

# Ritchie Havens Opens Woodstock



AUGUST 15 1969

**W**HEN FOLK SINGER Ritchie Havens took the stage on a Friday afternoon in 1969, he was performing the first act in what would become one of the most dramatic moments in the history of popular culture: the Woodstock Music & Art Fair.

By the time it was over, half a million fans—more than double the expected turnout—would endure traffic jams, rain, and primitive conditions to crowd the fields of Max Yasgur's farm in the upstate New York town of Bethel (about 40 miles from the village of Woodstock). The mud-soaked multitude was there to hear more than 30 of popular music's biggest stars, including the Who, Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young, Janis Joplin, Santana, Sly & the Family Stone, the Grateful Dead, and many others.

Ironically, the festival often cited as the pinnacle of 1960s rock culture was a far cry from its planners' original vision. When concert promoters Michael Lang and

Artie Kornfeld answered a newspaper ad by John Roberts and Joel Rosenman seeking investments, they first proposed a modest event featuring artists like Bob Dylan and the Band, who lived near Woodstock, about 90 minutes north of New York City. When they decided to stage a bigger outdoor concert, most towns in the area refused permission. They even had a hard time booking big-name acts. But that all changed once Creedence Clearwater Revival, who'd just released the huge hit album *Bayou Country*, agreed to play. Enough stars signed on to provide three days of music that spilled into a fourth. The crowd had thinned considerably when Jimi Hendrix & Band of Gypsies closed the festival Monday morning. But thanks to Michael Wadleigh's documentary *Woodstock* and its soundtrack album, performances like Hendrix's "Star Spangled Banner" continue to resonate to this day.