

WOODSTOCK TURNS 50



This summer, celebrate the 50th anniversary of the music festival that helped fuel a cultural revolution.

Fifty years ago this August, nearly a half-million young people gathered on a dairy farm in the Catskill Mountains of Upstate New York to hear a lineup of musical luminaries that read like a who's who of rock 'n' roll. Woodstock: An Aquarian Exposition, as it was formally titled, has long been considered a cultural touchstone of its time, an iconic moment that carried significant symbolic weight for a generation longing to change the world through peace and love.

"Those were such turbulent times," says Bobbi Ercoline of Pine Bush, New York, who in a serendipitous moment was captured on film one early morning during the concert hugging her then-boyfriend and now-husband, Nick, in an image that landed on the Woodstock album cover. "There was so much violence in the country, and yet there was none of it at Woodstock. It was exactly how [concert organizers] described it in their promotions: Three Days of Peace and Music."

Concerts continue to be held

today at the Woodstock site, now called the Bethel Woods Center for the Arts. But the real draw is its world-class museum chronicling both the 1969 concert and the tempestuous times. Visitors can spend hours there viewing film footage of the concert as well as news reports and documentaries. The fascinating interactive exhibits detail the lack of food and sanitation facilities during the three-day event as well as the monsoon-like thunderstorms that created so much mud that the enormous stage slid several feet downhill. Museum walls are adorned with posters and photos, and artifacts from the 1960s abound, including a minidress, bell-bottom jeans, draft cards and protest buttons. There's even a psychedelically painted VW Love Bug.

The huge meadow outside the center—a natural bowl-shaped amphitheater—is where the magic actually happened. It's hard to envision the sea of humanity that once covered this quiet, grassy spot, but its power to attract pilgrims from

across the globe endures.

"Not a week goes by I don't have people stopping in [to my business] before or after they've visited the site," says Stacy Cohen, owner of the Catskill Distillery and Dancing Cat Saloon, which sits just a thousand feet away on a narrow rural road. "Their eyes light up in wonderment when they find out I was [at the 1969 Woodstock]."

From August 15 to 18, Bethel Woods will hold a series of concerts by Ringo Starr, the Doobie Brothers, John Fogerty and Carlos Santana. Fogerty and Santana are veterans of the original concert. [Check bethelwoodscenter.org for concert updates.]

Ercoline hopes the anniversary events can capture some of the allure of the 1969 concert. "There was nothing unhappy about Woodstock," she says. "There was so much sharing and caring. If we could get just a little of that back, that would be really good news. And doesn't the world need more good news these days?"

—Rich Warren