

Photography That's me in the picture

Robert Stredder, 29, kissing at the Isle of Wight festival, 1970

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'It was a wonderful festival musically, and quite anarchic.' Photograph: William Lovelace/Getty Images

Robert Stredder

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I was living in Brighton, doing theatre acting when I met the band [Hawkwind](#). They had about 30 drummers, and invited me to join them backstage at the Isle of Wight festival in 1970 as a sort of extra. I played a small African drum, a [djembe](#), made of goatskin. We weren't part of the official festival. There were two stages: the main festival stage, and the one behind it, which faced a hill where about half a million people gathered, people who couldn't afford to get in. Hawkwind played when there were gaps in the show.

In this photograph, we're on that hill. The woman was a girlfriend of mine, but I can't remember her name. I was only with her for the duration of the festival. You lose friends all the time in a crowd of half a million, and there were no mobile phones, so it was hopeless. We had an understanding that if we lost each other, we would meet at the King & Queen pub in Brighton, and I think we did. She wasn't the great love of my life, but she was good fun.

At the time, I remember papers such as the Daily Mail and the Sun were disapproving of festivalgoers, but it was a really mixed audience – you couldn't generalise like that. Most people didn't have tents, so we just slept in the open, under a rug.

It was a wonderful festival musically, and quite anarchic, but so unhygienic. Rubbish was everywhere. The toilets were awful – overflowing with shit, so most people would go up the hill, dig a hole, and go in the heather. The people of the Isle of Wight didn't want another festival after that; this was the last one they did until 2000.

The day [Jimi Hendrix](#) played, people pushed the fence over and about 10,000 of us ran down the hill and followed them in. I got to 40 yards from the stage. He played the first note and I completely crashed out. I hadn't slept in three days. My friend tried to wake me up, but I missed the whole thing.

A few weeks after the festival, I was in Gothenburg: we were in a nightclub and the DJ announced that Hendrix had died. There was nearly a riot, because the DJ said something like: "Hendrix has died, serves him right." It went down like a lead balloon. I was very upset, and knowing I'd come so close but never really heard him play, I cried.

I first saw this photograph a week or so after Isle of Wight. My friends brought me the Observer magazine, stuck it in front of me, and said: "You're famous!" It felt weird because I didn't know the photographer had been there, but I don't blame him for taking the shot.

I'm an actor now, living in Swindon. When I look back at this picture, I feel it's quite naive and innocent. Despite the anarchy, we went there for the music. We were just having a good time.

Interview by Erica Buist

