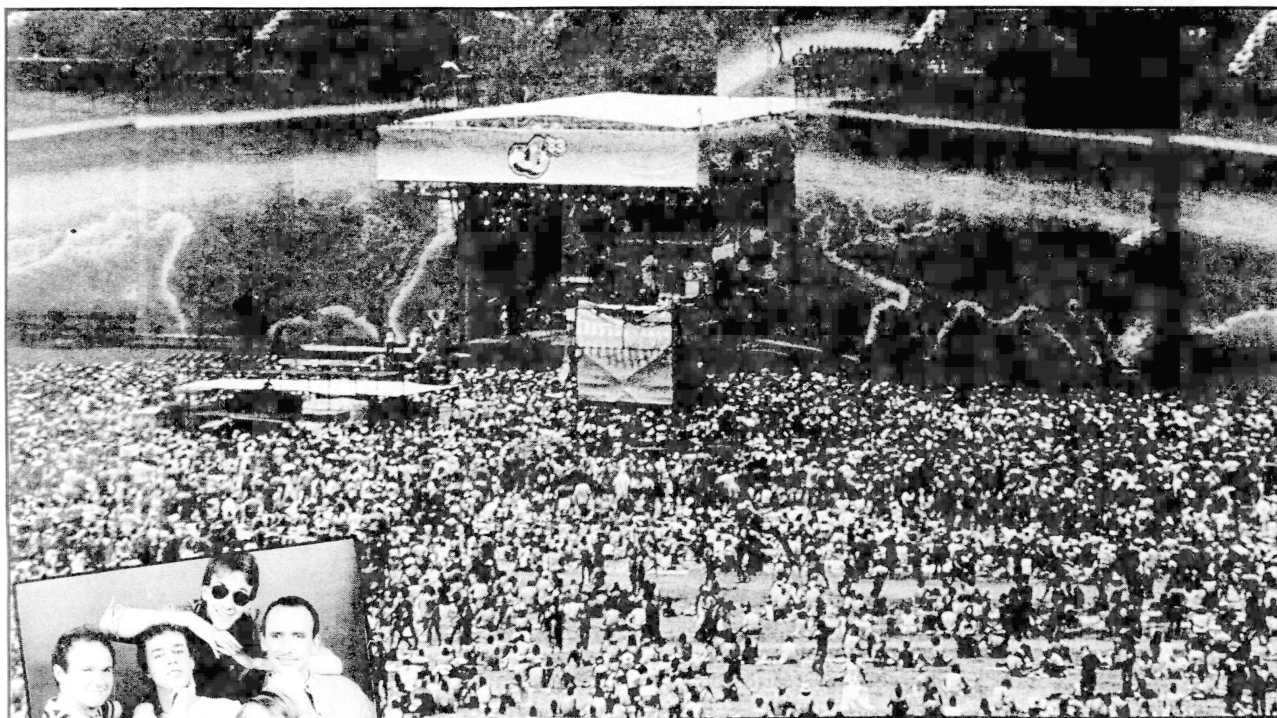


SMOGSTOCK FESTIVAL



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About 140,000 people showed up at US '83, top, where such groups as Men at Work, above, performed.

By Wayne Robins

Devore, Calif. — The quote of the day Saturday on the opening afternoon of the three-day US '83 festival came from Danny Elfman, singer of the band Oingo Boingo. "They say the US festival has no spirit, that it's not like Woodstock," Elfman said. Then, after a mild obscenity, Elfman continued telling the audience: "Woodstock's over, the '60s are finished. And good riddance!"

Elfman's statement reflected both the pride and the inferiority complex of this event. The brainchild of 32-year-old Apple Computers cofounder Stephen Wozniak, the US Festival's opening day showed just how far planning and technology for mass gatherings has improved since Woodstock snafued its way into legend in 1969.

There were enough food and drink stalls and portable toilets to make waiting minimal for the crowd, estimated at 140,000. The 435-foot-wide stage could be clearly seen from any point in the grassy, gradually sloping 58-acre amphitheater. A large Diamond Vision screen and two supplementary video installations made performers visible from hundreds of yards away. The customized, 400,000-watt sound system provided what is almost certainly the clearest, most well-balanced sound ever heard at an outdoor concert. It was like listening to a very large, very expensive home stereo.

One element that Wozniak and his UNUSON (for Unite Us in Song) Corporation's planners could not neutralize was Saturday's oppressive weather. This is smog season in southern California. When smog moves off from the Pacific Coast, it settles in this arid region 65 miles east of Los Angeles. With afternoon temperatures peaking at around 95 degrees and the air thick with a visible, lung-searing gray mist, it is no wonder that the mood at the festival was placid.

The most excited activity took place around the numerous water fountains. If the symbol of Woodstock was

the frequent flashing of the "V" peace sign, the benign gesture of US '83 was having a stranger give you a friendly squirt from a water bottle.

Most of the requests for treatment at first-aid stations were for heat exhaustion, but no serious cases were reported on opening day. No coolers were allowed on the concert grounds, minimizing access to alcoholic beverages. Beer and wine were available to those over 21 in fenced-in beer gardens, and those beverages could not be taken outside. There were 87 arrests by the end of the festival's first day including one arrest for murder in the case of a 23-year-old man who was beaten to death with a tire iron following a dispute over a money transaction in the the campgrounds near the concert area, police said. In the concert area itself, drug use did not seem to be a major factor among the crowd, which ranged from young teens to families with children.

Despite the weather, most of those in the audience seemed to be having a splendid time. "The sound is excellent, excellent — I thought it would be distorted," said Steve Dudino, a high school senior from San Francisco. Dudino and his friend Doug Kugler were in good spirits, even though their car had broken down 80 miles away. "We must have walked 40 of it," Kugler said. Dudino was enjoying Oingo Boingo, but he was more enthused about Sunday's heavy-metal show. "The Scorpions and Van Halen," he said as if invoking the names of gods. He gave thumbs up with both hands.

The mild mood at Saturday's show also might have been related to the relatively unexciting musical performances. The show was largely devoted to new-wave rock, headlined by England's politically conscious group, **the Clash**. Most of the first half-dozen bands to perform — the Divinyls, INXS, Wall of Voodoo, Oingo Boingo, A Flock of Seagulls, and the English Beat — would have been much more at home performing their dance-oriented music in small clubs or ballrooms.



Wall of Voodoo, far left, and A Flock of Seagulls appeared at the California festival sponsored by computer whiz Stephen Wozniak.

The Stray Cats, from Long Island, who went on around 7 PM, injected the first excitement into the show. The Stray Cats were beneficiaries of approaching darkness and a cooling breeze, which helped switch off the atmospheric furnace. The quickly plummeting temperature rejuvenated the audience, and the Stray Cats' infusion of animated rock and roll after hours of juiceless music brought the festival to life.

The Stray Cats' set was followed by one of the peculiar tangential events that dot the festival and which reflect Wozniak's philosophy of the 1980s as the "Us Decade." The event was a two-way satellite video hookup with the Soviet Union. The festival audience got to see a segment of the Russian band Arsenal performing in Moscow. The Russians, in return, were to get a view of the US audience and some of the music played by the band Men at Work.

"You're gonna be able to party with Russia tonight!" an enthusiastic disk jockey from a Los Angeles radio station said from the stage. "Cameras are filming you, since you are the stars." There was a double irony here. The first was that the "Big Brother is watching you" concept is one usually associated with the Soviet Union. The other is that the rock band being beamed to Russia from the festival is Australian.

Men at Work was so efficient in its performance that you might have thought their set was played by a clone band devoted to copying the group's hits, such as "Overkill," "Who Can It Be Now?" and "Down Under." It was easy to be distracted by the approach of an apparent UFO that looked like the one in the movie "Close Encounters of the Third Kind."

The spaceship with flashing lights was part of "the dream spectacle," an elaborate musical and visual extravaganza featuring laser beams, klieg lights, fireworks, video art and symphonic music. Eventually, one of the extraterrestrials appeared on the Diamond Vision screen, and offered some momentary wit. "Who were you expecting, Wayne Newton?" the spaceman asked.

But this science fiction distraction went on too long and became a showcase for the airhead utopianism that gives the US Festival its erratic undertow. "I am the

force of a thousand nations . . . I am hope, I am peace . . . As we realize we are all one, we unlock the doors to the new tomorrow," the spaceman said, accompanied by what sounded like musical outtakes from the scores to "E.T." or "Star Wars."

Such sentiments did not go over well with the Clash, a band that blends often brilliantly energetic rock and roll with a muddled leftist rhetoric that has been described as "socialism for sophomores." The Clash had been at the center of a propaganda battle with the UNUSON staff during the week that preceded the concert. The Clash's manager, Bernard Rhodes, denounced the telecast to Moscow the day before the festival. "You trying to sell them capitalism? Miller beer?" he said contemptuously to a member of the telecast staff. The Clash has charged that the festival is too commercialized, has too little minority representation among performers, and that despite claims to the contrary, its organizers are making too much money. The band has requested that the UNUSON Corp. make a substantial contribution to some socially worthwhile charity.

As usual, the Clash painted themselves into a rhetorical corner. Their fee for appearing at the festival is said to be \$500,000, and there were those who wondered why the Clash wasn't giving some of that money away themselves. (The Clash said that some of that money would be used to help less financially secure English rock bands.)

During Men at Work's set, the Clash called a press conference backstage. To show their disdain for that commercially successful Australian band, Clash representative Kosmo Vinyl played a tape of a Ray Charles record so loud that members of the press who attended the conference couldn't hear Men at Work's performance, according to Denis McNamara of Garden City's radio station WLIR.

At the press conference, Rhodes recapitulated the band's philosophical disgust with the US Festival. When asked why the band was going ahead with playing, Rhodes answered sarcastically; "If we didn't, we'd have chaos, and Van Halen would call us communists." Van Halen is the popular, decidedly apolitical, heavy-metal band that headlined yesterday's show.

Joe Strummer of the Clash continued the band's guerilla warfare with the festival from the stage during

their performance. "We're not going to get down on our knees and kiss all this microchip technology — it doesn't impress me much," Strummer said. He also noted that "the people in East Los Angeles [a Mexican-American ghetto] aren't going to be there forever."

Distracted and perhaps imprisoned by their anger, the Clash's set was musically defensive as well. "London Calling" and "Radio Clash" were ragged, though "Know Your Rights" was closer to form. The introduction had such a modified hillbilly beat that you expected Strummer to inject some "Ghost Riders in the Sky" yodels.

But after a tepid response to a slow reggae, Strummer berated the audience. "Try this on for size," and then he began speaking in a mocking hippie voice. "Hi, everybody! Ain't it groovy?" Then, returning to his normal voice, Strummer said: "Ain't you sick of hearing that for the last 150 years?"

Apparently not. The Clash continues to misjudge and condescend to the audience that has made the band wealthy. No matter how much one wants to agree with their message, there is an underlying hypocrisy that is making the Clash as tedious with its politics as George Harrison of the Beatles became with his insistent spiritualism.

The amount of money being paid to performers is one of the more frightening aspects of the US Festival. Wozniak, who is said to have lost \$4 million of his estimated \$100-million fortune on the first US Festival last Labor Day weekend, has twice as much to lose this time. Although the crowd for Sunday's heavy-metal show jumped to an estimated 400,000, opening day attendance was under the projected 200,000 or more per day estimated to be the break-even point for this weekend's three rock shows and next Saturday's country show headlined by Willie Nelson.

Wozniak is the George Steinbrenner of rock and roll, paying the kind of hugely inflated salaries to players that make millionaires out of part-time utility infielders. Some new-wave bands with minor hits and dubious box-office appeal are making as much as \$100,000. Van Halen was signed to play for \$1 million. But the band had a "most-favored-nation" clause in its contract, guaranteeing that no artist would be paid more. Later, when Bowie was signed for a reported \$1.5 million, Van Halen automatically became slightly more than half a million dollars richer.

How long can Wozniak keep it up if he loses money this year, which seems a strong possibility? "What's a fortune to you and me isn't a fortune to him," said Barry Fey, the Denver-based concert promoter who booked most of the acts. "He said to me the other day, 'If I do this for another 55 years, I'm in trouble.'" /II

Wayne Robins is Newsday's popular-music critic.



The Clash, left, made more rhetoric than music, but Stray Cats, above, sounded good on opening day Saturday.