

Remembering the Counterculture: *Ang Lee's Taking Woodstock*



Woodstock Music and Arts Fair 1969:

- Took place from 15-17 of August 1969 in White Lake, NY.
- Organized to make a profit, unlike the Monterey Pop Festival in 1967, which was non-profit.
- Originally set to take place in Wallkill, NY, but was thrown out of the town by the local community.
- Organizer Michael Lang was contacted by Elliot Teichburg with an idea for a new location.
- Took place on Max Yasgur's 600-acres of dairy fields.
- 500.000 people attended Woodstock. Organizers expected 50.000 to begin with.
- Became free when organizers were overwhelmed by the large number of people and forced to choose between finishing the stage or checking tickets.
- Was a financial disaster, but a cultural success.

The movie *Taking Woodstock*:

- Movie from 2009, directed by Taiwanese director Ang Lee.
- Based on *Taking Woodstock* written by Elliot Tiber, born Elliot Teichburg.
- Elliot never made it to any of the concert and that is why the movie does not include concerts.
- Greatly visually inspired by *Woodstock*, a documentary from 1970.

- Ang Lee has taken characters from the documentary and placed them in his movie in order to add realism and authenticity.
- Ang Lee found it difficult to find extras as today's youth has too much determination in their eyes, unlike the young people who attended Woodstock who had a mellower expression. The extras were cast months in advance in order to quit working out and to grow long hair.
- Ends with references to Altamont Festival, which took place in December 1969, where a man was stabbed to death during the Rolling Stones concert.

Woodstock today:

- Woodstock is considered the culmination and the high point of the hippie movement, whereas Altamont is considered the end - the loss of innocence.
- Even though Woodstock has been romanticized into three days of peace, love and happiness, the reality is that most of the time there where chaos.
- A stamp was made in 2009 at the 40th anniversary of the festival, proving that Woodstock has a place in our collective memory and is worth remembering.

Allen Cohen on the youth movement in 1967:

"[Michael] Bowen and I had become concerned about the philosophical split that was developing in the youth movement. The anti-war and free speech movement in Berkeley thought the Hippies were too disengaged and spaced out. Their influence might draw the young away from resistance to the war. The Hippies thought the anti-war movement was doomed to endless confrontations with the establishment which would recoil with violence and fascism. We decided that to strengthen the youth culture, we had to bring the two poles together."¹

Bibliography and Suggestive reading:

Taking Woodstock 2009

Woodstock (Documentary) 1970

Woodstock: Director's Cut (Documentary) 1994

American Experience: The Summer of Love, PBS (Documentary) 2007

Elliot Tiber, *Taking Woodstock: A True Story of a Riot, a Concert and a Life* (New York: Square One Publishers, 2007)

Allen Cohen on the youth movement 1967:

<http://s91990482.onlinehome.us/allencohen/be-in.html>