



Celebrate Woodstock
2020 by
Jim Ratts and Runaway Express

A JOURNEY FROM SMALL TOWNS TO WOODSTOCK — by Peter Jones
IT ALL BEGINS WITH ONE ACOUSTIC GUITAR AND THE SIMPLE STORY OF A
TEENAGER NAMED QUINCY.

FROM THERE, *CELEBRATE WOODSTOCK* EVOLVES INTO A
MULTI-SENSORY THEATER OF THE MIND AS QUINCY—AND HIS
GENERATION—WANDER INTO UPSTATE NEW YORK ON A LIFE-CHANGING
COMING-OF-AGE JOURNEY.

QUINCY IS NOT IN KANSAS ANYMORE. AND NEITHER ARE 400,000
OTHERS.

"I'VE GOT TO GO TO WOODSTOCK," THE BOY REASONS WITH HIS OLD
MAN, WHO IS SKEPTICAL UNTIL THE QUICK-ON-HIS-FEET TEEN MANAGES TO
CONVINCE HIS FATHER THAT HENDRIX AND JEFFERSON AIRPLANE ARE THE
ARTIE SHAW AND DORSEY BROTHERS OF TODAY. THE WILD-EYED KID WILL
SOON BACKPACK INTO 3 DAYS OF PEACE, LOVE AND MUSIC AT THE
UNLIKELY OF VENUES, A 600-ACRE-DAIRY-FARM-TURNED-AQUARIAN-
MECCA.

THE MOVIE-ERR CINEMATIC ALBUM—CALLED *CELEBRATE WOODSTOCK* IS
THE NEWEST CONCEPTUAL WORK BY JIM RATTS AND RUNAWAY EXPRESS.
THE CD MARKS THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ICONIC WOODSTOCK
FESTIVAL. THIS TIME, RATTS'S PENCHANT FOR AMBITIOUS SOUND COLLAGE
BORDERS ON ROCK OPERA AS A MASSIVE "BREAKFAST IN BED," THE
INFAMOUS TRAFFIC JAM AND OTHER WOODSTOCK TOUCHSTONES ARE TOLD
IN SONG, OFTEN FROM THE STANDPOINT OF THE AUDIENCE AND A
GENERATION LOST IN SPACE.

"SEVENTEEN BUCKS FOR THE WEEKEND," RUNAWAY EXPRESS SINGS,
AS A SORT OF '60S GREEK CHORUS.

CELEBRATE WOODSTOCK IS LESS A COLLECTION OF SONGS THAN AN
INTERWEAVING PERIOD PIECE WITH SINGER-SONGWRITER RATTS SERVING



NARRATOR. THE SEGUE-FILLED CD IS A MEDLEY OF NATURAL SOUND, DIALOGUE, AND, OF COURSE, THE SOUNDTRACK OF AN ERA—SONGS LIKE “GOIN’ UP THE COUNTRY,” “PIECE OF MY HEART,” AND THE JONI MITCHELL ODE THAT HELPED LAUNCH THE WOODSTOCK MYTHOS.

ALTHOUGH REFLECTIVE NARRATION AND THE WEIGHT OF HISTORY ARE HEARD THROUGHOUT CELEBRATE WOODSTOCK’S 80 MINUTES, A MORE PERSONAL, LESS OMNISCIENT ACCOUNT IS TOLD THROUGH THE EYES OF QUINCY. ARE THE STONES GOING TO SHOW UP? WHAT ABOUT DYLAN? HE LIVES IN WOODSTOCK.

AMID THOSE 12 ORIGINAL SONGS, RUNAWAY EXPRESS SERVES AS THE HOUSE BAND FOR A GENERATION “PLAYING” THE PARTS OF MANY WOODSTOCK ACTS, SOMETIMES LESS LITERALLY, RE-INVENTING THE WHO’S “MY GENERATION” AS A TIME-TRAVELING LOOK BACK AT THE CRAZINESS, FROM THE SEMI-JADED STANDPOINT OF TODAY’S AGING BOOMERS.

THE ALBUM IS NOT JUST ABOUT WOODSTOCK PER SE. ANTECEDENTS LIKE JACK KEROUAC AND 1950S ROCK AND ROLL MAKE CAMEOS, TOO. RATT’S, A BUDDY HOLLY SUPER FAN, USES THE QUIRKY-AND ODDLY WELL RECEIVED-PERFORMANCE BY SHA NA NA AS A CLEVER FLASHBACK WITHIN A FLASHBACK. AND WHEN RATT’S URGES “COME ON” TO THE TRIBE, HE NATURALLY EYOKES EDDIE COCHRAN AS MUCH AS WAYY GRAYY, WHOSE STAGE BANTER [“WE MUST BE IN HEAVEN, MAN”] IS THE BASIS FOR A NEW SONG CALLED “MOTHERLAND.”

AS A SINGER-SONGWRITER, RATT’S HAS AN EAR FOR HISTORY AND LARGER-THAN-LIFE IDEAS, BUT HE ALSO KNOWS HOW TO GET PERSONAL, AS EVIDENCED BY SUCH EARLIER “CONCEPT ALBUMS” AS HIS DOUBLE-SHOT TRIBUTE TO HOLLY AND 2018’S POIGNANT SMALL TOWNS, WHICH TELLS THE STORY OF RURAL AMERICA IN MUSICAL CHAPTERS.

ALTHOUGH RATT’S DID NOT MAKE IT TO WOODSTOCK HIMSELF, HE PLAYED HIS OWN ROLE IN MUSIC’S POST-WOODSTOCK COUNTRY-ROCK PERIOD AS A TOURING MUSICIAN IN THE 1970S. HIS SONGS HAVE BEEN RECORDED BY THE LIKES OF SAM BUSH [THE BLUEGRASS CHART HIT “HOWLIN’ AT THE MOON”] AND HE HAS PLAYED AND SUNG WITH MEMBERS OF THE NITTY GRITTY DIRT BAND, BOTH JOHN MCEUEN AND JIMMY IBBOTSON, YIELDING AN MCA RELEASE BY WILD JIMBOS.

CELEBRATE WOODSTOCK IS AFFECTING IN ITS INDIVIDUALIZED ACCOUNT, BUT THE CD IS MORE THAN NOSTALGIA AS IT PLACES ROCK’S MOST FAMOUS MUSIC FESTIVAL ON A KIND OF TIMELESS AND UNIVERSAL LEVEL. MOST IMPORTANT, RATT’S MANAGES TO PUT THE ENDURING IDEALISM OF WOODSTOCK IN A DECIDEDLY CONTEMPORARY AND THOUGHT-PROVOKING CONTEXT, WITHOUT EVER TAKING THE FUN OUT OF THE MUSIC.

HOW MANY OTHER POTENTIAL RESOURCES FOR A TERM PAPER CAN YOU DANCE TO?

CELEBRATE WOODSTOCK IS A SLICE OF HEAVEN, MAN.

—Peter Jones

This is a garden where people blossom
Flowers in a Gathering... Charles John Quarto

I sat down with Jim recently to ask him about his efforts to explore the '60s generation in his concept album, *Celebrate Woodstock*.

—Peter Jones

Did you go to Woodstock?

I'd been in college for two years in Texas and had a taste of the subculture, but, curiously enough in the summer of 1969, I was on our farm in Kansas driving a tractor for my dad, and the event just totally escaped me. Life magazine came out with an explosive full issue of pictures from the festival, and I swore I could see myself in the crowd.

There had already been the Monterey Pop Festival and a number of other similar large musical events. What was it about iconic Woodstock that pushed it above the rest?

It's just a timeline. These other rock festivals were predecessors. The scene was building. This music-powered subculture was getting bigger and stronger. At some point, it had to become a magnificent failure. It was destined for both implosion and explosion. Woodstock made an indelible impression, and as echos of the concert were fading away, Crosby, Stills and Nash were all over the radio with Joni's "Woodstock," this amazing and touching song. What bigger punchline did Woodstock need to drift into historical significance?

What prompted you to look back at the festival with a full-on theatrical concept album?

It wasn't the festival itself. The Woodstock Music and Arts Fair was just a platform on which to stage my play. A venue for me to sing about the times. Woodstock is in lower case, and the '60s experience for me is in all caps. It was special being a hippie teenager. I had so many friends I felt were stardust and golden. I needed the theatrical setting to celebrate that spirit I distinctly remember. I make records. Sometimes I make records that are disguised as movies.

"Celebrate Woodstock" seems to beg the question about the impact of the '60s generation—and a promise that was not necessarily fulfilled.

The clock is still ticking on whether it's fulfilled or not. The ideals of the '60s have become so perfectly assimilated that they may no longer be recognized as such. That's how influences work best. This opportunity for change will arise with every new generation of inquisitive minds and idealism. Each progressive generation has a chance to step in and make a difference, and do better than we did. Hey kids, it's your turn now!

It's appropriate that Woodstock would be the subject of a concept album, as the late '60s were the era of THE concept album, a genre that has largely gone the way of the 8-track tape.

Concept albums are archaic, I admit that. But I also am archaic, and my past encourages me to present ideas in that format. I've always wanted to create thematic collages. I've done a bunch of them. I really enjoy the seamless nature of audio continuity. I make ear movies, and this one started in 2004, and was released in 2006. This new, radically revised version to observe the 50th Anniversary of Woodstock has taken years and thousands of additional hours of re-recording, editing and re-organizing the original project. We now present *Celebrate Woodstock 2020* to reflect our continued efforts to highlight an amazing time in our history. I see plenty of additional activity on Woodstock in the future. I can't imagine closing the door on a record that's been this much fun to create.

Eighty minutes is a long record in this new age of downloaded files and personal playlists. Do you have any suggestions that will make Celebrate Woodstock any easier for the listener to absorb?

I do. Number 1—Take a Road Trip. Then also consider that on this one 80 minute CD, there are two distinct sides. The Prelude consists of tracks #1 through 6. That's a healthy listening experience for Side One. Over 26 minutes is a hefty length for any vinyl long-playing record side experience. Take a moment to pretend to flip the disc, or come back and resume later. *Back To The Garden*, starting at Track 7, will be the beginning of the festival presentation. Get comfortable. Sit there. Look at all those people around you. Get acquainted. And go to Woodstock.

Think about it this way, Peter: An idealist creates an imaginary journey to a festival he never attended, borrows from cherished memories, and invites others to join him on what he hopes to be a most exquisite trip back in time, and into the future.

Thanks. Jim

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