

OURGEN-EP002-2020-05-01-WOODSTOCK-HENRY-DILTZ_2

Julian G. Simmons: I'm Julian G Simmons. This is talking about our generation

Welcome back everyone after our long hiatus. Yeah, we got way laid, but we are back now with more Woodstock episodes. It will be worth the wait, I guarantee you. Since then, a lot of things have changed in all of our lives, specifically for us Baby Boomers who are most at risk wherever you are in the country or the world, it's difficult for us.

What is going to give us strength is community, and that's what Woodstock was really all about and that's exactly what we need right now. Woodstock was three days of peace, love, and music that drew more than a million people to a farm in upstate New York in the summer of 69, which I'm sure you all remember. Only about 400,000 made it in and the rest were stuck on the New York State Thruway, including little old me, who was only 15 years-old at the time.

There was something magical about Woodstock. It was like a magnet, a coming together of millions of like-minded people. That's what I loved about that whole idea of going to Woodstock. To me, it was like a spiritual pilgrimage, compelling us to be together, to connect. What was that Woodstock spirit? How did it happen?

What impact did it have on our society? On us? Can we bring it back? Because we definitely need it. Those are the questions we asked some of the people who were there, who made it happen and who still live that Woodstock spirit today. Initially we planned to mix these conversations up, but then we realized that each of these people is so unique and their individual stories so interesting that we decided to give each of them their own episode.

In this episode you're about to hear, we continue our conversation with Henry Diltz, who was the official photographer at Woodstock. In Part One, if you remember, we talked about his journey to Woodstock. Today, we pick him up arriving at Woodstock as the organizers are racing to get the festival ready for opening day.

Today, I'm talking with Henry at his studio, his photographic studio here in Los Angeles. Henry, thanks for inviting us over.

Henry Diltz: Sure thing, Julian.

Julian G. Simmons: Um, let's talk about the journey to Woodstock. I mean, how did that happen?

Henry Diltz: Well, as I often say, many of these jobs start with a phone call. So one day I'm up in my kitchen and Laurel Canyon and the phone rings.

Michael Lang called me and he, man of few words, he said, "Chip says, we need you. I'm sending you an airline ticket and \$500." Click. And I went, Oh my God. That was, that was pretty much it.

Julian G. Simmons: Wow!

Henry Diltz: Yeah. And I, you know, in those days it was, you know, have camera will travel. It was great. Everything was an adventure of great. Um, this is great.

So I got out there just that they changed from, from their, uh, original site in Wallkill. Right? They were building the stage, setting up the whole festival and the townspeople voted them out. The town council voted them out because they didn't want all those hippies overrunning their community. And then they had to go out and quickly find a new place and they found Yasgur's farm.

So I got there when they were just starting to build that new stage at the bottom of Yasgur's cow field of green alfalfa.

Julian G. Simmons: Do you remember what the first photograph you took was at Woodstock?

Henry Diltz: Mmm. Wow. Yes. I, well, one of the first photos was walking through the woods and when the woods kind of opened, then you look down the hill and there was that big --

Julian G. Simmons: Natural amphitheater?

Henry Diltz: Yes. It was kind of at the side of that and the first glimpse I got of that big platform they were building there, that was going to be the stage. But when I first got there, I had a friend named Mel Lawrence who was in charge of all the grounds and everything. And Mel was a dear, he was part of that group of hippies that watched my slide shows, you know...

Julian G. Simmons: Oh wow, really?

Henry Diltz: A karmic group of friends.

And so I remember I went to his trailer, first of all, and we talk, and then we took a little tour, him and me and his little dog, uh, walked around the grounds and looked at everything. And I started documenting what I saw, at that point.

Julian G. Simmons: Did Michael or anybody sit you down and say, okay, this is what we want you to shoot, or did they just kind of let you loose and do what?

Henry Diltz: Nobody said a word, but I knew what to shoot. You know, I just wake up and get in there and it just comes natural, you know? A lot, a lot of stuff going on. There were groups of artists putting up big signs and fixing up the woods and building structures for people to climb on and camp grounds and, Oh, just I documented every day stuff that were going on.

I mean, a number of, you know, all throughout the whole time. Well, and then, so this went on for almost two weeks. The typical day I would, I mean, I would drive from my boarding house down the road and my rented station wagon, park it behind the stage, climb up there and photograph all these, these suntan hippie carpenters, you know, guys with long hair

hammering. And in the afternoon, the girls from the office would come by and bring drinks and sandwiches, and it was like a party on this big, plywood deck, which is like kind of like an aircraft carrier. Then in the afternoon I would walk over to the hog farm, whether they had arrived from New Mexico, and they were setting up all the campgrounds and things like that, and I got to know those people, and then later in the afternoon we get in their school bus and go to a little lake nearby and go skinny dipping.

You know, everybody; kids, women, man, everybody would get naked and jump in the lake. And I mean, and every day Michael Lang would, would come by with his leather vest and either be on a horse, a tractor, uh, or a motor...

Julian G. Simmons: A motorbike.

Right,

Henry Diltz: a motorbike. And he was such a charming, looking, very cherubic looking.

Julian G. Simmons: Yeah.

Henry Diltz: And you know, it was his, his vibe, his vision, his idea that this will be three days of peace and music, you know? And recently we did an interview together and he said, you know, he said, "When things get weird, I get calm." And he was that way. I remember, I mean, I would kind of hang out with him when he spent an hour on the stage, I'd be kind of photographing him, talkin to Chip Monck, looking at blueprints, you know, going over the stage stuff.

Julian G. Simmons: I can see that, because whenever he's interviewed, he's very, even.

Henry Diltz: Yes.

Julian G. Simmons: You know? He doesn't get too upset or excited about it. And now, even though I'm sure he does.

Henry Diltz: Well, he, he is cherubic. He is cherubic, you know? The more I think about it, I mean, doing a lot of interviews now, 50 years later, the more I hear him talk, the more I'm convinced that was his vibe, his aura that kept everything so calm.

Plus the fact that they neglected to get an MC. And so at the last minute, I think Michael said, Chip, you go out there and be the MC, and Chip Monck has a very kind of low, melifluous voice, like a DJ. And that was a very calming as well.

Julian G. Simmons: John Morris did some of that too.

Henry Diltz: Yes, he did. Yeah. And I think Chip Monck said, "The person standing next to you is your friend."

Or words to that effect. And people got it in any way they knew.

Julian G. Simmons: Well, because there was a few times where I think things might've gotten out of hand, especially after the rain and everybody's, you know, kind of a mess.

Henry Diltz: But everybody just played in the mud, slid down the hillside and had a great time.

Julian G. Simmons: Yeah, exactly. It was, it's pretty amazing.

Henry Diltz: And I would say there is an obvious one-word answer to why all that was the way it was. And it's God's herb. All those people were smoking grass, and it does make you peaceful. You know? It does make you feel better and say, wow, I mean, I feel so alive, you know? Hey buddy, you know?

Julian G. Simmons: Was there anything at Woodstock that captured your attention so much that you just had trouble not photographing more and more of it?

Henry Diltz: Well, you know, when all the acts played, I mean, you know, that's, that was my thing. Music. I loved music. I loved to watch it and hear it, so, sure. I mean, I was well in, when The Who we're playing, I was right up there with the stage hitting my chest.

The film crew had built a little walkway just about three feet below the lip of the front of the stage, top of the stage, and only the film crew was up there. All the photographers were down several feet lower in the pit, looking up. But I had my "all access" kind of golden pass from Michael Lang, the best seat in the house, you know?

Julian G. Simmons: That's pretty cool.

Henry Diltz: So I would get out there right in front, you know, in fact, when The Who played it was, I had difficulty getting all four into the picture. I was so close. And so on the proof sheet, there's single shots of everybody. And at one point John Entwistle walked in from the left and Pete Townshend walked in from the right and for a minute they were all in my viewfinder and I got like one good group shot.

I'm going to be there. I was so close. But I could get headshots of, of, of all the performers there and the film crew would say, "You can't be here, this is only for the film group." I'd say, "No, I'm working for the producer. You know, here's my password. All access." At one point, I left the state for a while, when I came back they said, "Well, you don't have the purple dot on your pass now."

Now they have to have the purple dots. So I had to go find. Michael and get a purple dot. You know, to update my pass.

Julian G. Simmons: In general, it seems like you have a love for that candid shot, that real-life shot.

Henry Diltz: Absolutely do. I like to just document, when people aren't looking. Recently a lady, a young lady that I've hired to help me in the studio, pretty much an expert on Chinese animals, and she said, "What's your Chinese animal?"

I said, "I think I'm a tiger. I've heard that before". She said, "Good! You know, tigers are playful, sociable, but they're loners." And I went, "Oh, wow. I feel that way". She said, "We tigers like to sit on top of the cliff and watch the other animals". So I now, I feel that in my,

my, my psyche, my makeup, you know, I like to sit on top of the cliff or hide in the bushes or, you know, I like to watch the other animals. And the other thing is, I've always been fascinated by people. You know, it's the same. I want to find out about people. I want to know about people.

Julian G. Simmons: What were some of your favorite photographs from Woodstock that you took?

Henry Diltz: Well, this one, for sure.

Julian G. Simmons: So here in Michael Lang's book, you've opened to a photograph that you took of, uh, is that John, John Sebastian?

Henry Diltz: Yes, it is.

Julian G. Simmons: Um, facing the enormous --

Henry Diltz: 400,000 people

Julian G. Simmons: -- crowd. Um, so since we're not visual here -- we're a podcast -- tell us about the photo.

Henry Diltz: Right. While he's wearing tie-dyed Levis and the tie-dyed Levi jacket, it's kind of bright yellow with, you know, like a sunburst on the back. And these were his, his clothes that he tie-dyed. Um, he, when the Lovin Spoonful ended, he moved to LA and he lived on a kind of artistic commune with friends of mine that I had sung with and, and there was a lady there that taught him how to tie-dye. Her name was Tie-Dye Annie, and I saw him tie-dyeing all of his clothes and his pillow cases and sheets and the tent he lived in. And just the year before I had been watching him do this.

And so here he was one of my good friends on stage and John wasn't on the bill. He hadn't been hired to play Woodstock, but he lived in the town of Woodstock, so he came over to hang out with his buddies on stage. And, um, he had decided -- he had decided that day to take a little psychedelic trip, and he was very high.

Julian G. Simmons: Uh-huh.

Henry Diltz: And so-- the next act had not arrived yet by helicopter, and here all these 400,000 people were standing there waiting to be entertained. Someone thrust a guitar into his hand and said, quick, go out there and sing something. He did. He did, and it was oh. He says it wasn't a very good performance, I thought it was amazing! Yeah. I say, what I noticed was he spoke to that crowd like it was his friend, like it was one, you know, one of his best friends.

John Sebastian: Oh boy. This is really a mind fucker of all times, man. I've never seen anything like this, man.

Henry Diltz: Someone had said at one point, wow, we didn't realize there were so many of us.

John Sebastian: Wow. Just love everybody all around you and clean up a little garbage on your way out, and everything gonna be all right.

Henry Diltz: You know, because from our little hometowns or wherever we live, I mean, I lived in LA, we had Love-ins on the weekend, in the park, a couple of two, 300 hippies, you know, would dress up and, you know, bring their ladies and their kids and just have a lovely Sunday in the park, you know? People would bring blankets and play instruments and just love each other, really. Um, but now here was 400,000 kind of, of like-minded people.

Julian G. Simmons: Community.

Henry Diltz: Yeah. You know, and, and, you know, we, we hippies wanted to really, we thought, we're going to change the world. I mean, peace and love, but we don't have enough of that.

„ and we think they're doing it wrong. You know, our, our, our parents and the older people are off on the wrong track, really.

John Sebastian: Why must every generation think their folks are square? And no matter where their heads are, they know mom's ain't there.

Henry Diltz: They still are.

Julian G. Simmons: Yeah. I mean, people are still people, but the energy isn't the same. The reason we're talking about Woodstock is not just because all of these great musicians went there, but there was this energy that propelled us to a new way of looking at society.

Henry Diltz: Well, in 69 we all were peace and love, brotherhood, hippies, you know? I mean, now it's not that way.

Julian G. Simmons: So how do we get some of that back? I mean, to create an influence? I mean, when you photograph things, I know that you, you're not photographing politically, but do you sometimes find yourself trying to put an influence there? Do you know what I'm saying?

Henry Diltz: I'm just taking pictures of things I like. I mean, I'm just always in that world of -- visual world --and not so much thinking about, oh, what will this mean? Or what I am, and it's up to me.

Julian G. Simmons: Yeah.

Henry Diltz: I've never really ---

Julian G. Simmons: And I know I keep pushing you that way.

Henry Diltz: I certainly would when Jimi Hendrix played the last morning, that was riveting. You know, that that was something that, that whole hillside that had been just, you know, little tiny human faces as far as you could see, was now just a muddy hillside and there was a crowd in front of the stage.

Julian G. Simmons: So what was that morning like when you, when you photographed Hendrix?

Henry Diltz: Well, we all'd been up for several days. I mean, a little sleep here and there, a couple of hours, but then Monday morning, you know, just as it was getting light out, I mean, it was still kind of dawn, and he walked out with these colorful, his high, you know, his colorful band, you know, with their, with their bandanas, pink Mandana red.

And it was like, well, you know, what is this?

Then they started playing and it was definitely -- main thing -- I had been asleep in the back of my station wagon, um, and I think I got an hour or two sleep and I woke up hearing Chip Monck's voice. "Ladies and Gentlemen, Jimi Hendrix". I jumped out of the station wagon, you know, grabbed my cameras, ran up the backstage, and I was right there.

Right on stage. Right. Right almost next to him. And, um, started photographing him. And then when he started playing the Star-Spangled Banner, it was just amazing. It was --

First of all, you know, here we were, this whole, you know, generation of peace and love, against the war, brotherhood, you know, against Nixon and the government. Then the Vietnam war and all that, we all were, you know, certainly agreed on all of that. And so it was kind of strange for a moment to hear him playing kind of the official country song. Wait, that's their song! You know? Why is he playing that official U S song? But then, immediately there'll be no, but that's our song too! You know?

Julian G. Simmons: Yeah.

Henry Diltz: He's taking it back for us.

I've

Julian G. Simmons: heard people say that it was his kind of pronouncing that one era had ended and a new era was beginning.

Henry Diltz: Yeah. This was, you know, early morning -- still kind of misty.

Julian G. Simmons: Yeah.

Henry Diltz: That whole field, which had been green alfalfa and then had been 400,000 little faces was now just a muddy hillside and there was piles of wet blankets and sleeping bags all over the place. And it looked --yeah --and it looked kind of like those old Matthew Brady, um, Civil War photographs, you know, with maybe dead horses and soldiers laying in the field. It really looked like that and it was no longer that huge crowd of people to absorb the sound. So it kind of, it kind of reflected off of that muddy hillside and bounced back and made it kind of twice as loud. And in that still morning air, when he was playing that Star-Spangled Banner, it was, just awesome! I mean, you just stood there with your mouth open, you know? Then he started playing all the sounds of war, you know, machine guns and rockets in the air and all that sound he was making.

Wow. Never heard. I mean, you hear someone singing the Star-Spangled Banner at the baseball game usually, right?

Julian G. Simmons: Yeah.

Henry Diltz: Well, this was a what a sound collage he was making. Recently. I had the thought, well, when, when, uh, Francis Scott Key wrote that song, Fort McHenry was being bombarded by the British fleet and they were lobbing these, you know, cannon balls and rockets, I don't know, "rocket's red glare, the bombs bursting in air". And so when he wrote it, that was the sound. That was the sounds of war were all mixed up in that, as he was jotting it on a piece of paper and, and so, you know, it was kind of a true, true to form thing to hear it done that way with all the war sounds in it, you know.

Julian G. Simmons: It was quite amazing. And it's so wonderful that it was captured by you and also captured on film, so that people could see it and experience it because of people like me who didn't make it there. It was profound to me. Just listening to it the way you described that scene with the Civil War field, do you see yourself as a historian of sorts or...?

Henry Diltz: Yeah. No .

Julian G. Simmons: Do you not look at yourself that way? No?

Henry Diltz: No. Here's what, okay. I think that somehow by accident, if there are accidents, you know? I mean, if there's Angels and I was supposed to do this, maybe they figured out a way for me to get that camera in my hand. I don't claim the credit, maybe as much as I, you know, other people might. I don't say, Oh yes.

Look at my body of work. I just think, no, you know, look, I'm so happy I got to be there and take these pictures of all, all my friends and people like it and appreciate it. Share it with the world.

Julian G. Simmons: Hearing you talk about how you see what you do and have done for all these years and are still doing, um, it sounds like you're talking about that community.

You know, that community of the Woodstock Nation of sharing and, and how we perceive life, you know, um, there's not a lot of ego in it, you know, which is, which is interesting, you know, because, you know, asking you, if you saw yourself as a historian, you could have sat there and said, well, yeah, I think I'm a historian and blah, blah, you know?

Henry Diltz: No, I'm an accidental historian , absolutely accidental. You know, for me, taking a picture is -- it's a thrill --it's something that it makes me feel good. It's endorphins or something, you know? It's thrilling to me, and so I'm never thinking, Oh boy, wait, you know, 20 years from now this, Oh boy, I think I have a picture. There'll be famous. No, I'm just, you know, of the moment. And that comes from being a hippie and taking LSD and smoke and God's herb and all of that.

You know, you really, you're in the moment. You love the moment. And it kind of bothered me one time I thought, well, gosh, I'm sort of known for capturing all these past moments, you know? But I don't revere the past that way. I'm over here in the present.

Julian G. Simmons: You're in the present. Yeah.

Henry Diltz: Yeah. And then somebody said, well, yeah, but you bring the past into the present. And I thought, that's good. Okay.

Julian G. Simmons: Absolutely. I think that's what a lot of this, the anniversary of Woodstock is about is, is people of our generation trying to recapture that energy. You know, even if just for a little while to recapture that energy to remember what we started back then, you know, because it's, it's missing.

Henry Diltz: Yes.

Julian G. Simmons: You know, and we need it.

Henry Diltz: Yeah.

Julian G. Simmons: What we're trying to do is make people, when they have listened to these episodes, that we've created -- these podcasts -- and they think about Woodstock that they feel reinvigorated and happy and not sad. It isn't --

Henry Diltz: Because we want it to happen again. We're looking forward to that and everything is, it's a big, it's either a big circle or a big pendulum, you know, it's all gonna come around again.

Julian G. Simmons: You have to have something, you know, pushes you forward.

Henry Diltz: Yeah. Well, look, I'm 80 years old, right? I should've retired 20 years ago, but I'm more and more into it.

Julian G. Simmons: But that's what is so wonderful about it.

Henry Diltz: Of course, but I'm looking around and I like life. I love life. I think it's an amazing adventure, and I like so many facets of it and so many things I see and people, I mean, I'm photographing people all the time, whether I know them or I don't know them.

I mean, I still, I mean, every day I'm photographing an old truck or a flower or a, you know, a little kid or a dog. Whatever I see, I mean, I just love to frame up all the things I see. And I've taken almost a million photos and you know, I've filled up boxes and suitcases. I have all these photos. I want to make a book out of all that.

I'm going to make a hundred books. So I'm, I mean, I plan on doing that. I am going to do that. I've made a few prototypes and I'm going to do that. Just the way to get all those pictures out there, you know, share them. And that's what it's all about.

Julian G. Simmons: Right. Well, Henry, it was great talking to you and thank you for taking the time and, uh,

Henry Diltz: Yeah, I've got to take a picture of you guys!

Julian G. Simmons: We want to get a picture of you and I together.

Henry Diltz: Yeah, of course!

Julian G. Simmons: Here. let me take these off.

Henry Diltz: Oh no! See, no, no, no! This is documentary! Yeah, I remember that. Yeah, that happened. Those guys came over.

Julian G. Simmons: I loved sitting down with Henry Diltz. He is one of those people that makes life interesting and his message at the end there about sharing really is what this is all about. So on that note, here are a couple of Woodstock moments from our listeners.

Eugene Grossbeck: My name is Eugene Grossbeck from Shelby Township, Michigan.

So here's my Woodstock memories. I was almost 10 years old when Woodstock took place. My oldest sister, Cindy, who was 21 at the time, was going to attend with some friends, but she wound up in the hospital with complications from her diabetes and could not go. She later bought the soundtracks to the movie, and I listened to them also, and of course later saw the movie.

Over the years. I purchased various Woodstock additions on both the vinyl and CD. This year I purchased the deluxe 50th Anniversary Box Sets and am enjoying listening to it. A local festival called "Woodstock in the D" took place here in Southeast Michigan. Many local bands from the Woodstock era performed and Canned Heat was the headliner, who of course, was one of the featured acts at Woodstock.

So the spirit of Woodstock lives on and rightly so.

Gail Rogers: Hi, my name is Gail Rogers. I am from New York and in August, 1969 I was a candy counter girl and box office treasurer at the Fillmore East in New York City. Bill Graham, who was not involved with the concert, came to us and said, this guy in Woodstock really needs help.

So, uh, all of you who want to work the festival, I'll pay you \$100 for the festival and give you hotel rooms and it'll be fine. So up we went, um, I ended up being part of the crew that kept the roadway open that was behind the stage, so actually I never saw any of the festival at all. We also never saw the hotel rooms

Julian G. Simmons: I love those stories. Can you imagine being at Woodstock with half a million people there, the most amazing music acts on the planet and being stuck behind the stage and never seeing anything? None of the performances? That's wild. We would love to hear your story. So tell us where you were when Woodstock was happening.

You didn't have to be at Woodstock, you could have been working at your summer job and would have loved to have been there, but couldn't. Or maybe you were serving over in Vietnam, and definitely couldn't. Send us a short audio clip and we'll do our best to include it in a future podcast. You can record your voice on most smartphones using the voice memo app.

So don't be shy. Try to keep it under a minute and send your clips, ideas and questions to "ourgen2019@gmail.com" that's "O-U-R-G-E-N2019@gmail.com." And you can also send your ideas for future episodes to that same email address. To be notified of when the next episode is up, please go to our website at "talkinboutourgeneration.com and subscribe. That's talking without the G and about without the A.

You can also subscribe to our podcast on whatever podcast platform you like. In our next installment, we'll be continuing our conversation with my old friend, the amazing Carol Green. Carol was the staff cook at Woodstock, and she has an amusing and passionate story to tell.

Henry Diltz really said it all. It's about sharing and that is what this podcast is about. It's about sharing our stories, sharing our agony, sharing our happiness, sharing our laughter so that we all have a place that we can belong. And that's what "talkin' 'bout Our Generation" is. So the whole thing about Woodstock was the music, but it was really about being together and feeling like we belonged, and that there were a lot of us out there that we didn't know where their.

Music. Sharing.

Sharing is community, right? So what I would like to ask all of you to do in this really, really rough time that we're going through right now with Covid- 19 -- it's pretty scary, especially for people our age and how hard it is hitting our generation. Reach out. Reach out to your family, reach out to your friends, reach out to those people that you know are alone and are scared and, and really could use hearing from someone who says, you know, you matter. Don't be afraid.

Finally, before we go, I'd also like to give a shout out of thanks to my old friend, Billy Aldridge, for creating the original intro music to this episode. Sharing music, that's what brought us all together, especially at Woodstock and throughout our lives. Our music was about the message.

In that vein, we found this music that really spoke to us and we want to share some of that with you right now. One of the things I loved about it was that it talks about dreams and you know you're never ever too old to dream. So. I'm going to be quiet now and we're going to close with, "I Remember," by Dayon.

I'm Julian G Simmons. This is "talkin' 'bout Our Generation".

Thanks for listening.

Take care everyone. Be healthy, be safe,

Announcer: Covid-19, better known as Coronavirus, has spread throughout the world. There are a few ways to help lower the spread of this respiratory disease. Wash your hands. Avoid touching your face, including mouth, nose, and eyes. Cover your cough since sneezes. Monitor your symptoms and consult with your doctor.

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