

SUMMER OF LOVE

Haight Ashbury - HISTORY

HAIGHT ASHBURY VF
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Style



Summer of Love

American hippie, circa the Summer of Love. The colorful plumage was symbolic of a disillusioned generation looking for a new way. Most never found it © Michael Alexander 1967

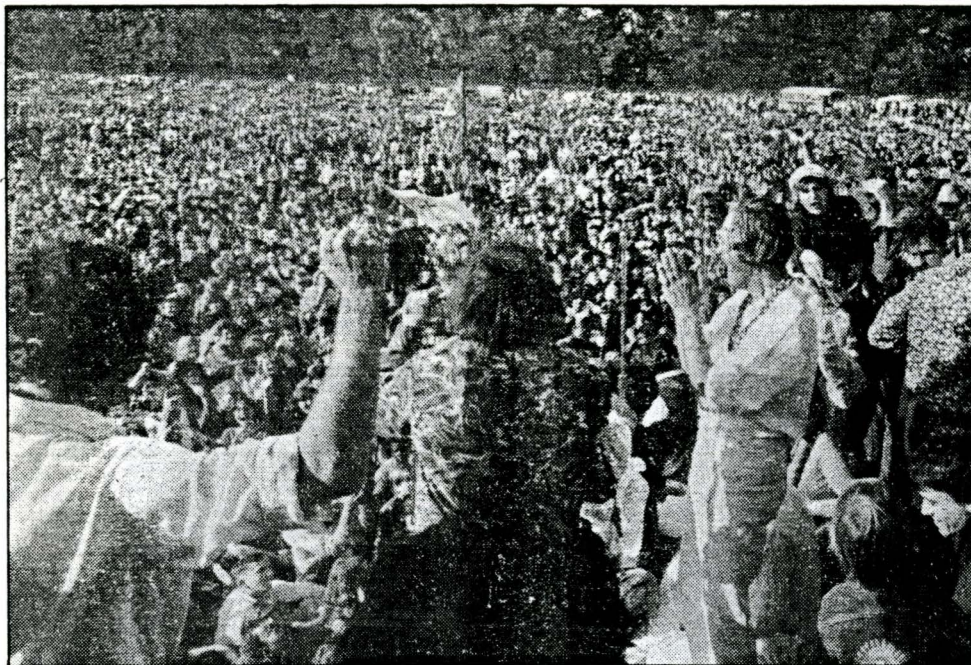
How society changed out in the Haight

By David Armstrong
OF THE EXAMINER STAFF

NOSTALGIA is history seen through rose-colored glasses. Few events lend themselves more readily to nostalgia — and few are more difficult to see whole — than the Summer of Love, which blossomed in San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury 20 years ago in the glare of global attention.

A media event before it even began, the Summer of Love has been swaddled in layers of hyperbole by its champions and critics alike, and now feels so remote from the I've-got-mine sensibility of the 1980s that it's hard to believe it actually happened.

Yet, happen it did. And for all its rococo excesses and inevitable failures, the counterculture that reached its highest public expression in the patchouli-and-paisley summer of '67 subtly changed the way America and much of the world lives: The way we dress, talk, listen to music, read a book, watch television, fashion a career, regard our sexuality, explore our psyches, relate to the natural world, and



Examiner file foto

Golden Gate Park in 1967 was the amphitheater for hippie gatherings. This was the Polo Field

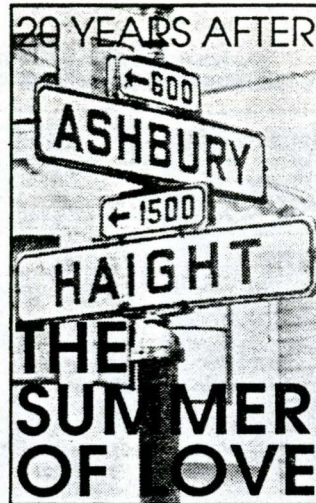
weigh issues of war and peace.

Few, if any, of those changes came about the way counterculture activists expected. They are more piecemeal than holistic, more reformist than revolutionary. But the continuing impact of the summer of Hip in the Haight has outlasted

the peace medallions, miniskirts and long hair that served as its surface symbols.

Although the particulars of the Summer of Love were peculiar to the Haight and like-minded communities such as New York's East Village and London's Soho, the

broad, idealistic quest it represented had roots in the Beat texts of North Beach and Greenwich Village, the utopian communes of the 19th century, the occultist circles that have long called California home — even the Children's Crusades.



It is well to remember when extolling the vibrancy or deploring the overheated romanticism of the hippie era that the great majority of "heads" — as they styled themselves before "hippies" and "freaks" came into vogue — were in their teens and 20s. With few exceptions, the boys and girls of summer had ahistorical outlooks. They made up rules as they went along and, unlike the Children's Crusades of the Middle Ages, these young seekers weren't led by older and supposedly wiser monarchs. Pied pipers, perhaps, but not kings.

The rock 'n' roll trinity —

— See SUMMER, E-3

SUMMER

— from E-1

Patles, Stones, Dylan — of this culture of improvisation was not composed of local talent. But the groups most closely identified with Hip as a grass roots movement were Bay Area bands.

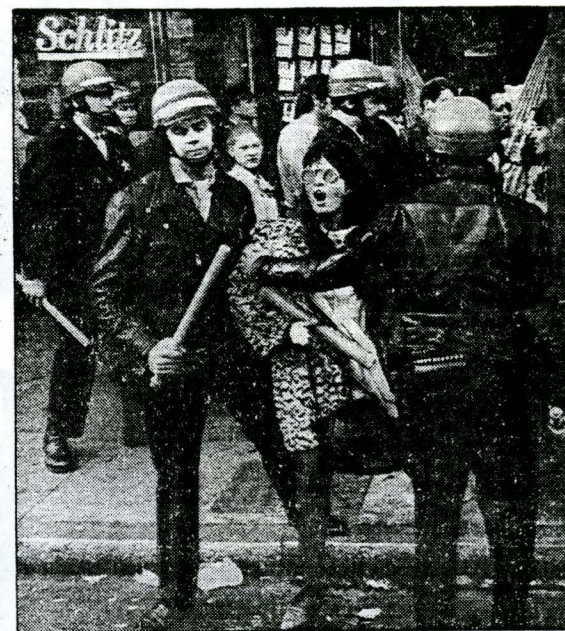
The Jefferson Airplane, Charlatans, Quicksilver Messenger Service, Country Joe and the Fish, Big Brother and the Holding Company and the Grateful Dead may well have meant more to your basic longhair in the street than did the established pop icons. They were more accessible, part of the community — if a very privileged part.

Indeed, it was the participation of bands such as the Dead that ensured the success of the first big public precursor of the Summer of Love, the Human Be-In at Golden Gate Park's Polo Grounds in January 1967. A fragile alliance of Berkeley politicians (Jerry Rubin), pacifist psychedelic gurus (Timothy Leary) and poets (Allen Ginsberg, Gary Snyder), the Be-In attracted the then-astounding total of 20,000 Aquarian Age argonauts to the deep, green oval in the park.

By May, the bands moved to center stage for the Monterey Pop Festival, where Big Brother's Janis Joplin joined Jimi Hendrix, Otis Redding and the Who as the latest rock wunderkind. This was two years before the collective mud wallow on Max Yagur's farm and 2½ years before the debacle at Altamont showed the dark side of the moon to Woodstock Nation. Monterey prefigured later, larger rockfests, with its self-consciously public consumption of dope — more recreational than sacramental by then — and nascent commercialism.

The transformation of radio — or at least a significant part of it — proceeded apace with the changing tastes of rock acolytes in the Victorian flats along the Panhandle. There, beaded and befeathered heads who fancied themselves reincarnated Native Americans lingered over free food ladled out by the Diggers and took in concerts — likewise free — by rock bands.

Former AM radio disc jockey Tom Donahue caught the spirit of those communal feeds and free-form musical jams when he commandeered KMPX in April 1967 and turned it into the nation's first



Images from a bygone era: The Summer of Love was a time to 'roll your own,' left, but it began to unravel, above, and finally ended in a 'hippie funeral' through Haight-Ashbury, far left, in October 1967

underground FM rock station. The format, both reflecting and reinforcing the Haight's celebration of spontaneity, was soon copied all over the country.

Underground radio's emphasis on stream-of-consciousness eclecticism was paralleled (preceded by about two years, actually) in the underground press, especially the quintessential hippie newspaper, the San Francisco Oracle.

Printed in swirls of color, with non-linear layout that was perhaps best understood in the fourth di-

mension, and filled with spiritual reconnaissance flights, trippers' tips and prophecies, the Oracle was among the most definitive of the estimated 400 underground newspapers that published nationwide by the end of the 1960s.

Shorn of its esoterica and displayed in a much more coherent design, the underground press' over-the-top subjectivity, antiwar politics and devotion to rock 'n' roll surfaced in streamlined form in the pages of Rolling Stone. Founded in October 1967, Rolling Stone — then

published in San Francisco — was not an underground magazine. But it's hard to imagine Rolling Stone's early sensibility or its later success without the scruffy pioneers of the underground during and before the Summer of Love.

Permeating the whole scene, of course, was what the mainstream media invariably referred to as "the sickly-sweet smell of marijuana." Many other drugs were also much in evidence in the Summer of Love, giving the counterculture its air of danger and exhilaration. But

with the early infusion of methedrine and heroin, the drugs of escape, and the eventual widespread popularity of cocaine, the drug of control, the mind-expansion associated with LSD went out of favor, and the doors of perception were slammed shut.

More remains to be said about the Summer of Love and the counterculture that produced it. Much more.

The stereotyping of women as earth mothers destined only to bake bread and make babies, for

one.

The relative paucity of invited minorities in paradise, for another — even though the Haight as a social laboratory circa 1964-67 was probably less racist than American society as a whole.

Then there were the Vietnam warriors — many of them poor and minority youths, many of them draftees, some with peace symbols painted hopefully on their helmets — who couldn't enjoy paradise, either.

The working-class people who produced the prosperity that drop-outs relied on to keep their bellies full while they fed their heads, were given restricted access, too — demonstrating that even universalist visions have their limits.

Starting today, the first day of summer, and continuing throughout the summer, The Examiner will feature weekly articles about the Summer of Love. This newspaper's staff and additional special contributors — including participants in the underground movements that surfaced so boldly two decades ago — will examine the origin, meaning, impact and legacy of that phantasmagorical season.

We'll be writing about the Haight-Ashbury as a cultural epicenter and a sometimes bewildering City neighborhood, seen through the eyes of Haight habitués who were there before the tremors of '67 and are there still.

We'll talk to the catalysts of the scene, sifting their thoughts about then and now.

We'll examine the transcendental promise of psychedelics and the sometimes grimly mundane realities of the drug culture.

Mindful that the Summer of Love began with an invitation by mediawise musicians and activists to people all over the world to decamp in San Francisco with flowers in their hair, we'll look at the way TV, movies, magazines, radio, newspapers and popular music gave a public identity to the Summer of Love and were themselves changed by it.

Coming Wednesday: The transformation of a neighborhood

David Armstrong's essays and reviews appear regularly in The Examiner's Style and Weekend sections.