

Chinese Whispers: Jimi Hendrix, Fame and “The Star Spangled Banner”¹

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Drawing on Halbwach’s notion of collective memory the paper reassess some of the key turning points in Hendrix’s legacy. Highlighting the contingent nature of Hendrix’s rise to fame through to its peak in 1968, the paper illustrates how, despite the fact that Hendrix continued to grow as a musician, from 1969 onwards his business and personal affairs were increasingly in disarray. In fact he was telling Rolling Stone in May of that year, that he needed to take a year off (“Hendrix’s One Year Retirement Plan”). Secondly, I show that Hendrix’s Woodstock performance did not represent the high point of the festival either artistically or in terms of crowd numbers, and that rather than being regarded as iconic at the time, Hendrix’s rendering of the anthem was regarded as controversial by his opponents and as a theatrical display of music virtuosity by his supporters. I also demonstrate how Hendrix’s flirtation with the American anthem represented part of a wider cultural phenomenon at the time.

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Introduction

Given that today Jimi Hendrix's fame is an institution, attempting to re-evaluate his significance to the 1960s is a difficult and risky undertaking. By asking probing questions about established truths, one will encounter a great wall of resistance. This is because for many, Hendrix is more than just a virtuoso guitarist. He is a religion. According to convention then, Woodstock and Monterey are iconic cultural moments because Hendrix was pivotal in defining them. And we remember Hendrix today because of his timeless genius. I am very reluctant to take issue with these beliefs, but there is more than meets the eye to Hendrix's fame than this.

According to Maurice Halbwachs, we remember the past through the social framework of the present. He refers to this mode of remembering as collective memory (Halbwachs 37-40). Therefore, following his line of reasoning, today's iconic status of Hendrix's Woodstock performance is not a reflection of how it was thought of in the 1960s, but rather how it is regarded today by the collective memory of our society. If we accept this thesis, this does not mean "that there is no real past" and that the "only world that is real is the one we live in today." (Wegman 145) Rather, in order to interpret how Hendrix's rendition of the American anthem was regarded during his lifetime then we need to undertake a patient historical and sociological analysis of it.

The recent release of the so called definitive two DVD collection of Hendrix's Woodstock performance Jimi Hendrix: Live At Woodstock (Goodman and Wadleigh) prompted me to ask the following questions: why is it that the film creates the impression that Hendrix and his group were the only performers at Woodstock, when reports of that era describe the whole event as the world's largest happening? ("The Message of History's Biggest Happening"). Why, if this is one of Hendrix's most celebrated performances, are small pockets of the audience leaving the festival site or seemingly not paying attention while he his playing?² Why does the inner-sleeve note of the DVD claim that "Message To Love" and "Izabella" make clear his continuing musical evolution and his surging momentum, thereby recasting Woodstock as a tabula rasa for Hendrix's genius? Given that by the time Hendrix appeared on stage on Monday morning of 18 August 1969 that the crowd had shrunk from 300,000 to 25,000 people, was Woodstock really about Jimi Hendrix or was Hendrix rather part of Woodstock Nation?

Despite the technical brilliance of his rendition of the American anthem, I struggle to accept the convoluted idea that at Woodstock, Hendrix was the Moses of his times. To counteract these claims, in this paper I aim to show how the intersection of Hendrix's biography and history is anything but a linear narrative of success, genius, self-assuredness and rugged heroism, leading up to his apotheosis at Woodstock. Instead, I demonstrate how Hendrix, a gifted, charismatic hard working individual, collided with fashion in 1966, enjoyed rapid success in 1967, peaked in 1968 and then, caught between shifting musical trends and pigeonholed as a psychedelic clown, struggled between 1969 and 1970 to maintain his earlier momentum. Trying as he desperately did to reinvent himself, this came too late and like many youth of his age, Hendrix died in London of barbiturate intoxication.

The paper concludes that Hendrix's past will always be refracted through the looking eye glass of the present, and that Hendrix archivists have an important role to play in the shaping of this process.

Hendrix's Posthumous and Lived Fame

After his death on the 18 September 1970, Jimi Hendrix, born John Allen Hendrix in 1942³, enjoyed a brief flutter of posthumous public adulation before riding into the sunset of sixties rock folklore. In the mid-seventies, when the hysteria surrounding his legendary performances had well and truly subsided,⁴ a small army of loyal supporters - band mates, friends, fans, biographers, the press (particularly Rolling Stone, Melody Maker and Guitar Player) and his beleaguered estate - kept Hendrix's flagging legacy alive. The *raison d'être* behind their activities ranged from a labour of love and a wish to set the record straight, to a cold and calculated desire to turn a quick profit – though it has usually been a varying combination of all three motives. Given that so much of Hendrix's tapes and film have been hoarded in private collections, much of it bootlegged live performances and works-in-progress, studying and producing quality Hendrix products requires co-ordination and co-operation between key players, something that has been characteristically common amongst Hendrix collectors, but much less so between business entrepreneurs.

To this day, the administration of Hendrix's estate has been characterised by bitter acrimony and ongoing lawsuits. Whilst the struggle to control Hendrix's legacy has focussed upon the repackaging of his music, the legal fights have also spilt over into extra musical terrain. Most recently, Hendrix's brother Leon sued his sister Janie for control of the estate, but lost the case. Former lovers have sued each other over libellous claims (resulting in the suicide of one of the aggrieved parties in 1996 after a heavily publicised libel suit loss), and Hendrix Experience drummer Mitch Mitchell sued a publisher over claims whom, he alleged, portrayed him as a bigot and a racist. Band members from both The Jimi Hendrix Experience and The Band of Gypsys have taken legal action against successive administrations of Hendrix's estate for alleged non-payment of royalty income. Fans and scholars have been particularly vocal regarding the Hendrix estate's representation of what they view as their artist's legacy, crying foul on many occasions over the release of patchy posthumous albums and dubious merchandising schemes.

However, as a direct result of these activities three things have occurred: the quality control of official Hendrix albums (and other merchandise) has been, for the most part, of a reasonably high standard (Brattin);⁵ secondly it has continued to sell remarkably well; and perhaps more importantly, the memory of Hendrix's rock guitar virtuosity and theatricality has remained fresh in the mind of the public.

Coupled with Hendrix's induction into the Rock 'n' Roll Hall of Fame in the early 1990s, the opening in the year 2000 of Seattle's Experience Music Project (a pop music museum initially inspired by Jimi Hendrix's legacy), and the explosion of the Internet, which is saturated with web pages featuring Hendrix's name, image and likeness, his popularity seems to have attained critical mass. In the words of Daniel Boorstin, Hendrix has become "known for his well-knownness" (57).

The official account of rock history is that Hendrix's iconic status rests on his tenacity as a guitarist, and that the spectacle of his performances, which caused earthquakes of change, continues to produce powerful after-tremors. Off the record, though, Hendrix's enduring appeal has been made possible through the work of various individuals and groups throughout the subsequent three decades. Indeed, history has been kind to Hendrix. Although Hendrix was a remarkably talented rhythm and lead guitarist, one of the typical claims by his biographers is that he was "discovered" by an individual or a group of individuals. It is true that Keith Richards's girlfriend at the time, Linda Keith (a passionate champion of his talents and also his lover), identified Hendrix as someone who clearly stood out amongst the bevy of local talents working in MacDougal Street (the entertainment precinct in Greenwich Village), and that the bass player for the very successful British rhythm and blues group, The Animals, Chas Chandler, had the artistic and business acumen to anticipate that Hendrix would send massive shockwaves throughout the British rock fiefdom, which at the time was dominated by mod rockers. All this is true. But neither Keith nor Chandler were visionaries.

What distinguished them from the New York talent scouts on the lower east side was that, as outsiders, they were not plagued by the deals, allegiances and small-minded jealousies peculiar to local grass roots music scenes. Perhaps more importantly, though, they shared a secret cultural knowledge – which may seem astonishing to us – that Hendrix's style represented an imaginative synthesis of the three styles that were very popular with British mods: the iconic rock n' roll of Hendrix's childhood heroes Chuck Berry and Little Richard, the majestic blues of Muddy Waters and John Lee Hooker, the cool jazz of John Coltrane and Wes Montgomery and, particularly, the sweaty and funky R&B of Ray Charles, and the various soul groups of Motown and Stax (Hewitt). In this light, Chandler's surprise that Hendrix was floating about the village without a major record deal and his belief that Hendrix would bring the British rock aristocracy to its knees could only have made perfect sense to an Englishman plugged into the UK trends and fashions that were popular at the time.

The Rise and Fall of Jimi Hendrix

Hendrix's first LP, Are You Experienced, was heavily influenced by psychedelic culture. Its popularity was in part due to its perceived homage to the drug scene in Britain. He bypassed the LSD and hippie culture of California only to collide head on with it in London in late 1966. His management changed the spelling of his name from Jimmy to Jimi and built a band around him. The result was the Jimi Hendrix Experience, probably named so after the popular book, The Psychedelic Experience (Leary, Metzner and Alpert). This represented a concerted effort on the part of Hendrix's management team to appeal to the sensibilities of the burgeoning hippy culture in the UK, elements of which had been imported from the American West Coast. Overall, Hendrix's success in the UK in 1967-68 was contingent upon three key conditions: the financial, social and cultural capital that his English management team drew upon at a local level to promote and finance him: the allusions and specific references to LSD in the lyrics, music and image of the group, and, just as importantly, the existence of a popular audience that was very

well versed in the conventions of rhythm and blues, and generally warmly receptive to black American entertainers.

With the rise of FM radio, the improved quality of LP discs and players and more importantly the expansion of recording technology from four tracks to eight tracks, like many rock groups of the era⁶ Hendrix was inspired to experiment with longer songs, complex textures and improvisational jams that drew upon the rich tradition of the blues and the idiomatic styles of modern jazz and classical. This eclectic synthesis of styles is best demonstrated in his post-apocalyptic Atlantean epic “1983...(A Merman I Should Turn To Be)”.⁷ This newfound freedom gained expression in his self-produced double album Electric Ladyland. More conceptually cohesive and realised than his classic debut and his sophomore effort Axis Bold As Love, the double LP released in 1968 went number one in America and peaked at number six in the UK. Although now at the height of his powers, and enjoying both critical acclaim and popular support on both sides of the Atlantic, Hendrix was unhappy with the UK release’s outer sleeve design (it featured naked women in an unflattering light, in both senses of the word) and was deeply disillusioned with how the album was mastered, somewhat distancing himself from it as a result. Ultimately, Hendrix’s maturation as an artist catalysed the drift away from his teenage single buying constituency towards the more radicalised so called “counter culture” (Roszak).⁸

Hendrix was changing with the times. Seeking to break with the “Black Elvis” and “Wild Man of Borneo” tabloid images of Fleet Street, he began to publicly express his reticence toward his newfound fame and fortune, playing down his status as a guitar hero. In interviews, echoes of the Frankfurt School’s Theodor Adorno could be heard in Hendrix’s growing cosmic mantra that music was a truth-telling device that in certain instances could convey the mood of the times more effectively than political rhetoric ever could. He loosely referred to this belief as an “Electric Church.” Indeed, Hendrix’s incendiary rendition of the American anthem “The Star Spangled Banner” expressed the zeitgeist of the times. A few weeks after Woodstock he discussed why he chose to play the anthem as he did:

Oh because we’re all American [...] When it was written then, it was written in a very, very beautiful, what they call, beautiful state, you know, it is nice and inspiring, you’re heart throbs and you say ‘great I’m American!’ But now days when we play it we don’t play it to take away all the greatness that America’s supposed to have. We play the way the air is in America today. The air is slightly static (qtd. in Goodman and Wadleigh).

Although it is has been said that Hendrix had little to no formal musical training, he was certainly a keen student not just of the guitar but also of music in general. In his pre-fame days he was very aware of what was happening in the musical underground in his native country and in the UK. As a struggling free-lance guitarist, Hendrix had travelled across America with various high profile R n’ B groups between late 1963 and 1965, before basing himself in lower east side Manhattan. Probably already aware of the electronic tape music scene in the Sunset strip through his Greenwich Village connections, it is entirely possible that he also had direct contact with the scene when he was playing with Little Richard in San Francisco California in early 1965. If those associated with the tape

centre in the Haight Ashbury area were beginning to experiment with the American national anthem in late 1965 (Perry 39), it is not unreasonable to speculate that they may have had some contact with Karlheinz Stockhausen who based himself in California between 1966 and 1967, the period in which he composed his electronic epic of national anthems, Hymnem. At that time, Stockhausen, one of the key founders of electronic music back in the 1950s, was an underground hero in the transatlantic rock scene (an image of him is featured in the Beatle's Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band LP sleeve montage). Stockhausen's abstract interpretation of "The Star Spangled Banner" would have had a profound impact on Hendrix as it surely did for others. Being as a fan of country music, Hendrix would have probably also heard Johnny Cash's 1964 LP Bitter Tears: Ballads of The American Indian, an obscure beautiful work sympathetic to Native American civil rights. The flute featured on the melancholy "The Ballad of Ira Hayes" - a story about a Native American, Ira Hayes, who served in the marine corps, but upon his return from war, is forgotten by his country and dies a tragic death of alcoholism - quotes sections of the melody of "The Star Spangled Banner." One might conclude that it is the synthesis of Cash's ballad and Stockhausen's electronic treatment of the anthem, that inspired Hendrix's dramatic Woodstock version that he is best remembered for. Though I am sure that further research would uncover other examples of "The Star Spangled Banner". It would be safer to say then, that the national anthem, as both a highly personal and collective symbol of national identity was being reinterpreted at a time when artists and citizens were questioning their country's moral standing on a broad range of social, political, economic and cultural issues.

Hendrix had been performing "The Star Spangled Banner" from around August 1968, one year earlier than Woodstock. After Woodstock he continued to perform it up until his death. The recent popular release of Hendrix's performance at Woodstock containing an official recording on disc one and a never before seen posthumously authorised bootleg recording on disc two (Goodman and Wadleigh) has been publicly portrayed as the discovery of the lost Holy Grail of Hendrix performances. Indeed it is an important and exciting find and no one better than Joel Brattin, the contributing editor of the Hendrix journal, UniVibes, has highlighted its attributes and deficiencies (Brattin, "Reviews: Jimi Hendrix: Live at Woostock" 3-13).⁹ Notwithstanding this, it was the mythologisation of Woodstock as a glimpse of Utopia, if but only for three days, not Hendrix's performance per se, that has made his rendition of his "Star Spangled Banner" so iconic.¹⁰ It is important to note that the decision to have Hendrix appear at Woodstock was decided, according to Woodstock impresario Michael Lang, primarily on the basis of the novelty factor of his theatrical show, a sentiment that illustrates the growing gulf between Hendrix's perception of himself as a serious artist and the public's anachronistic view of him as an entertainer with a bag of tired gimmicks. Moreover, Hendrix closed the show because that was what his management had stipulated as a condition for him appearing at the festival in the first place. It was not because he was considered to be a more important act than the likes of the The Who, Jefferson Airplane, Joan Baez or Sly and The Family Stone. In fact, Lang, originally wanted Roy Rogers to close the show, for sentimental reasons, but apparently Rogers declined the invitation.

Sacrifice and Death 1960s Style

To borrow Nietzsche's expression Hendrix was "human all too human". He was an interesting yet flawed man – but not a tragic figure, as some hagiographies contend. Moreover, if you dig deep enough you will find that Hendrix's contemporaries such as Janis Joplin and Jim Morrison and subsequent generations of popular icons, such as Kurt Cobain, were equally mortal. The reason why these details are not public knowledge has little to do with Hendrix scholarship or people's capacity to critically engage with mass media messages. Despite the fact that we are living in the age of information, advances in science are still thought of in terms of miracles. We remain in thrall of our idols even though empirical evidence may suggest they are mere mortals. As an icon of the sixties generation, creative artists such as Hendrix were regarded as more than just heroes. They were worshiped with a passion that was once reserved for deity (this is particularly evident in the iconic images of Hendrix in sixties poster art and posthumous album covers which allude to the figure of a suffering Jesus).

Whilst the thin veneer of his media-contrived public persona never lost its shine, Hendrix the man buckled under the weight of public adulation and scrutiny. He was very candid about suffering from panic attacks and depression. For the few people who knew Hendrix personally, it was a devastating shock that he died when he did because it seemed that despite his seemingly intractable personal problems, he was writing better and making a concerted effort to become more financially autonomous from his manager. But in the eyes of the public Hendrix's death was a *fait accompli*.

Certainly all the apparent signs were there.¹¹ After a hectic touring schedule to promote his third LP, he suffered a private breakdown and allegedly slashed his wrists (Redding and Appleby 110; Shadwick 167). In 1969, Hendrix was the highest paid performer appearing at the Newport 69 Pop Festival in California for a fee of \$125,000 (Black 193). But despite his demand as a live entertainer, Hendrix failed to release any new LPs or singles. Instead, to his displeasure, his management released singles taken from his previous year's work and followed this up with a best of album Smash Hits. The Jimi Hendrix Experience, by now a dysfunctional and uninspired unit, broke up in June 1969. During this period some critics began to articulate what must have been on some of his fan's minds. Nik Cohn's assessment of rock scene in 1969 is not irrelevant here:

Still, if Elvis and Jagger have returned, they've been balanced by a bumper crop of failures. Jimi Hendrix has repeated himself *ad nauseam*; Janis Joplin, who was once the real thing, has sunk into abject self-caricature, screeching and caterwauling at random; the Beach Boys have done nothing; Arthur Brown has taken himself seriously; the Mamas and Papas, Traffic, the Small Faces and Manfred Mann have broken up; and most of the new groups – Led Zeppelin Iron Butterfly, King Crimson, Blood, Sweat and Tears – have been merely embarrassing (Cohn 266-67).

Hendrix was clearly a huge draw card in 1969. But by this time he was extending himself beyond the pop sensibility of his earlier works produced by Chas Chandler, towards flamenco, blues and free form jazz; styles that were subterranean to the pop charts. Yet his fans were not satiated until he recapitulated to their requests for such

classic hits as “Foxy Lady”, “Purple Haze” and “Fire. At a time when Hendrix was entertaining the idea of working with expanded ensembles and undertaking projects with such luminaries as Miles Davis and Gil Evans, he made no secret of feeling stifled by public expectation.¹² This dilemma of course was not a private trouble. An article published in Melody Maker in 1969 provides a fascinating insight into the angst of a generation of entertainers torn between the demands of the pop charts and pleasing themselves:

Jimi Hendrix – like Eric Clapton, The Nice, the Pink Floyd and many others – is faced with one major problem. He is trying to produce music, which claims to permanent value, yet the outlets for that music and the mass media, which, as yet seem unable to distinguish between a Jimi Hendrix or Donald Peers. (Dawbarn 14)

Hendrix was reluctant to release any new material in 1969 because it has been claimed he did not want to repeat himself. One might say that 1969 was a year of experimentation for Hendrix. However, his inner sanctum regarded his experiment with the Gypsy Sun and Rainbows at Woodstock as a disappointment, even though his rendition of “The Star Spangled Banner” has since assumed iconic status.¹³ Towards the latter part of 1969 Hendrix teamed up with Buddy Miles and long time friend Billy Cox to form the Band of Gypsys. This all black power trio, although showing great promise, suffered a similar fate to that of Hendrix’s Woodstock project. Indeed, the eponymous Band Of Gypsys LP released in early 1970 charted fairly well both in the UK and North America, but it did not receive the critical accolades and success that Hendrix’s earlier work with the Experience did. A single containing “Stepping Stone” and “Izabella” was released around the same time in North America, but was quickly withdrawn due to Hendrix’s dissatisfaction with the quality of the pressing. This public relations debacle was not only a false start for the apparently new and rejuvenated Hendrix, but also proved to be the last work that he was to authorise prior to his untimely death. During September 1970, the poorly organised Isle of Wight Festival, and the disastrous Isle of Fernham, were both regarded by fans and critics as metaphors for the waning of Hendrix’s creative powers, and for some as harbingers of Hendrix’s death. Of course Hendrix’s powers were not in decline¹⁴, and neither were the powers of other comparable artists that subsequently died or had near death experiences. Though the point is, that as heroes to a generation no longer perceived to be capable of perpetuating their heroic feats, this state of affairs threatened both the health and vitality of the quasi-religious movement that had elevated them to sainthood in the first place. There must have been a strong sense at the time, consciously or otherwise, that only their sacrifice could ensure the salvation of the counter culture. Indeed, the spirit of the times, which was increasingly one of apocalyptic visions, manifested a kind of romantic relation to nihilism amongst the young. The march towards the destruction of civilisation was internalised as a way of life. Recall the famous lyric to the Who’s 1965 British hit “My Generation”: “I hope I die before I get old” (Townshend). In fact BMI (Broadcast Music, Inc.) reported that 23 different songwriters used the phrase ‘the end of the world’ in their lyrics (qtd. in Junker 43).

Despite the ongoing speculation surrounding Hendrix’s death, from a sociological standpoint, his fatal drug overdose was a mundane statistical consideration. The British Observer reported that in 1964, 506 cases of a fatal barbiturate overdose had been

recorded. This figure is not surprising. It was the most widely used sleeping pill in England and as a result both the number of accidental deaths and suicides each year were on the rise (Clark). Hendrix used sleeping pills on a regular basis, so, from a sociological perspective, his death was not only a private trouble, but also part of a growing structural problem that England (and North America) was just beginning to come to terms with. However, at the time the media portrayed the death of Hendrix and Joplin as a symbolic atonement for the excesses of a generation. The most hyperbolic yet powerful and moving eulogies for Hendrix flowed from the pen of a young Australian expatriate, an emerging public intellectual by the name of Germaine Greer. The piece, originally published in the controversial underground magazine *Oz* a few weeks after Hendrix's death, summed up the mood of the times. Greer's opening passage says it all: "It was no surprise that Jimi split. He was a long time dying and he gave us adequate warning" (41).

Today, much like the seventies, the shadow of death hangs over Hendrix's posthumous fame. But now it is divorced from its sociological significance. The religiosity of his passing has been reduced to the level of a personal trouble – an unsolved mystery, a preventable tragedy or perhaps the curse of the age 27, shared by Joplin, Morrison and Cobain, hence "the 27-club". Notwithstanding this, the religious irony of his posthumous fame, the phenomenon of his resurrection, is not yet well understood. During the early 1970s several posthumous LPs of Hendrix's unfinished songs were released, such as The Cry of Love, Hendrix In The West and Loose Ends. The view then was that there was not much more music of value worth putting out without further damaging his musical legacy. There was certainly a feeling amongst some critics at that time, that the Hendrix estate - under Jeffery and subsequently under Alan Douglas - was scraping the bottom of the barrel. This was well before the knowledge that the repackaging and remastering of previously released LP had massive commercial potential. This realisation dawned on the music industry in the mid 1980s following the remarkable advent of the CD age, where fans were convinced that a copy of their favourite LP on the new laser driven technology was essential. But the re-release of Hendrix LPs did much more than just rekindle the flame of their childhood hero. Perhaps more significantly, it inadvertently introduced a new legion of fans to Hendrix, either too young to remember him, or born after his death. For these new apostles, the vicissitudes of Hendrix's trajectory and the turbulence and excitement of the 1960s has been smoothed out into a linear narrative of heroism and revolution. This is another story altogether.

Conclusion

Clearly Hendrix's rise to fame was not inevitable. It could have been anyone, but given the unique set of historical, biographical, social, economic and cultural circumstances, it had to be John Allen Hendrix. Today, Hendrix is remembered for more than just his skills as a guitar virtuoso and musical innovator. He is the counterculture's pin up boy, and his jarring rendition of the national anthem, echoes a primordial cry of pain and anguish that resonates deeply within all of us. Ultimately though, Woodstock was chronicled so extensively in print, radio, television and film that it was as much a media event as it was a hippy happening. The film, for example, was described by one reviewer as "a three-hour multiple-screen ecstatic mindblown underground freak movie." (Goodwin) As a media event, it gave rise to an imagined community of such mythical

proportions that it quickly eclipsed the individual memories of those people who had actually participated in the three day festival. As Rolling Stone wrote on the eve of the Woodstock album release a year later

if you were at Woodstock, you probably think that the film had little to do with what you saw. And, if you've seen the movie, you'll note that the documentary record ("all the music from the original soundtrack and more" they call it) doesn't have all that much to do with what you saw. (Ward)

Clearly, watching the film and being there was not, and can never be, one and the same thing. Without the audio and video record of Hendrix's version of "The Star Spangled Banner", there would have been no controversy in the press, and Hendrix's legacy would be much the poorer today. But fortunately this is not the case and thus the question remains: does it matter if Hendrix seemed to be in decline or not? Does it matter if Hendrix was not asked to be the headline act at Woodstock but that his imposing manager Michael Jeffery made sure it looked that way anyhow? Does it matter that Hendrix's "The Star Spangled Banner" as hauntingly beautiful as it is, was not his genius; that cutting it up like confetti and then sticking it back together again, was a profoundly sociological phenomena of the 1960s not peculiar to him?

The retelling of an event will always be embellished by the whim and fancy of its narrator - just like a game of Chinese whispers. And regardless of the times, we all need heroes, even though some of us feel we can live without them. Therefore, does it make a difference if the collective memory of Jimi Hendrix and his performance at Woodstock is refracted through the social prism of an age that has nothing to do with the original event? I, for one, do not think it does. Halbwachs reminds us that "at the moment of reproducing the past our imagination remains under the influence of the present social milieu." (Halbwachs 49). The past does exist. Though it is our collective destiny that in conjuring it up, none of us can completely discard the veil of the present.

In conclusion then, it is inevitable that the meaning of the events that took place at Woodstock will continue to be redefined in terms of its symbolic importance for the present, and archivists working in this area will play a vital role in shaping this narrative. No one, however, enjoys a monopoly over the meaning of Hendrix's life history, not even his greatest devotees. Hendrix's story remains a collective labour of love and struggle.

End Notes

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² The bootleg film recording of Hendrix's Woodstock performance (Goodman and Wadleigh) shot by 22 year old drama student Albert Goodman is distinctly different to the official film recording in that it stylistically reflects the sentiments of his generation. Given that Woodstock was considered a happening, a spontaneous event between the audience and the performers, it is not surprising that Goodman quite often

pointed the camera in the audience's direction (one wonders if some of his shots were edited because the producers wanted to par down the length of audience footage). Even when filming the Gypsy Sun and Rainbows, Goodman included the audience in the frame. In these instances, one can see that even though most of what was left of the crowd that morning is quite attentive to Hendrix's performance, in the distance one can see people leaving the site or just walking around, not really engaging with the band. Also it seems that in general, as Hendrix's songs segued into extended improvisatory jams, that the audience had begun to grow listless. Hendrix noticed this too. At around the 44:40 minute mark he thanks the audience for their patience. Again at approximately 64:30 minutes Hendrix tells the audience that they can leave if they want to or they can clap because the group is just jamming. When Hendrix did his one and only encore for the show, "Hey Joe", a slow exodus from the festival site is evident between the 82:10 and 82:15 minute mark and between 82:35 and 82:47 minutes.

³ The name given to him by his mother. His father subsequently changed his name to James Marshall Hendrix.

⁴ For example, one critic wrote that "In the here and now his music does not sound as daring and revolutionary as it once was proclaimed to be" ("The Lighter Side: Crash Landing (Recording)")

⁵ Joel Brattin is a contributing editor to UniVibes and Jimpress, and is a much sought after freelance consultant to Hendrix researchers and fans around the world.

⁶ For example, The Doors' "The Soft Parade" (08:40), The Mothers of Invention's "The Chrome Plated Megaphone of Destiny" (06:25) and The Who's "We're not gonna take it" (07:09).

⁷ The second part of a four song cycle that comes after track 10 "Rainy Day, Dream Away" and is followed by track 12 "Moon, Turn The Tides...gently gently away" concluding with track 13 "Still Raining, Still Dreaming". The total duration of the cycle is approximately 14:15.

⁸ The audience at Woodstock, for example, mainly comprised of twenty-somethings, where as archival footage of Hendrix's early performances show that his patrons were predominantly teenagers.

⁹ One of the key points Brattin makes is that the 2 DVD collection is not definitive in the sense that, like its predecessor - released by Experience Hendrix in July 1999 - it has excised the songs and individual contributions of other members in the group. Although Gypsy Sun and Rainbows was a six-piece band, for the most part one can only hear the trio of Hendrix, Billy Cox (bassist) and Mitch Mitchell (drums). In other words, what subsequent generations have heard of Hendrix's performance on film and record (and more recently on DVD and CD) and what the crowd who were actually present at the show experienced, was, and remains vastly different. Which leads us to speculate that if the collection was presented as close as possible to what was heard on the morning of Monday 18, August 1969, the memory of Hendrix's performance would certainly take on a different hue.

¹⁰ I think that for the counter-culture, Hendrix's "Star Spangled Banner" was primarily interpreted at the time as a happening; a spontaneous and absurd theatrical event. In this light, Hendrix's performance would have caused great offence to America's patriarchs.

¹¹ In retrospect, Hendrix's drug bust in Toronto in May 1969 and his alleged kidnapping in September 1969 portend doom.

¹² Tensions between Hendrix and his manager Michael Jeffery were also building. With expenses soaring, Jeffery was growing anxious over Hendrix's perceived lack of progress in the studio towards a finished LP. In turn Hendrix allegedly reacted badly to Jeffery's interference in the creative process. Unwilling to compromise, Hendrix was forced out of the studio onto the road in order to finance his whims, ironically delaying, and as fate would have it, preventing the completion of his fourth studio LP.

¹³ Hendrix's "Star Spangled Banner" was legion at the time simply because it was controversial. Most reviews of the Woodstock film, released in mid 1970, were more preoccupied with the fact that the event had been turned into a commercial venture. Where the focus fell on the performance, Hendrix's drew praise for his musicianship, not for the alleged political gesture. For example, Ed Ward's review of the

film in Rolling Stone states that “[...] Hendrix’s “Star-Spangled Banner,” a classic statement which alternates verses of the anthem with long, extremely well thought-out passages of free playing that rank among the greatest achievements of rock” (Ward).

¹⁴ It should be noted, that in the aftermath of Hendrix’s death, if a music critics’ memory is anything to go by, Hendrix was remembered as a man who had lost his mojo. For example, in 1975, a feature on posthumous fame in Melody Maker opines that “Jimi Hendrix’s career had declined – both artistically and commercially – by 1970”(Jones).

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