



Media

Cool



Aid



By David Corn

BY THE TIME WE GOT TO PHILADELPHIA, we were 90,000 strong—"we" being those of us of the Live Aid generation who trekked to John F. Kennedy Stadium to witness first-hand the marathon 14-hour Live Aid benefit concert for African famine relief.

Comparisons with Woodstock—while perhaps unfair on some accounts—were unavoidable. After all, it was Joan Baez who gave in first to the temptation. At exactly 9:04 a.m. on July 13—as the minute-by-minute schedule dictated—Baez walked on to the stage, the first act of the U.S. half of the transatlantic concert. She greeted the throng before her: "Good morning, children of the '80s. This is your Woodstock, and it's long overdue."

As far as the analogies can go, she was right. It was our Woodstock. In the way that Woodstock reflected its generation, Live Aid reflected ours. But signs of cultural resistance or opposition to the powers that be were not to be found within the gates of JFK Stadium. The entire event was a video extravaganza—Jerry Lewis meets MTV on a monstrous scale. Everything was meticulously planned and staged from the first to the 840th minute, leaving little room for spontaneity. Any sense of politics—be it left or right—was absent. Nothing was asked of those who attended. We were not even requested to make donations or write our elected officials.

Corporate sponsors—AT&T, Chevrolet, Kodak and Pepsi-Cola—proudly hung their corporate banners on the stage and advertised their wares on the four giant TV screens that were set up in the stadium. At the start of the day, AT&T distributed tens of thousands of white caps emblazoned with its name, transforming the audience into a sea of AT&T logos. Imagine Woodstock brought to you by IBM.

This is not to disparage the gala and what it achieved. As the show ended, Bill Graham, the veteran rock impresario who helped to produce the benefit, announced that Live Aid, which also included a sister concert in Wembley Stadium in Great Britain, netted more than \$40 million—all of which, it was promised, would flow directly toward famine relief, through such agencies as Oxfam and Catholic Relief Services. (This figure was later revised to \$70 million.) That should save a great many lives—quite a legacy for a rock music festival. Woodstock might have aspired to something more spiritual or mystical, the promise of a harmonious Woodstock Nation. Live Aid was the epitome of practical-

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Photographs by Paul Comstock