

From Woodstock to Glastonbury to the Isle of Wight: the Role of Festival Films in the Construction of the Countercultural Carnavalesque

Chris Anderton

This chapter examines the narrative construction of two British music festival films – *Message to Love: the Isle of Wight Festival* (1995) and *Glastonbury Fayre* (1972) – that have, perhaps surprisingly, received little prior attention within academia. These films portray the 1970 Isle of Wight Festival and the 1971 Glastonbury Fayre – events which were regarded at the time as British versions of the US Woodstock Festival. *Glastonbury Fayre* was released within a year of the event taking place, while legal disagreements regarding copyright meant that *Message to Love* was not edited and released until the 1990s. These films demonstrate narratives and techniques familiar from *Woodstock – Three Days of Peace and Music* (1970), and have helped to construct and reinforce what I have referred to as the “countercultural carnivalesque” – a way of thinking about festival culture that is informed by a particular understanding of the youth counterculture of the late-1960s, and the role of music festivals as modern-day manifestations of the medieval carnival behaviors and ideas described by Mikhail Bakhtin. I critically examine the narratives and framing devices used in the films to demonstrate how and why representations of the countercultural carnivalesque differ between them.

Introduction

In popular culture the emergence of large-scale outdoor rock music festivals in the late 1960s is synonymous with the transatlantic hippie youth counterculture of the era

(Gebhardt). As Simon Frith has suggested, music festivals provided the material experience of countercultural community – a highly visual celebration of youth solidarity that publicly opposed the hegemonic values of the parent culture (66). Furthermore, as Richard Peterson has argued, “the media did not act as a neutral mirror but played an active role in shaping everyone’s view of reality” at this time (116). This active role can be seen in the contemporary news reporting (Coates; Warner) and films (Bennett; Goodall; Kitts; Schowalter; Warner; Wright) discussed in this article and in later mass media and internet resources that continue to mythologize the events of the time (Street). The filmed representations are particularly important as their documentary approach and focus on audiences as well as musical performances gives the viewer the sense of being there, of experiencing the events and atmosphere of those occasions (Bennett 43). Their representations serve to construct a history of the past for modern audiences whose experience of music festivals in the twenty-first century may consist largely of corporately-run events saturated with brand sponsorships and mainstream media coverage (Anderton, “Commercializing”, “Sponsorship”, “Branding”). The socio-political meanings and behaviors associated with music festivals have changed markedly over the past fifty years (Anderton, “Music Festivals in the UK”; Robinson), so the films made in the late 1960s and early 1970s form an important representational and pedagogic resource, which helps to immerse students in the aesthetic and political experience of the time. The films also allow for critical discussion of the constructed nature of the “reality” that they purport to present and to challenge the received myths and understandings they have helped to create (Arnold 156). As Michael Saffle suggests, the documentary format allows the director to retrospectively compile various sources to give the appearance of an unfolding narrative that naturalizes a particular point of view (42–3). This is achieved through the use of documentary tropes such as a

focus on peripheral activities other than the music that also give the films wider audience appeal (Donnelly 173). They typically have a temporal structure that begins with the pre-event stages, passes through days and nights of performances and ends with the post-event aftermath. They also lack a narrator, instead allowing the viewer to piece together their own understanding of the events from the material that has been presented. However, the editing process does not necessarily follow the event's actual timeline or give full coverage of the range of activities, people or points of view; instead, footage is chosen to help propel a preferred storyline.¹

This article presents an analysis of the films *Glastonbury Fayre* (1972) and *Message to Love: the Isle of Wight Festival* (1995): films that are relatively underrepresented in academic work. It is contextualized within what I have termed the “countercultural carnivalesque” (Anderton, “Music Festivals in the UK” 19–23), and with comparisons to the film *Woodstock – Three Days of Peace and Love* (1970). *Woodstock* is particularly important because both *Glastonbury Fayre* and the 1970 Isle of Wight Festival were regarded (in differing ways) as British versions of the US event, and because the worldwide success of the film popularized and mythologized the notion of the countercultural rock festival. Indeed, the documentary films of *Glastonbury Fayre* and the *Isle of Wight Festival* each demonstrate narratives and techniques familiar from *Woodstock*, though adapted to the particular contexts of the British events. The article is structured in five sections. In the first, I discuss the notion of the countercultural carnivalesque and its development in the late 1960s and early 1970s, arguing that this concept underpins our understanding and representation of the music festival culture of that time. In the second I introduce the main events and films under consideration, while the third analyzes the framing devices used in the films with comparisons made to *Woodstock*. The final two sections draw attention to two specific sets of representations

within the films *Message to Love* and *Glastonbury Fayre*, and how these reflect different narratives of the countercultural carnivalesque: the portrayal of festival organizers in terms of their ideologies and actions, and the representation of festival audiences including their interactions with performers, organizers and each other.

The Countercultural Carnivalesque

The concept of the countercultural carnivalesque was first introduced to describe the way that academics have theorized the socio-cultural positioning of the rock music festivals of the 1960s and 1970s (Anderton, “Commercializing” 40–1). It refers to the application of 1960s countercultural ideas to Mikhail Bakhtin’s depiction of the medieval carnival: a Christian celebration marked by behaviors that overturned the social hierarchies and mores of the time. During carnival, the peasantry was given license to indulge in excessive eating and drinking, sexual promiscuity, the wearing of grotesque masks and costumes, and irreverence towards those in authority (Stallybrass and White 189). For Bakhtin, carnival created a temporary “second world” (10–11) that was imbued with wholly positive connotations and was a necessary means of releasing the tensions and contradictions inherent to a structurally unequal society (Lindley 17). Stallybrass and White describe how these carnivalesque customs and events were gradually reduced through the efforts of Protestantism, industrial capitalism and an emergent Bourgeoisie which sought to repress “the material pleasures of the body and the pleasures of role-playing in public” (Blake 180). Their actions foreshadow the moral panics that attended the countercultural rock festivals of the 1960s and 1970s, where nudity, sexual license, drugs and subversive cultural and political commentary were present at events that seemed to offer a utopian second world – one that critiqued mainstream capitalist society.² Barbara Ehrenreich suggests that the recreated carnival

of the rock festival was perceived by some festivalgoers as more than just a temporary interruption (220); that it had the potential to form a new way of life, rather than simply being a place for “weekend hippies” (Clarke 26) – those seeking to connect with the idealism of the counterculture and to “turn on, tune in [and] drop out” for a weekend or a week (McKay 45).

It is within the above context that a carnivalesque understanding of outdoor music festivals has emerged in academia and become conflated with the social and political meanings associated with the late 1960s counterculture. An early example is provided by Harvey Cox in 1969, who described the “conscious excess”, “celebrative affirmation” and “juxtaposition” of the hippie festivals in the US, which he saw as comparable to the Christian Feast of Fools (22). Similarly, Andy Gordon’s analysis, published a year later, placed the rock festival within the traditions of the harvest festival and the Lord of Misrule, describing them as offering a “sanctioned release” (32). Later academics, including Andrew Blake, Barbara Ehrenreich, Kevin Hetherington, Robert Hewison and George McKay, specifically refer to Bakhtin’s notion of the carnivalesque (whose book, *Rabelais and His World*, was first published in an English translation in 1984). They also extend the discussion of the behavioral aspects associated with the carnivalesque to focus on the spiritual search of counterculture participants in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s: people shown to be seeking meaning in their lives through New Age and alternative spirituality, and through their interests in environmental, social and political causes.

Writing in the early 1980s, the political historian Michael Clarke argued that British music festivals of the 1970s offered playful and spectacular critiques of mainstream society by inverting social norms with regard to sex/nudity, drug use, squalor and disorder (27–34). These inversions offer a useful way to examine the

hedonistic, carnivalesque, aspects of the outdoor rock festival and can also be clearly identified in *Woodstock* (1970). The film presents the counterculture in a positive light, where the carnivalesque overturnings have the potential to lead to a new way of life – an Edenic representation where the element of disorder has been actively downplayed by the director. Where disorder is shown, it is related to the attempts of the commercial organizers to deal with the unexpectedly high numbers of people coming to the event, and the heavy rains that turned parts of the site into a mud bath. Problems included traffic congestion, a lack of adequate shelter, and difficulties in providing food supplies and sanitation (Kitts 721). The bad weather led to squalid conditions, but the crowds are shown dealing with the privations in good spirits, and creating their own entertainments in mud slides and communal music making. Thomas Kitts argues that the film “depicts boundaries – sonic, social, and sexual – being gently removed, although it stops short of showing drug ingestion and sex” (717). Nevertheless, drug use, sexual relationships and nudity are discussed in the film. For instance, naked men and women are seen at a number of points during the film, including an extended scene with festivalgoers skinny dipping at a nearby lake and talking about the sense of freedom it gives them, while during Arlo Guthrie’s performance of “Coming Into Los Angeles” (a song about bringing drugs across a border), we see a collage of images of festivalgoers rolling marijuana cigarettes and passing joints between each other. Drug use is explicitly mentioned in main stage announcements, with both stage manager Chip Monck and Wavy Gravy of the Hog Farm commune warning the crowd about the brown acid (LSD) tablets that have been causing “bum trips”. Wavy Gravy goes on to tell the crowd that the tablets are not poison, but have been “manufactured poorly” and talks about how those recovering from their “bum trips” are now helping the medical staff to help others. There is also interview sequence of over five minutes with a male and

female festivalgoer where they talk casually about drug use (and how it now feels like a rather contrived scene), and about sexual relationships. There is an expectation that there will be “a lot of balling” at the festival, which foregrounds the “free love” attitudes associated with the counterculture. The man thinks that people are feeling lost in their lives and have come to the event to search for answers. This spiritual search is another common trope of the counterculture, and while the film focuses more on Eastern religions (Swami Satchidananda Saraswati is shown speaking to the crowd, and there are shots of people practicing yoga and tai chi), the event was also referred to by some commentators at the time as a “Jesus revival movement” (Nita and Gemie 7).

Contextualization

The 1970 Isle of Wight Festival was the third event staged by the Foulk brothers (Fiery Creations), with previous headliners including Jefferson Airplane and Bob Dylan. It was of a similar scale to Woodstock, with over 500,000 people estimated to have attended, and featured several acts who had played Woodstock the previous year, including Joan Baez, Melanie, John Sebastian, Ten Years After, Sly & the Family Stone, Jimi Hendrix and The Who. Like Woodstock, local opposition meant that there were difficulties securing a site, with the event also being declared free.³ In comparison, the 1971 Glastonbury Fayre was a much smaller and intentionally free event, with only a few thousand attendees. It featured performances from lesser-known acts such as Arthur Brown’s Kingdom Come, Fairport Convention, Gong, Family and Quintessence, alongside Woodstock veterans Melanie and Joan Baez. Unlike the commercially managed Isle of Wight Festival, which was publicized around the world and seen as an important marketing opportunity by the major record labels of the day (Blevins, “Record Firms”), Glastonbury Fayre was free to attend and had a much lower media

profile. As a result, the major weekly music papers of the time (*NME*, *Melody Maker* and *Sounds*) did not review the event, though it was discussed in the underground freak press, such as *IT* (for example, Farren et al., “Glastonbury”). The legendary status of the 1971 festival grew over the years, in part because of the film made of the event and in part through word of mouth discussion at the later events it inspired.

The film *Glastonbury Fayre* was, like *Woodstock*, released within a year of the event taking place, though the British public and press were less enthusiastic in their response. For instance, a review in *Melody Maker* described the film as “a cheapo action replay of all your favourite scenes from *Woodstock*” (Partridge 53).

Nevertheless, the film clearly shows the development of a British counterculture based around the more Aquarian aspects of the US counterculture seen in *Woodstock*. In the *Making Of* feature of the DVD release, director Nic Roeg laments that the film captured the end of the hippie dream (*Glastonbury*); yet it also captured the beginning of what would become the Free Festivals movement in the UK – a grassroots movement that ran throughout the 1970s and 1980s and was strongly associated with the so-called New Age travelers: a catch-all term for a post-hippie counterculture of people who dropped out of mainstream society to live an itinerant existence in converted vehicles. From the mid-1970s they would create a network of free festivals around the UK, including the Stonehenge Free Festival, where they would congregate to celebrate the summer solstice.⁴

In contrast, *Message to Love*, directed by Murray Lerner, presents the commercialization of festival culture and the more highly politicized response of counterculture radicals, who felt that music festivals could and should (after the cultural, if not financial, success of *Woodstock*) be free to attend (Kramer 150).⁵ Unlike the films mentioned above, *Message to Love* was edited and released 25 years after the

events it depicts. This was partly to do with legal issues regarding copyright, since artists were, following *Woodstock*, “wary of signing any film deal in the absence of guaranteed big money and a measure of artistic control” (Foulk with Foulk 289). The conflict between the forces of capitalism on one side and the counterculture on the other is central to the film, which sought to capture both the opposition that the organizers faced – primarily from foreign radicals who had traveled to the event without a ticket – and their efforts to deal with it (Hinton 104). The radicals arrived well before the event was due to start and set up camp on Afton Down – a hillside that overlooked the festival arena and allowed them to hear the music without paying an entrance fee. The shanty town of hippies and radicals came to be dubbed “Desolation Row” and was the focus for conflict between the organizers (who had guaranteed to keep the hill clear) and those seeking to disrupt the event.⁶ As Lerner puts it, “I was trying in the film to show the realities behind the myth, the complexity of ideologies that say one thing and do another” (Lerner, quoted by Lister 6). As a result, the experience of the vast majority of festivalgoers who were not part of the radical scene is largely ignored in the film, so that a distinctly polarized vision of the event is presented instead (Foulk with Foulk 307).

Framing Devices

Music festival films are a form of documentary in which the experience of a multi-day event is necessarily compressed through the creative and artistic choices of the films’ directors (Renov 7). As Thomas Kitts puts it, filmmakers “manipulate footage” in order to tell stories even as the films themselves may give the impression that the cameras are “engaged in reportage” (Edgar et al. 3). Nevertheless, Michael Renov suggests that “there is nothing inherently less creative about non-fictional representations”: that they still create “a ‘truth’ of the text” (7). Two main questions arise from this. First, what were the intentions of the director during the filming process? Second, what affected the

editorial choices made in the later compiling of the film? Julie Lobalzo Wright suggests with respect to the latter question that the time lag between the event being filmed and the edit being made allows filmmakers to review “popular opinion about the events”, and that the cultural memory of them is then confirmed through the editing process, thereby reinforcing mediated narratives and mythologies (71–2).

As an example Wright mentions the special edition of *Life* magazine that focused on the 1969 Woodstock Festival (Wright 71). The magazine presented Woodstock as a “real city” with “all the urban problems of water supply, food, sanitation and health. Drugs too, certainly, because so many of its inhabitants belong to the drug culture” (*Life* 7). There is, however, relatively little criticism in the magazine, which offers instead a largely positive celebration of the event: “Overrun, strained to its limits, the system, somehow didn’t break... there wasn’t so much as a fist fight” (*ibid.*). The early part of the magazine focuses predominantly on the visual style of the countercultural audience, and it is page 26 before we see any pictures of musicians performing on stage. The presence of the Hog Farm and other communes is noted, as are the stage announcements (8), the nude bathing at nearby Philippine Pond (9), and the issues caused by drugs (23) – all elements that are present in *Woodstock* the movie. The primary narrative of the magazine and subsequent film are triumph in adversity and the presentation of the US counterculture as young, peaceful and somewhat naïve..

Woodstock was directed by Michael Wadleigh, who said of the film: “We never thought we were ‘editing a film’. We thought we were editing an experience, that we wanted to ‘take you there’” (12). Nic Roeg’s attitude to filming *Glastonbury Fayre* was similar. In the audio commentary to the DVD he states: “I remember saying to Tony Richmond [cinematographer]: ‘Don’t let’s set anything up; don’t ask anybody to do anything; shoot it’” (*Glastonbury*). In both films the viewer is immersed within the

social experience of the crowd, while the various scenes are largely impressionistic in nature: establishing the mood of the crowd and giving us insights into their beliefs. There are techniques borrowed from Direct Cinema, such as the use of hand-held cameras and a sense of events unfolding as you watch, and also from Cinéma Vérité, such as the overlaying of audio interviews across montages of images and, in *Woodstock*, seeing the filmmakers interacting with organizers and festivalgoers (Saffle 44). The latter is also seen in *Message to Love*, though the director Murray Lerner suggests that his work is not really Cinéma Vérité because he adopts a more “classical approach” to filmmaking: it “should be in focus and you should hear them” and that “there has to be a concept behind the film – even if it’s an emotion – that hooks it together or fuses it” (quoted in Lieberfeld 434, 435). The original concept had been to document the battle between the organizers and the local authorities seeking to prevent the festival, but the film crew was not in place in time to capture that. Instead, Lerner saw the potential of the Desolation Row radicals to provide his overarching concept, and focused his attention on their opposition to the organizers instead.

Message to Love, like *Woodstock*, clearly draws on contemporary press coverage to guide its narrative, though it tends to recapitulate the more critical and sensationalist narratives of the time, and to present key moments identifiable from them.⁷ For instance, a *Melody Maker* review referred to the troubles faced by the organizers on Desolation Row, and also highlighted the various radicals allowed on-stage to address the crowd, such as the French poet and political activist Jean-Jacques Lebel who described the commercial festival scene as a “psychedelic concentration camp” (Welch et al.). For *Melody Maker*, which mostly focused on the quality of the musical performances rather than clashes with the radicals, the event nevertheless demonstrated “a breakdown of communication” between the organizers and the crowd,

stating that the event “may be last time we “get ourselves back to the garden””. This last quote is a reference to Joni Mitchell’s song “Woodstock” and to the on-stage interruption by a hippie known as Yogi Joe. Apparently under the influence of drugs, Yogi Joe attempts to address the crowd but is pulled off stage by Mitchell’s manager and others. In the film we see him talking backstage, claiming that commercial organizers have co-opted the notion of the music festival (*Message to Love*), even though commercial events pre-date the US counterculture by many years (Anderton 2019 23–31). In *IT* Mick Farren draws attention to the VIP enclosure in front of the stage⁸, and to the exterior fences of the site being attacked by radicals. Later in the article it is reported that the event publicist gave “paint to 50 freaks to paint the fence and receive complimentary tickets” before writing slogans on the walls such as “Off the pigs”, “Bring down the walls!” and “Capitalist motherfuckers die!!” (Farren et al., “Isle of Wight” 9). Farren also picks up on the breakdown of communication between the organizers and the audience, quoting a “hysterical outburst” from compere Rikki Farr: “You bastards, you ruined everything. I’ll see you in Hell before you come onto my island again” (7). Such reports helped to create the popular narrative of the festival as beset by trouble – a narrative enhanced by the editing of *Message to Love*.

The general lack of press coverage for the 1971 Glastonbury Fayre meant that the film’s concept became much more closely attuned with the needs and interests of the organizers, though the brief review by Mick Farren in *IT* is instructive of the overall feel of the festival. He states:

The main thing about the event was the real sense of community that developed during the course of time. Although at times the atmosphere of mystic reverence became a mite strong, it was a good feeling laying on the grass, consuming rare

and exotic drugs ... We didn't find God, but it was nice to relax for a few days and forget the problems of the city (Farren et al., "Glastonbury" 11).

The "atmosphere of mystic reverence" is foregrounded in the film and even more so in the live album box set that was issued a year later. The 32-page booklet included in the set directly connects the festival to the mythology of King Arthur, Avalon and Glastonbury Tor, as well as to Stonehenge and the Egyptian pyramids, through reference to alternative belief systems such as ley lines and the writings of the esotericist author John Michell (*Glastonbury* [album]). The booklet describes the aims of the event as "the conservation of our natural resources; a respect for nature and life; and a spiritual awakening" (5). The latter is particularly important within the film as there are scenes and interviews with the production team and others that reinforce it. Examples include co-organizer Andrew Kerr talking about the potential spiritual benefits of holding similar events at both equinoxes and both solstices, John Michell discussing dowsing and the placement of the Pyramid stage, and the thirteen year old Guru Maharaj Ji of the Divine Light Mission briefly addressing the crowd (as had Swami Satchidananda Saraswati at Woodstock Festival).

Like *Woodstock*, *Glastonbury Fayre* uses hand-held camera shots in the Direct Cinema style and focuses on the countercultural audience of the event as much as it does the artists. *Woodstock* achieves some of its representational power by making use of split screen images that comment upon or visually support the interview material (Bennett 47–8), but this technique is not used in either *Glastonbury Fayre* or *Message to Love*. Instead, we see such narratives being implied by editing choices that play scenes against each other. Two good examples from *Glastonbury Fayre* come about an hour into the film. As the summer solstice sun rises we hear Gong's "Tried So Hard" together with images of festivalgoers worshipping the sun, sunbathing nude and

performing yoga in the fields. Following this is a scene that cuts back and forth between a rather somber Catholic mass held near Glastonbury Tor and the ecstatic singing and dancing of a Hare Krishna service held at the base of the Pyramid stage. Both services feature a silent moment when hands are raised to the skies (cross-edited together), which forges a link between them, but the overall feeling is that the Christian service represents the past while the bright colors, chanting and dancing of the Hare Krishna service represents the future.

In *Message to Love* the narrative contrasts and commentaries are provided through “unexpected transitions” that are inspired, according to Lerner, by Eisenstein’s theory of montage (Lerner, quoted in Lieberfeld 435). These transitions have a similar effect to the split-screen use of *Woodstock* in that they invite viewers to think about the contrasts between the scenes presented: to develop their own narrative and understanding of the event, albeit guided by the filmmakers’ own intentions in juxtaposing them. A good example is the footage of Tiny Tim and his agent Bert Block. Backstage interviews show Lerner asking “Do you think festivals should be free by the way?” to which Tiny Tim answers “Oh, sure” (*Message to Love*). The film then cuts to Bert saying (with a smile) “Tiny Tim’s straight... We had to give him the money first. He can’t sing with his ukulele without the money. He doesn’t tune up without the money.” The film then cuts back to Tiny Tim again, surrounded by people in the backstage area saying “Of course it’s a good idea to have it free, but get rid of those terrible marijuana drugs. It’s nothing but milk and honey” (ibid.). Here we see a common tactic of Lerner’s: to challenge an interviewee with a question in order to elicit responses that might be useful to the film (Lerner, quoted in Lieberfeld 434). Another example comes after Taste’s “Sinner Boy” (during which a naked woman climbs onto the stage), when prominent anti-festival campaigner Commander Rees-Millington RN is

interviewed: “You see... if you have a festival with all the stops pulled out, kids running about naked, fucking in the bushes, and doing every damned thing that they feel inclined to do... I don’t think that’s particularly good for the body politic.” As soon as he finishes the film cuts to Tiny Tim on stage singing “There’ll Always be an England” through a megaphone.

Representations of Festival Organizers

Message to Love focuses on festival compere Rikki Farr as the main representative of the organizers, and he seems to oscillate between two personalities – on the one hand, he loudly berates the audience for causing trouble, while on the other he tries to create a rapport with them by claiming that the promoters are working in the audience’s best interests and that they, as organizers, are also victims of a capitalist society that demands a monetary exchange in order to stage the event. Lerner’s presentation of Farr’s stage announcements adds to this split personality as the scenes are edited out of sync with the timeline of the event – picking and choosing clips that help to drive a dramatic narrative rather than presenting a true account of how things actually unfolded. For instance, at one point we see him on stage announcing (in a rather flippant manner) a police amnesty for people aged 17 years and under to hand in their drugs with no consequences, while later in the film (though filmed days earlier) we see him backstage complaining that:

There is an unintelligent element that... [want to] cause trouble and make a name for themselves... They will be treated with the contempt they deserve.

And if they try to get in through the mud they shall go out through the mud, but on their chins.

Later still he makes a stage announcement appealing for 170,000 tickets to be sold so that the organizers can break even, and when he finally announces that the event has been declared free he asks the audience to stand up and join hands together as a version of “Amazing Grace” is played on the PA.⁹ At the end of the film he states: “For a year we defended a generation. A very minor part of that generation blew it.”

In comparison, event promoters Ron and Ray Foulk are seen more rarely in the film. When they, they are typically shown wearing business suits in their off-site offices and arguing on the phone with artist managers on the telephone about artist billing and the need for advances to be paid. We also see Ray Foulk in the middle of the night trying to talk to the radical protesters attacking the fences on Desolation Row. He asks them how the organizers can pay the artists if the fences come down, while on a later occasion we see him having an awkward argument with Jethro Tull’s manager Terry Ellis, who suggests the organizers should stop blaming the artists for their money troubles. Both scenes are dramatized by Lerner through editing choices that conflate events from different times/days/locations to make them appear to be happening concurrently. For instance, the night time scene of Ray Foulk noted above occurred on the Monday morning before the festival opened, not while the Doors performed “When the Music’s Over” in the early hours on the following Sunday morning, as presented in *Message to Love* (Foulk with Foulk 102–3).¹⁰ For the purposes of the film the Foulk brothers have been cast as representatives of capitalist interests – they are the authority figures against which the countercultural radicals have massed. However, contrary to the film’s portrayal of events, Ray Foulk has suggested that there was only ever a small minority of radicals causing trouble. As evidence he quotes Caroline Coon (of the drugs advice agency Release), who said that there “was this really wonderful atmosphere. There was a good community feeling. That’s why, when the festival came under attack

from the anarchists outside, the community inside took the side of the festival” (quoted in Foulk with Foulk 99–100). However, there is little evidence of this in the film.

Glastonbury Fayre takes a very different approach to documenting the organizers of the event. We learn little about them other than that they are driven by their Aquarian hippie beliefs. The funding of the festival is not mentioned, nor are the names of those involved, though Bill Harkin (designer of the Pyramid stage) and Andrew Kerr (co-organizer) are both featured in pieces to camera in which they talk about the spiritual significance of the site and of positioning the stage at a confluence of ley lines. We see the construction of the now iconic Pyramid stage, complete with a rather informal crew who in some cases appear to be smoking marijuana while working. The ubiquity of drugs is also seen when the performers take to the stage: for instance, at the start of Terry Reid’s set we see drummer Alan White smoking a long reefer before he begins to play. The informality of the event is shown towards the end of the song, when singer Linda Lewis unexpectedly comes to the microphone to join in. Reid and his band are trying to finish the song, but play an extended coda as Lewis, seemingly oblivious, carries on singing.¹¹ The looseness of the stage management is indicated further at the end of the film when we watch Traffic performing onstage. The camera roves around the edges of the stage, looking at all the hangers-on that are there and giving the appearance of a big party at the conclusion of the film. The overall feeling gained from these glimpses of the organizers and the production of the event is that they are as one with the audience, that they are part of the same countercultural milieu. This is, perhaps, enhanced by Roeg’s decision not to use on-screen captions to identify either the organizers or the performers. Instead, it is assumed that the viewer will know who they are, as they are also part of the same countercultural community. In contrast, in *Message to Love* Lerner does make use of on-screen captions for performers and key

members of the organization, though the majority of festivalgoers interviewed remain un-named. This creates an implicit hierarchy that undermines any notion of countercultural community between organizers, performers and audience at the event, which also adds a distancing effect for the viewer.

Representations of Festival Audiences

The potential of a new way to live, of a spiritual search for meaning, that harks back to an imagined world of pre-industrial paganism and agrarianism (of getting “back to the garden”), lies at the heart of the representation of the Glastonbury Fayre audience. A sense of community is imparted early on, as the Pink Fairies and Rainbow Gypsies march into the festival arena as a scratch band of percussion, wind instruments and voices, and are joined by well over a hundred festivalgoers. The camera swirls around and amidst them in a camera style that is far from the “classical approach” of Murray Lerner in *Message to Love*. Instead, it is evocative of *Woodstock*, with the procession akin to the spontaneous music-making seen during the rainstorm in Wadleigh’s film. In *Message to Love*, the arena audience is largely missing from the final edit, typically only seen briefly at the start and end of songs. There are few close-ups of their faces, and we are rarely immersed in the crowd itself. In contrast, the audience is very much part of *Glastonbury Fayre*. Nic Roeg enhances a sense of community and communion between the audience and the musicians by regularly cutting from the stage to the audience or panning slowly from one to the other. This is particularly clear in the daytime footage of Terry Reid and Fairport Convention, where we see people dancing, walking around the site, greeting each other warmly and sun bathing. We see naked people, horses and dogs on the site, and are later shown drum circles and people

entertaining themselves. It is clearly an event where, like *Woodstock*, the music on stage is almost incidental to the gathering.¹²

The carnivalesque aspects of public nudity and sexuality, such as Magic Michael performing naked from the waist down, and a scene in which a group of naked men and a woman writhe in the mud, are given validation by the intercutting of an on-screen interview with a visiting clergyman. He states:

I was amazed how there was nothing... suggesting indecency and pornography and that sort of thing and yet there they were, you know, all in the nude

behaving perfectly natural. I, as part of the crowd too, didn't feel awkward at all.

Strangely, perhaps, there are few interviews with other festivalgoers in the film, so the footage of the audience can feel somewhat voyeuristic at times. For instance, in one scene a long distance zoom shows a nearby field where there are people sunbathing and walking around naked and even having sex in the grass. Other elements also feel a little staged, though Nic Roeg implies that this was not the case in his commentary on the DVD release. A good example is the scene just before the religious services of the summer solstice, where we watch members of the Rainbow Gypsies performing yoga in a field in a clearly choreographed manner. An earlier scene of hippies climbing Glastonbury Tor also seems staged, though as Mark Goodall notes, this is because the editing process conflates a variety of shots from different times in order to gain the desired mystical effect.

The sense of community, spirituality and getting “back to the garden” is largely absent from *Message to Love*. Instead, the director focuses on the views of the ticketless hippie radicals on Desolation Row. Early in the film one of these interviewees states that “It’s... not so much a festival as meeting people and coming together... It gives you the faith to carry on... [because] everyone’s got the same outlook on life.” Another

interviewee suggests that “You should put an empty field at the beginning and hopefully an empty field at the end so that we’re like invisible gypsies and we all pick up the garbage.” The final scenes of the film showing the waste left behind at the end of the event are, therefore, rather ironic in this context, and remind viewers of similar scenes at the end of *Woodstock*. However, the film also shows us a darker side to Desolation Row and, as the film continues, presents the people there in an increasingly menacing light (even though many of the events and interviews actually pre-date the opening of the festival itself). This begins with an interview in which a young man asks why people would want to see them in the film. He suggests that: “I think it’s because they’re afraid.... That we’re very different from them, in our opinions, in what we care about...” Later, we see footage of the more radical festivalgoers confronting security guards, painting offensive slogans on the fences, and then breaking them down. As one interviewee says: “It [the festival] started as a commercial concern but its fast becoming a people’s festival you know, and the people that are here are going to use the festival as they want and they’re going to use the facilities as they want.” Another blames the organizers for caring about money more than the audience before saying that “we’re here so we can sit up on that hill and fucking groove.” There is a sense of entitlement that ignores the financial realities of putting on a festival and suggests that artists and promoters are betraying the supposed communal roots of rock music.

Lerner makes no reference to the White Panthers – essentially Mick Farren from IT – who had been encouraging festivalgoers to turn up without a ticket, and neither does he mention the free festival set up by Hawkwind and the Pink Fairies at the communal sleeping tent known as Canvas City¹³. Also absent from the film are the skinny dipping hippies at nearby Compton Bay, the on-site counselling services provided by the local churches, the open-air communion held on the Sunday morning of

the event, and any interviews at all with the ticket-paying festivalgoers inside the arena – all of which would have given a very different understanding of the event (Hinton; Foulk with Foulk). He does show the fences being forced down on the Sunday morning, but this was a ‘symbolic gesture’ by a small group of radicals rather than a broad-based rebellion. Indeed, Ray Foulk implies that it was staged to help create a story and that it was no accident that the film crew was there to capture it.

Conclusion

The films discussed in this article present two very different versions of the countercultural carnivalesque, with each focusing selectively on elements of the festival experience. *Glastonbury Fayre* presents a “back to the garden” narrative that largely ignores the financial aspects of the organization and dramatizes the countercultural search for meaning – in music, spirituality and communion with nature. Like *Woodstock*, it shows sex, drugs and squalor, while downplaying disorder – there are no bad trips and no problems at Glastonbury. Instead, the festival shows the potential for living life differently and for engaging with others on a more spiritual level: a truly Aquarian alternative of peace, love, ecology and religion. In contrast, *Message to Love* downplays the positive aspects of the Isle of Wight Festival in order to present a narrative of countercultural disorder and a radicalized vision of a counterculture willing to take direct action to achieve its ends. It offers a British “end of an era” story that matches the original working title of the film as “The Last Great Event”, while *Glastonbury Fayre* suggests that the Woodstock dream may not yet be over. Hence, both *Woodstock* and *Glastonbury* have become, through their filmed representations and mythologizing, symbolic resources that helped to inspire the British Free Festivals movement of the 1970s and 1980s, while the 1970 Isle of Wight has become both a

symbol of capitalist exploitation and of countercultural radicalism . The films of Woodstock, Glastonbury Fayre and Isle the Wight Festival have each created “a ‘truth’ of the text” (Renov 7) that has come to overshadow the reality of the events they depict – to become the historical narrative of these festivals. It is therefore important to unpick their representations, as this article has sought to do, in order to understand their constructed nature and their contribution to contemporary understandings of festival history and culture.

Works Cited

- Anderton, Chris. "Commercializing the Carnavalesque: the V Festival and Image/Risk Management." *Event Management*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2008, pp. 39–51.
- . "Music Festival Sponsorship: Between Commerce and Carnival." *Arts Marketing*, vol. 1, no. 2, 2011, pp. 145–58.
- . "Branding, Sponsorship and the Music Festival." *The Pop Festival: History, Music, Media, Culture*, edited by George McKay, Bloomsbury Academic, 2015, pp. 199–212.
- . *Music Festivals in the UK. Beyond the Carnavalesque*. Routledge, 2019.
- Arnold, Gina. "Nobody's Army." *Counterculture and Popular Music*, edited by Sheila Whiteley and Jediah Sklowers, Ashgate, 2014, pp. 123-40.
- Aubrey, Crispin and John Shearlaw. *Glastonbury. An Oral History of Music, Mud and Magic*. Ebury Press, 2006.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Rabelais and His World*. Translated by Helen Iswolsky, Indiana University Press, 1984.
- Bennett, Andy. "'Everybody's Happy, Everybody's Free': Representation and Nostalgia in the Woodstock Film." *Remembering Woodstock*, edited by Andy Bennett, Ashgate, 2004, pp. 43–54.
- Blake, Andrew. *The Land Without Music: Music, Culture and Society in Twentieth-Century Britain*. Manchester University Press, 1997.
- Blevins, Brian. "Record Firms Plan Promotional Assault for Wight Festival." *Billboard*, 22 August 1970, pp. 41, 46, 55.
- Clarke, Michael. *The Politics of Pop Festivals*. Junction Books, 1982.

- Coates, Norma. "If Anything, Blame Woodstock. The Rolling Stones: Altamont, December 6, 1969." *Performance and Popular Music: History, Place and Time*, edited by Ian Inglis, Ashgate, 2006, pp. 58–69.
- Cox, Harvey. *The Feast of Fools: A Theological Essay on Festivity and Fantasy*. Harvard University Press, 1969.
- Donnelly, K.J. "Visualizing Live Albums. Progressive Rock and the British Concert Film in the 1970s." *The Music Documentary: Acid Rock to Electropop*, edited by Robert Edgar, Kirsty Fairclough-Isaacs, and Benjamin Halligan, Routledge, 2013, pp. 171–82.
- Edgar, Robert, Kirsty Fairclough-Isaacs, and Benjamin Halligan. "Music Seen. The Formats and Functions of the Music Documentary." *The Music Documentary: Acid Rock to Electropop*, edited by Robert Edgar, Kirsty Fairclough-Isaacs, and Benjamin Halligan, Routledge, 2013, pp. 1–22.
- Ehrenreich, Barbara. *Dancing in the Streets. A History of Collective Joy*. Henry Holt & Co., 2006.
- Farren, Mick, and other (unnamed) contributors. "The Isle of Wight Festival: 5 Days of Peace, Music and Love." *IT*, vol. 87, 10–24 September 1970, pp. 7–9.
- Farren, Mick, Andi Zaps, Charles Shaar Murray and Paul Lewis. "Glastonbury Fair to Independence Day." *IT*, vol. 108, 15–29 July 1971, pp. 11–14.
- Fouk, Ray with Caroline Fouk. *When the World Came to the Isle of Wight. 1970. The Last Great Event*. Medina Publishing, 2016.
- Frith, Simon. "Rock and the Politics of Memory." *Social Text*, vol. 9, no. 10, 1984, pp. 59–69.

- Gebhardt, Nicholas. “‘Let There be Rock!’ Myth and Ideology in the Rock Festivals of the Transatlantic Counterculture.” *The Pop Festival: History, Music, Media, Culture*, edited by George McKay, Bloomsbury Academic, 2015, pp. 49–59.
- Glastonbury Fayre*. Directed by Nic Roeg and Peter Neal, Goodtimes Enterprises and Si Litvinoff Film Production, 1972. [Available on DVD, Odeon Entertainment – including a *Making Of* feature].
- Glastonbury Fayre* [album]. *Various Artists – Glastonbury Fayre – The Electric Score*. Revelation Enterprises Ltd, 1972.
- Goodall, Mark. “Out of Sight: the Mediation of the Music Festival.” *The Pop Festival: History, Music, Media, Culture*, edited by George McKay, Bloomsbury Academic, 2015, pp. 33–48.
- Gordon, Andy. “Satan and the Angels: Paradise Loused.” *Altamont: Death of Innocence in the Woodstock Nation*, edited by Jonathan Eisen, Avon Books, 1970, pp. 30–71.
- Hetherington, Kevin. *New Age Travellers: Vanloads of Uproarious Humanity*. Cassell, 2001.
- Hewison, Robert. *Too Much. Art and Society in the Sixties, 1960-75*. Methuen, 1986.
- Hinton, Brian. *Message to Love. The Isle of Wight Festivals, 1968-70*. Castle Communications, 1995.
- Kitts, Thomas M. “Documenting, Creating, and Interpreting Moments of Definition: Monterey Pop, Woodstock, and Gimme Shelter.” *The Journal of Popular Culture*, vol. 42, no. 4, 2009, pp. 715–32.
- Kramer, Michael J. “The Psychedelic Public and Its Problems: Rock Music Festivals and Civil Society in the Sixties Counterculture.” *Media and Public Spheres*, edited by Richard Butsch, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, pp. 149–61.

- Lieberfeld, Daniel. "Between Happenstance and Intentionality: an Interview with Murray Lerner." *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, vol. 29, no. 5, pp. 432–39.
- Life*. "The Great Woodstock Rock Trip." *Life* [magazine], special edition, September 1969.
- Lindley, Arthur. *Hyperion and the Hobbyhorse. Studies in Carnavalesque Subversion*. Associated University Presses, 1996.
- Lister, David. "Revealed: Squalid Truth of IoW Festival." *The Independent* [London], 13 August 1995, p. 6.
- Martin, Greg. "The Politics, Pleasure and Performance of New Age Travellers, Ravers and Anti-Road Protestors: Connecting Festivals, Carnival and New Social Movements." *The Festivalization of Culture*, edited by Andy Bennett, Jodie Taylor and Ian Woodward, Ashgate, 2014, pp. 87–106.
- McKay, George. *Glastonbury: A Very English Fair*. Victor Gollancz, 2000.
- Message to Love: the Isle of Wight Festival. The Movie*. Directed by Murray Lerner, Pulsar Production for Sanctuary Records Group Ltd and BBC in association with Initial Film and Television, 1995.
- Nita, Maria and Sharif Gemie. "Counterculture, local authorities and British Christianity at the Windsor and Watchfield free festivals", *Twentieth Century British History*, 2019, doi:10.1093/tcbh/hwy053. Accessed 1 July 2019.
- Partridge, Rob. "Caught in the Act: *Glastonbury Fayre*." *Melody Maker*, 9 June 1973, p. 53.
- Peterson, Richard A. "The Unnatural History of Rock Festivals: an Instance of Media Facilitation." *Popular Music and Society*, vol. 2, no. 2, 1973, pp. 97–123

- Renov, Michael. "Introduction: The Truth about Non-Fiction." *Theorizing Documentary*, edited by Michael Renov, Routledge, 1993, pp. 1–11.
- Robinson, Roxy. *Music Festivals and the Politics of Participation*. Ashgate, 2015.
- Saffle, Michael. "Retrospective Compilations. (Re)defining the Music Documentary." *The Music Documentary: Acid Rock to Electropop*, edited by Robert Edgar, Kirsty Fairclough-Isaacs, and Benjamin Halligan, Routledge, 2013, pp. 42–54.
- Schowalter, Daniel F. "Remembering the Dangers of Rock and Roll: Toward a Historical Narrative of the Rock Festival." *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, vol. 17, no. 1, 2000, pp. 86–102.
- Stallybrass, Peter and Allon White. *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*. Cornell University Press, 1986.
- Street, John. "'This is your Woodstock': Popular Memories and Political Myths." *Remembering Woodstock*, edited by Andy Bennett, Ashgate, 2004, pp. 29–42.
- Wadleigh, Michael. "Triumph of the Will." *Woodstock: An Inside Look at the Movie That Shook Up the World and Defined a Generation*, edited by Dale Bell, Michael Wiese Productions, 1999.
- Warner, Simon. "Reporting Woodstock: Some Contemporary Press Reflections on the Festival." *Remembering Woodstock*, edited by Andy Bennett, Ashgate, 2004, pp. 55–74.
- Welch, Chris, Michael Watts, Richard Williams, and Mark Plummer. "The Isle of Wight Festival: Five Days That Rocked Britain." *Melody Maker*, 5 September 1970, rocksbackpages.com/Library/Article/the-isle-of-wight-festival-five-days-that-rocked-britain.
- Woodstock – Three Days of Peace and Music*. Directed by Michael Wadleigh, Wadleigh-Maurice/Warner Bros, 1970.

Worthington, Andy. *Stonehenge. Celebration and Subversion*. Alternative Albion, 2004.

Wright, Julie Lobalzo. "The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly '60s: the Opposing Gazes of Woodstock and Gimme Shelter." *The Music Documentary: Acid Rock to Electropop*, edited by Robert Edgar, Kirsty Fairclough-Isaacs, and Benjamin Halligan, Routledge, 2013, pp. 71–86.

-
- ¹ A classic example of this is the positioning of Country Joe McDonald's solo performance of "I-Feel-Like-I'm-Fixin'-To-Die" mid-way through the film even though it actually occurred at the beginning of the event (Bennett 46)
- ² For detailed histories of British music festival culture in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, see Michael Clarke, Kevin Hetherington, George McKay, and Andy Worthington, who chart the more countercultural history of the sector during those decades.
- ³ This was due to a combination of cash flow problems, escalating costs and the actions of the 'free festival' radicals who attended the event.
- ⁴ More information about the New Age travellers and free festivals can be found in Kevin Hetherington, Greg Martin and Andy Worthington.
- ⁵ 1969 also saw gate-crashers at the Denver Pop Festival, the Atlantic City Pop Festival and the Newport Pop Festival.
- ⁶ Prior to the event, the musicians and activist Mick Farren issued leaflets under the White Panther name, advising festivalgoers to watch for free from a hill overlooking the arena, and that "The fencing would not withstand a well organised attack by the people" (Foulk with Foulk 277). Desolation Row is also referred to as "Devastation Hill" and "Desolation Hill" in the press of the time.
- ⁷ Ray Foulk offers summaries of the press coverage from the Friday, Saturday and Sunday which, while positive at times, tends to focus on issues related to drugs (complaints from locals and arrests by the police), disorder (gate-crashers, foreign radicals, thefts and property damage) and the organizers' financial difficulties (Foulk with Foulk 134, 162, 216–7).
- ⁸ Standard tickets cost £3 for the weekend, but the VIP enclosure was sold at the premium rate of 10 guineas (£10.50), with proceeds going to charity (Foulk with Foulk 89).

⁹ It is the version by The Great Awakening, released in 1969 by London Records. It became the unofficial theme of the festival, with DJ Jeff Dexter playing it prior to the start of each day's performances.

¹⁰ This strategy is common to all three films under discussion in this article, thus providing narrative movement and an element of drama for the viewer (Goodall; Kitts).

¹¹ Lewis admits on the *Making Of* feature that she was high on drugs at the time.

¹² For example, during the first twenty minutes of *Woodstock* we hear live performances on the film soundtrack but do not actually see the performers.

¹³ This was another precursor of the later 'free festival' scene in the UK, with Andrew Kerr suggesting that the initial idea for Glastonbury Fayre came when he and Arabella Churchill (co-organizer of the event) visited Canvas City at the 1970 Isle of Wight Festival (Foull with Foull 325). According to co-organizer Thomas Crimble, the idea was to stage an event that was "the exact opposite of the Isle of Wight" (quoted in Aubrey and Shearlaw 27).