

THE DENVER POP FESTIVAL: AN EXAMINATION OF WHEN A CULTURAL
MOVEMENT IS PACKAGED AND SOLD FOR PROFIT

by

JUSTIN KITE

A Thesis submitted to the

Graduate School-Newark

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of History

Written under the direction of

Dr. Mark Krasovic

and approved by

Newark, New Jersey

October 2018

© 2018

Justin Kite

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

THE DENVER POP FESTIVAL: AN EXAMINATION OF WHEN A CULTURAL MOVEMENT IS PACKAGED AND SOLD FOR PROFIT

By JUSTIN KITE

Thesis Director:

Dr. Mark Krasovic

In 1969, on the nights of June 27, 28 and 29, Mile High Stadium in Denver, Colorado hosted the Denver Pop Festival. It was three nights of incredible music brought to the Rocky Mountain Region by an upstart concert promoter named Barry Fey. Pop/rock festivals were a new invention, and Fey attempted for his event to follow a mold that had been created two years earlier at the Monterey International Pop Music Festival in northern California. Musical acts like The Jimi Hendrix Experience and Creedence Clearwater Revival electrified the Denver crowds, but what stole the show each of the three nights was gatecrashing and protests that resulted in violence, arrests and police brutality.

Each night's violence dominated the media coverage of the festival, but the media, the police, and even Fey all failed to understand why the violence occurred. In this paper I trace the origins of the pop festival and link it to a cultural movement that sprung from the Haight-Ashbury neighborhood of San Francisco,

California. I then explain, primarily through Fey, unique connections that Denver had with the cultural movement that came out of San Francisco. To do this I read through the archives of Denver newspapers, *The Denver Post* and *Rocky Mountain News*, examined the archives of *Rolling Stone* magazine, and explored an assortment of related biographies, autobiographies and music festival-related publications. My research uncovered the reason why violence broke out each night and disproved the theories from the media, the authorities, and the man who created the event. The results of this paper tell readers what happens when an organic non-commercial vibe is packaged and sold for profit.

Next August will mark the fifty-year anniversary of the Woodstock Music & Art Fair, and over the next year there is certain to be much written about its memory. Thanks to its romantic upstate New York location, its incredible size (more than 400,000 people attended), its star-studded musical lineup, and the widespread media coverage it attracted, Woodstock is a name famous even outside of the people who were there that weekend. It was a music festival, but for many (especially of more recent generations) the name “Woodstock” is more than just that—it is also symbolic of dramatic cultural shifts that took place during a few famous years in the late 1960’s.

Half a century has passed, and while for many “Woodstock” has become synonymous with the radical changes in music, language, fashion, sex, drug use, and deference towards authority that happened in the late 60’s, it was just the culmination of a countrywide phenomena where these radical changes had been wrapped up together, packaged, and sold to the public in the form of multi-day popular music festivals.

‘Pop’ festivals, as they were colloquially, and sometimes officially referred to, began 26 months before Woodstock, and took place on various weekends across the country during the last three years of the 60’s. A few, like the Monterey International Pop Music Festival and Newport 69, are known to music fans and music historians, but most have been overshadowed and forgotten outside of the people who actually attended them. Many of these forgotten pop festivals did not lack musical star power, colorful stories, or even media coverage. One of these star-studded musical weekends, full of evocative tales,

took place seven weeks before Woodstock, during the nights of June 27th, 28th and 29th in Denver, Colorado.

On that last weekend in June of 1969, 50,000 longhairs, hippies, and wide-eyed music enthusiasts gathered in Mile High Stadium for the first annual Denver Pop Festival. A remarkable young concert promoter had booked an even more remarkable lineup of performers. He aimed to pair the music with an atmosphere of peace, and just like the other pop festival promoters (including those of Woodstock), he hoped to capitalize on a cultural fallout that had been drifting across the country for two years. This festival, that would be the first of its kind for the entire Rocky Mountain and Great Plains regions, promised to be three nights of great music with a peaceful vibe. According to local and national reports, the musical performances were spectacular, and the Denver Pop Festival followed through with its promise for great music. The peaceful half of the deal however left much to be desired.

Let's make up in our minds that we make our own world here tonight, starting tonight. We've seen some teargas, that's the start of a Third World War. Just pick your side now.

—Jimi Hendrix at the Denver Pop Festival¹

I traveled to Denver to check out the three-day pop festival at Mile High Stadium, June 27 to 29. There I ran head-on into everything I wanted to avoid at Woodstock... I'd do whatever it took to prevent something like Denver happening at Woodstock.

—Michael Lang, creator of Woodstock Music and Art Festival²

¹ Barry Fey, Steve Alexander, and Rich Wolfe, *Backstage Past* (Phoenix, AZ: Lone Wolfe Press, 2011), 38.

² Michael Lang and Holly George-Warren, *The Road to Woodstock* (New York: Ecco, 2010), 102-103.

Today, outside of those who attended, not much is known about the Denver Pop Festival. From its page in Wikipedia, to a handful of brief mentions in festival anthologies and music-related biographies, two things are always mentioned—that it was the last time Jimi Hendrix played with The Experience, and that it was three nights of rioting—and rarely are there more details given. This dissertation will explain that the Denver Pop Festival was not unique in that it had memorable music, and neither was it unique in having violence, but it will explain the unique set of circumstances that lead to the ominous quotations above, and it will explain that because of its unique relationship with the genesis of an organic movement that was trying to be recreated, the Denver Pop Festival tells us something that the other early pop festivals don't—not even Woodstock.

During the 1960s a truly original way of living formed in a small urban neighborhood in San Francisco, California. That way of life came to be defined by many things, including drugs, fashion, a rejection of certain norms, and others, but at its heart was music. For many this new way of life was so alien that at best it was confusing and at worst disgusting, but for others, especially a good amount of young people, this new alien culture was incredibly attractive and appealing. Music industry executives recognized how attractive this culture was and understood that music (and the talented performers and bands living in the neighborhood) was central to its appeal. Certainly not everyone attracted to this new way of living could go to San Francisco, but through its music, anyone who wanted to, could have a taste of it.

On the surface, The Denver Pop Festival doesn't seem terribly different from similar festivals that attempted to bring a taste of that San Francisco neighborhood to cities all over the country, but it was. Thanks to a unique blend of timing, geography, and especially business connections, Denver had a special connection to the beginnings of the cultural movement that all of the early pop festivals were trying to give to audiences, and because of this, telling the story of the Denver Pop Festival will uncover valuable questions about authenticity that arose from when a cultural movement was packaged and sold for profit.

Festivals centered on music have a long tradition in the United States of America. The oldest continuous one, the annual Worcester Music Festival held in Worcester, Massachusetts, began in 1858 and still runs in 2018. The music performed in it is classical, and is known for hosting world famous choral acts.³ A few others began during the 19th century, notably, classical festivals in Chautauqua, New York, in 1874, and in Ann Arbor, Michigan, in 1894, but music festivals did not sweep the nation until the middle of the 1940s, when hundreds began being held each year. The rapid emergence was due to a mixture of timing, technology and progressive politics. Timing, because the Great Depression and the World Wars were over. Technology, because of improved transportation seen through ever-expanding roadway systems and the ownership of automobiles for average Americans. Progressive politics because workweeks were shorter and vacations were longer, and oftentimes paid.⁴ The music at these festivals was

³ Howard E. Smither, *A History of the Oratorio*, vol. 4 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 416.

⁴ Jerry Hopkins, Jim Marshall, and Baron Wolman, *Festival!* (New York, NY: First Collier Books, 1970), 13-14.

primarily classical, jazz and folk, with country and western or rhythm and blues sprinkled in depending upon geography. Music that was featured in movies could reach a national audience, but most music that was popular remained regional because it was dependent upon the distance of radio signals. During the 1950s many young American music acts began experimenting with new musical forms that fused rhythm and blues, country, and swing. This musical fusion created rock and roll music. At the same time as this creation took place, televisions began being mass produced and entered the homes of middle class Americans. Mass production advancements were also making record players and portable radios cheaper, and therefore more of a possibility for young people to own their own, and not be reliant upon the living room phonograph for music listening.⁵

By the middle of the 1950s, hundreds, if not thousands, of cutting edge young musical artists were making rock and roll music, and young people across the country, who were armed with more agency than ever before, were making independent music listening decisions. Many, regardless of gender, race, religion or geography were choosing rock and roll. Rock and roll record sales exploded into the tens of millions, hit rock and roll songs began topping the music charts, and rock and roll artists like Elvis Presley began being featured on nationally broadcasted television variety shows. Popular music began being called pop music, and pop music was rock and roll.⁶

⁵ Jerry Hopkins, Jim Marshall, and Baron Wolman, *Festival!* (New York, NY: First Collier Books, 1970), 13-14.

⁶ Glenn C. Altschuler, *All Shook Up: How Rock N Roll Changed America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 35.

Running parallel with the quick emergence of rock and roll music, was the festival scene in the upscale Rhode Island town of Newport. In 1954, this idyllic if not staid, seaside resort town was chosen by Boston jazz impresario George Wein, and the Newport socialite couple Elaine and Louis Lorillard, to host the “First Annual American Jazz Festival.”⁷ With world famous performers such as Billie Holiday, the festival was an enormous success. The first brought in an audience of over 13,000 and that number steadily climbed each year. By 1959 the name had been changed to the Newport Jazz Festival and Wein was ready to expand into other genres. He owned a nightclub in Boston called Storyville, and in it, folk music performances had been regularly selling out for over a year. He wanted to capitalize on this popularity and incorporate folk music into the Jazz Festival, but it quickly became clear to him that to meet demand, a full festival was needed, and so in the summer of 1959, Newport hosted both a Jazz and Folk festival.⁸

Despite their popularity and growing audiences, in what would become a hallmark of music festivals, the Jazz and Folk Festivals were not popular with local residents. The first festival in 1954 was held at the Newport Casino, and organizers were forced to find a new spot for the second because casino owners were not pleased with how the crowds left their lawn and other facilities. Each subsequent year during the fifties, as the crowds grew, so too did local angst.

⁷ "Elaine Lorillard, Jazz Festival Pioneer, Dies," *Newsday*. Associated Press, November 29, 2007.

⁸ George Wein and Nate Chinen, *Myself among Others* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2004), 313.

The crowds also became more racially diverse, and especially with the advent of the Folk Festival, skewed younger and younger.

At the second Newport Folk Festival in 1960, local residents had had enough and called in the authorities to break up the festival. State police and the National Guard were brought in to close the biggest festival in America, and to tame summer-breaking college students who were accused of violence and drunken rioting.⁹ Because of the 1960 fiasco, neither the Jazz nor the Folk festival were allowed to take place in 1961, but after reorganization and logistical adjustments the festivals were revived and back in Newport for 1962. Acts like Peter, Paul and Mary, Pete Seeger and Joan Baez were popular with east coast college kids and kept the crowds growing in numbers. However, it was a skinny young man with a head full of dark curly hair from Minnesota, by way of Manhattan's Greenwich Village, who took the Folk Festival to new levels of attendance and eventually amplification.

A crowd of 40,000 gathered to see Bob Dylan close the first night of the 1963 festival—his first appearance at a Newport Folk Festival. The next year he returned and the crowd erupted to 70,000. In 1965, Dylan made his third and final 20th century appearance at Newport. This time 80,000 spectators had flocked to the festival, and Dylan had a surprise for them. Backed by members of the Paul Butterfield Blues Band, the artists plugged their instruments into amplifiers and literally electrified the audience. A large portion of the audience booed, a large portion of the audience cheered, and there is much controversy

⁹ "Newport Blues," *Time Magazine*, July 18, 1960.

over which of the two sides was larger, but what couldn't be argued was that Bob Dylan had brought rock and roll to the music festival.¹⁰

Many were not ready for Dylan to bring rock music to the festival scene, but at the same time that he was pushing boundaries on the east coast, across the country in a small San Francisco neighborhood, a group of people were pushing societal boundaries beyond just music and they would soon have a profound affect on the music scene in Denver, Colorado.

On the eastern border of San Francisco's picturesque Golden Gate Park, snugly fit between The Panhandle park and Buena Vista Park, lies the district of Haight-Ashbury. Despite its park-laden location, Haight-Ashbury is a densely populated neighborhood characterized by large Victorian houses tightly packed together in an area of about 40 square blocks.

A few miles to the northeast of Haight-Ashbury lies the North Beach neighborhood of San Francisco, and during the 1950s it was at the cutting edge of cool. North Beach was the epicenter of the San Francisco Renaissance and the Beat Generation. It was home to famed beatniks such as Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg, and while married, Joe DiMaggio and Marilyn Monroe lived there when baseball wasn't in season. The hipness of North Beach made it attractive to young people in search of cool, but the star power of its residents made it too expensive for most young people to settle there.

The 50s became the 60s and a proposed freeway that would cut through the Haight-Ashbury district saw property values there plummet. The

¹⁰ Jerry Hopkins, Jim Marshall, and Baron Wolman, *Festival!* (New York, NY: First Collier Books, 1970), 63-66.

neighborhood's elaborately decorated 19th century multi-storied houses were perfect for segmenting-off and renting by the floor or by the room. The ethos of North Beach and its beatniks provided San Francisco with an undeniable counter-culture cool, and the affordability and setting of Haight-Ashbury made it possible for the next generation of "culture-counterers" to find a home just a few miles away from the scene made famous by the Ginsbergs and Kerouacs of the world.

The proposed freeway never came to be, and by 1965 Haight-Ashbury had become a Mecca for the nation's social misfits, and for disaffected youth who were looking for a bohemian enclave. The book *Festival!* was published in 1970 and is a collection of disjointed and unorganized festival-related articles written by Jerry Hopkins of *Rolling Stone* magazine, but regardless of how jumbled the book is, Hopkins affectively paints a picture of the early days of Haight-Ashbury:

Before "hippie" had become a household expletive, before young people with long hair and colorful clothing began to believe their own press notices and began to act like the mass media said they did, back then— young musicians began to collect on warm evenings in Victorian houses in this old section of the city near Golden Gate Park. Guitar players and organists and drummers and singers wandered from house to house, rehearsing together and apart, organizing and folding and reorganizing bands, listening to records and smoking dope. The music of rock groups practicing in garages and behind drawn shades filled the air of the Haight-Ashbury.¹¹

Two of the nation's social misfits who made their way to Haight-Ashbury were Janis Joplin and Chet Helms. Both grew up in Texas, were friends while Joplin was a student at the University of Texas in Austin, and would each be

¹¹ Jerry Hopkins, Jim Marshall, and Baron Wolman, *Festival!* (New York, NY: First Collier Books, 1970), 16.

connected in their own way to the Denver music scene within a few years. Joplin was a singer, and after seeing her perform in Austin, Helms (a Kerouac and Ginsburg enthusiast), convinced her to drop out of school and hitchhike with him to North Beach, San Francisco. This was 1963, and North Beach proved too expensive, so they ended up settling in Haight-Ashbury. They each also began making their marks in what was becoming the San Francisco sound, and inside what would become known as the hippie movement. Joplin became the lead singer of a band called Big Brother and the Holding Company— a group that along with other neighborhood bands like Jefferson Airplane, Country Joe and the Fish, and The Grateful Dead were helping define the Haight-Ashbury, San Francisco sound. Helms formed a creative business commune named The Family Dog that managed local bands (like Joplin's), put on concerts, and threw psychedelic dance parties infused with LSD and copious amounts of marijuana.¹²

Haight-Ashbury, as a cultural entity and community, was thriving, but in those first few years it was not a movement that was spreading very far beyond its physical borders. The Beatles had landed stateside in February of 1964, Beatlemania was sweeping the nation, and Beatle-style rock and roll had become the mainstream for rock and roll and popular music. At this time, much of the country viewed the Fab Four, (with their mop-top haircuts a symbol) as something new and even radical, but changes brought about through Beatlemania paled in comparison to what was happening in Haight-Ashbury.

¹² Dave Laing, "Obituary: Chet Helms," *The Guardian*, June 26, 2005, , accessed September 28, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2005/jun/27/guardianobituaries.artsobituaries>.

At a purely cosmetic level the hairstyles in Haight-Ashbury were much longer and a lot less manicured, and the same could be said for the music. Bands jammed without paying attention to convention, or what was popular, and experimented with all kinds of distorted and psychedelic sounds. Much of this was because of the independence connected to the area, but it was also because of the rampant drug use. "Head drugs" as they were referred to, were everywhere; used in homes but also openly on city streets and in the parks.

The music, the drugs and a prevailing spirit of freedom, peace and love engulfed the Haight-Ashbury neighborhood, and made it an attractive place for young people looking for a community of acceptance and sharing, and who also rejected social norms of the day. The apex of the scene as a local entity occurred on January 14, 1967 in Golden Gate Park and was called "A Gathering of Tribes for a Human Be-In." It was a one-day event advertised only in the local underground newspaper, *The San Francisco Oracle*, and was to be a celebration of the community and what it stood for. Drug activists, Timothy Leary and Ram Dass, spoke to the crowd that was estimated to be between 20,000 and 30,000. Janis Joplin, The Grateful Dead and other bands entertained throughout the day, and complimentary LSD and food were distributed to everyone. Importantly, everything was free¹³

A gathering so large was bound to attract attention, and one as colorful, eccentric, and counter to mainstream American sensibilities as the Human Be-In

¹³ Peter Hartlaub and Sam Whiting, "Reliving the Human Be-In 50 Years Later," *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 11, 2017, , accessed September 28, 2018, <https://www.sfchronicle.com/music/article/Reliving-the-Human-Be-In-50-years-later-10854785.php#photo-12168922>.

was, was destined to make headlines—and it did. For the rest of the winter of 1967 and into the spring, media outlets from all across the country featured stories about the hippies living in the Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco. For older generations, and even many of the country's young people, these tales of unemployed, unkept and drugged-out twenty-somethings who were running away from society, was one that confused, scared or infuriated them. However, for some young people who were receiving the same stories, these hippies were peaceful, community-driven twenty-somethings not confined by antiquated societal norms. Plus they were wearing cool clothes and listening to hip music that sounded unlike anything being played on the radio. Word was spreading and once school was out, hundreds of thousands of young people were gearing up to make their way to San Francisco for the "Summer of Love."¹⁴

In anticipation for this "Summer of Love" the music industry began conspiring how they could capitalize on the moment. What a collection of producers and artists decided upon was to hold the world's first ever popular music festival, and they wanted it to be as close to San Francisco as possible. On May 13, 1967, a song called "San Francisco (Be Sure to Wear Flowers in Your Hair)" was released. It was written by John Phillips of The Mamas and the Papas, but sung and performed by much less famous Scott McKenzie. The song was an instant hit, earned international fame, and became the unofficial anthem for The Summer of Love. However it was not just a beautiful ballad meant to

¹⁴ Hunter S. Thompson, "The 'Hashbury' Is the Capital Of the Hippies; The," *The New York Times*, May 14, 1967, , accessed September 28, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/1967/05/14/archives/the-hashbury-is-the-capital-of-the-hippies-the-hashbury-is-the.html>.

capture the zeitgeist of the season by telling listeners to make sure that they had flowers in their hair as they traveled to San Francisco. It had been written with business in mind.¹⁵

The song was written by Phillips to promote the upcoming popular music festival that he had an ownership stake in. Phillips and a collection of music industry leaders, headed by record producer Lou Adler, wanted to stage a multi-day musical event with a diverse collection of famous artists, but that would also showcase and “exploit the booming San Francisco music scene.” The festival was to be held in the northern California town of Monterrey (which is about 120 miles south of San Francisco along the Pacific Coast Highway) and film rights had been sold to ABC network for \$600,000.¹⁶

Festival organizers viewed the San Francisco/Haight-Ashbury music scene as “the conscience of the movement,” and were reluctant to capitalize financially, so they decided to make the festival free for attendees, and any money leftover from selling the film rights would go to charity. Organizers felt that having an altruistic atmosphere was inline with the Haight-Ashbury scene, and it also made recruitment of performers easy. Nationally and internationally famous artists were booked, and most importantly, all of the major players from San Francisco. Every major record company of the day would attend the festival, and their representatives had blank checks in hand to sign up as many bands as possible who represented the San Francisco movement.¹⁷

¹⁵ John Glatt, *Live at the Fillmore East and West: Getting Backstage and Personal with Rocks Greatest Legends* (Guilford, CT: LP, 2016), 98-101.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

Chet Helms predicted that the festival would be an enormous success, and anticipated that the San Francisco bands that he managed would gain enough notoriety to soon begin touring nationwide. Because of this he took out an advertisement in Billboard Magazine for his company Family Dog Promotions stating that he was looking for bands from around the country who played original songs. His plan was to sign groups who played their own music, and who lived in cities around the country where he hoped his San Francisco bands would soon be traveling through on tour. In theory, when bands like Big Brother and the Holding Company or Jefferson Airplane played a city, Helms would have a quality local band, that he was familiar with, already lined up to serve as an opening act to warm up the crowd for his San Francisco-based traveling musicians. On a day in early June, a little-known concert promoter from Denver walked into Helms's office with a tape in his hand. This young man was responding to the Billboard ad, and his name was Barry Fey.¹⁸

Barry Fey never played a chord or sung a lyric for a Denver audience, but he is arguably the Mile High City's father of rock and roll. For decades Fey brought the biggest names in music to Denver, and without him there would have been no Denver Pop Festival. Fey spent his childhood in New Jersey and his adolescence in Chicago, and after a pre-Vietnam stint in the marines, and a few years of college on the east coast, he found himself an assistant manager at a mom-and-pop clothing store in Rockford, Illinois. The year was 1965, and simply because he found Rockford's social scene boring, he decided to throw a dance

¹⁸ Barry Fey, Steve Alexander, and Rich Wolfe, *Backstage Past* (Phoenix, AZ: Lone Wolfe Press, 2011), 18-19.

on the night of Easter Sunday. For the dance's music, Fey used a connection from his Chicago days and booked a band called Baby Huey and the Babysitters. On the day of the dance, Fey drove to Chicago, picked up the band and delivered them to the Rockford American Legion Hall. The event was a success, it sold-out, and after all the expenses Fey pocketed \$92.50 for himself. He quit his job at the clothing store the next day and a concert promoter was born.

Fey had an instant knack for the concert hustle, and after about a year of booking shows in Rockford, another of his Chicago connections used him to start remotely booking bands to play fraternity parties at universities in Colorado. After successfully booking chart topper Eric Burdon and the Animals to play at the University of Denver in January of 1967 (the same month of Haight-Ashbury's Human Be-In) Fey decided to leave Illinois and move to Denver.

Fey hit the ground running in Denver and continued booking nationally recognizable acts to play at Denver University, Regis College and the University of Colorado in Boulder. He had also become familiar with many of Colorado's rising local bands, and in the late spring of 1967, after coming across an advertisement in Billboard Magazine, he made an appointment to meet Chet Helms of Family Dog Productions in San Francisco.

The meeting took place two weeks before the Monterey Pop Festival and at the time San Francisco was at the center of the music universe. Fey, who had not wanted to appear provincial or amateur was dressed in his most impressive formalwear. His response upon walking into Family Dog Productions was indicative of how far both he, and in a sense Denver, were from hip. "I couldn't

believe what I was seeing. Long-haired people my age were wearing beads, flowers, robes and what looked like bear skin rugs as clothing. My preppy Penn outfit couldn't have been more out of place.”¹⁹ In their meeting, Fey describes Helms as looking like “Jesus,” but despite their differences in appearance, the meeting was a huge success. Not only did Helms like Fey’s tape of Denver band Eighth Penny Matter, but more importantly he liked Fey, and the two laid the groundwork for a business relationship that ultimately made the Denver Pop Festival possible just two years later.

Immediately following his meeting with Helms, Fey and his new bride Cindy (the trip to San Francisco was doubling as their honeymoon) walked to Haight Street, to buy some “Jesus sandals,” and then continued through the neighborhood of the Haight-Ashbury. The Summer of Love had already begun and Barry Fey was amazed by what he saw:

We walked into Golden Gate Park and it was unbelievable with thousands of dancing hippies everywhere. Bands were playing—I think it was either Quicksilver or The Dead—and the Diggers were giving out free food. The Diggers were community activists, although I found out later they were maybe more like community anarchists. Anyway, everybody’s happy, smiling, dancing and diggin’ the music. It was the most beautiful example of mass peace and harmony I’d ever seen.²⁰

That night Barry and Cindy attended a party at the Avalon Ballroom that Helms had invited them to. Family Dog Productions was well known for staging psychedelic, drug-infused dance parties at the historic venue, and it was telling of just how provincial Fey was, that in a music venue full of people tripping on LSD,

¹⁹ Barry Fey, Steve Alexander, and Rich Wolfe, *Backstage Past* (Phoenix, AZ: Lone Wolfe Press, 2011), 19.

²⁰ Ibid.

he reports in his autobiography simply being amazed at seeing black lights and strobe lights for the first time.

The Fey's returned to Denver the next day and Barry immediately went to a record store and picked up a copy of Scott McKenzie's "San Francisco (Be Sure to Wear Flowers in Your Hair)," and he played it over and over. Like so many other young people of his generation the ethos of Haight-Ashbury had grabbed ahold of Fey, and in a line from his autobiography that would prove telling for what was to come, he writes, "I wanted to figure out a way to bring that San Francisco vibe to Denver."²¹

Back in Northern California, organizers of the Monterey Pop Festival were preparing for their big weekend, but dreams of being the first music festival to feature rock and roll since Bob Dylan two summers prior in Newport, were dashed. This was because, one week before Monterey Pop, San Francisco radio station KFRC held a two-day concert called the Magic Mountain Music Festival across the bay at Sydney B. Cushing Amphitheater on Mount Tamalpais in Marin County, California. School buses were provided for 36,000 music fans to make their way to the top of the mountain where there was an amphitheater, where nearly 30 rock bands played for them from 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Unlike Monterey, tickets were sold, but sticking with a similar vibe, bands were not paid, and all of the proceeds from the \$2 tickets went to the Hunters Point Child Care Project charity in nearby Oakland.²²

²¹ Barry Fey, Steve Alexander, and Rich Wolfe, *Backstage Past* (Phoenix, AZ: Lone Wolfe Press, 2011), 20.

²² Jason Newman, "The Untold Story of the First U.S. Rock Festival," *Rolling Stone*, June 25, 2018, , accessed September 28, 2018,

The next weekend, from June 16th through the 18th the Monterey International Pop Music Festival took place without a hitch. 32 bands played over the three afternoons and evenings, and some of them gave iconic performances. It was the first large-scale public performance for Janis Joplin, and her bluesy-wailings wowed both the crowd and her fellow performers. Simon and Garfunkel flew in from across the country and performed a memorable set to close Friday night. Jefferson Airplane played their psychedelic best. The Who were brought in from England and electrified the audience before shocking them when they smashed and destroyed all their instruments. Otis Redding closed Saturday night and opened the eyes and ears of festivalgoers he called “The Love Crowd” to his soulful stylings. Sunday, and the festival, were closed with The Mamas & the Papas with help from Scott McKenzie to, of course, play the summer anthem “San Francisco (Be sure to Wear Flowers in Your Hair.)”

The crowd was certainly treated to a feast of musical talent, but the crowds themselves were also a treat. Leading up to the festival, local police were worried about the size of the crowd that would be invading their quiet coastal town, and they were also suspicious of the types of people that would be making up the crowds. Their worries were quickly put to rest. There were no arrests made that weekend, and not even any reported disturbances. Expecting the worst from the massive influx of young people, the Monterey chief of police, Frank Marinello, had added 100 cops from neighboring counties to his staff of 46, but by Sunday he had sent them all home. Jerry Hopkins of *Rolling Stone*

interviewed Marinello at the festival, and with a piece of burning incense stuck in his hat-band he said of the crowd, “From what I’ve seen this weekend of these so-called hippies, I have begun to like them very much. As a matter of fact, I have made arrangements to be escorted through the Haight-Ashbury district by some of my new-found friends.”²³

The festival had proven to be exactly what the promotional posters and stickers had promised it would be—“Music, Flowers and Love”—and the San Francisco bands were snapped up by record companies. They would soon be spreading that vibe that Barry Fey and so many others had fallen in love with on national tours. However most importantly for the spreading of the vibe was that everything was filmed—the footage just didn’t get disseminated as planned.

Paul McCartney had served on the board of artists who organized the festival, and there had been whispers that the Beatles would make a surprise performance in Monterey. That did not happen but McCartney was still responsible for the weekend’s most memorable performance. It was McCartney who insisted that a young American guitar player and singer, who had been honing his craft in England, be added to the roster of performers. That young American was Jimi Hendrix, and Monterey was the first major American concert for he and his band The Jimi Hendrix Experience. Hendrix’s virtuoso guitar performance left those in attendance wide-eyed and with mouths agape, but not just because no one had ever made an electric guitar sound the way he did, but also because of what he physically did to his Fender Stratocaster. While playing

²³ Jerry Hopkins, Jim Marshall, and Baron Wolman, *Festival!* (New York, NY: First Collier Books, 1970), 37.

the guitar that night in Monterey, Hendrix moved and gyrated so that his guitar was a phallus, and he made love to his music. When he was done he placed his guitar on the stage, set it on fire, and offered it as a sacrifice.²⁴

A few days later, festival producer, Lou Adler, showed film of Hendrix's performance to the head of ABC, Thomas W. Moore, who had wanted to quickly turn the footage into an ABC Movie of the Week, but as Adler recalled in an interview with NPR, "We showed him Jimi Hendrix fornicating with his amp and we said, 'What do you think?' and he said, 'Keep the money and get out.'"²⁵

By any metric the Monterey International Pop festival was a rousing success. Everyone was happy—the artists, the promoters, the attendees, and even the local authorities. A mold had been cast for the pop festival, and thanks to savvy business planning and marketing, a relationship between the San Francisco counterculture and rock music was firmly established. Armed with hours of film footage of the bands and the crowds, the festival producers and documentarian D.A. Pennebaker, now had independence to package that mold and that relationship to the masses however they wanted to.²⁶

One other pop festival took place in 1967. In July the Schaefer Music Festival rocked Central Park in New York City. A total of eight were held across the country in 1968—the first and last taking place at the same venue just

²⁴ *Monterey Pop*, dir. D.A. Pennebaker (United States: Leacock Pennebaker, 1968), DVD.

²⁵ Paul Ingles, "A Look Back At Monterey Pop, 50 Years Later," *NPR*, June 15, 2017, , accessed September 28, 2018, <https://www.npr.org/2017/06/15/532978213/a-look-back-at-monterey-pop-50-years-later>.

²⁶ George McKay, *The Pop Festival: History, Music, Media, Culture* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 55.

outside of Miami, Florida at a horse racing track in Hallandale, and in between those there were four in California and one each in Washington state and Milwaukee, Wisconsin. These festivals had many of the same performers who performed at Monterey, and for the most part stuck to the pop festival script and few headlines were made. Festival rock and roll had a more grown up feel because of the music but also because of the atmosphere. The music at pop festivals, and the accompanying aesthetic, appealed to a more mature 20-something audience who read underground newspapers, listened to college radio, and who thought they had outgrown (or perhaps never thought they were into) stylized and produced music.²⁷ Few of them knew how much thought had gone into making Monterey Pop look and sound exactly like it did, but the pop festival culture had yet to receive mainstream attention, and so the festival vibe—punctuated by the Haight-Ashbury vibe—remained niche. As 1968 was coming to a close, on the day after Christmas, the 78 minute feature film Monterey Pop directed by D.A. Pennebaker, and produced by John Phillips and Lou Adler, opened in theaters across the nation. 1969 was less than a week away, and pop festivals were about to change.

Back in Denver, Barry Fey had been hard at work bringing the San Francisco vibe to the metropolis of the Rocky Mountains. This was whether Denver was ready for it or not. Mere weeks after his pilgrimage to meet Chet Helms in San Francisco, Fey called Family Dog Productions with a business idea. A downtown Denver venue, used for teenager dances had just closed, and

²⁷ Jerry Hopkins, Jim Marshall, and Baron Wolman, *Festival!* (New York, NY: First Collier Books, 1970), 14-24.

Fey thought the space would make an ideal replica of Helms's Avalon Ballroom in San Francisco. The plan was to turn the venue into an adult concert venue, and have national touring bands who were making their way east from California stop in and play Denver. The plan made sense geographically and aligned with Helms's vision of having San Francisco-ready concert experiences around the country. Helms loved the idea and gave his stamp of approval and financial backing to the project. However instead of naming it after the Avalon, downtown Denver's first rock concert club would be named after Helms's production company, and was named The Family Dog.

On September 8th, 1967, just three months after his pledge to bring the San Francisco vibe to Denver, the doors of The Family Dog rock and roll club opened for its first concert. Eight Penny Matter (the band from the demo tape Fey had played for Helms back in San Francisco) was the opening act and from San Francisco, Big Brother and the Holding Company fronted by Janis Joplin headlined, and as Fey put it in his autobiography, "Denver had never scene anything like Janis."²⁸

Helms and Joplin came to Denver a few days before the opening concert and Fey played tour guide. He explains that everywhere they went around Denver, jaws dropped. Joplin rarely didn't have a bottle of Southern Comfort bourbon in one hand, and as Fey describes, "What a mouth! She was a bawdy, vulgar woman and scared me a little, but maybe she had to be that way," and as they ventured around town, "Not only were they gawking at Janis who looked

²⁸ Barry Fey, Steve Alexander, and Rich Wolfe, *Backstage Past* (Phoenix, AZ: Lone Wolfe Press, 2011), 22.

every bit like the hippie rock star she was, there was Chet Helms, who was tall and with those animal skin clothes he wore and the long hair and beard, he looked like Jesus.”²⁹

Despite the gawking from the Denver locals, Joplin’s concert was a success and The Family Dog was up and running. The first six concerts put on were all headlined by rock bands from California. Following Big Brother and the Holding Company there was (in order) Quicksilver Messenger Service, The Grateful Dead, Captain Beefheart, The Doors, and Buffalo Springfield. For these first six shows, the venue was packed, and money was being made, but as Fey quickly found out, not everyone was happy.

The San Francisco bands we brought in to play the Family Dog were also quite a shock to the sensibilities of the Denver establishment. Their long hair, their messages of free love and peace and urging kids to challenge authority didn’t go over well. The Denver District Attorney, Mike McKevitt, and the Denver Police Department weren’t going to stand for it; especially Sgt. John Gray who brought in the narcs and harassed and busted people. On our sixth weekend when Buffalo Springfield was playing, the police did a full-scale raid on the Dog.³⁰

Helms hired a lawyer and sued the Denver Police for harassment. The courts ruled in favor of Helms and an injunction was put in place that kept the police from entering The Family Dog unless they were called for an emergency. This seemed like a win for The Family Dog but rare was the show where a distressed parent wouldn’t call the police with claims of an emergency after learning that their child was at The Family Dog attending a hippie rock and roll show, so battles with the authorities continued.

²⁹ Barry Fey, Steve Alexander, and Rich Wolfe, *Backstage* (Phoenix, AZ: Lone Wolfe Press, 2011), 23.

³⁰ Ibid.

Thanks to consistent police meddling, attendance began to dwindle, the operation began losing money, and Helms pulled out. The name was shortened to simply The Dog. Fey fought to keep the doors open, and some of the musical acts he was able to bring in were amazing —Van Morrison, The Jefferson Airplane, Chuck Berry, Jimi Hendrix (who played an after party, not a billed concert), Cream, and The Byrds were just some—but after only nine months of business, on June 19th, 1968, Janis Joplin returned to Denver to literally finish what she started, and The Dog held its last concert. The operation ended and Fey's days running Denver's first rock and roll club were over.³¹

His rock venue was closed, but Fey continued scheduling and promoting concerts. He had a good relationship with Tom Currigan, the Denver Mayor, and for the remainder of 1968 was able to arrange concerts to be held in downtown Denver at Auditorium Arena and outside the city at the world famous Red Rocks. In February of 1969, Fey held a concert in Auditorium Arena for the band Iron Butterfly. After the show that night, some downtown Denver windows were smashed and some stores were vandalized. Armed with nothing more than circumstantial evidence, the Denver political leadership blamed the criminal activity on concert attendees and responded sharply. Currigan had stepped down two months previously, and new Denver Mayor Bill McNichols effectively outlawed rock and roll. There was to be no more rock concerts of any size in the venues in and near downtown Denver and there was to be none at Red Rocks.

³¹ Barry Fey, Steve Alexander, and Rich Wolfe, *Backstage Past* (Phoenix, AZ: Lone Wolfe Press, 2011), 26.

Barry Fey was a rock and roll concert promoter who lived in Denver, but there were no longer venues available to him that were suitable to hold rock and roll concerts. He had to get creative.

After the Iron Butterfly Show, I didn't put on another concert in Denver for about four months. I decided to put on something called The Denver Pop Festival, outdoors, at Mile High Stadium, where the NFL Denver Broncos played. Now, I didn't really know quite what a pop festival was, but I picked out three dates: June 28, 29 and 30, 1969 and started calling groups.³²

The year was 1969 and Barry Fey was not alone in his idea to hold a popular music festival. D.A. Pennebaker's Monterey Pop was doing well in theaters nationwide and Forbes magazine had recently run an issue with the music industry as its cover story. Popular music had become an industry. Record sales now created revenues that topped a billion dollars and concert grosses added roughly another \$500 million. Less than two years from their American debut at Monterey (where like the other acts they performed for free) The Jimi Hendrix Experience was the highest paid act in the world, now receiving up to \$100,000 per show. Very quickly, what was niche had become mainstream, and the money had gotten very big. Promoters around the country were looking to capitalize, and for many, their idea was to hold their own version of what had taken place in Northern California back in the Summer of Love of 1967.^{33 34}

³² Barry Fey, Steve Alexander, and Rich Wolfe, *Backstage Past* (Phoenix, AZ: Lone Wolfe Press, 2011), 39.

³³ Thomas MacCluskey, "The Current State of Music in U.S.: A Thriving Art, but Classics Decline," *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver), June 1, 1969.

³⁴ Jerry Hopkins, *The Jimi Hendrix Experience* (New York, NY: Arcade Publ., 2014), 197.

Beginning in April and going through December, pop festivals were scheduled across the country, and very few of the summer weekends didn't have one lined up, but 1969 was much different from 1967 and the Summer of Love, and that quickly became apparent at these pop festivals.

The April 5th, 1969 issue of *Rolling Stone* magazine ran with a cover page title that read, "American Revolution 1969." Joining that title on the cover was a picture of a policeman wearing riot gear—a helmet with mask, body armor and a club. It was a special issue with 18 pages devoted to reports and editorials written about the civil unrest that was sweeping the nation. As it is today, *Rolling Stone* was primarily a music magazine, but this special section did not involve the music world. The coverage focused on the protests and demonstrations relating to civil rights issues and the war in Vietnam that were sweeping the nation and taking over city streets and universities.³⁵ However, a few days earlier, on April 1st and 2nd, the year's first pop music festival had taken place. It had a star-studded lineup and brought out thousands of fans. It also brought out police in riot gear. For the rest of 1969 the issues of *Rolling Stone* continued to report stories of police clashing with young people, but from this point on the violence was mixed with music.

The two-night Palm Springs Pop Festival and San Andreas Boogie was 1969's first pop festival. It was headlined by Canned Heat and the Ike and Tina Turner Revue, and Jerry Hopkins of *Rolling Stone* was there to cover the action.

³⁵ "American Revolution 1969," *Rolling Stone*, April 5, 1969, 1-18.

From his page-one article that appeared in the April 19, 1969 issue of the magazine title, "Vacationing in Palm Springs: A Real Lark:"

Thousands of vacationing students battled with police here Easter week, leaving two students hospitalized with gunshot wounds and dozens of others injured, some seriously. Focal point of the violence was this resort town's first (and probably last) pop festival.³⁶

Palm Springs was used to springtime visitors. It was an annual ritual for California college students on Spring Break to head to the conservative desert town for a few days to, "lie in the sun, drink beer, smoke dope, and grab chicks." With a dual mission of capitalizing on the pop music craze, and also wanting to keep thousands of invading young people off of the streets, the city organized a festival that would hold 12,000 attendees. Maybe it was because many of the beaches in Los Angeles at the time were closed because of a recent oil spill, or maybe because of the pop festival, but 20,000 to 30,000 young people descended upon Palm Springs and this unexpected amount put local authorities on edge. On the first night of the festival, cops clashed with young people when a legion of gatecrashers stormed the venue and climbed the fences. The next night the gatecrashers were back, and this time tried forcing their way in by breaking down the partitions keeping them out. One person even drove a car through a wall. Police responded with force, and violence spilled out into the surrounding area. In response to the police reaction, a 21-year-old College of Marin student named Ray Gilberti, who had gotten into the festival said, "That's ridiculous, man. I think it's a shame the way they are reacting. We're not harming anyone."

³⁶ Jerry Hopkins, "Vacationing in Palm Springs: A Real Lark," *Rolling Stone*, April 19, 1969, 1.

Perhaps a coincidence, but perhaps not, the College of Marin campus lies just five miles from where the Magic Mountain Festival had taken place less than two years earlier just north of San Francisco.³⁷

Cops and concert-goers continued to clash throughout the spring. There was reported violence at shows in Madison, Wisconsin, Los Angeles, California, and Dallas, Texas. Summer arrived and the problems continued. Local schools had just gone on summer vacation when the Newport 69 Pop Festival, which was convolutedly named after The Newport Jazz and Folk festivals, roared into the suburban San Fernando Valley, outside of Los Angeles. From June 20 through 22, 200,000 ticket holders passed through the gates at the Devonshire Downs racetrack, making it double the nearest sized pop festival to date.

Rolling Stone reported that the first two days felt like “attending a high school reunion in a closet” but there were only minor occurrences of gatecrashing. However early Sunday afternoon “all hell broke loose,” and carried on late into the night. Outside the festival, residents of the residential suburb, called police complaining that hippies were swimming in backyard swimming pools and sleeping in flower beds. Two nearby gas stations and a grocery store reported over \$10,000 in damages, and just outside the festival gates, would-be attendees battled with police by throwing rocks and bottles. Police responded with chokeholds and vicious clubbings. Inside the festival, canopies built to keep attendees comfortable were dismantled and burned. Giant bonfires were built where the astroturf was torn up. Two police helicopters passed over and circled

³⁷ Jerry Hopkins, "Vacationing in Palm Springs: A Real Lark," *Rolling Stone*, April 19, 1969, 1.

with regularity and drowned out a sound system that was already inadequate for the size of the show.³⁸

Not only were the police and attendees upset but so were the performers. Despite being paid \$100,000 for his performance, Jimi Hendrix was upset and gave a listless performance. He did not like the response to his performance and insulted the audience while on stage, calling them a “teeny-bopper crowd.”

High ticket prices (\$6 for a single day with an advanced purchase, \$7 if bought at the door, or \$15 for a three-day pass) said *Rolling Stone*, were to blame for the chaos. In their final report, Northridge, California police “concluded that ‘ultra-liberal organizations’ and at least one person ‘reported to have Communist connections’ had incited the riot.”³⁹

Looking for further reasons for so much unrest, Jerry Hopkins of *Rolling Stone* interviewed a gatecrasher who failed to give his name but called himself one of the ‘ringleaders.’ “I never pay to go to these things, man. Why should I? I don’t support these guys. I’ve been to every festival there is and I never paid to get into one of them.” It’s impossible to know for sure who “these guys” were that the gatecrasher didn’t support, but my guess is that rather than blaming some combination of artist or promoter, the young man simply didn’t respect the entity of an organized festival. When informed by Hopkins that it was attitudes and actions like his that were causing festivals to be seen across the country with

³⁸ Jerry Hopkins, “Crashers, Cops, Producers Spoil Newport ‘69,” *Rolling Stone*, July 26, 1969, 1 & 6.

³⁹ David Wharton, “The Lost Love-In : It Was the Woodstock They Forgot: Newport ‘69, Los Angeles’ Own Weekend of Music, Masses and Mayhem,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 06, 1989, accessed September 28, 2018, http://articles.latimes.com/1989-08-06/entertainment/ca-315_1_los-angeles.

worry, Hopkins reports that, “He told me to go fuck myself and walked off.” When all was said and done, despite making over \$750,000 in ticket sales, the festival lost \$150,000, and resulted in 75 arrests and roughly 300 injured people—including 15 policeman. Some of those injuries were captured by news cameras, and the carnage aired and stunned news audiences that night on multiple networks.⁴⁰

News of the Newport 69 disaster quickly made its way across the country, including to Denver. In the Monday morning issue of the *Denver Post* a picture of a young man tangling with two police officers and an adjoining article from the Associated Press took up a large section of the June 26th issue. The two policemen in the picture are wearing riot gear and one is leading the young man by the arm and the other by his hair. The title of the article reads, “100 Injured: Rock Festival Scene of Clash.” The report blamed the violence on people wanting to avoid the admittance charge, but there were no reports of festival goers saying that cost was an issue. It also vastly erred in its reporting of the crowd—stating that there were only 58,000 in attendance. There was no mention of the musical performances, and no mention of the upcoming Denver Pop Festival, which was only days away.⁴¹

By the time summer came around Barry Fey had already been at work for months preparing for his Denver Pop Festival. The initial budget was \$120,000 and he initially hoped it would be easy to make a substantial profit, but as the

⁴⁰ Jerry Hopkins, “Crashers, Cops, Producers Spoil Newport '69,” *Rolling Stone*, July 26, 1969, 1 & 6.

⁴¹ “Rock Festival Scene of Clash,” *Denver Post*, June 23, 1969.

festival approached, costs were rising and his hopes were fading. One problem he wasn't having was attracting talented acts to fill the lineup. Despite only a few years in the business, Fey had accumulated a large network of contacts inside the music industry. One of these insiders was David Geffen, and once Geffen heard about the festival, he approached Fey with an idea for a headline act to closeout the weekend on Sunday night. Two members from Buffalo Springfield, Stephen Stills and Neil Young, one from The Byrds, David Crosby, and one from The Hollies, Graham Nash, had formed a supergroup with a combination of their last names as the band moniker. Geffen was representing them and he told Fey, "They've got an album coming out in a few weeks, Barry. Your concert will be the worldwide debut of Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young. It will be great timing."⁴²

Fey booked Friday night's headliner, Iron Butterfly for \$25,000, and spent \$30,000 for Creedence Clearwater Rival to closeout Saturday night. Because Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young didn't have an album yet (and therefore no songs being played on the radio) Fey was able to get them for only \$10,000. Through April and May, Fey filled out the rest of the lineup, and got the sound and lighting set up. Fey thought it would be silly to bring in all these top groups, and not have top sound and lighting, so he paid \$30,000 for Chip Monck and his team to handle production. Monck was already well known from producing at Monterey Pop and would become famous after serving as announcer at Woodstock.

June arrived and there was still no album from Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young. Despite each of the four musicians being well known, Fey felt that he

⁴² Barry Fey, Steve Alexander, and Rich Wolfe, *Backstage Past* (Phoenix, AZ: Lone Wolfe Press, 2011), 39.

couldn't risk having a headliner who didn't have a radio hit, so he called Geffen and reneged on the deal, and the new supergroup was removed from the lineup. In desperate need for a big name, Fey called up his friend Jimi Hendrix. The going rate for The Jimi Hendrix Experience was \$100,000 but because of their close relationship Hendrix agreed to perform at the Denver Pop Festival for half of that. Fey had promoted both small concerts that Jimmy had already done in Denver and each time he and Fey had shared time away from the hustle and the crowds, and had formed a genuine friendship. A few years later, Fey was even an invited guest at Hendrix's funeral.

Once the bands were all set, Fey hired The Goldstein Organization to handle the official press release. It read:

From: The Goldstein Organization, Inc.
200 West 57th Street
New York, NY 10019
(212) LT 1-3800

Denver Pop Festival Presents \$250,000 Worth of Talent June 27, 28, 29

Over a quarter of a million dollars of talent will be presented at the Denver Pop Festival being held at Mile High Stadium. The Festival begins on Friday, June 27 and continues through Sunday, June 29. The three-day festival is being produced by Barry Fey, President of Feyline Productions, Inc.

The following groups will perform: The Jimi Hendrix Experience; The Mother of Invention; Sweetwater; Iron Butterfly; 3 Dog Night; Big Mamma Thornton; Creedence Clearwater Revival; Tim Buckley; Crosby Stills & Nash; Johnny Winter; Joe Cocker; Taj Mahal; Aum; Zephyr and the Rev. Cleophus Robinson.

Backstage will be such veterans of the Monterey and Miami Pop Festivals as Bill Hanley providing the sound system, and Chip Monck designing the lights. This promises to be a heavyweight production with the top stars in the pop field.

Hours for the festival will be 5pm to Midnight all three days. Tickets for the event are \$6 for one day and \$15 for all three days. Checks or money orders for advance tickets should be sent to the Denver Pop Festival, Box 306, Denver, Colorado 80201. For further press material, contact Goldstein Organization, 200 West 57th Street, New York, NY.⁴³

The *Denver Post* failed to pickup the story, and ran no promotional copy, but on June 14th both *Rolling Stone* and the *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver's other leading newspaper) ran stories echoing the press release from The Goldstein Organization. Neither of the pieces were paid-for advertisements—the *Rolling Stone* story appeared in the “Festivals” section and the one in the *Rocky Mountain News* took up a tiny, understated piece of real estate in the Arts section next to a story about the recently released Hollywood film “Oliver.” The two stories are straightforward and factual with simple information. There are abbreviated lists of performers, location details, prices (\$6 for one-day tickets or \$15 for the entire weekend), and details as to how to obtain a ticket. The only apparent difference is that for advance ticketing the *Rocky Mountain News* told readers to send in checks or money orders, and *Rolling Stone* told readers to send in their “bread” to the appropriate post office box.^{44 45}

In the weeks leading up to the festival, neither paper paid much attention to the upcoming musical extravaganza. Fey was mostly reliant upon radio advertisements, especially from KIMN the local AM radio powerhouse that held a

⁴³ The Goldstein Organization, Inc., “Denver Pop Festival Presents \$250,000 Worth of Talent June 27, 28, 29,” news release, New York, NY, 1969 (Goldstein Organization).

⁴⁴ Feyline Productions, “Denver Pop Festival,” advertisement, *Rolling Stone*, June 14, 1969.

⁴⁵ “Pop Festival Opens June 27,” *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver), June 14, 1969.

remarkable 24 ratings share in Denver at the time.⁴⁶ Of the two large daily newspapers the *Rocky Mountain News* paid more attention to music than the *Denver Post* did. *The Rocky Mountain News* had specific music reporters, and had regular music reports inside a weekly section dedicated to music called “Music Musings.” Weeks before the festival, their lead music critic, Thomas MacCuskey, interviewed Fey about the Denver Pop Festival for weekly “Music Musings” that wouldn’t run until Sunday of the festival. In it MacCuskey writes specifically of Fey, “His concerts in Denver have broken most of the previous house records. The Denver Pop Festival is the largest production he has ever headed, and it’s the greatest explosion of talent ever assembled in the area.” He asked Fey for a statement about the production and the young concert promoter responded:

It took years of experience both on the road and in Denver before I could even dream of putting on a Festival like this one. Everything has fallen into place. I think we know what the kids want here, and I think we are giving them even more. We are giving them not only what they want, but what we think they should want—groups that no one knows about that soon everyone will. This is my type of festival. I think it will be everyone’s.⁴⁷

On the Monday before the festival both large Denver-based daily newspapers addressed the upcoming festival. *The Denver Post* handed the assignment to their freshly hired, and first ever music reporter, James Pagliasotti. The 23-year-old was the youngest reporter at *The Post*, and was their only male employee with long hair. He had been hired just a month before and had been

⁴⁶ Barry Fey, Steve Alexander, and Rich Wolfe, *Backstage Past* (Phoenix, AZ: Lone Wolfe Press, 2011), 21.

⁴⁷ Thomas MacCluskey, “Hendrix Closing Pop Festival Sunday,” *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver), June 29, 1969.

charged with covering all things related to youth culture.⁴⁸ For the *Rocky Mountain News*, Thomas MacCluskey handled their preview. He was nearing 40 and along with being well into his career in musical criticism—he cranked out over 1,600 music reviews and columns over his career at the RMN—MacCluskey was also a faculty member at the University of Colorado where he taught music.^{49 50}

Pagliasotti formatted his breakdown by choosing to provide snippets of information on the bands, and highlighting those who had recently released albums. His preview is titled “Performers Due at Denver Pop Festival Busy at Record Racks.”⁵¹ In-line with the *Rocky Mountain News*’s more conversational and editorial style, MacCluskey’s report is styled as an explainer to the ignorant. He introduces the piece by saying:

This discussion is for all of you parents out there whose offspring are going to the Denver Summer Pop Festival... The purpose of the discussion is to give you an idea of this old man’s impression of the music the young people are going to hear... and since the stereos that you gave them for Christmas (which you wish were broken now) have been blasting out all these sounds generated by groups with incredible names... I thought maybe you’d like to know a little more as to what it’s all about.⁵²

⁴⁸ Dylan Owens, "High Notes in The Denver Post's 125 Years of Music Coverage," *The Denver Post*, October 18, 2017, accessed September 28, 2018, <https://www.denverpost.com/2017/10/15/denver-post-music-coverage/>.

⁴⁹ Electa Draper, "Colorado News," *Denver Entertainment: The Denver Post*, March 12, 2001, accessed September 28, 2018, <http://extras.denverpost.com/news/news0312f.htm>.

⁵⁰ Thomas MacCluskey, "Rock in Its Elements," *Music Educators Journal* 56, no. 3 (November 1, 1969): , <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/002743216905600305>.

⁵¹ James Pagliasotti, "Performers Due at Denver Pop Festival Busy at Record Racks," *The Denver Post*, June 22, 1969.

⁵² Thomas MacCluskey, "What Summer Pop Festival's All About," *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver), June 22, 1969.

Pagliasotti writes that if record sales are to judge for music quality, then Denver will be treated to a fine display, and his reviews are of the bands with recent album releases are for the most part positive. He concludes his review stating, "All in all, look for a lot of good music to come out of Mile High Stadium June 27-29, and afterward, pick up some of these very groovy albums. You won't be sorry you did."

MacCluskey is also positive. Along with describing many of the artists as "first-rate musicians," he uses plaudits such as inventive, imaginative and uninhibited to compliment the artists set to play. He also compliments Barry Fey on the diversity of sound that will come from bands, describing the roster with phrases such as "well established heavies," "urban blues," "countrified," and "funky-bluesy."

The local newspapers were preparing Denver for the festival, and local officials were getting ready too. Judging by advanced ticket sales, predictions were that at least 20,000 people were expected to descend upon Mile High Stadium for the three day event, and a large percentage would be traveling from out of town. City leaders correctly predicted that the majority of festival goers would be young and would have limited funds for overnight accommodations, and did not want them taking matters into their own hands for where they would sleep after each night of the festival.

To prevent festival attendees from squatting on private property or defying a strict city ordinance that prevented use of city parks after 11p.m., Mayor Bill McNichols decided to set aside a patch of open city land as a free campsite. The

piece of land was an open field three miles away from Mile High Stadium at the corner of West 6th Avenue and Federal Boulevard across the street from Barnum Park. Through what the mayor's office called "private sources," a water truck and portable toilets would be on hand for campers, and the spot was strategically placed on a bus line that could deliver campers near the festival.

The Denver Post covered the decision to hold the campsite and sent a staff reporter to the mayor's office for statements, and then to the campsite after its first night of existence. Beneath a picture of the campsite and a picture of the group of young people sitting in a circle, one wearing a bandana tied around his head and a shirt with the words 'Denver or Bust' across it is the story. Inside was is the quote, "A statement from the mayor's office said 'concern for the health of the individuals and the community' prompted the city to cooperate in furnishing the campsite."⁵³ That concern, wrote the author, was not just prompted out of goodwill towards out-of-town guests, but also because of a national activist group that had descended upon Denver at the same time as the festival.

The American Liberation Front (ALF) were a national organization that protested the Vietnam war and domestic oppression, and had organized a "Freedom Week" to be held five miles east of Mile High Stadium in Denver's expansive city park. Leaders from the group strategically planned for their events to begin the first night of the Denver Pop Festival and end a week later on July the 4th. Rumors were abound that ALF members would try to recruit impressionable festival goers to not only make their way to the ALF events, but

⁵³ "City Provides Pop Festival Camp Site," *The Denver Post*, June 27, 1969.

also to defy the city ordinance and campout in City Park. It was the Denver Post's opinion that the city-sponsored campsite was as much an attempt to undermine the ALF as it was a goodwill gesture towards out-of-towners without funds for accommodations. Regardless, after interviewing some campers, the Denver Post reported, "Some were disgruntled about the weedy surroundings, but others were satisfied... One long-haired youth from San Antonio, Texas, praised the city for setting aside land and facilities for the youths. 'It wouldn't happen in Texas,' he said 'They'd just arrest everybody.'"⁵⁴

Friday June 27th arrived and Barry Fey was ready for the festival. He had wanted to keep the costs close to \$120,000 but they had reached \$300,000. To make up the difference he mortgaged everything he owned and took out loans—not with banks, but with a man named Nate Feld, who in his autobiography, Fey refers to simply as "a local beer dealer." However, according to Fey, it wasn't the money that had him on the edge of disaster but rather the weather. Fey stated, "Starting in May of 1969, it rained just about everyday. It was a monsoon that kept pouring in June. The week of the festival it poured... [If it rained on any of the festival days] I'd be out of business, out of everything. But on Thursday, the day before opening day, I was listening to the radio and the forecast said, 'zero percent chance of rain Friday, zero percent chance of rain Saturday, 5 percent chance of rain Sunday.'"⁵⁵

⁵⁴"City Provides Pop Festival Camp Site," *The Denver Post*, June 27, 1969.

⁵⁵ Barry Fey, Steve Alexander, and Rich Wolfe, *Backstage Past* (Phoenix, AZ: Lone Wolfe Press, 2011), 42.

The forecast was correct and Friday was sunny and clear. Thousands of tickets had been sold and were continuing to sell. Flocks of music enthusiasts traveled from all over to the Denver Pop Festival, and the Denver Pop Festival was ready for them. Friday's lineup, in order of appearance: Big Mama Thornton, The Flock, Three Dog Night, Frank Zappa and the Mothers of Invention, and Iron Butterfly, and the gates opened at 6:00 P.M.

The sun was still out and its rays covered the stadium when Big Mama Thornton grabbed the microphone and kicked off the first annual Denver Pop Festival. The veteran blues singer was forty-two years old, and had been performing for audiences for more than two decades, but not many like this. For the vast majority of her career, she had sung for rhythm-and-blues audiences, not pop and rock crowds. However, thanks to Janis Joplin covering Thornton's *Ball and Chain*, if she was not known to the audience, at least one of her songs was known well by most. Staying true to the eclecticism of the moment, Thornton took the stage wearing a ten-gallon hat and complimentary cowboy boots, a western shirt and slacks. She warmed up the crowd with a soul-filled, blues-heavy set that included "Ball and Chain" before ending with what James Pagliasotti of the *Denver Post* reported as, "The heaviest version of 'Wade in the Water' I've ever heard. Along with singing throughout her performance, Thornton also played the harmonica and took a turn on the drums. The *Rocky Mountain News*'s Alan Cunningham (filling in on the day for Thomas MacCluskey) was a bit taken aback by her "stomping" and "whooping," but approved of the performance—especially the female piano player "who really plays mean blues."

It was a successful opening act for the weekend, and as Pagliasotti said in his review, "Her routine was both loud and shouting, and slow and easy, just what was needed to 'get it cookin,' as she said."⁵⁶ ⁵⁷

Next up was The Flock, a seven member band out of Chicago. The band consisted of musicians playing traditional rock and roll instruments like electric guitar, electric bass guitar and drums, but there was also two saxophonists, a trumpeter and to the welcomed surprise of both Cunningham and Pagliasotti an electric violinist. The longhaired and shirtless violinist, named Jerry Goodman, began their performance with a prolonged violin solo which Cunningham commented, "included surprisingly little deliberate put-on screeching sounds, and the crowd actually dug it."⁵⁸

The rest of their performance was what Pagliasotti called the "freakiest sounds of the night," but he meant that in the most positive of ways because he backed that statement claiming that, "Although they rely heavily on amplification and feedback, The Flock has perfect feel for the texture of their music, particularly in the way they juxtapose the rhythm and brass sections with the guitar-violin duo."

Cunningham was in agreement with Pagliasotti, and gave a praise-laden summation of the band from the Windy City. "Their musicianship was excellent and often acutely swinging," he wrote. "It looked as though the seven musicians

⁵⁶ Alan Cunningham, "Mile High Stadium Hurlled Into Orbit by Pop Festival," *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver), June 28, 1969.

⁵⁷ James Pagliasotti, "If One 'Digs' a Pop Festival--Then That's What Happened," *The Denver Post*, June 28, 1969.

⁵⁸ Alan Cunningham, "Mile High Stadium Hurlled Into Orbit by Pop Festival," *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver), June 28, 1969.

were living an experience of utter, total self-expression, with their egos saturated in satisfaction and all possible hostilities thoroughly vented.”

It is unknown whether Cunningham was prone to hyperbole in his writing, but he was the author of a piece that ran earlier in the month that vilified marijuana and aimed to shame those who used it, and it seems that for someone who openly pined for the more conservative days of his youth he was left gobsmacked by The Flock and the overall moment. He wrote of their performance that it, “does things for the psyche of an old duffer with a pencil and of all things!—wearing a necktie... And the sum total effect of it all was, somehow, the most sensuous thing I ever saw a bunch of grown men doing in my life.” ⁵⁹

Cunningham doesn’t mention in his piece whether or not he stuck around for the other bands that performed that night, but he doesn’t provide reviews for them. From the final paragraph of his review of the festival’s opening day, it can be assumed that he left at sunset which would have been near the end of The Flock’s set. Regardless, from that paragraph, it can also be assumed that he had experienced something close to what Barry Fey had felt two years prior when he visited San Francisco for the first time. He waxes poetically:

Peach-colored clouds drifted happily across the Denver sky, a faint moon looked across the Denver skyline, and the brightly painted stadium stands blended with multi-colored sights of bell-bottomed pants, T-shirts, Indian head bands and buckskin coats. It was a psychedelic electronic rainbow of sight and sound. ⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Alan Cunningham, "Mile High Stadium Hurlled Into Orbit by Pop Festival," *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver), June 28, 1969.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

Cunningham's night was apparently over but the festival rocked on. The third band to take the stage was 3 Dog Night from Los Angeles. Pagliasotti called their performance exciting and said that it surprised him because he did not care for their album. He was also surprised that their drummer spent much of the act playing with his bare hands rather than with sticks.

As the night wore on it was becoming clear that not everyone was having the same euphoric experience that Bill Cunningham had had. Hundreds of what the Rocky Mountain News referred to as "hippishly-dressed young people" were milling around the parking lot and gathering around the gates. They were upset that the music had been monetized and that to get in they needed to purchase a ticket. Fey blamed their feelings on simple anti-establishmentarianism, and he was neither happy about them showing up nor sympathetic to their feelings. He wrote in his autobiography of them:

So, from the first night of the festival, hundreds gathered outside the gates and protested against having to pay to hear the music. They said it was their music and they weren't going to pay for it. What bullshit. I paid over \$300,000 so they could hear their music!⁶¹

As 3 Dog Night wound down their set, the first sign that all was not well inside started to emerge. The band had a planned stunt built-in to their act that was not well received by the police. During their last song, singer Corey Wells would climb to the top of his organ while smoke from a smoke bomb rose to cover him as he sung. As band member Chuck Negron remembered, it wasn't well received at the Denver Pop Festival. "Cory Wells got on top of the Hammon

⁶¹ Barry Fey, Steve Alexander, and Rich Wolfe, *Backstage Past* (Phoenix, AZ: Lone Wolfe Press, 2011), 42.

Organ as the smoke engulfed him. The police attacked our roadie who was in charge of the effect and dragged him off the stage... They thought we were starting a fire. Things were getting tense.”⁶²

Next up on that opening Friday night was Frank Zappa and his band Mothers of Invention. Zappa was not just a musical performer, but a showman who not only pandered to the crowd, he also made them part of the show as well. However, theatrics aside, Pagliasotti went out of his way to make certain that his readers knew of Zappa and the Mothers musical abilities. “Frank Zappa is so talented a composer that his truly outstanding guitar work is often overlooked,” wrote Pagliasotti, and continued, “The whole group in fact, is nothing short of incredible. They clown, tease, fool around, and still play some of the most complex progressions in rock music today without missing a note.”⁶³

In-between songs, and sometimes during them, Zappa enlisted the thousands in attendance to join in his revelry. During the Mothers’ set, the unrest outside the gates was growing and it was spilling into the stadium to the audience as well as the paid peacekeepers. The police officers, and private security on hand were stirring, and with a glint in his eye Zappa played a song about undercover cops called “The Heat’s Out Every Night.” As the show progressed, the scene was tense but under control, and a group of 25 helmeted law officers made their way to a box section where the stadium seats met the lawn. Zappa dedicated the next song, “Browning Out,” to the boys in blue and

⁶² Marley Brant, *Join Together: Forty Years of the Rock Music Festival* (New York, NY: Backbeat, 2008), 38.

⁶³ James Pagliasotti, "If One 'Digs' a Pop Festival--Then That's What Happened," *The Denver Post*, June 28, 1969.

told the audience before beginning the song, “The cops are here to protect you from you.”⁶⁴

Zappa and the Mothers continued their performance to the delight of many. Chuck Negron of 3 Dog Night had stuck around to watch their set and he was equally amazed at how captivated the crowd was and also by how much control Zappa had over them. Zappa began playing a game with the crowd similar to “The Wave,” that is done at sporting events—only instead of audience members strategically rising from their seats and lifting their arms in a sectional progression that visually resembled a wave, he commanded them to strategically sound-out the words “shit” and “fuck” in elongated sounds so that the same people who uttered a demonstrative “shhhh” or “fffff” sound finished the stunt with a rousing “t” and “ck.” “It was funny and amazing how he controlled the audience and had them almost totally in sync,” remembered Negron. He continued in his reflection, “I believe it was the start of the police fearing they were losing control of the festival because I noticed their reaction of fear while observing Zappa and his control over thousands of people. They [the cops] were on alert after that.”⁶⁵

The final performers of the night were Iron Butterfly, and while their performance neither stood out nor made news, the action surrounding it did. Pagliasotti commented that their “stage personalities and other non-musical entities,” outshone the band’s heavy rock music, but that did not keep the crowd from making noise of its own. Reports are conflicting, both *Rolling Stone* and the

⁶⁴ Jim Fouratt, “Denver Festival: Mace with Music,” *Rolling Stone*, July 26, 1969.

⁶⁵ Marley Brant, *Join Together: Forty Years of the Rock Music Festival* (New York, NY: Backbeat, 2008), 38.

Rocky Mountain News reported that the first bit of crowd unrest took place during the performance from The Flock, but the *Denver Post* reported that it happened in the intermission between the Mothers of Invention and Iron Butterfly. This first reported incident was of a teenaged boy, so taken by the moment, that he “stripped naked and pranced around the stands.”⁶⁶

Two eager policemen chased and corralled the emancipated youth before using chemical mace to subdue him. Those in the crowd who witnessed the event cheered wildly both during the chase and while the young man was taken away. Shortly after the nude youth was led from the stadium, the protestors outside made their move. In a swift coordinated move, a section of chainlink fence was pulled up near the South entrance to the stadium and non-ticket holders began flowing into the stadium. John Whitworth took a picture of the gatecrashing and it appeared on the front page of the next day's *Rocky Mountain News*. More than 100 people successfully squeezed under the fence before the outnumbered corp of security guards could repair the fence.⁶⁷

Amid the chaos of the gatecrashing a few hundred seated spectators left the stadium stands and surged onto the field and moved towards the stage. Authorities turned on a set of lawn sprinklers to create a barrier between the stage and the crowd. The *Denver Post* reported, “Iron Butterfly, the musical group on stage at the time continued performing as several Denver Police and

⁶⁶ Jim Fouratt, "Denver Festival: Mace with Music," *Rolling Stone*, July 26, 1969.

⁶⁷ John Whitworth, 100 Crashers Join 8,000 at Pop Festival, June 28, 1969, Denver Public Library, Denver.

the show's promoters firmly but tactfully kept order from vantage points on stage."⁶⁸

Despite the unrest, the disturbances were described by the newspapers and the authorities as only minor. Four arrests were made inside the stadium and the *Denver Post* provided details of the incidents in a way that both shows the conservative nature of the era and just how far some people traveled to attend.

Those arrested were identified by police as Clifford Walter McCafferty (the streaker), 19, of 975 Bannock St., indecent exposure and investigation of illegal use of dangerous drugs; James Gary McCoy, 21, of Columbus, Ohio, investigation of using filthy language, disturbance and interference; Joe Duane Bosserman, 20, Gallup, N.M., investigation of illegal possession of marijuana; and a 17-year-old Littleton youth jailed for investigation of illegal possession of dangerous drugs.⁶⁹

Overall the first night of the festival was viewed as a huge success. Iron Butterfly wrapped their show on time at midnight, and the crowd began filing out of the stadium. The exiting festival goers were for the most part orderly, but just outside the gates there was one last incident. While the public address system serenaded the departing masses with an ironic and foreboding song by the Rolling Stones, *Rolling Stone* the magazine reported, "A flying bottle hit a cop's helmet, (and) a chase resulted in the arrest of a zonked-out black dressed in an orange jumpsuit. Sirens blared while the P.A. system played "Street Fighting Man" from the stage, and the scene was set for Saturday."⁷⁰

The temperature had only exceeded 90 degrees once all year (when a high of 92 degrees was recorded on June 5th) and on Saturday the 28th it

⁶⁸ Fred Gillies, "14,000 at Opening of Pop Festival," *The Denver Post*, June 28, 1969.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Jerry Hopkins, "Crashers, Cops, Producers Spoil Newport '69," *Rolling Stone*, July 26, 1969.

reached a scalding 95. For the second night of the festival the temperature was high and so were the nerves around Mile High Stadium. Again the music began at 6 P.M., and again there were angry young people outside protesting that the festival had entrance fees. The difference from Friday to Saturday, according to *Rolling Stone* reporter Jim Fouratt, was that the size of the group protesting, and also that the number of uniformed police officers had mightily increased. Also, instead of wandering around from entrance to entrance looking for a security soft spot, as they had done the night before, Saturday night the protesters were gathered on a small hill just outside the stadium positioned to where they could hear the music.

In his article titled, "Denver Festival: Mace with Music," Fouratt called the protesters the "hill people" and claimed that their numbers had "multiplied tenfold" from what they were the night before—hundreds of protesters had become thousands.⁷¹ But the Denver Police had anticipated their multiplication of numbers and had increased their numbers too. Festival promoter, Michael Lang, came to Denver on a scouting mission as he prepared for his upcoming August festival—Woodstock. He arrived in Denver just in time to see the opening of the second night, and he described his entrance in his autobiography:

By the time I arrived on Saturday, there were several squads of police—maybe 150 men in full riot gear—placed in the stands to the left of the stage. I guess they thought a show of force would serve as a deterrent to the gate-crashers and protesters, but I had a feeling it would do just the opposite.⁷²

⁷¹ Jim Fouratt, "Denver Festival: Mace with Music," *Rolling Stone*, July 26, 1969.

⁷² Michael Lang and Holly George-Warren, *The Road to Woodstock* (New York: Ecco, 2010), 102.

The first band to take the stage was a Chicago group called Aorta. Both MacCluskey from the *Rocky Mountain News* and Pagliasotti of *The Denver Post* were present for all of the night's performances and events. MacCluskey said Aorta was, "Okay for a show opener, but long forgotten by the end."⁷³ Pagliasotti had a similar opinion but offered up an excuse for the band's "not especially impressive set." He benevolently claimed that, "It should be noted, however, that anyone who opens the evening's show has a lot to overcome in reaching the audience, since waiting in line under the hot sun tends to put people uptight."⁷⁴

While Aorta played, the hill people appeared to begin plotting. Both *Rolling Stone* and *The Denver Post* reported that their actions began to draw attention from the authorities when, around 6:30, they descended upon the stadium from multiple locations. A crowd of roughly 300 had made their way to the south end of the west stands and quickly attempted to climb over a 7-foot high fence that was topped with barbed wire. A group of 33 police officers, lead by sergeant Wally Horan, closed in on the spot and closed it up, but not before 60-100 protesters made it successfully into the stadium. While Horan and his men dealt with the fence-jumpers, a group of an estimated 500 protesters quickly formed outside the main southwest gate entrance and attempted to jam their way through. Horan saw this action develop and called for backup. Police Chief George Seaton and Division Chief Stan Cayou answered the call for help and lead a selection of 80 officers to halt the protesters progress.

⁷³ Thomas MacCluskey, "Contrasts Noted In Pop Concert," *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver), June 29, 1969.

⁷⁴ James Pagliasotti, "Ruckus Outside Mars Music Inside Stadium," *The Denver Post*, June 30, 1969.

The crowd of non ticket holders pushed, pulled and battered the barriers to their entry but were unsuccessful. Their attempts were hindered by police who used mace and yard-long riot sticks to fend of the surging hill people.^{75 76}

Next up on stage was the festival's only local act—Zephyr. Named after a train that traveled between Denver and Chicago, they had formed in nearby Boulder only four months prior and were already making a name for themselves. Their singer, Candy Owens was drawing comparisons to Janis Joplin and Jefferson Airplane's Grace Slick, and their 17-year-old lead guitar player, Tommy Bolin, was being hailed a virtuoso. 16 months earlier, after Jimi Hendrix's Denver debut at Regis College (organized and promoted by Barry Fey) on Valentines Day 1968, Hendrix made his way to The Family Dog for a late night jam session with a then 16-year-old Bolin. That night the audience was blown away by Bolin and so too were they this day at the festival. ⁷⁷

MacCluskey called Zephyr's performance "deeply moving" and Pagliasotti said they were "mind-blowing," and while they performed the standoff between the riot gear adorned police and the hovering hill people intensified. The crowd outside began to pelt the officers, who were still inside the gates with bottles, cans and rocks. Sergeant Horan ordered his men to use their tear gas. The officers threw their activated tear gas canisters into the crowd outside the fences, but instead of dispersing the hopeful gatecrashers, the agitated crowd picked up

⁷⁵ "5 Arrested In Ruckus At Stadium," *The Denver Post*, June 29, 1969.

⁷⁶ Jim Fouratt, "Denver Festival: Mace with Music," *Rolling Stone*, July 26, 1969.

⁷⁷ Barry Fey, Steve Alexander, and Rich Wolfe, *Backstage Past* (Phoenix, AZ: Lone Wolfe Press, 2011), 31.

the canisters with their bare hands, or with the assistance of blankets and tossed them back inside directed where they had originally hurled from.⁷⁸

Zephyr continued playing through the chaos and even donned gas masks (partially as a joke and partially out of necessity). Barry Fey and festival announcer, Chip Monck, gave the crowd directions from the stage as to how to avoid the wafting tear gas, allowing a section of the seated stadium audience onto the field near the stage, and order was temporarily maintained.⁷⁹

The next band was Poco, and their country infused songs were smooth and soothing, and while they played the chaos surrounding the festival faded for awhile. However during the next performance, the battle between the protesters and police kicked off again. The albino bluesman from Texas, Johnny Winter, had taken the stage and was in the middle of what Pagliasotti called, "The best show of the entire festival." In his review of Winter's performance, the music editor of the Denver Post wrote, "He turned the audience inside out with his fantastically fluid and hard driving blues, running through what seemed like every chord progression conceivable on his three guitars."⁸⁰

Mac Cluskey was equally effusive with his critique of Winter's act. He wrote, "Winter's straight-forward, one-volume level, all systems go, tremendously

⁷⁸ "5 Arrested In Ruckus At Stadium," *The Denver Post*, June 29, 1969.

⁷⁹ Barry Fey, Steve Alexander, and Rich Wolfe, *Backstage Past* (Phoenix, AZ: Lone Wolfe Press, 2011), 42.

⁸⁰ James Pagliasotti, "Ruckus Outside Mars Music Inside Stadium," *The Denver Post*, June 30, 1969.

hard-driving blues guitar work and his equally incredible singing kept the approximately 15,000 listeners on their feet clapping.”⁸¹

But while Winter showed off his prodigious talent on stage, the protesters began to once again press their luck with the peacekeepers, and once again the police decided to use tear gas. Like the Denver journalists, Michael Lang was enjoying to the hard blues performance before the tear gas began to blow. He recalled, “During the middle of Johnny Winter’s set, the cops sprayed tear gas to clear the area by the entrance gates.”⁸² This action pacified the situation and Winter completed his set and made way for Tim Buckley.

Buckley sang and played his acoustic guitar, and was joined only by his fellow guitar player Lee Underwood. The two played and Buckley sang. MacCluskey wrote of the performance, “Buckley’s singing of several thoughtfully touching songs brought a near silence over the youthful listeners. His singing voice was so well controlled that every subtle inflection of pitch and timbre was meaningfully effective.”⁸³

However the silence that Buckley and Underwood had engendered from the youthful listeners came to an abrupt halt after only a handful of songs. The tear gas that had been fired during Winter’s show had not dissipated, but had wafted to the north of the stadium. In a moment that the Denver Post called “ironic” a strong wind from the northeast whipped the fumes from the tear gas

⁸¹ Thomas MacCluskey, "Contrasts Noted In Pop Concert," *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver), June 29, 1969.

⁸² Michael Lang and Holly George-Warren, *The Road to Woodstock* (New York: Ecco, 2010), 102.

⁸³ Thomas MacCluskey, "Contrasts Noted In Pop Concert," *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver), June 29, 1969.

back into the stadium. This sent thousands of ticket holders rushing to the stadium field. This turn of wind and events provided the hill people with another attempt to break in, and a large number of them seized the moment. Underwood detailed the moment and its dramatic immediate followings in his autobiography:

Tim and I stood on a platform in the middle of a baseball diamond, looking up at thousands of people, just the two of us playing our hearts out. Suddenly, from our left, after only four songs, a great roar erupted from the crowd. Wire fences crashed down. Hundreds of fans who had been denied entrance to the sold-out festival rushed in. People screamed, ran, fell, tried to get away. Cops pulled on gas masks and attacked the crowd with billy clubs. Other cops set off tear gas bombs. Great clouds of smoke rolled up into the stands and billowed out on the field. Tim and I heaved our guitars into cases and ran down the stairs at the side of the stage, out into right field.⁸⁴

Barry Fey and Chip Monck took the stage and tried to calm everyone down. Fey said of the moment, "People were choking and crying and running into the concourses and onto the field to get away from the gas. Most of them didn't know what it was."⁸⁵ Fey left the stage in Monck's hands and made his way to Police Chief Cayou to figure out what to do. Meanwhile, Underwood and Buckley struggled to make their way out of the chaos. Underwood described the scene:

People screamed, yelled, coughed and cried while cops attacked them wherever they could. Tim and I got separated. Whenever a wave of smoke came my way, I lay down on the grass, covered my head, buried my face in soil, then got up clutching my guitar and kept running for the restrooms, coughing, crying, eyes stinging, lungs hurting. Inside, safe from the smoke, I watched a cop taking a leak. He popped his gas mask up on his forehead, chuckled, smiled a big grin, and said to the guy standing next to him, 'More fun than shootin' bunnies, ain't it?'"⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Lee Underwood, *Blue Melody: Tim Buckley Remembered* (San Francisco: Backbeat Books, 2002), 105.

⁸⁵ Barry Fey, Steve Alexander, and Rich Wolfe, *Backstage Past* (Phoenix, AZ: Lone Wolfe Press, 2011), 42.

⁸⁶ Lee Underwood, *Blue Melody: Tim Buckley Remembered* (San Francisco: Backbeat Books, 2002), 105.

Fey and Cayou frantically discussed their options, settled on opening all the gates and allowed everyone on the outside in for free. Sergeant Horan said that the violence erupted again because when the wind shifted and the old tear gas re-entered the stadium, the outside protesters, “many of them long-haired and some of them shirtless,” began throwing water-filled bottles, cans, boards, rocks and even pieces of pipe. In his statement to the *Denver Post*, Horan said, “It would have resulted in a beauty of a riot if we hadn’t knocked it out. I sure as hell wouldn’t classify it as a minor disturbance.” ⁸⁷

With the gates now open, thousands flocked inside the stadium and Credence Clearwater Revival took the stage to closeout the wild night. Pagliasotti reported that the band was greeted with thunderous cheers and that the clapping didn’t end until the show did. MacCluskey said CCR had a “near-hypnotic effect” over the crowd, and the young Pagliasotti, only a month removed from his college graduation, finished his recap of the night writing, “Credence’s mixture of bayou blues and gutsy rock was exactly what the crowd wanted to round out the grooviest night of the festival.” ^{88 89}

The final show of the night was enjoyed by the bloated crowd, the newspapermen, and even some of the police officers. Once the melee was over, the gates officially opened, and the tear gas had cleared, about half of the police left for the night. However the *Denver Post* reported that about 80 uniformed

⁸⁷ James Pagliasotti, "Ruckus Outside Mars Music Inside Stadium," *The Denver Post*, June 30, 1969.

⁸⁸ *ibid*

⁸⁹ Thomas MacCluskey, "Contrasts Noted In Pop Concert," *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver), June 29, 1969.

officers remained, and of that bunch, 25 made their way to the south stands to take in the sights and sounds of the festival:

Clustered near the bottom rows of seats they sat quietly, occasionally beating time with their riot sticks on the metal floor—a sound that couldn't be heard a few feet away because of the roar of the amplified music. Most were young, and while ready for action, were clearly enjoying the concert.
⁹⁰

Blame for Saturday's violence and pandemonium was spread around. Fey again blamed the people who believed "their music" should be free, and claimed the police were too club and teargas happy. Rolling Stone curiously blamed a group of bikers who were not mentioned in any other sources, and also called the police to task for an excessive reaction. Michael Lang, the Denver Post and the Denver Police blamed the American Liberation Front. In the end, despite the pandemonium, only two people were taken to the hospital and only five arrests were made.

In the earliest hours of Sunday morning, Fey met with the head of the Denver Police to discuss the festival's final night of performances. All at the meeting agreed that they did not want another night of violence, and so it was decided that as soon as the show started a 6:00 P.M., the gates would open and no tickets would be taken. There would be no announcement. The decision would remain quiet. The gates would simply be opened for anyone to come and go as they pleased. Fey was satisfied with the plan and went home to get some sleep.

⁹⁰ "Police Enjoy Pops Music After Melee," *The Denver Post*, June 29, 1969.

Fey arrived back at Mile High Stadium in the afternoon and was greeted by Captain Cayou who said to him, “We’ve changed our mind. We’re not going to let these fuckin’ punks push us around. We’re not opening the gates. If they want a war, we’ll give them a war.” Fey was furious, and wanted to tell him that it was his show and it should be his decision, but he thought better of it and relented. In response, Fey and an assistant quickly grabbed all the tickets that had yet to be sold (over 1,000) and began canvassing the oncoming people. They tried to give tickets away to any who had not already purchased one, but to their surprise many of the non-ticket holders refused to take one. Fey believed this was because they had come to simply fight cops.⁹¹

6:00 P.M. arrived and a three-piece band from San Francisco named Aum took the stage. They were greeted by a crowd of 17,000—the largest of the three nights. Outside the stadium a collection of around 500 people sat at the top of the hill and listened to Aum’s performance from a set of speakers that had been arranged inside the stadium to face the hill. At the base of the hill was the majority of the day’s allotment of police officers. In response to Saturday night’s conflict, the police had made some adjustments to their festival presence. They nearly doubled their numbers to roughly 300, they brought a platoon of police dogs, and they were armed with birdshot filled shotgun-like firearms. In addition to these additions, the police set up a portable teargas generating machine called “The Pepper Fog.” Clouds of teargas mixed with mace could be aimed and fired

⁹¹ Barry Fey, Steve Alexander, and Rich Wolfe, *Backstage Past* (Phoenix, AZ: Lone Wolfe Press, 2011), 44.

by the machine, and the police had it positioned at the base of the hill and it was pointed directly towards those gathered to listen to Aum.

Despite a lack of trouble, the police readied "The Pepper Fog" as soon as Aum began their set and fired up its engine. The machine made a loud rumbling sound, similar to a powerful motorboat engine, and drown out much of the sound coming from inside the stadium. At around 6:30 P.M. a watermelon rind was tossed into the sea of cops and immediately "The Pepper Fog" was unleashed. Some of the nonpaying crowd had also come prepared to battle and brought firecrackers. As soon as "The Pepper Fog" began belching out gas, an arsenal of rocks, bottles and firecrackers was sent as return fire.⁹²

The battle had begun, and as soon as the face-off on the hill started, an estimated 2,000 young people who were roaming the various parking lots around the stadium began scaling the fences and climbing into the festival. Cops not at the hill used riot sticks to keep as many fence climbers out as possible but for the most part their efforts were futile.

Inside the stadium the situation was complicated by roughly 1,000 youths who lined the stadium ramps that overlooked the parking lots and hurled an assortment of projectiles towards the police below. Some of this group were made up of those who had recently evaded police and climbed over the fences, and some were ticket holders who left their seats to join the fracas.⁹³

⁹² Jim Fouratt, "Denver Festival: Mace with Music," *Rolling Stone*, July 26, 1969.

⁹³ Richard O'Reilly, "Festival Flap: 33 Arrested, 6 Hurt," *The Denver Post*, June 30, 1969.

On stage Reverend Cleophus Robinson and his soul-filled gospel band, and Zephyr (who made an encore appearance because Sweetwater failed to show up) played their sets while chaos consumed the periphery of the stadium. Understandably little is written about these performances. Pagliasotti wrote in his review of them, "The audience's attention was distracted. To say the performers bombed would be unfair, but they certainly didn't carry the evening."⁹⁴

For two hours a game of cat-and-mouse took place between the cops and the troublemakers. The Denver Post reported that the police were never able to single out the "hard-core troublemakers" and so instead turned tear gas onto large groups of people. In response, "The people would merely run away from the gas, however, and once they recovered from its effect—usually within a few minutes—would begin to congregate again and move back through the parking lots to the stadium."⁹⁵

When openings were presented gatecrashers continued attempting to sneak in, and police continued to attack them. There were reports of gatecrashers being dragged along the ground by their hair and beaten with clubs. In all, 33 were arrested and six were sent to the hospital. At roughly 8:30 P.M. Fey and the police leadership agreed to once again relent to the chaos, and for the third night in a row, the gates were opened to the nonpaying crowds that had

⁹⁴ James Pagliasotti, "Ruckus Outside Mars Music Inside Stadium," *The Denver Post*, June 30, 1969.

⁹⁵ Richard O'Reilly, "Festival Flap: 33 Arrested, 6 Hurt," *The Denver Post*, June 30, 1969.

gathered. This night thousands were ready to be let in and the stadium flooded with people in time to see Joe Cocker's performance.⁹⁶

When it was Cocker's time to go on, Fey found him hiding in a restroom in the north stands. Fey said that he was terrified to go out and meet the crowd. Cocker sheepishly asked Fey, "So, this is America?" Cocker told Fey that he wasn't just concerned about his safety but also was feeling insecure about his music. The British rocker had not been over in America long and was unsure as to how his unique voice and spastic, jerky movements would be received by the audience—especially one that had battled cops all day and were waiting to see Jimi Hendrix.⁹⁷

Pagliasotti reported that following the rush of excitement from the gates being finally opened, the spirit of the crowd had deflated, and that Cocker was only mildly received. However, Fey reported that Cocker "had an incredible set," and Michael Lang, who had remained in Denver specifically to see Cocker, stated, "Joe Cocker and the Grease Band were amazing. When we first heard him, everyone assumed he was a black soul singer, but he turned out to be a skinny English guy who hopped around stage like he had Saint Vitus's Dance. He could wail!"^{98 99 100}

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Barry Fey, Steve Alexander, and Rich Wolfe, *Backstage past* (Phoenix, AZ: Lone Wolfe Press, 2011), 44.

⁹⁸ James Pagliasotti, "Ruckus Outside Mars Music Inside Stadium," *The Denver Post*, June 30, 1969.

⁹⁹ Barry Fey, Steve Alexander, and Rich Wolfe, *Backstage Past* (Phoenix, AZ: Lone Wolfe Press, 2011), 44.

¹⁰⁰ Michael Lang and Holly George-Warren, *The Road to Woodstock* (New York: Ecco, 2010), 102-103.

At 10:30 P.M. It was time for the final performance of the Denver Pop Festival. It was time for the headliner—Jimi Hendrix and the Experience. Hendrix and his two bandmates, Noel Redding on bass and Mitch Mitchell on drums, took the stage right on time, and were received by thunderous applause from the 20,000-plus who were now in attendance.¹⁰¹

Armed with a white Fender Stratocaster slung over his shoulder, Hendrix wore a red silk button-up shirt, and a vest with floral designs. He had matching blue bandanas—one around his head containing his wild hair and the other tied around his left arm. The guitar man began tuning his instrument and spoke to his enraptured audience with a not so subtle commentary regarding the day's non-musical events, "It's going to take us about an hou-, about a minute to get tuned up and everything," he teased, "In the meantime, let's make up in our minds that we make our own world here tonight, starting tonight. We've seen some teargas, that's the start of a Third World War. Just pick your side now."¹⁰²

Hendrix continued tuning his guitar and continued playfully talking to the crowd, "Oh yeah, this show is also dedicated to all the Sagittarians, cause that's our moon, supposedly. We tune up because we really care for your ears. That's why we don't play so loud. Okay? Oh yeah, this is also dedicated to the people who brought their birthday suits."¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Barry Fey, Steve Alexander, and Rich Wolfe, *Backstage Past* (Phoenix, AZ: Lone Wolfe Press, 2011), 44.

¹⁰² Phil Carson, "Jimi Plays Denver," *Experience Hendrix*, May/June 1999.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

And with that playful nod of appreciation to the scores of young ladies in attendance who were wearing no clothes above the waste, Hendrix's guitar was primed, and he began making it sing out into the Denver night.

The first song played by the trio was an instrumental called "Tax Free." It was a thirteen-minute explosion of sound where Hendrix put on full display the near limitless array of amplified noises he could make with his instrument. Two years removed from his legendary Monterrey Pop performance, Hendrix had now toned down his on-stage physical stunts, and this night in Denver was no different. He didn't do somersaults while playing or set his guitar on fire, but he electrified the audience for well over an hour in a style of musical expression never made before him and never copied afterword.

He played two blues songs, "Hear my Train a Comin'" and "Red House," with ferocious fuzz-filled distortion. He played some of his hits "Fire" and "Foxy Lady" and had the crowd dancing on their seats and in the aisles. Band members from 3 Dog Night, Zephyr and Aum hung out just to the left of the stage and watched him in amazement. Before his seventh song, he told the crowd, "Here's for all Americans to really feel proud to be Americans..." and then hit the beginning notes of his version of the Star Spangled Banner. Two months later, at Woodstock, this cover of the American national anthem would bring him to new levels of stardom. In Denver, where for three days the festival had experienced chaos driven by social and cultural divides, this beautiful but distorted and haunting recreation of the John Stafford Smith tune captured the audience. At the moment where Francis Scott Key's lyrics sing "and the home of the brave,"

Hendrix seamlessly transitioned into Purple Haze and the crowd went absolutely bananas!

The stage had been placed on the playing field in the end of the stadium where the stands wrapped around in a horseshoe shape. The stage had close to forty yards of grass between it and the beginning of the stands—twenty of which was for milling around before finding your seat, and twenty of which (nearest the stage) was a buffer. The night before, the field had been invaded when the teargas had wafted back inside the stadium. Teargas was not the reason for Sunday night's field invasion. It was Jimi Hendrix who was the reason. With his virtuosity, he had touched a primal music-loving nerve of the young rock enthusiasts, and his presence and talent made it to where they were aggressively drawn to get near him. The stands were emptied and the field was jammed with audience members slammed all the way to the stage.

The bootlegged recording of Hendrix's performance that has survived through the decades, and now lives on through YouTube (and other sources), was recorded by a 25-year-old ex-marine named Lance Romance (I couldn't make that name up). Romance recorded the set while he sat in the front rows of the stadium seats. The recording is a good representation of the sudden excitement that grabbed the audience, and lead them to leave their seats—and in true Denver Pop Festival fashion, destroy barriers and get close to "their music,"— because as "Purple Haze" begins the recording gets jumbled and stops. The next reported festival coverage from Mr. Romance are still shots that he took of Hendrix and the members of the Experience as they played their last

song—not just of the night but forever, as they broke up after the show and never played together as a trio again.

Hendrix, Mitchell and Redding finished “Purple Haze” while the young people of Denver left their cares behind and made their way towards the stage—some getting so close that they lay on top of the stage speakers. The three musicians effortlessly transitioned into “Voodoo Child (Slight Return),” and the scene was euphoric.¹⁰⁴

James Pagliasotti of the *Denver Post* reported the event in an understated manner that was typical for Denver media coverage of rock music in that day. He wrote:

The long-awaited Jimi Hendrix Experience put the cap on the weekend with one of their usual out-of-sight performances. Hendrix gets more sounds out of a guitar than can be imagined, and puts them all together in a form that owes more to jazz than to rock... The final song brought the audience out onto the field, some dancing joyously, others content just to be near the Experience. Then with feedback still droning through the amplifiers, the group ducked behind the curtains and the first Denver Pop Festival came to an end.¹⁰⁵

As Jimi, Noel, and Mitch finished up “Voodoo Child (Slight Return),” Redding and Mitchell placed their instruments on the stage floor and calmly exited to the back. Hendrix continued attacking his Stratocaster, without accompaniment, until three men emerged from the back of the stage. One calmly and delicately took Hendrix’s guitar—not to disrupt the feedback and distortion

¹⁰⁴ Phil Carson, “Jimi Plays Denver,” *Experience Hendrix*, May/June 1999.

¹⁰⁵ James Pagliasotti, “Ruckus Outside Mars Music Inside Stadium,” *The Denver Post*, June 30, 1969.

still emanating from it, and the other two carried Jimi away by the arms and legs.¹⁰⁶

The men carried Hendrix through audience members who had now fully surrounded the stage. A U-Haul truck with Redding and Mitchell already sitting on a couch in the back of it, was parked and waiting for Hendrix. Jimi's escorts placed him in the back of the truck and closed the door behind him. With adoring fans screaming and pounding on the sides of the vehicle, it started up and drove away. The festival was done.

Pagliasotti was pleased with the weekend and hoped for more in the future. He wrapped up his final appraisal of the weekend writing:

It was, despite outside disruptions, an outstanding show in every respect. It was well organized, the sound was excellent, the audience was groovy, and the performances superb. Here's hoping more of the same will follow in coming years.¹⁰⁷

Tom MacCluskey's opinion echoed that of Pagliasotti, and in his wrap-up he made a point to bring attention to the man who made it all possible. "Barry Fey, who made his promised appearance in bell bottoms, is the gentleman who presented the three tremendous nights of rock. It's a first for Denver to have a festival of this import; and despite the hassles involved, we all hope that he'll do it again."¹⁰⁸

As for Fey himself, he sang a different tune. In his final assessment of the festival he said. "I couldn't wait for him (Hendrix) to finish his set so we could end

¹⁰⁶ Phil Carson, "Jimi Plays Denver," *Experience Hendrix*, May/June 1999.

¹⁰⁷ James Pagliasotti, "Ruckus Outside Mars Music Inside Stadium," *The Denver Post*, June 30, 1969.

¹⁰⁸ Tom MacCluskey, "Final Pop Festival Concert Proved to Be Real Gas," *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver), June 30, 1969.

the festival. Thank God it was over. What a mess. But, I wound up netting about \$50,000.”¹⁰⁹

The Denver Police blamed the chaos and violence surrounding the festival on political activism. They believed that anti-establishment radicals, specifically anti-war activists showed up to the festival with the intent of taunting the cops and provoking them into an overreaction that would lead to a riot. There certainly was a riot, and as reported in numerous places, the cops certainly did overreact, but cops did not correctly understand the reasons behind the aggression from those they clashed with, nor did they correctly understand whom they were clashing with.¹¹⁰

The Denver Police believed that the American Liberation Front was sinisterly behind the chaos, and said so in their reports to Rolling Stone and the Denver Post. The ALF is also credited for the violence in Michael Lang’s autobiography, but upon examination, placing the blame on the political activist group does not add-up. Barry Fey gave a different reason for the barrage of gatecrashing that lead to the weekend’s widespread chaos that resulted in violence. And while I believe Fey’s explanation is closer than the others to understanding the causes of the trouble he too ultimately failed to understand the motivations behind the troublemakers. According to national articles in Time magazine and Rolling Stone, these new pop/rock festivals held inherent traits that lead to violence, but those traits didn’t align with the traits in Denver, and

¹⁰⁹ Barry Fey, Steve Alexander, and Rich Wolfe, *Backstage Past* (Phoenix, AZ: Lone Wolfe Press, 2011), 45.

¹¹⁰ Jim Fouratt, "Denver Festival: Mace with Music," *Rolling Stone*, July 26, 1969.

these publications also failed in their assessment of the troublemakers. None of my sources understood the roots of the angst, because while some of them may have been attracted to the movement, or vibe, or culture, or whatever moniker is placed on it--none of them grasped it at its essence, which was that commercialism was anathema to it, and now it had become a commodity. For a brief time Haight-Ashbury was a community of free music, free food, free drugs and free love. Those days were gone, and for people with a connection to them, the Denver Pop Festival was a fabricated reminder.

The music at the Denver Pop Festival was incredible—in a June 26th, 2018 list of the “Top 100 Music Festival Lineups of All Time,” music blog behemoth, “Consequence of Sound” ranked the Denver Pop Festival 33rd all-time and seventh of the 60s pop festivals, for having simply the best roster of performances.¹¹¹ On music quality alone the Denver Pop Festival was a special event that deserves remembrance, however 50 years later, what is most compelling is the defiance, chaos and violence that took place away from the stage, and that such a great number of those close to the events failed to see why it even started.

Record San Fernando Valley Heat was a cause given for Newport 69’s disastrous weekend. Other reasons were that the sound was terrible, the facility was too small for all that wanted in, and the facility was surrounded by residential neighborhoods in a conservative area. The troubles at the festivals in Palm

¹¹¹ “100 Top Music Festival Lineups of All Time,” Vivid Seats, June 26, 2018, accessed September 28, 2018, <https://www.vividseats.com/blog/top-100-musical-festival-lineups-all-time#Bot50>.

Springs, and (even back into the pre-pop festival era) Newport, Rhode Island, was caused because of staid communities being invaded by unpredicted numbers who didn't fit comfortably into their given festival spaces.

The Denver Pop Festival was different. Despite Fey's fears the weather was perfect. During my research in the Mile High City I learned that mid-nineties and clear during a hot summer day leads to perfect feeling evenings. Weather was no problem and neither was the comfort provided by the venue. Mile High Stadium provided a complete opposite effect towards the festival experience from others. The stadium itself, is not in a residential area of the city and festival violence did not spill into neighboring areas. It also provided ample room. Even with the stage placement there was plenty of room leftover inside the stadium even after the gatecrashers were let in each night. Thanks to beautiful weather and plenty of space provided, the concert-goers were physically comfortable, and their ears were also treated because the sound was reported by multiple sources to have been perfect. So, environmental factors that haunted other festivals were not a part of the experience in Denver. The weather was perfect, the facility provided comfort and plenty of space, the sound was wonderful, and while the city can easily be described as conservative, the venue was far from residential areas and isolated from persons who wished not to be bothered by a vibe they viewed with contempt.

On multiple occasions during their festival coverage, Rolling Stone attempted to pin blame for festival troubles on festival promoters. Editor, Ralph Gleason claimed that fights took place because people felt they were being

“shafted” and that, “The promoters of the commercial festivals have screwed the artists and the fans both.” Reporter, Jerry Hopkins wrote similarly of the organizers, saying, “In most cases, the ‘Bummer in the Summer’ seemed to be the product of greed. Since so much money was to be made so quickly, it attracted people who had no experience, no taste or no love for the thing that should have been the cause of it all: Music.”^{112 113}

Festival promoter problems is another claim for unrest that did not apply to Denver. Barry Fey was certainly a business man who was concerned with the bottom line, but he loved music and his musical taste was impeccable. He certainly wanted to make money, but he was also conscious of the money music fans spent and that artists made. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Fey was not looking to get rich and get out. He loved working in the music business and did it successfully in Denver for decades following his Pop Festival.

As for the American Liberation Front theory, championed by so many of my sources, simply put, the schedules did not match. The schedules did not permit the ALF to have an impactful presence at the festival because they went on during the same time, and even if time had permitted festival goers to be recruited over to the protest in the park, the values of the two events contradicted far more than they complimented each other, and the ALF themselves admitted as much. “Liberation Week,” hosted by the ALF, began the same Friday as the Pop Festival, and its lineup of speakers and music did not end each night until

¹¹² Ralph J. Gleason, “Perspectives: Festival Paranoia,” *Rolling Stone*, September 5, 1969.

¹¹³ Jerry Hopkins, Jim Marshall, and Baron Wolman, *Festival!* (New York, NY: First Collier Books, 1970), 49.

11:00 P.M. By that time each night the authorities at the Pop Festival had already opened the gates of Mile High Stadium and let everyone in, and they remained until the Pop Festival ended each night at midnight--logistically there could not have been any crossover.

Plus, according to the Denver Post's profile of "Liberation Week," the ALF claimed no connection to the Pop Festival, and while their leaders hoped that some of the festival attendees would make their way to the anti-war demonstrations once the festival was finished, they didn't expect many. They admitted to passing out pamphlets all around town, but said that was the extent of their contact with the "commercial festival." ALF spokesman, Tom Lyons, told the Denver Post that the "commercial festival" was about "fun and music," and the mission of "Liberation Week" was to be "serious" and "stress political education." One sentence in the report that summed up the differences well is, "Liberation Front members are exceedingly political, of course, and view with dismay the 'Tune in, turn on, drop out' style."¹¹⁴

In describing the style of the Denver Pop Festival as "Tune in, turn on, drop out," the Denver Post is alluding to a phrase that was famously coined at the Human Be-in from Haight-Ashbury back on January 14th of 1967, and also provides an important clue towards uncovering the major reason for the unrest at the Denver Pop Festival. In between the musical performances at the Human Be-In, a number of speakers addressed the 30,000 hippies who had gathered in Golden Gate Park to enjoy the free food, free entertainment and fellowship. One

¹¹⁴ "ALF Seeks to Unify Anti-War Groups," *The Denver Post*, June 29, 1969.

of the speakers was psychologist Timothy Leary. At the time, Leary was the nation's leading advocate for psychedelic drug use. He believed that drugs like LSD held therapeutic potential and could assist people to "Tune in, turn on, drop out." For Leary, this mantra meant to activate your mind and interact in harmony with your surroundings, but all the while becoming self-reliant and not partake in institutions that cause disruptions. It was a message that aligned well with the hippie ethos, and combined easily with the rampant psychedelic drug use already in Haight-Ashbury. It was a "peace" that adhered to peaceful acceptance of what can and cannot be controlled by the individual, whereas the "peace" that the ALF, and similar groups of the era promoted had to do with nonacceptance and efforts towards institutional change.¹¹⁵

Denver was so unique, because in May of 1967 California and Nevada became the first states to outlaw the manufacture, sale, and possession of LSD. The law would go into effect in October of 1967. Sometime during that summer, the "Summer of Love," the main supplier of LSD in Haight-Ashbury moved his operation to Denver. Owsley Stanley mass produced over a million hits of LSD during the 1960s (including the one that Jimi Hendrix took right before going on stage to close out the Denver Pop Festival) and after California determined it would make the drug illegal, Owsley moved his laboratory to Colorado and into the basement of a house across the street from the Denver Zoo.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ Timothy Leary, *Flashbacks: A Personal and Cultural History of an Era* (Los Angeles: J.P. Tarcher, 1990), 253.

¹¹⁶ Barry Fey, Steve Alexander, and Rich Wolfe, *Backstage Past* (Phoenix, AZ: Lone Wolfe Press, 2011), 26.

On its third weekend of existence, Barry Fey's Family Dog hosted the Grateful Dead for back-to-back, Friday and Saturday night concerts. The next day, Sunday, September 24, 1967, The Dead played a free concert in Denver's City Park from the steps of the city's Natural History Museum. Their performance was a part of Denver's very own Human Be-In. Five other bands played from the steps out over the park that day, and there were speakers in-between the acts—including Timothy Leary. The Denver Zoo is adjacent to City Park, so access to Owsley's LSD could not have been easier and it flowed like water that day in the park.¹¹⁷

Barry Fey didn't have any business connections to Denver's Human Be-In. No one did because there was no business—everything was free. However, Fey was in attendance, and despite not partaking in the LSD use, he was pleased with the event and said of it: "If nothing else, it gave music fans of Denver a firsthand look at the Psychedelic Era. I was thrilled."¹¹⁸

It is incredible that Fey enjoyed himself at Denver's Human Be-In, but didn't understand why so many people were upset at his festival. He had been to Haight-Ashbury during the Summer of Love. He had witnessed the preparations for the Monterey Pop Festival. Like himself many of the thousands of people at Denver's Human Be-In probably had direct connections to the zenith of a cultural phenomena that a few years later he was helping package and sell. The

¹¹⁷ Jon Solomon, "The Day the Grateful Dead, Timothy Leary and LSD Turned On City Park," *Westword*, November 14, 2017, accessed September 28, 2018, <https://www.westword.com/music/timothy-leary-and-the-grateful-dead-turned-on-denvers-city-park-in-1967-9638031>.

¹¹⁸ Barry Fey, Steve Alexander, and Rich Wolfe, *Backstage Past* (Phoenix, AZ: Lone Wolfe Press, 2011), 27.

gatecrashers on Friday and Saturday nights of the Denver Pop Festival didn't go to protest and raise awareness of anything. They showed up to a music festival that they wanted to attend, but the festival had an entrance fee they didn't want to spend.

At least Fey didn't take the easy way out when assigning blame for Denver's violence. The Police and others that blamed political activism had no place for nuance and simply saw angry guys with long hair, and snapped to judgment. Civil rights and anti-war protests from college campuses, and on the streets from big cities, had already received years of media coverage across the nation. For these sources, they saw people who looked like war protestors, so they said they were war protestors.

Fey actually tells of speaking with the gatecrashers in his autobiography. He says that Friday and Saturday night's invaders were upset that they were having to pay to get in. Hundreds gathered, told Fey that they shouldn't have to pay to see "their music," and waited for chances to pounce. When a chance to sneak in presented itself, they took it. With patience, each of the first two nights, a large number of gatecrashers waited for a weak moment and overwhelmed entire sections of security to the point where the gates were reluctantly opened. Those who claimed the music was "theirs" felt an ownership because they had probably been there from the beginning. Maybe like Fey, they had been to Haight-Ashbury, or had even been lucky enough to attend Monterey Pop. Perhaps they had been to Denver's very own Human Be-In and listened to The Dead put on a free show while they dropped Owsley LSD. Now the music that

they loved, created by artists who had helped shape their lives, was being played inside of a fence and required paid admittance. They looked inside and saw that many of the paying customers were teenie-boppers and rubes from places like Nebraska who had no connection to the original vibe--who were just looking to see boobs, hear a cool guitar solo, or smoke their first joint. Everything had changed and they were mad.

Sunday there were a lot more gatecrashers, and a lot more milling around without a ticket in general. Fey tried handing out free tickets on Sunday and was turned down by a number of people who he claimed had shown up just to fight the cops. After two nights of the establishment succumbing to the efforts of lawbreakers, it is surely plausible that it emboldened new people to the stadium. It is probable that those new non-ticket holders weren't also there because of "their music," but that doesn't negate that the reason for the gatecrashing, and subsequent chaos, violence, criminal charges, and eventual victory, was because a lot of people fell in love with a movement that was dead, dying, or at the very least had been redirected. The movement began declining as soon as a national audience became aware of it. Once the outside world learned of Haight-Ashbury and Golden Gate Park, not to mention free love, free food and free music (All with flowers in everyone's hair!), it's easy to see why, during an era dominated by war abroad and revolution at home, a significant amount of people would be drawn to something promoting peace and love.

In its truest form the Haight-Ashbury culture surely peaked at the Human Be-In, held in Golden Gate Park, January of 1967. That same culture was

packaged and amplified and presented to the masses five months later in Monterey. The organizers of Monterey Pop understood the potential for conflicts and made the festival free for attendees. They also selected a geographic location advantageous for having the aesthetic they were aiming to sell.

Guitar player for Janis Joplin's Big Brother and the Holding Company—who performed twice during the weekend, and featured prominently on Pennebaker's film—Sam Andrew, said of the iconic pop festival, "We had a clear idea about what was going to happen there when we signed up for the festival. Monterey was John Philips deciding that he was going to package that crude San Francisco sound and sell it 'Los Angeles-style to the world.'"¹¹⁹

Whether Monterey Pop, with its Southern California production, was an authentic representation of Haight-Ashbury is certainly debatable. Philips's fellow southern California, Monterey Pop producer Lou Adler aptly referred to Monterey Pop as a catalyst for changes in commercial and social norms.

Half a century later, it's easy to confuse the packaging as negative, but it is important to remember the timing of it all. Barry Melton from the band Country Joe and the Fish said of the festival,

The Monterey Pop Festival was a time of hope and optimism, and it was perhaps the highpoint of sixties counterculture. People were happy... There was no violence, there were no arrests, and there was no trouble. We really thought we could change the world. And for a moment, in Monterey, it looked like all things were possible¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ Marley Brant, *Join Together: Forty Years of the Rock Music Festival* (New York, NY: Backbeat, 2008), 17.

¹²⁰ *Ibid* 27-28.

Speaking about all the early weekends of the Family Dog being packed with bands from San Francisco, Fey spoke with similar altruism as Melton when he said,

‘Summer of Love’ or not, 1967 was such a fucked up time politically, racially and with the Vietnam War. I wanted Denver to see and feel that peace, love and freedom and hear the great music that I’d experienced in San Francisco.¹²¹

Regardless of debates surrounding the connection between the Human Be-in and Monterey Pop, the timing of the festival, its performers, and its media coverage created the industry standard. It created a sound and an aesthetic that, if artist prices could be met, could be replicated.

Promoters grabbed the opportunity, and claimed weekends in large metropolitan areas across the country. Jerry Hopkins of Rolling Stone asked Adler to reflect on the pop festivals that followed his, and he replied:

The music industry has prostituted Monterey. Monterey was a climax of a fantastic time of our music. And now it’s hype. It’s become a promoter’s tool. It’s really a drag sometimes.¹²²

The gatecrashers at the Denver Pop Festival agreed with Adler (and in a weird twist of fate, some might have been created by him). They too thought that the movement had been prostituted, and like Adler said, it was a drag. For some, the movement had sold-out and become sanitized. Jimi Hendrix agreed when he insulted the Newport 69 “crowd” by calling them, “Teeny-boppers,” and the amount of teenagers in the audience in Denver reflected this too. For others, by

¹²¹ Barry Fey, Steve Alexander, and Rich Wolfe, *Backstage pass* (Phoenix, AZ: Lone Wolfe Press, 2011), 26.

¹²² Jerry Hopkins, Jim Marshall, and Baron Wolman, *Festival!* (New York, NY: First Collier Books, 1970), 47.

putting a price tag on a culture, the movement was completely dead. “Their music” was being played inside a football stadium, for paying customers, but it was still “their music,” and it was worth fighting for.

Barry Fey truly never saw the movement as more than entertainment. For three days he literally stood toe-to-toe with people telling him it wasn’t about the price—it was about the money—or perhaps more clearly, that money was even present. Fey couldn’t understand how they didn’t understand the circumstances and see the bargain. More than a business man, perhaps Fey was a realist who understand that things change, and when something gains popularity it is inevitable that it will be commodified.

The story of the Denver Pop Festival is one of incredible music from legendary artists. It is also one of a hustling promoter who embodied the American Dream. It is also the rare time where mischievous lawbreakers defeated the establishment—and in Denver that happened three nights in a row. Most importantly the Denver Pop Festival was a monetized version of a vibe, and by packaging and selling that vibe, the essence of the vibe was removed, and this upset a good number of people. The establishment—the media, the police and the businessman—didn’t understand, but have they ever.

Bibliography

"100 Top Music Festival Lineups of All Time." Vivid Seats. June 26, 2018.

Accessed September 28, 2018. <https://www.vividseats.com/blog/top-100-musical-festival-lineups-all-time#Bot50>.

"5 Arrested In Ruckus At Stadium." *The Denver Post*, June 29, 1969.

"ALF Seeks to Unify Anti-War Groups." *The Denver Post*, June 29, 1969.

Altschuler, Glenn C. *All Shook Up: How Rock N Roll Changed America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.

"American Revolution 1969." *Rolling Stone*, April 5, 1969, 1-18.

Brant, Marley. *Join Together: Forty Years of the Rock Music Festival*. New York, NY: Backbeat, 2008.

Carson, Phil. "Jimi Plays Denver." *Experience Hendrix*, May/June 1999.

"City Provides Pop Festival Camp Site." *The Denver Post*, June 27, 1969.

Cunningham, Alan. "Mile High Stadium Hurlled Into Orbit by Pop Festival." *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver), June 28, 1969.

Feyline Productions. "Denver Pop Festival." Advertisement. *Rolling Stone*, June 14, 1969, 37.

The Goldstein Organization, Inc. "Denver Pop Festival Presents \$250,000 Worth of Talent June 27, 28, 29." News release, New York, NY, 1969. Goldstein Organization.

Draper, Electa. "Colorado News." Denver Entertainment: The Denver Post. March 12, 2001. Accessed September 28, 2018.
<http://extras.denverpost.com/news/news0312f.htm>.

"Elaine Lorillard, Jazz Festival Pioneer, Dies." *Newsday*. Associated Press, November 29, 2007.

Fey, Barry, Steve Alexander, and Rich Wolfe. *Backstage past*. Phoenix, AZ: Lone Wolfe Press, 2011.

Fouratt, Jim. "Denver Festival: Mace with Music." *Rolling Stone*, July 26, 1969.

Gillies, Fred. "14,000 at Opening of Pop Festival." *The Denver Post*, June 28, 1969.

Glatt, John. *Live at the Fillmore East and West: Getting Backstage and Personal with Rocks Greatest Legends*. Guilford, CT: LP, 2016.

Gleason, Ralph J. "Perspectives: Festival Paranoia." *Rolling Stone*, September 5, 1969.

Hartlaub, Peter, and Sam Whiting. "Reliving the Human Be-In 50 Years Later." San Francisco Chronicle. March 11, 2017. Accessed September 28,

2018. <https://www.sfchronicle.com/music/article/Reliving-the-Human-Be-In-50-years-later-10854785.php#photo-12168922>.

Hopkins, Jerry. "Vacationing in Palm Springs: A Real Lark." *Rolling Stone*, April 19, 1969, 1 .

Hopkins, Jerry. "Crashers, Cops, Producers Spoil Newport '69." *Rolling Stone*, July 26, 1969, 1.

Hopkins, Jerry. "Crashers, Cops, Producers Spoil Newport '69." *Rolling Stone*, July 26, 1969.

Hopkins, Jerry, Jim Marshall, and Baron Wolman. *Festival!* New York, NY: First Collier Books, 1970.

Hopkins, Jerry. *The Jimi Hendrix Experience*. New York, NY: Arcade Publ., 2014.

Ingles, Paul. "A Look Back At Monterey Pop, 50 Years Later." NPR. June 15, 2017. Accessed September 28, 2018.
<https://www.npr.org/2017/06/15/532978213/a-look-back-at-monterey-pop-50-years-later>.

Laing, Dave. "Obituary: Chet Helms." *The Guardian*. June 26, 2005. Accessed September 28, 2018.
<https://www.theguardian.com/news/2005/jun/27/guardianobituaries.artsobituaries>.

Lang, Michael, and Holly George-Warren. *The Road to Woodstock*. New York: Ecco, 2010.

Leary, Timothy. *Flashbacks: A Personal and Cultural History of an Era*. Los Angeles: J.P. Tarcher, 1990.

MacCluskey, Thomas. "Rock in Its Elements." *Music Educators Journal* 56, no. 3 (November 1, 1969): 47-49.
<http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/002743216905600305>.

MacCluskey, Thomas. "The Current State of Music in U.S.: A Thriving Art, but Classics Decline." *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver), June 1, 1969.

MacCluskey, Thomas. "Hendrix Closing Pop Festival Sunday." *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver), June 29, 1969.

MacCluskey, Thomas. "What Summer Pop Festival's All About." *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver), June 22, 1969.

MacCluskey, Thomas. "Contrasts Noted In Pop Concert." *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver), June 29, 1969.

MacCluskey, Tom. "Final Pop Festival Concert Proved to Be Real Gas." *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver), June 30, 1969.

McKay, George. *The Pop Festival: History, Music, Media, Culture*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015.

Monterey Pop. Directed by D.A. Pennebaker. United States: Leacock

Pennebaker, 1968. DVD.

Newman, Jason. "The Untold Story of the First U.S. Rock Festival." *Rolling*

Stone. June 25, 2018. Accessed September 28, 2018.

<https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/the-untold-and-deeply-stoned-story-of-the-first-u-s-rock-festival-124437/>.

"Newport Blues." *Time Magazine*, July 18, 1960.

O'Reilly, Richard. "Festival Flap: 33 Arrested, 6 Hurt." *The Denver Post*, June 30, 1969.

Owens, Dylan. "High Notes in The Denver Post's 125 Years of Music Coverage."

The Denver Post. October 18, 2017. Accessed September 28, 2018.

<https://www.denverpost.com/2017/10/15/denver-post-music-coverage/>.

Pagliasotti, James. "Performers Due at Denver Pop Festival Busy at Record

Racks." *The Denver Post*, June 22, 1969.

Pagliasotti, James. "If One 'Digs' a Pop Festival--Then That's What Happened."

The Denver Post, June 28, 1969.

Pagliasotti, James. "Ruckus Outside Mars Music Inside Stadium." *The Denver*

Post, June 30, 1969.

Pagliasotti, James. "Ruckus Outside Mars Music Inside Stadium." *The Denver Post*, June 30, 1969.

"Police Enjoy Pops Music After Melee." *The Denver Post*, June 29, 1969.

"Pop Festival Opens June 27." *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver), June 14, 1969.

"Rock Festival Scene of Clash." *Denver Post*, June 23, 1969.

Smither, Howard E. *A History of the Oratorio*. Vol. 4. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000.

Solomon, Jon. "The Day the Grateful Dead, Timothy Leary and LSD Turned On City Park." Westword. November 14, 2017. Accessed September 28, 2018. <https://www.westword.com/music/timothy-leary-and-the-grateful-dead-turned-on-denvers-city-park-in-1967-9638031>.

Thompson, Hunter S. "The 'Hashbury' Is the Capital Of the Hippies; The." *The New York Times*. May 14, 1967. Accessed September 28, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/1967/05/14/archives/the-hashbury-is-the-capital-of-the-hippies-the-hashbury-is-the.html>.

Underwood, Lee. *Blue Melody: Tim Buckley Remembered*. San Francisco: Backbeat Books, 2002.

Wein, George, and Nate Chinen. *Myself among Others*. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2004.

Wharton, David. "The Lost Love-In : It Was the Woodstock They Forgot: Newport '69, Los Angeles' Own Weekend of Music, Masses and Mayhem." Los Angeles Times. August 06, 1989. Accessed September 28, 2018.
http://articles.latimes.com/1989-08-06/entertainment/ca-315_1_los-angeles.

Whitworth, John. *100 Crashers Join 8,000 at Pop Festival*. June 28, 1969.
Denver Public Library, Denver.