

# 50 YEARS OF AQUARIUS

If you can remember Woodstock, the saying goes, you weren't really there. These books help fill in the blanks.

BY LELA NARGI

**C**elebrating its 50th anniversary in August, the Woodstock music festival is often, with the benefit of hindsight, hailed as an example of what can go right when hundreds of thousands of young, stoned music fans assemble—in stark contrast to the Altamont Speedway Free Festival just a few months later, where four people died. Here, we round up new, forthcoming, and older releases and reissues, which give adults and young readers a window onto the three-day event in Bethel, N.Y., and the larger culture that gave rise to it.

## “Going Down to Yasgur’s Farm”

### Barefoot in Babylon

Bob Spitz. Plume, 2019 (reissue)

When this book was first released a decade after Woodstock took place, *PW* called it “an enticing story,” and the author’s recounting of “the music festival and the months leading up to [it] vivid and exciting.” It’s been newly beefed up for the 50th anniversary with an introduction by Graham Nash, who

performed at Woodstock as part of Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young.

### The Road to Woodstock

Michael Lang, with Holly George-Warren. Ecco, 2009

One of several titles released for the 40th anniversary of Woodstock 10 years ago—it’s sold 26,000 copies in hardcover and paperback—this memoir chronicles the festival as devised and experienced by Lang, its producer and co-creator. *PW*’s review said it provides the “gritty insights of the ultimate insider,” along with “a glimpse of the madness, frustration, happiness, and sheer euphoria that turned Woodstock into a memorable music festival.”

### Something’s Happening Here

Mark Berger. Excelsior Editions, 2019

This memoir of one young Brooklynite’s experience of the 1960s culminates in his involvement with Woodstock, where he arrived four days early to help set up, then “worked to calm kids tripping out on bad acid, maneuvered a water truck through a sea of spectators, and fell in love, twice,” according to the publisher.

### The Story of Woodstock Live

Julien Bitoun. Cassell, 2019

Bitoun, a musician, is aiming for Woodstock completists with this title, packed with insider-y information about the kind of guitar Country Joe McDonald played at the festival (a Yamaha FG-150), who played when, and what time they were actually supposed to hit the stage, as well as some of the political context surrounding the weekend. With a foreword by Michael Lang.

### Woodstock: 3 Days of Peace & Music

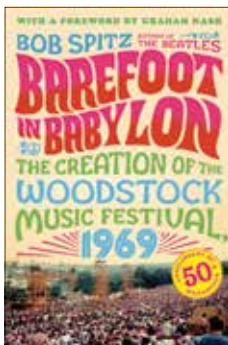
Michael Lang. Reel Art, 2019

Billed as the official commemoration of Woodstock’s 50th anniversary, this book, written by a festival cofounder (who’s had a hand in several titles on the subject), is heavy on photos and a positive framing of the weekend. “There was a lot of fear among the general population about us,” Lang writes in the introduction, but “once the kids started to arrive and mingled with the townsfolk, and interacted with the businesses and residents of the surrounding towns, suddenly they were just kids.”

### Woodstock: 50 Years of Peace and Music

Daniel Bukszpan. Imagine, 2019

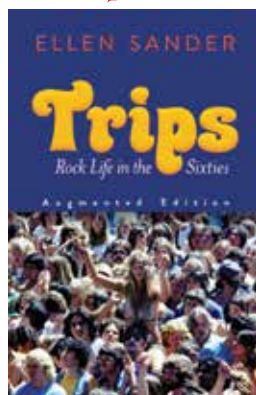
Music critic Bukszpan set out to compile a true accounting of what happened at the festival through conversations with, as he details in the introduction, “members of the technical crew, promoters, performers, and anyone else who was there and wanted



## Camaraderie and Rapture

PW talks with Ellen Sander

"Name an iconic Sixties rock moment and Ellen Sander was probably there," *Rolling Stone* recently wrote of the veteran rock and culture journalist. That includes Woodstock, though Sander qualifies that she covered the festival "not out in the muck and mud, but backstage with all the comforts: food, champagne, rides back and forth." She detailed some of that experience in *Trips*, first published in 1973 as a wider consideration of '60s music culture. PW spoke with Sander about the book's latest iteration and Woodstock's continued relevance.



### What have you changed for the new edition?

I didn't change a lot in the body of the work, because I wanted to keep that voice, even though some of the writing is cringe-worthy. Some things I couldn't abide, like calling Jimi Hendrix a "spade." It was the parlance of the time, but I couldn't live with it now. Sometimes the language was too casual in terms of first or last names that I would throw around; I put whole names in because people are not too familiar with them two generations later. End notes. Record reviews and some interviews. I also added pieces of journalism where I felt they had context. And a couple of extra chapters, like Plaster Casters of Chicago; Scribner wouldn't print it at the time even though it was the story that broke the groupie scene open. It was published originally in the *Realist*.

### Does hindsight change what you think about Woodstock?

I remember the camaraderie and rapture of the event; it was extraordinary. I don't question what I felt because it hasn't changed with time in my memory. It was a remarkable event not just because of the amazing musical lineup but because of the audience itself, which made it newsworthy:

their cooperation and people enjoying each other as much as the music. The star quality was immeasurable and unprecedented. As a concert it would have been a great concert, but as an event it was momentous.

### Do you think press coverage at the time shaped how people think about Woodstock today?

I don't know how anybody else thinks about it. I was writing for conventional media by then, like the *Saturday Review*. I read one account of [a journalist] who left; he said it was a mess, but I don't know how many there were of those. With hindsight, we had all the information about the breakdown of the infrastructure, which we didn't have while we were there. But I can only look at it through my own memory. I do think it's amazing that all of these commemorative things are coming out—I've got an essay in the [38-disc box set] *Woodstock 50: Back to the Garden* put out by Rhino Records.

### Why do you think Woodstock continues to intrigue 50 years on?

In the contentious times we live in, with our culture so fractious, to identify with a moment where there was such a high degree of harmony might be very appealing. If we ever will get there again, though, is an open question.

—L.N.

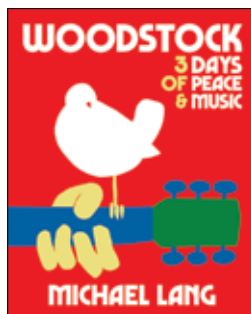
to talk about it," as a way to counter negative talk over the years from nonattendees with an ax to grind. He also focuses attention on underappreciated performers such as Nancy Nevins of Sweetwater and Dan Cole of Quill, who, he writes, "were there as much as Jimi Hendrix was."

### Woodstock 50th Anniversary:

#### Back to Yasgur's Farm

Mike Greenblatt. Kraus, 2019

The author, who writes for the record collecting and music memorabilia magazine *Goldmine*, combines personal



musings about attending the weekend with a timeline of acts, photos, and remembrances from those who performed and those who took in the scene.

### Woodstock: The Oral History

Joel Makower. Excelsior, 2009

"Woodstock comes alive here," according to PW's review of this 40th anniversary title, which praises the author, another music journalist grabbing the Woodstock mic, for "setting it squarely within its historical context and interviewing scores of participants, among them musicians, neighbors (both the hostile and

the amicable), and employees at the food concessions.”

## Woodstock: Three Days That Rocked the World

*Edited by Mike Evans and Paul Kingsbury, Sterling, 2019 (reissue)*

When this book first pubbed in 2009, *PW*'s review called it a “coffee-table tribute” offering “a balanced, moving, and chronological pictorial of each of the 31 acts” who performed over the course of the festival. Also of interest to avid Woodstock fans, *PW* noted, are firsthand accounts from attendees, crew, farm workers, and musicians including David Crosby, who said, “It looked like an encampment of a Macedonian army on a Greek hill, crossed with the biggest batch of gypsies you’ve ever seen.”

## “Everywhere Was a Song and a Celebration”

### Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young

*David Browne. Da Capo, 2019*

The supergroup lasted only a short while—Woodstock was their second live performance as a quartet, and they broke up two years later. But interest in the band endures, as evidenced by two hefty bios this spring. *PW*'s review called this one “the most comprehensive biography of the group to date.”

### CSNY

*Peter Doggett. Atria, 2019*

English music critic Doggett contributes an “honest, occasionally laudatory history,” *PW*'s review said, of the band whose musical legacy includes the song “Woodstock.” The book addresses the festival in four sections—the plan, the performance, the aftermath, and the backlash—the last of which mostly documents the negative associations that Stephen Stills and Neil Young had with the festival for years after.

### Janis

*Holly George-Warren. Simon & Schuster, Oct.*

Janis Joplin appeared at Woodstock one year before her death from an overdose. This biography, which *PW*'s starred review calls “excellent” and “moving,” spends time with the singer at the festival, covering her tawdry liaisons upon arrival and then her exhausted performance during an hour-long 3 a.m. set. “The photos of her on stage show how tired she is, but they also show how she gives everything she has in that performance,” George-Warren told *PW* in June. “Ellen Willis, then the music critic at the *New Yorker*, said she wasn’t willing to keep applauding Janis to bring her out for more since Janis gave too much of herself.”

### Jim Marshall: Show Me the Picture

*Amelia Davis. Chronicle, Aug.*

San Francisco photographer Jim Marshall, who died in 2010, documented many iconic American moments—and the musical stars who helped to make them so—including Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, and others who performed at Woodstock. Davis, Marshall’s assistant turned archivist, devotes a chapter to images of the festival. *Variety*, in a review of a 2019 documentary

## Generation Next

### *PW* talks with Todd Strasser and Sarvenaz Tash

For the recently released *Summer of ’69* (Candlewick), Todd Strasser mined his adolescent experience to bring the Woodstock era to life. Sarvenaz Tash, who wasn’t yet born when the festival was held, was surprised when researching 2015’s *Three Day Summer* (Simon & Schuster) at how challenging it was to find set lists from the event; this year’s anniversary reissues and commemorative titles for adults, she says, “would have been helpful to have at the time.” *PW* spoke with the authors about making Woodstock relevant to YA readers.



Sarvenaz Tash



Todd Strasser

### Why write about Woodstock so many decades later?

**Sarvenaz Tash:** When I was in middle school, for the 20th anniversary, I wound up watching all the VH1 specials about Woodstock. For the first time, I got to see footage and hear bands talk about it, and the image of that cool, idealistic age stayed with me. I remember wishing, “Wow, I wish I could go to Woodstock.” It took a while for me realize that the way to go to Woodstock was to write about it.

**Todd Strasser:** For many years, I wrote a lot of books about what I imagined were the relevant issues for teens. But after age 60 I began to look at my past to see what historical events YA might be interested in. The first was the Cuban Missile Crisis and the Cold War—that was *Fallout*. The next was the summer of 1969.

### How did what you knew or experienced of Woodstock change when you began your research?

**T.S.:** We were the counterculture; we wore bell-bottoms and beads, we smoked pot and listened to rock and roll and thought we were this rebellious group of individuals. Fifty years later, I saw that we were all wearing the same clothes, believing the same things. That came as a surprise to me working on the book, but I still think all that antiwar and love and peace sentiment was important.

**S.T.:** I hadn’t realized how much Vietnam was a part of the experience. I looked at it through the lens of “everyone is so happy, look at the clothes!” But kids were getting drafted for a war most

## Woodstock 50th Anniversary

people seemed to think was pretty pointless. I found out my father-in-law decided to become a teacher to avoid being drafted; he talked to me about how scary that was. I still think it was an amazing weekend, but it came after a lot of political strife.

### What do you hope kids learn about Woodstock from your books?

S.T.: My characters know they're in the middle of something big but don't know how big. Showing that was my main goal. I also wanted that joy of everything I read and saw and felt as a teen to come across.

T.S.: I want to show kids how different we were at that time. A phenomenal number of people went all the way to Woodstock barefoot. As each day passed, I kept seeing more and more people with bandages on their feet, because there was no plastic; everything was in glass bottles, and we brought food in cans. I also wanted to let kids know that not everybody was a hippie. Heads smoked pot and grew their hair long, but they were still going to college to be doc-



tors and lawyers and fit right into society. I considered myself a freak; we were more political and wanted to change world. Hippies completely rejected society as we knew it.

### What resonance do you see Woodstock having for today's teens?

T.S.: Woodstock was the last time the country was as violently divided as it is now, but we sorted things out. A message for teens that comes through by the end of the book

is that no matter how crappy your home situation may be, you can overcome and rise above it. One of the slogans of that era was "Tomorrow is the first day of the rest of your life," and at the end of the novel, that saying has a special resonance.

S.T.: The thing that sticks with me is how big social activism was at Woodstock, with its message of peace and hope and being young and having power. You have so much power when you're young, even though you think you don't. But your ideals as a teen stay with you. Woodstock's ideals were so pure and good and are something to still strive for.

—L.N.

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related to the book, noted that Marshall's "shots from the Woodstock stage are marked by their unique wide-angle sprawl."

## Trips

*Ellen Sander. Dover, 2019 (expanded reissue)*

Ahead of Woodstock's 50th anniversary, the author, an eyewitness to the festival and many other seminal musical events of the 1960s, refreshed this title, originally published by Scribner in 1973. (For our q&a with Sander, see "Camaraderie and Rapture," p. 35.)

## "I Came upon a Child of God"

### Max Said Yes!

*Abigail Yasgur and Joseph Lipner, illus. by Barbara Mendes. Change the Universe Press, 2009; IPG, dist. Ages 5–7.*

Coauthor Yasgur is a cousin of the dairy farmer who allowed his acreage in Bethel, N.Y., to be used as the staging ground for Woodstock when the official venue balked. She and her husband self-published this simple rhyming story, punched up with trippy illustrations by Mendes, as a way to "share the ideals of kindness, generosity, peace and love with future generations," she told the *Los Angeles Times* when the book released.

### Summer of '69

*Todd Strasser. Candlewick, 2019. Ages 16–up.*

YA veteran Strasser mines his teenage experience of the summer of 1969 in a novel showcasing, as he told *PW*, "that momentous time of revolution and reform." (For more from Strasser, see "Generation Next," p. 36)

### Three Day Summer

*Sarvenaz Tash. Simon & Schuster, 2015. Ages 12–up.*

"It's going to be a long weekend," one of the protagonists muses at the beginning of this novel as she prepares to care for bad-tripping concertgoers in the Woodstock medical tent. *PW*'s review found that throughout the story, the author's "love for the era and this defining musical moment shines through." (For our q&a with Tash, see "Generation Next," p. 36.)

### What Was Woodstock?

*Joan Holub, illus. by Gregory Copeland. Penguin Workshop, 2016. Ages 8–12.*

Part of the popular What Was...? series, which offers context for historical and contemporary events and figures, this title has sold 10,000 print copies since its publication, per NPD BookScan. "Many thought the festival would be a flop," Holub writes. "It wasn't. It was exactly the opposite. It was out of sight, which in the 1960s meant awesome."

### Woodstock, Baby!

*Spencer Wilson. Doubleday, 2019. Up to age 3.*

This counting book encourages the youngest flower children to tally up bell-bottoms, psychedelic VW vans, peace signs, and more.

### Woodstock Paper Dolls

*Tom Tierney. Dover, 2019 (reissue). Ages 10–up.*

Originally released for the festival's 40th anniversary, this collection of 16 plates offers costume changes for performers including Joan Baez, Roger Daltry, Jerry Garcia, and Grace Slick.



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