The Woodstock Music and Art Fair

In 1969, a group of young men decided to host a rock concert. While the oldest member of the group was 26, no one had experience in planning a major music concert. Woodstock was the first event of its kind to be held in America. The concert was advertised as three days of peace and rock and roll. The producers planned to hold the concert on 600 acres of pastureland in upstate New York and charge admission by day, or by a three-day pass. Sounds simple; but as it turned out, Woodstock was far from simple.

The organizers of the music weekend scheduled for mid-August had no idea that their concept would sweep through the younger generation and pull hundreds of thousands to Woodstock's musical doorstep. After switching locations once and dealing with hesitant and expensive band members, irate townspeople, and licensing headaches, the date was finally set for the production.

From the beginning, there were problems. Traffic lines going into the area trailed nearly twenty miles long. The people who attended were an unusual and sometimes volatile mix. Hippies, Vietnam War veterans, college students, and militants were just a portion of the eclectic melting pot of people. The lineup of musicians hired to play was an impressive list of over thirty of the most popular artists of the '60s such as the Rolling Stones, Grateful Dead, the Who, Jimi Hendrix, and Janis Joplin.

Advertised as three days of peace and love, the townspeople in the surrounding areas of the festival broke the peace and protested the invasion of rock and roll music and the appearance of its followers. Their concerns proved true, as sanitation facilities were inadequate and overused. The rains began and the field of camping, tramping, music lovers quickly became a sea of muck and mire. Shower facilities were overcrowded and nearly impossible to use.

A pond ran across the back of the property, and many people helped themselves to the water, bathing and cooling off in the over eighty-degree weather. For a while, some security members tried to convince people to wear some type of clothing while they bathed, but the task eventually became too difficult. After a while, people were bathing and sometimes even walking around the concert nude.
Food and water was also in short supply. Many Sullivan county residents worked together to help feed the thousands attending the concert. Food was flown in from a nearby Air Force base, and many of the local families fed people who wandered by their houses. The number of people who attended is still debated today. Some historians claim it was over 500,000, while others believe the number to be as low as 150,000. What was promoted as an atmosphere of love and peace lived up to its name. There were two deaths and a few births at Woodstock, but violence was rare and people coexisted in music and harmony most of the three days.

Historically, some people view Woodstock as a mass of humanity and music with little relevance to American culture or society. Others view Woodstock as the beginning of an age of cultural freedoms and change that helped push through many reforms and social enlightenments.