

In July, the weather down in middle Georgia is always hot and humid, so thick you can touch it, feel it envelop you in a sticky warm embrace. The summer of 1970 was even hotter than usual, a real scorcher, a barn-burning kind of heat. The 4th of July weekend would prove to be a barnburner as well in so many other ways.

That summer the political climate in America also was on fire and had reached a boiling point. The war in Viet Nam moved into Cambodia – and our troops moved onto college campuses across the country as the youth of America rose up in protest. A flash point had occurred at Kent State in Ohio where four students laid dead at the hands of the National Guard. The Nixon White House was waging war in the jungles of Southeast Asia and in the streets of our hometowns across the nation. The Black Panthers, the SDS, the Weathermen, the Chicago Seven trials – all this turmoil thrust the young people into an exciting new world, a world where people believed that they held the power to affect cultural change. The music of the day was the loudest voice this generation had for a while – and they used this voice for radical change.

The rock festival was a relatively new phenomenon. The Monterey Pop Festival was staged in 1967. Woodstock was in August of 1969 followed by Altamont that December. The first two were magnificent successes. From both musical and cultural standpoints they represented the joyous and empowering gatherings of a generation. The ideals of peace, equality, free love and drugs – and the power of musicians to convey these ideals to the people – were a heady and powerful intoxicant. Not all the festivals were peace and love events, however. Altamont was proof enough of that. Dark, dangerous, deadly and demonic, the Rolling Stones just never got the hang of the hippie thing.

The big festivals got all the attention, but dozens of summer rockfests took place or were attempted throughout 1969 and 1970, ranging from Atlantic City, Randalls Island, Texas International, Kickapoo Creek, Miami Pop, Galena,

White Water, Powder Ridge, the Celebration of Life, etc. The first Atlanta Pop Festival occurred in Hampton, Georgia in July 1969 and was a great success. The outlook for the second Atlanta Pop Festival was bright. The Atlanta Speedway wouldn't host part two, but a racetrack 75 miles further south down I-75 in the little hamlet of Byron, Georgia proved to be at least a little bit more welcoming. It wasn't all rosy though. Georgia's infamous racist governor Lester Maddox campaigned hard to block the event, but couldn't. The Georgia State Patrol, the Bibb County and the Peach County Sheriff's departments all kept close eye on the promoters and arriving participants, arresting dozens and generally making everyone nervous until the crowds arrived en masse and proved to be gentle and peaceful. Thousands of stoned, naked kids were much easier to watch over than to try to arrest or disrupt. It all turned out fairly groovy, actually.

The promoters from Atlanta had prepared well with weeks of stage and fence-building, advertising, signing major acts, fending off police and politicians. Alex Cooley and his partners expected 100,000 or so groovy hippie kids each paying \$14.00 for a three-day 4th of July celebration. The acts were impressive: Jimi Hendrix, Jethro Tull, Ten Years After, Grand Funk Railroad, B. B. King, Mountain, Captain Beefheart, Johnny Winter, Spirit and several local favorites, among them the Hampton Grease Band and some boys from Macon called The Allman Brothers Band.

Macon, Georgia was a sleepy deep South city of 90,000, and was the home of some amazing music. Otis Redding, James Brown and Little Richard had all called Macon home; now a whole new kind of musical thing was happening there. Otis Redding's former manager, a powerful R&B booking agent named Phil Walden, signed session guitar player Duane Allman and formed a record label to release his new band's music. The Allman Brothers Band moved to Macon in 1969 from Jacksonville, FL for the same reason bank robbers rob

banks – because that's where the money is.

Macon was quiet, Otis was dead, Little Richard and James Brown had moved on and the Brothers were freaky hippies in a town more curious and fearful of them than they had been of the black soul giants that had lived among them before.

The Allman Brothers Band released their first album in November 1969 and was in the process of recording their second LP in the summer of 1970. Duane continued to do sessions to help supplement the band's income. Atlantic Records had him playing with an amazing cross section of talent from their roster. In fact, during the last week of June 1970 Duane was down in Miami doing a session.

The promoters' idea was to have The Allman Brothers Band, the local heroes (it was 14 miles from the band's Big House in Macon to the stage in Byron), open and close the festival: the only band to play twice. In those days the band toured in a large Winnebago mobile home since this was long before the day of the tour bus. Early the week before the festival they parked their Winnebago backstage. Phil Walden rented one himself and parked it next door. That along with a couple more vehicles and the boys created a great little compound that served as party and musician central – and the only air conditioned spot in a backstage area that was basically little more than Port-O-Johns and large army tents.

The band's new tour manager, Willie Perkins, had been on the job about 30 days at that time (Twiggs Lyndon, the original tour manager, was awaiting trial in Buffalo, NY, accused of killing a club owner who had refused to pay the band for the night's performance). Willie was just developing his tour managing skills and learning how to control a rock band, typically a group of unruly, single-minded musicians who are more prone to getting high and playing than being on time and dependable.

So it was that on the opening day of the Atlanta Pop Festival, as the starting time drew closer and closer and

