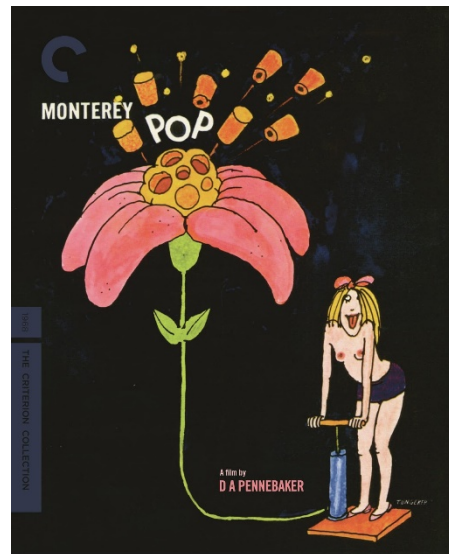


# “Monterey Pop” (1968)

## An Interview with Michelle Phillips

### From The Mamas & the Papas



The 1967 Summer of Love introduced the world to the California sunshine, flowers in your hair, peace, love, hippies, and most of all, music. If there's one documentary that captures the true spirit and embodies the Summer of Love it is the 1968 concert film “Monterey Pop.”

The Monterey International Pop Music Festival, as it was officially known, was a three-day concert event held June 16, 17 and 18, 1967 at the Monterey Fairgrounds in Monterey, California. It was the first large-scale rock festival of its kind and became the template for future powerhouse festivals like Woodstock and Altamont in 1969. The influence of Monterey Pop is still felt today at festivals all over the world including Coachella, Lollapalooza, and Bonnaroo.

The brainchild of John Phillips of The Mamas & the Papas and legendary music producer Lou Adler, the Monterey Pop music festival brought some 200,000 fans to see legendary performances by The Who, Jefferson Airplane, The Mamas & the Papas, Grateful Dead, Simon and Garfunkel, The Byrds, The Animals, Ravi Shanker, and over 20 other high-profile performances. The careers of Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin and Otis Redding skyrocketed due to their now-famous and electrifying Monterey Pop sets.

Phillips and Adler partnered with filmmaker D.A. Pennebaker, whose 1967 debut concert documentary “Don’t Look Back” covering Bob Dylan’s 1965 tour of England was already proving him to be a respected filmmaking visionary. “Don’t Look Back” was added to the Library of Congress National Film Registry in 1998.

For Monterey Pop, Pennebaker wanted to simultaneously capture on-stage performances, crowd shots and backstage interactions. As recalled in a 2006 Washington Post article, he decided to shoot and record the film using five portable 16mm cameras equipped with synchronized sound recording devices.

In 2018, the documentary film “Monterey Pop” was inducted into the National Film Registry for its cultural, historical and aesthetic significance.

The Library of Congress spoke with Michelle Phillips, the only remaining member of The Mamas & the Papas, in April 2021 about her experiences with the film and the legendary concert event.



*The Mamas & the Papas warming up backstage at Monterey Pop*

**Monterey Pop had a groundbreaking line-up. How did you get so many amazing artists to perform for free?**

Lou and John decided that a Board of Governors should be established to help guide the talent and some of the decisions. The Board included Paul McCartney, Brian Wilson, Donovan, Mick Jagger, Terry Melcher, Andrew Loog Oldham, Smokey Robinson, Jim McGuire, Johnny Rivers, and others.

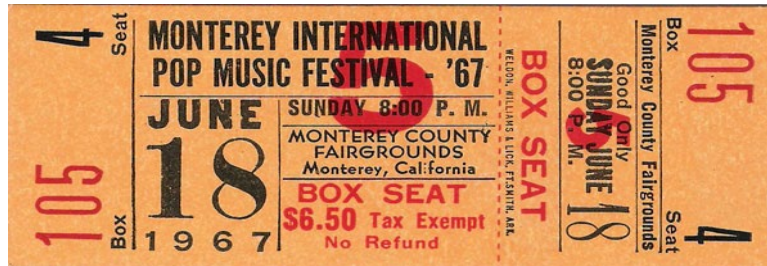
**Wow! That is quite a brain trust!**

They were our friends, and while they weren’t expected to do too much with the day-to-day, their names attracted attention and looked very good on the festival stationary. (laughs)

As a result, we had an incredible list of talent willing to play, but we didn’t have the money to pay them. I don’t recall if it was John or Lou, but someone said “why don’t we do it for charity?” We discussed opening a music school for underprivileged children, providing instruments to schools and supporting free clinics.

The Monterey International Pop Festival Foundation was started and still exists today.

No one could have managed this money for over 50 years better than Lou Adler. He kept his word and proceeds from Monterey Pop music, merchandise and the film are still given to charitable programs in the names of the artists who appeared at the festival.



**Did you have a specific role in the planning of the festival?**

One of my jobs was selling ads for the Monterey Pop Festival booklet. The ads cost \$1500 for a full page, which was a lot of money in 1967. I called every shop I knew on Rodeo Drive and told them that this historic event will be remembered long after the three days. I don't think I realized just how true that would be.



*Lou Adler, John Phillips, Michelle Phillips  
backstage at Monterey Pop (Photo by Bobby Klein)*

**It was very forward thinking to make it a documentary and record the performances.**

John and Lou made a deal with ABC television to pay D.A. Pennebaker \$200,000 to shoot the movie with the intent it would air on ABC. However, when John and Lou started seeing the footage, they

realized this was so much more than a television special and they had bigger plans. So, they took the raunchous footage of Jimi using lighter fluid to set his guitar ablaze, The Who kicking their drum set and whatever they could find to make it look less appealing.

When ABC saw it, they were aghast and quickly replied that this wasn't right for their "family network," and the deal was off. That is how John, Lou and the Monterey Pop Corporation got to keep the footage, the rights, and the money.

### **Let's talk about Janis Joplin and her incredible performance.**

Janis was in the band Big Brother and the Holding Company, and nobody really knew who she was. Their manager did not want the band filmed for the Monterey Pop movie, so Pennebaker did not film their set. When Janis started singing, she brought the house down! She got a standing ovation and the crowd was cheering and screaming. Record executive Clive Davis was in the audience, the only person in a suit and tie, and he swept her up and signed her to a record deal.

When Janis saw what an impact she had on the audience, she went to John and Lou and said "I want to be in the movie. Please let me do another set and film it." They said, "Okay, how about tomorrow afternoon?"

The band went out again the next day and Janis got an even bigger ovation.

In the film as she finishes her set, she runs to the wings of the stage and is jumping and down full of happiness. You see the pure joy she is feeling. She was virtually unknown and never had this kind of adulation before.

There is a great scene in the movie where Cass is watching Janis and she mouths the words "wow!" That is how people responded to her performance.

### **How did Janis and Big Brother Holding Company get invited to play Monterey Pop?**

I don't know, but all of us involved in the production were given the opportunity to suggest someone. Paul McCartney suggested Jimi Hendrix. I suggested Otis Redding. Lou and John thought it was a great idea and began working with his people. Everybody had some input.

### **What made you pick Otis Redding?**

I had a friend who was a dancer in the cage at the Whiskey A-Go-Go. I went to see her and it was on the night that Otis Redding was performing. I was the only white girl in the audience, and I was blown away. When I got the opportunity to put my two-cents in for Monterey Pop, I said I want Otis Redding.

When he came out on-stage at Monterey Pop, he was smiling and laughing "So, this is the love crowd!" I don't think he had ever played in front of an all-white audience before, or certainly not one this big.

From what I heard, he called his wife that night and said "My career just took a turn for the better."

Sadly, he would die 6 months later. It makes his appearance and the footage of him at Monterey Pop even more special.

**The same could be said for Jimi Hendrix, or the Jimi Hendrix Experience as they were known. What did you think when you saw him light his guitar on fire?**

Well truthfully, I really disapproved. I couldn't believe these musicians were destroying their guitars. I came into music respecting our instruments, so this was something I didn't understand.

With Jimi Hendrix and The Who, I was seeing theatrics in rock and roll that I had never seen before. Then it became a competition of how bad can you really get.

**When a film is inducted into the National Film Registry, the Librarian looks at its cultural, historical or aesthetic importance, and this film has all three. It isn't just the music, it's the fashion, the people and overall feeling of the time.**

There are so many things in the film that are sweet and loving. And, the details! Lou had 150,000 orchids flown in. The police put them on their antennas and in their helmets, and people were putting them in their hair. Then there's that scene in the movie where Lou is walking the fairgrounds and playfully goes for the policeman's badge. They are laughing and having fun. That is how it was.

When you see footage of Woodstock, it is raining and people are muddy, cold and strung-out. Then, you watch our movie and you see that Monterey Pop was the complete opposite. And, it really was. It was beautiful weather, the fans brought their children and dogs, and I don't think there was a single arrest or overdose.

The Monterey Pop team did something really brilliant by creating an onsite medical tent. In the film, you see the tee-pee being built, but that was really an onsite medical tent and a place to go if you had a bad drug trip. It was very smart and the first of its kind.

**Impressive. And, you're right, most people at Woodstock didn't see the performances.**

At Monterey Pop everyone was outside in the sunshine, sitting in chairs or laying in the grass enjoying the music. We were the complete opposite of Altamont and Woodstock.

When Ravi Shankar came out on-stage, he asked the crowd not to smoke and to close their eyes and go with the flow. And, they did. Even the artists playing the festival went out into the crowd to watch Ravi Shankar perform. A lot of people had never heard Indian music, and Ravi was the master.



*Janis Joplin and Peter Tork of the Monkees at Monterey Pop*

It was around the time George Harrison was bringing the Sitar-sound to The Beatles. We got lucky in many ways. Many of these bands were on the cusp of making it big. I'd like to think Monterey Pop was a launching pad.

**In 2018, the Library of Congress inducted “Monterey Pop” into the National Film Registry. What does that mean to you?**

It's really a wonderful thing. If there ever was a film that documents that particular era, it's Monterey Pop. When people talk about the fashions of '60, they are really talking about 1967. It was when mini-skirts, go-go boots and Twiggy make-up came onto the scene. The world was really changing with politics and the Vietnam War. It was the beginning of the Summer of Love.

I am grateful that it will be preserved, so that everyone can look back and feel a part of the culture, the music and the wonderful time in our world.

*Essay and interview by Stacie Seifrit-Griffin with the Library of Congress National Film Preservation Board and the National Film Registry.*

*Interview was conducted in April 2021, and opinions expressed are not necessarily those of the Library of Congress.*