was possible within the virtual reality of an expanded mind. In a teeth-gnashing sea of globe-trashing self-interest, the Haight oasis formed for the flowering of humanity. By 1966, the culture that "countered" competitive Puritanism had coalesced in perpetual *Festival*. The term made a New Year debut with the *Trips Festival* at Longshoreman's Hall in San Francisco. Rock 'n' Roll bands layed down the beat as flashing strobes danced on writhing *freaks*. Possessed trippers rode the loa and saw God. This Winter '66 festival marked ten years of Elvis. In that decade-wake of original mainstream Rock, a generation's inner transformation boiled to a head. The call of Rhythm 'n' Blues produced a new breed of teen. In exile from prudery, tuned-in to *earth vibes*, kids gathered at *Sabbats* in tribes.

During ten thousand years of recorded human history, nearly 495 of the last 500 generations have lived *tribally*. In small villages or in roaming clusters of extended families, survival was linked to the *group*. But change came quick with the Industrial Age. As tribal ties died in today's age of the *individual*, so too did a feeling of connection with the web of cycles that sustains us. A state of alienation reached World War proportions as we raced to waste a planet of its capacity for life. Carbon dioxide in the air was first measured in '58, while Rock 'n' Roll fueled forces that were re-shaping our ties with nature. There was no time to lose. After centuries of indifferent dominion over the land, our eco-balance niche triggered Earth's reciprocity process. In the nick of time, native drums reawakened our instinct for *interdependence*. Tribal life, lost during our pursuit of industry, reappeared.

The '66 Spring equinox inspired Frisco freaks to bring their celebrations outdoors to the *Free Faires* - open-air, free-admission expansions of the *Trips Festival*. Baby-boom crowds grew larger and larger until consciousness finally blossomed in Golden Gate Park during the *Great Human Be-In* of January 1967. Sunday's ecstatic afternoon pitched twenty-thousand heads to bliss as they collectively gave birth to the *Rock Festival*.

Rock Festivals loom like initiation rites for a generation's defection from what was. These back-to-the-land mass-gathering rituals enacted the virtues of group living: cooperation, compassion, kindness, generosity, patience, tolerance - all were ideals enshrined at the *Be-In*. Each festival that followed was gauged by adherence to these new tribal ways.

When the Summer of Love dawned in June, unrestrained, sprawling mass gatherings with back-to-back bands for days on end, became the New Age standard for youth entertainment. Ceremonies commenced at the *Monterey International Pop Festival*, just south of the Frisco tribes. After Monterey, these vast networks of flying circuses came undone by their own size. Gates couldn't contain all who came, and walls couldn't keep out crowds that wouldn't pay. Prior to Woodstock in August '69, three summer festivals had succumbed to gate-crasher chaos. Dozens of people were busted and six injured at a Denver Pop fracas that drew 50,000 fans to Mile High Stadium for three days of Rock in late June. And both the Newport Pop (L.A.) and the Newport Jazz (R.I.) festivals got national press for violence.

The largest gathering to date took place in L.A. when 150,000 people turned out for the Newport Pop Festival at Devonshire Downs in Northridge. The three-day summer solstice bash was seriously marred by violence as thousands of gate-crashers battled with cops. Then, when the fourteenth annual Newport Jazz Festival included a few Rock bands on the July Fourth bill, 78,000 people showed up at a 21,000-seat arena. Mobs of ticketless teens battered in the gates during a downpour and stormed the enclosure. The Jazz Festival lost its home and Rock concerts were banned in Newport.

Newport became the *third* mass-gathering within a two-week period to flare riot headlines nationwide. But there were *peaceful* festivals this season, too. In May, at a more tranquil three-day gathering of 20,000 in the Santa Clara County Fairgrounds for the San Jose Pop Festival, Jimi Hendrix mesmerized the crowd with a supernatural set. And offsetting festival-bashing over the Independence Day weekend were reports of a *groovy* hootenanny in Atlanta. "Our main concept was not to have a *musical* gathering," stressed the promoter, "but to have a real music *festival*. I went down to Miami Pop last December for one of these and about 100,000 people came during the three days. I went just to see what kind of trouble might come up, but it was the most peaceful thing you ever saw; no shoving, no fights, no trouble at all. It's a matter of leaving the kids alone and not baiting them."

Like the 1967 Monterey Pop Festival, the 1969 Atlanta Pop Festival offered first-rate bands soon to become major acts. And the crowds found free camping available during the three-day fling. Attractions on the grounds included palm readers, astrologers, clothing and poster booths, and concessions. 130,000 people packed into a raceway bowl designed to accommodate 100,000. Hordes of ticketless fans outside the gates chanted to be let in. With five hours of concerts remaining, the promoter conceded, "Let 'em in, we don't want trouble." Despite a heatwave, inadequate concessions and hour-long lines for the johns, the scene remained peaceful, with only a few minor busts-*none* being for drugs. Still, Atlanta's traffic jams and rampant nudity made national headlines and "Rock Festivals" were a hot topic that summer.

When Woodstock Ventures set up operations in Wallkill, New York, their festival got run right out of town. Apollo 11 was racing to the moon while Ventures frantically combed the Catskills for some space to land their stage. A last minute deal to rent Max Yasgur's farm moved their site west by 40 miles.

Woodstock was born in Bethel. Ventures' plan for Yasgur's land was to situate the gathering in a natural bowl amphitheater; an alfalfa field carved out of rolling maplewood forests. Located one hundred miles north of Manhattan, remote Yasgur pastures couldn't have been better suited for an agrarian gathering of city refugees.

On the afternoon of Thursday, August 14, a 60-foot wide, 70-foot long stage was ready, but the last minute move to Bethel left no time to build ticket booths. The few barbed-wire restraints that had been constructed were quickly dismantled by kids. Twenty-four hours before showtime found a hundred-thousand hippies camping in the bowl.

By Friday morning traffic around Bethel is at a standstill. Cars are jammed along roads for 15 miles in all directions. Of more than a million freeks in the vicinity, only 40 percent make it to the site. Crowds form hour-long lines to use overflowing johns. It takes two hours of standing in queues to use pay phones, and the wait to get water is 45 minutes. Ventures has no choice but to declare Woodstock a free festival.

Wiring the PA takes all day and gear arrives on stage at a snail's pace. With roadies, amps and bands stuck in traffic, the closest soloist available is called upon to open the show. Amidst threats of thunderstorms, Richie Havens begins the music at 5:07 p.m. Richie recalls, "The fact that those of us with acoustic instruments could be set up quickly was the only reason why we went on first." Following him to the stage on "acoustic" Friday are *Country Joe McDonald, John Sebastian, the Incredible String Band, Sweetwater, Tim Hardin, Bert Sommer, Ravi Shankar, Melanie, Arlo Guthrie, and Joan Baez.*

Sprinkles turn to showers around midnight as warm thunderstorms blow in. There are no lights to shine on the field when the music's over. Rather than get up for a long trek to the johns without hope of finding a way back to friends in the dark, many campers simply fertilize the field. Five inches of rain falls in the space of three hours. A half-million campers bed down in deep mud.

By Saturday, rain over Yasgur's farm transforms Peoples' Hill into a slippery slope. A "Sea Of Mud" aerial photo of what authorities term "a disaster area" appears on the front page of the *New York Times*. The three-inch deep black silt is the consistency of brownie mix and smells like hashish. It's mud that makes you itch. Woodstock teeters at the brink: a revolt of the *Motherfuckers* underground street gang vs. food concessionaires threatens everyone with hunger. For the duration, armed troops on standby alert are ready to invade the site at the first sight of trouble.

But the media can't see the rain's improbable effect. A spirit of gentleness and concern washes over the soaked crowd. Their shared discomfort and crisis-driven bonding inspires communal regard on the farm. Bethel residents marvel at the vibes. Local businesses have their best-ever boom. Native neighbors pitch in to feed the hordes of Woodstock's invading pagan feast. Peter Beren flipped food-stand burgers and noticed, "There were fires built and very strange groups of people being very primal, with faces painted up. It was like being in Borneo, people dancing around fires, people shouting, freaking out. At one campfire there was a large woman with unkempt hair and bones around her neck, shouting, wildly out of control. She looked like a witch doctor. I felt like I was going back in time, entering an era that was very primitive, precivilized. They were performing rituals, shouting. The overwhelming impression was one that was atavistic, *shamanistic*, as if all the restraints of civilization had been removed."

Rainless Saturday concerts bring euphoric peaks. Participants groove to the tunes of *Quill, Keef Hartley, Santana, Mountain, Canned Heat, Creedence Clearwater Revival, the Grateful Dead, Janis Joplin, Sly & the Family Stone, the Who, and the Jefferson Airplane*. Gladiator gods at the frontlines of consciousness, these bands lead the masses past breakthrough peaks. Rock's Freedom Beat by moonlight unites the tribes at the apex of a decade. Woodstock's field of dreams awakens ancient rites and Sabbat dance. The music is a fruit rooted in Blues, ripening sweet in a half-million heads. It is the Saturnalia of the Century, casting *possession frenzy* 'til dawn...

When the *Airplane* lands in Sunday morning sunshine, the masses are blind with bliss. Lines of exhausted freeks stream from Yasgur's farm long before an afternoon thunderstorm triggers the big migration. Chants of "NO RAIN!" do little to calm the skies over White Lake. All weekend long Woodstock wavers on a thin limb: torrential rains wash away topsoil and expose buried electrical cables. Thousands of feet step on thinning rubber insulation. The promoters risk mass electrocution, or mass riot if the power goes out. Lightning and high winds dance around swaying towers anchored in mud. Huge speakers stand ready to topple on a sea of heads. Limited access to the site courts potential medical disaster.

And through it all, just a flimsy security force is present. Woodstock is the first and last time a Rock Festival happens without massive police presence. And it works! Music continues through Sunday and into Monday morning, interrupted only by the heavy rains. People who remain hear *Joe Cocker*, a speech from *Max Yasgur, Country Joe & the Fish*, a lecture by *Swami Satchidananda, Ten Years After, the Band, Blood Sweat & Tears, Johnny Winter, CSNY, Paul Butterfield Blues Band, Sha Na Na*, and *Jimi Hendrix*.

Richie Havens' acoustic set opened the festival and Hendrix's electric set closed it. Hendrix was the centerpiece at all of the heavy festivals and the highest-paid performer at Woodstock. His Space-Age Voodoo Blues made him the Golden Calf idol of the tribes. Jimi was the living embodiment of Spiritual Blues. Only a handful of his gigs occurred in daylight. Woodstock stands as the only example of a *morning* Hendrix set. Having *Sha Na Na* open his show was like seeing the *Experience* warm up for the *Monkees*.

By the time Jimi finished the weekend festivities, 5,162 people were treated in the medical tents. Babies were born and three boys died; one overdose, one burst appendix and one tractor accident. A girl broke her back during a fall from a lighting tower. The Bethel Town Justice deals with what is normally a year's worth of work - 177 arrests. Fines average \$25, but most cases are dismissed. Festival promoters begin the task of refunding 18,000 tickets sold to people who missed the show because of blocked roads.

Against many odds Woodstock attained Promised Land status. The "Spirit of the Sixties" crystallized. With music and dance the masses reclaimed their ancient inheritance and discovered anew that Eden, like Woodstock, has no gates. The gathering at Yasgur's remains the closest we came to Utopia.