

with 200,000 music fans awaiting the opening band, Duane Allman was nowhere to be found. In the days before cell phones and pagers, Duane was on his way back from a Miami recording session, driving alone in his old Ford Galaxie. The rest of the band was hanging in the backstage Winnebago, chilling. The single biggest problem was people – too many of them. With between 100,000 and 200,000 freaks on site and crowds that grew to 500,000 before the weekend was over, traffic on the roads to the festival was gridlocked. The festival site was only 2 miles off I-75 so the traffic backed up on the interstate, sometimes as far as 70 miles. The prospect of Duane getting caught in this mess was a big problem – but not too big for Skydog. He just parked his old Ford at a truck stop and hitched a ride on the back of a motorcycle. Driving on highway shoulders and through the pecan groves, Duane arrived with minutes to spare and saved Willie's sanity for the weekend. The band took the stage and the second Atlanta Pop Festival kicked off with "Statesboro Blues." The Allman Brothers Band tore it up.

About one hour into the band's set, the stage emcee took the microphone to announce that the gates were being thrown open and that it would be a free festival. Word spread and the crowd swelled in the heat of that July in Georgia to estimates of 500,000 to 600,000, with little trouble but for countless delays. The first arrived during The Allman Brothers Band set. While playing, a typical tropical thunderstorm popped up, drenching the crowd with welcomed rain; but since there was no roof on the stage the band had to stop for thirty minutes. The Brothers came back, picked up where they left off in "Mountain Jam" and just kept on grooving.

The first set by the ABB started about 3:00 PM on July 3rd and lasted a couple hours, including the rain delay. Joining the band on harmonica was Thom "Ace" Doucette, long-time friend and frequent guest player, almost a part-time band member really. Thom didn't want to join the band because that would be too much like having a job, and if you were a great harp player with a good line of b.s., who needed a job anyway?

The song list for the first set included several songs the band had just recorded for their second album *Idlewild South*, that would be released later

that year. "In Memory Of Elizabeth Reed" was a majestic instrumental, the first written by Dickey Betts: a song that over time would become one of the ABB's greatest musical pieces. "Hoochie Coochie Man" was a Muddy Waters song penned by Willie Dixon that when sung by Berry Oakley had more venom than a 12-foot cottonmouth. Oakley, always the gentle father figure, family man of the ABB, would just terrorize the crowd, spittin' the words out with all the power Howlin' Wolf ever had. A fairly dangerous man, that Oakley was.

The second set was way late on the last night of the festival, 3:50 A.M. on July 6th to be exact. The crowd had experienced some amazing things during this hot weekend in the South. Jimi Hendrix playing the "Star Spangled Banner" while fireworks exploded overhead at midnight on the 4th of July. As I sat on my huge 48-star American flag laid out on the dusty red Georgia clay, trippin' my brains out on good, pure LSD, I wondered aloud what country could be better than the good old USA. Hendrix, acid, fireworks and the "Star Spangled Banner" on the 4th of July – what a great country America is!!!

So, to cap it all off, the Brothers came on and burned the place down until dawn. Johnny Winter sat in with them on "Mountain Jam," Ace Doucette played harp again throughout the set, and the tape machines kept rolling. This was a hometown band "hittin' the note," hittin' their stride on their way to the Fillmore East, to Watkins Glen, to the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame and to more than thirty years of playing some of the world's greatest rock and roll music. Thank the Lord those tape machines were loaded and rolling; that and the fact that I made it home in one piece. The Brothers all made it home fine... the front porch was only 14 miles away.

—Kirk West 9/11/2002

Kirk West is currently The Allman Brothers Band tour magician and has been since 1989. In 1970 he was a 19-year-old hippie boy from Chicago who lived in a van going from rock fest to rock fest selling his wares to earn money to move on the next rock fest. He later figured out an easier way. The Allman Brothers have always been his favorite band.

