

Ken Marcus - *Jimi Hendrix Burning Guitar, Monterey Pop Festival, 1967*

THE PICTURE | THE STORY

The Monterey Pop Festival in Monterey, California happened 50 years ago this June. The festival took place at a time that was called the “Summer of Love” during the summer of 1967. This bacchanalian event has been characterized as the beginning of the counterculture in America. Jimi Hendrix’s performance at the festival made him a unique player to be reckoned with. Los Angeles Photographer, Ken Marcus was there to capture some of Jimi’s magical moments.

“In June of 1967, I was invited by my friend Alan Pariser to document the Monterey Pop Festival. The idea for the festival was Alan’s, who along with John Phillips and Lou Adler, produced the first music festival event to bring together unknown groups and major talents on the same stage. Amongst those unknown artists, that went on to become superstars were performers like Janis Joplin, The Who, Grateful Dead, and of course, Jimi Hendrix.

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I spent the first two days photographing various performances and the audience filled with hippies, while being exposed to amazing music and light shows.

Late on the third day, I was positioned in the wings on stage right, as this flamboyantly dressed young black guitarist came on to perform. He didn't look like any of the other black musicians that I'd seen. I had no idea who he was or what to expect. I don't think most of the attendees did either. I recall at that time seeing many in the audience getting up and heading to the exits for food and drink.

Almost as soon as the group began playing, people stopped in their tracks and quickly returned to their seats. Apparently, nobody had seen or heard anything like this before and their stunned reaction was immediate. His unusual guitar techniques and use of controlled feedback was mesmerizing.

As I shot their performance with my two cameras (Nikon & Hasselblad) the action onstage became louder and wilder with each song. Towards the end of their rendition of Wild Thing, Jimi dropped to his knees, placed his guitar on the floor, retrieved a tube of lighter fluid and mimicked masturbating with it while dousing his guitar before setting fire to it. Picking up the burning guitar, he waved it around, smashed it to the floor and produced bizarre sounds that were unworldly. Eventually it broke apart, and he threw what was left out into the audience before leaving the stage. The crowd was left with their jaws dropped wide open.

After the festival was over, I returned to Los Angeles and processed the transparency film as a color negative (a trendy, alternative, artsy technique at the time). Since I had no commercial use for the festival photos, I filed them away in one of my job envelopes. As the years went on, the envelope was eventually removed from my studio and stored in a cardboard box, at home in my garage.

Thirty-seven years went by rather quickly and one day in the process of moving, I found the dilapidated box containing the festival negatives and discovered to my surprise that they were still intact. By this time, I owned a digital scanner and selected a few of the images to see what they looked like. The first image I chose to scan was Jimi burning his guitar. I was amazed how intense it looked and realized that this was Hendrix at his most decisive moment.

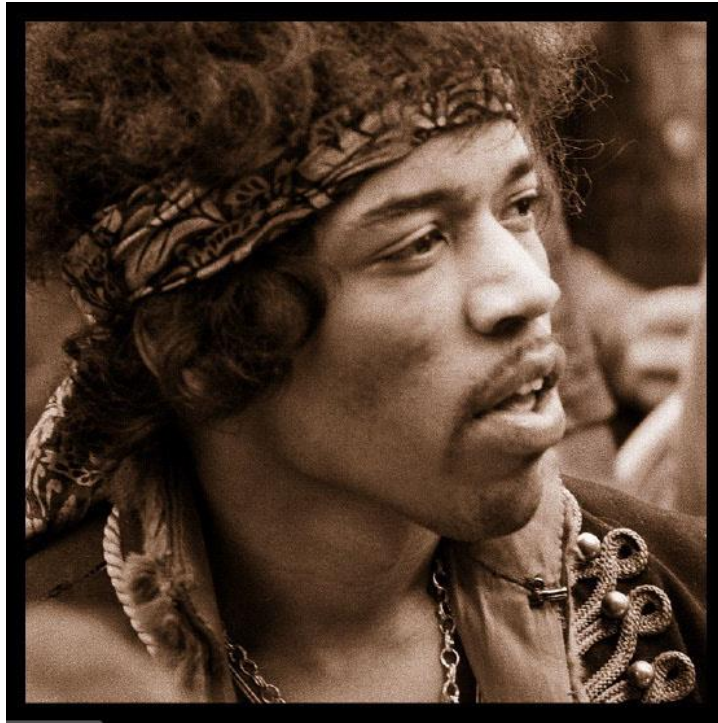
Nobody, including myself had ever seen this image before, taken from onstage. I was awestruck at what I discovered! Here was Jimi Hendrix, onstage in America, setting fire to his guitar and blowing everyone's mind. When he went onstage, hardly anybody knew who he was. A short time later when he left the stage, he had established himself as a legend in rock n' roll history.

There were other negatives in black and white of this performance that I found, along with dozens of images of other performers.

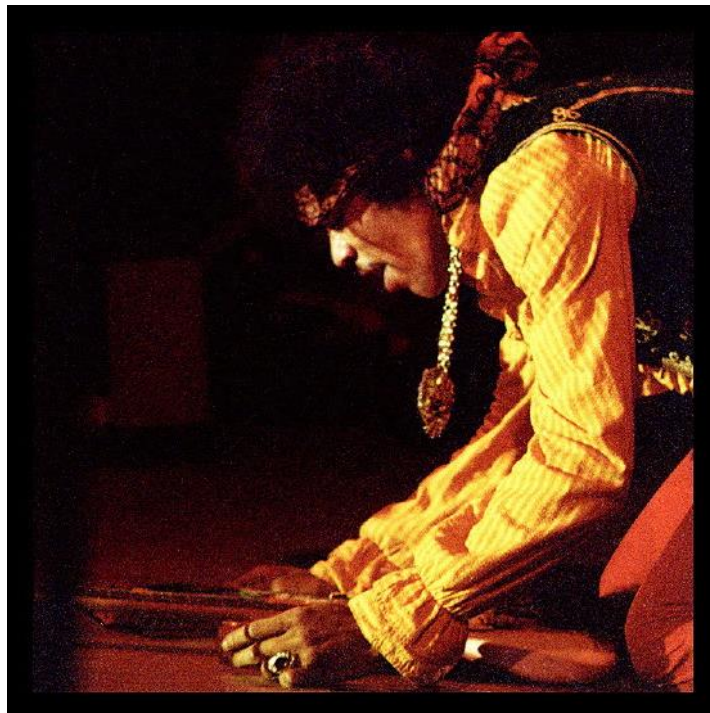
The Hendrix family utilized this iconic photograph as the album cover image to commemorate Jimi's appearance for the 40th Anniversary of the Monterey Pop Festival."

Ken Marcus, 2016

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Ken Marcus - Jimi Hendrix, Monterey Pop Festival, 1967



Ken Marcus - Jimi Hendrix Preparing to Light Guitar, Monterey Pop Festival, 1967