

## SUMMER OF LOVE

## TRUCKIN' DOWN MEMORY LANE

A look back at the historic summer 30 years later

Ben Fong-Torres

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

There's a simple reason I appreciate exhibitions like "Summer of Love: Revolution and Evolution" and almost any collection of photographs from that era: I don't have any pictures of my own.

Our house of pseudo-hipsters — we all worked in media or music, and we were all regulars at the Avalon Ballroom and the Fillmore — never got into snapping photos. But, despite Robin Williams' often-quoted theorem, "If you can remember the '60s, you weren't really there," I actually do recall a few things.

And, as the Friends of Photography present their exhibition of photographs and memorabilia reflecting three distinct aspects of the late '60s — the Haight-Ashbury lifestyle; free speech and anti-war protests; and the Black Panther movement — I offer my own reflections on those times. It amounts to an album's worth of memories. Not a photo album, in my case, but a compilation of disparate tracks, treks down memory lane.

#### For What It's Worth, Yes, There Was a Summer of Love in San Francisco in 1967

At least that's what the mass media and Scott McKenzie decreed. But for most of us who were here, that wasn't *the* Summer. We'd had our own warm-up the year before — and even the year before that. 1965, after all, was the year of the Charlatans causing and creating a scene at the Red Dog Saloon in Virginia City, Nev.; of "Like a Rolling Stone" by Bob Dylan; of the opening of the Matrix nightclub in the Marina, where the house band was the Jefferson Airplane; of the Watts riots; of a massive anti-war protest in Berkeley; and of the first hippie dance concerts, at Longshoreman's Hall and the Fillmore Auditorium.

By the time the rest of the world caught up or began packing to be part of the Summer of Love, we'd been there. We'd done that.

#### Feed Your Head

In the Haight-Ashbury, the operative word seemed to be weird. Here's Rock Scully, the former co-manager of the Grateful Dead, who, most of them, lived at 710 Ashbury:

Ben Fong-Torres was one of the first editors at Rolling Stone magazine and is a former Chronicle staff writer and KSAN disc jockey. He is currently managing editor of Gavin magazine.

"We realized that for the most part, all of us were really rejects from other towns; we were most of us all pretty big swellheads that had stood out like sore thumbs in other communities and had split. And for the most part, San Francisco is made up of all these people that had come from these towns. They did have one thing in common: They had been weird in their high school, and these were the kind of people we were running into so frequently at S.F. State and in the Haight-Ashbury."

And here's Jerry Garcia sharing with me his reflections on the arrival of that still-legal phenomenon, lysergic acid diethylamide: "All of a sudden, bam, there was LSD. That was an incredible thing, because at that time it was all so very invisible in some weird way. You could just get so out of it and go wandering around anywhere and nobody would pick up on it, no matter how weird it seemed. So there was this freedom starting to spring out in terms of public audacity."

#### Stop, Hey, What's That Sound?

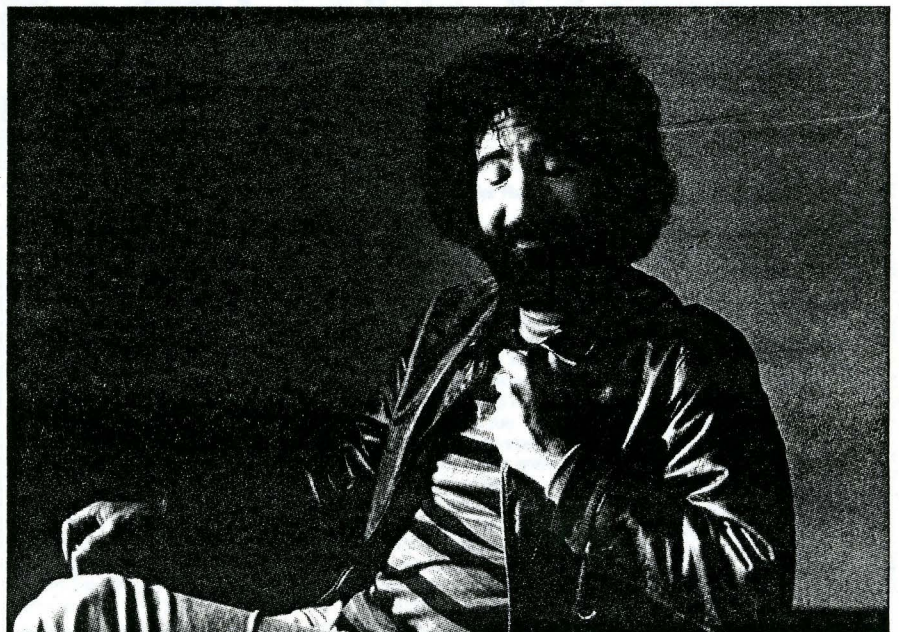
Let's get one thing, um, straight. There was no San Francisco sound. There was a scene; an attitude; an anti-approach. Bands, by and large, were unconcerned with hit records and celebrity. As they lived, they played for the moment. They thought of themselves less as stars than as part of the party.

As the Airplane's Paul Kantner recalls: "Grace used to say that the stage was just the least crowded place to stand. Songs lasted from three to 30 minutes, depending on what kind of buzz band members had on." Garcia recalled the Grateful Dead, circa the Acid Tests of early 1966: "Sometimes we'd play for five minutes and freak out — it's too weird! — 'cause when you're high, sometimes you might want to play music for five hours, but sometimes you might want to stick your head in a bucket of water, or have some Jell-O."

When they played, the Dead, the Airplane, Quicksilver, Country Joe and the Fish, and others ranged from folk, blues and jazz to rock 'n' roll and R&B. Music was influenced equally by cowboy classics and Indian ragas. Some bands had no clue. The Charlatans, for example, were formed by an artist more into image than music. As Dan Hicks recalls, the leader didn't know how to play music, and at rehearsals would say things like, "Well, when we get to this place here, we'll get far out!"

#### Gotta Revolution

It was Country Joe McDonald who reminded me that the youth gen-



"Perfecto Garcia," 1969, by Herb Greene.

eration of the mid-'60s actually comprised two worlds. You had your hippies, grooving in the Haight and enjoying all the freebies: sex, drugs, music and the ballroom scenes, with the light and poster artists, the fashions, the endless tripping. And then you had your activists, the ardent proselytizers for free speech; against the draft and the war in Vietnam; for civil rights and black power; and, when civil disobedience didn't seem to be working, for the Black Panthers and their brethren, the Third World Liberation Front.

Two different worlds, separated by the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge — the day-trippers and the Diggers in San Francisco and Marin, the protesters and the resisters in Berkeley and Oakland.

Of course, there were overlaps, and the biggest overlap dance took place in January 1967, with the Human Be-In in Golden Gate Park. This, as its organizers promised, would be a union of love and activism. Timothy Leary shared the stage with Jerry Rubin; Allen Ginsberg sat alongside Dick Gregory. That day in the park proved to those who were there — between 20,000 and 100,000, depending on whom you believe — that they were not alone, and that utopians and activists had much in common.

The purpose was just to be there, said Ginsberg in the new book "I Want to Take You Higher." This was after the sit-ins, and the idea was

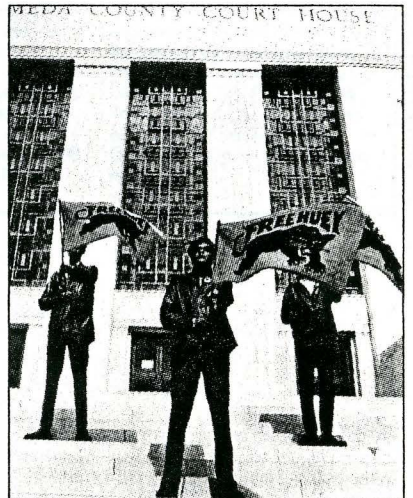
more Buddhist-influenced: to be there, to simply be there, not having to do anything particular except to enjoy the phenomenon of being together outside the realm of the state. And if that's not political, I don't know what is.

#### Your Old Lady

In the hippie scene, men were men and women were girls, chicks, old ladies. They cleaned, cooked, had babies and rolled the joints. Wow: What an escape from the straight world.

#### Good Vibrations

The Summer of Love gave birth to a radio revolution. Tom Donahue discovered the FM band and ushered in free-form rock radio at KMPX on Green Street. At our pseudo-hip pad on Sacramento Street, my roommates and I tuned in to KMPX, but I worked the all-night shift at KFOG, which, in 1967, offered "beautiful music." On occasion, I'd sneak in a little Donovan or a lite Beatles track and feel pretty revolutionary — until it was time to go back to Henry Mancini.



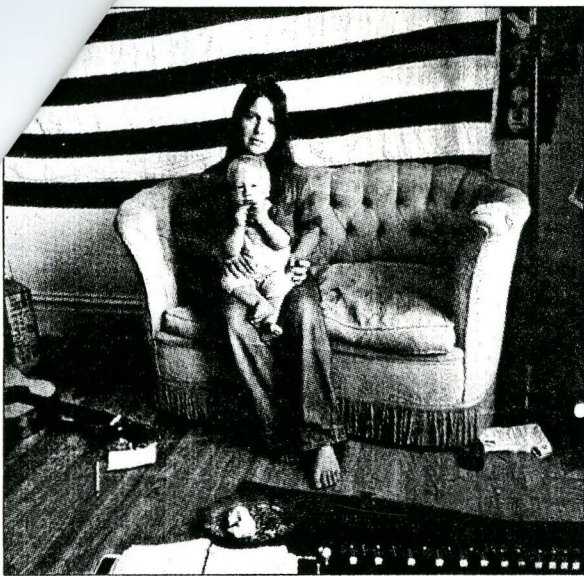
"Free Huey Rally," 1968, by Pirkle Jones.

#### If You're Going to San Francisco...

George Harrison and his wife, Patti Boyd Harrison, weren't the only celebrity tourists in the Haight. Another million-selling recording artist drawn to the Summer of Love was Vaughan Meader.

For all you kiddies out there, that's the comedian whose impersonation of John F. Kennedy propelled the album "The First Family" into the stratosphere in early 1963.





Untitled, 1968, by Elaine Mayes.



"Hippie Hill," 1969, by Elaine Mayes.



"George Murray, Leader of the S.F. State Student and Teacher Strike," 1968, by Stephen Shames

His career destroyed by the events of November 22, he turned to drink, blew the million or so he'd made from the album and, in 1967, gave away his Grammy and left New York in a van, destination: the Summer of Love.

Now 61 and living in Maine, Meader recently wrote a song about that year.

It was a summer he can't remember, his song goes. But it's one he will never forget.

### ③ The Flower Children

At the Avalon Ballroom, Chet Helms and the Family Dog made it feel good; at the Fillmore Auditorium, Bill Graham made it work. Graham was the first to admit that, as much as he did for the scene, he was an outsider. "Initially, I was catering to another species," he once told me. "It wasn't other people. It was mind-boggling. I looked at the scene in general as a group of blind people with wonderful, warm,

honest dreams. ... There was so much talk, so much movement, but so little doing."

Graham said he knew what dreams the hippies had were over when he saw a Haight Street coffee shop begin advertising Love Burgers. That, he said, was the death knell. Shortly after that sign went up, a singer and guitarist, Boz Scaggs, arrived in town to join his

friend, Steve Miller, in a band. "I describe it as missing the Summer of Love," Scaggs says, "but arriving at the Autumn of Mild Discontent."

### ④ Act Naturally

Five grooviest things about the 1967 Haight-Ashbury movie "Revolution": 5. The central character, a quintessential blond hippie girl who called herself Today. (She also called her mother Yesterday.) 4. Herb Caen talking about first smoking pot as a 17-year-old reporter (that'd be 1933), with cops, after a drug bust. "I found it pleasant, not particularly exciting," he said. "Maybe because I was surrounded by the fuzz while smoking it." 3. The Rev. Cecil Williams, B.B. (Before Beard). 2. Dan Hicks, unplugged, singing "He Don't Care," with the refrain, "He's stoned." For his film debut, he said, "I got a dollar." 1. The director of public health was Dr. Ellis D. Sox.

### ⑤ Flying on the Ground Is Wrong

Country Joe is not proud about having performed shows on acid, about having proselytized for drug use. "In the '60s, we were playing with fire," he told me. "There are people who just started taking it literally. They got strung out on drugs and killed themselves and other peo-



"Killed in Vietnam," 1969, by Stephen Shames.



"Rena, Michael and Greg Chanting Om," 1969, by Sylvia Clarke Hamilton.

ple; VD was rampant because of this great promiscuity riff that everybody ran down — free love and make revolution, and it really got out of hand, and I feel like every band of the San Francisco era was responsible in some way for promoting an image that was unfair, because the average working-class young person, the things that were available to us — money, protection, living in a kind of insular society — wasn't available to them, and they took hard knocks."

### ⑥ The Time Has Come Today

Ten years after the Summer of Love, Jerry Garcia thought back. "It seems like hundreds of years, and it also seems like ... I don't know. It's time, you know. Some things haven't changed at all, really — and the world has changed."

### ⑦ Not Fade Away

Whether or not the flower children were trying to change the world — some were, some weren't — there's no question that they did cause a youthquake, as Look magazine put it. The tremors continue in the Haight, where babies are swathed in tie-dyed clothing, and far beyond.

It'd be easy, too easy, to make up a laundry list: the Grateful Dead cult; the H.O.R.D.E. tour; TV advertising, reissues, plays, movies and books about '60s icons; and all the celebrations of the 30th anniversary of something that, in the end, is indefinable, and perhaps better left that way.

As Garcia says in "Feed Your Head," a film showing at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum in Cleveland. "It doesn't matter to me whether it has any historical value." What matters is that the Summer of Love energized a generation.

"A lot of people are still moving with that energy," said Garcia. "That energy is still propelling us. It's partly responsible for all the things that've happened historically since then. It's part of the gain in consciousness that the last half of the century has represented."

## WHERE TO CELEBRATE THE 30TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE SUMMER OF LOVE

■ **"Summer of Love: Revolution and Evolution."** Exhibition of photographs and memorabilia that examines the counterculture that took root and thrived in the '60s and continues to define the San Francisco Bay Area. Opens Wednesday. Through September 7. In July, noon-time events, readings and discussions feature some of the people who personify this cultural movement. Ansel Adams Center, 250 Fourth St., San Francisco. Open 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Sunday-Wednesday and Friday-Saturday, 11 a.m.-8 p.m. Thursday. (415) 495-7000.

■ **"Dead to Die For: The Summer of Love, 1967."** Marilyn and Michael Lucas present a lecture on the fashions and jewelry of the 1960s and an exhibition of 10 original and rare Grateful Dead concert posters. 7:30 p.m. Thursday, San Francisco History Association, the Cannery, third floor (adjacent to the Museum of the City of San Francisco), 2801 Leavenworth St., San Francisco. (415) 750-9986.

■ **"Flashback: A Psychedelic Exhibition."** A survey of the graphics and book arts that flourished and became the "look" of the '60s. Related events throughout the summer include a reading by Diane Di Prima and Saul White at 4 p.m. July 12 and workshops on making books by hand and techniques in '60s graphic design. Through September 1. Opening reception with a light show by Moes Glows and featuring Phyllis Laurie at 7 p.m. Saturday, San Francisco Center for the Book, 300 De-Haro St., San Francisco. Open noon to 5 p.m. Monday-Friday, noon-4 p.m. Saturday. (415) 565-0545.

■ **"Summer of Love '97 Concert."** Featuring Barry McGuire, Terry Talbot, Lynn Kellogg, Christafari, Larry Hampton and the Lower Than Angels Band. Noon-6 p.m. July 12, Sharon Meadow, Golden Gate Park, San Francisco. This concert is the finale of a weeklong celebration that will include nightly music at the Vineyard Christian Fellowship (1098 Harrison St.), music and drama at

Justin Herman Plaza (noon, Monday-Friday) and community service in San Francisco. For details, call Vineyard Christian Fellowship of San Francisco, (415) 558-9900, ext. 3009.

■ **"Summer of Love Auction."** Butterfield & Butterfield of San Francisco will hold an auction in September (date to be announced later) of artifacts and collectibles from the '60s, including Silver, the Hog Farm's psychedelic-painted bus; the billiard table from the Jefferson Airplane's house; Peter Max art; and Jerry Garcia's handwritten lyrics to "Mars Hotel." Also, photographs from the portfolios of Jim Marshall, Gene Anthony, Lisa Law, Baron Wolman and Herb Greene. Consignors of property are encouraged to donate a portion of the sale's proceeds to participating nonprofit organizations, including the Haight Asbury Free Clinic, Bread & Roses and Wavy Gravy's Camp Win-narainbow. For details, call Eric Christensen at (415) 861-7500, ext. 467.