



## redwoods, lovely women, new culture :

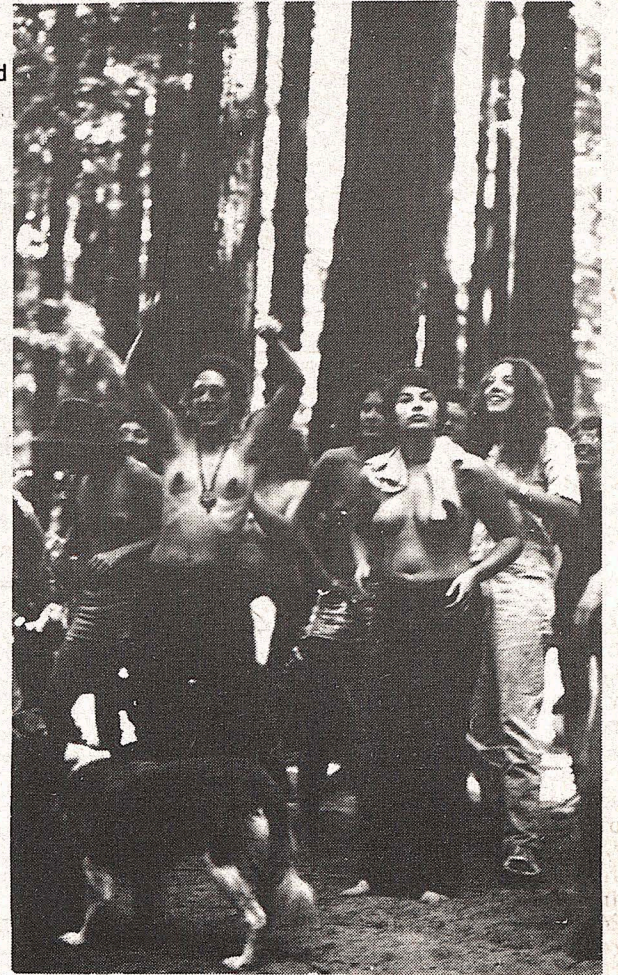
Women from the women's media collective video taped a women's music concert in Sacramento a year ago. They were so excited by the event that they decided to organize something similar in the Santa Cruz area. Interested women came together and created

the Amazon Music Project (AMP). In February they sent out letters all over the country asking for feedback on the need and desire to have a lesbian music festival.

*"But, the REALITY is clear too: Sexism, Patriarchy, capitalism exist as barriers to our vision. Women must learn to recognize the system and maneuver it to work for us.*

*The most striking reality the organizers of the Amazon Music Party have been faced with is the concept of private property. There are many beautiful places for people to gather in this area but they are owned by wealthy and by men."*

---Amazon Music Project Statement



photos by natalie

Last spring women in Washington D.C. heard stories of an Amazon Music Festival. We heard the celebration would happen in the late summer in Santa Cruz, California. My summer wanderings took me to California and to the festival.

Santa Cruz is a small city two hours south of San Francisco. It lies between the ocean and coastal mountains and has an abundance of sunshine and fine women. Although it is a small community, women's struggle has been characteristically exuberant. There is a women's health clinic, a rape crisis center, a new women's paper called *Definitely Biased*, a woman's media collective which produces video tapes (their tape on sexuality was banned from the local cable channel because of its lesbian and male homosexual content). There is also the Santa Cruz Birth Center and the Santa Cruz Women's Prison Project which does prison organizing in the California Institution for Women bringing radical therapies, women's art/music/poetry and revolutionary analysis with them.

I went to an organization meeting before the festival. Women there told me that the major difficulty was finding a site for such an event. They spoke to the contradictions. Capitalism dictates that the wealthy own land, and landowners don't support women's struggle. And AMP had a limited supply of money use.

Finally a site was found--the Chateau Liberte. A bar/club in the mountains on acres of redwood forest. A contract was negotiated which agreed that women could occupy all the facilities (land, bar, swimming pool) during the hours of 9 a.m. to 7 p.m., that at 7 the club would reopen to "normal" business. It was also agreed that women would control the gate during those hours and that the owner would receive \$600 for letting said facilities and some negotiated take of the gate. The only men to be present were those who lived or worked on the land.

At the same meeting, AMP women spent a lot of time speaking about security. How would they keep men out? What would they do if bikers came? A system of whistles was agreed upon to indicate trouble. Women working the gate were to have support in numbers--and women from the rape crisis center who were trained in the martial arts would be in the crowd.

## coming together

*The purpose of the Amazon Music Project is to create a space for women to get together to enjoy each other's company and make our own music. The music party is the creation of all the women who attend.*

*Amazon Music Project is a core group of women who have coordinated facilities in the Santa Cruz area. The non-professional make-up has been intentional to provide a supportive, conducive environment for women musicians whose music might otherwise remain unheard.*

*The organizational process can be a very alienating one because it places individuals in the situation of developing reality out of a vision.*

*Our vision is clear; it surpasses the creation of an all-women's music party. Strong women will gain control of our own culture, our own economics, our own bodies--we will control our own lives.*

---Amazon Music Project Statement

## music and bodies

On Saturday I arrived at the gate and was greeted by lovely bare-breasted women who took my \$2. I wandered down the road under huge redwoods and began to hear guitars and women's voices. Wandered further to find an outside pool filled with naked women playing in the water. Women mostly chose to be free of garments the entire weekend. Around the pool women were jamming on flute, clarinet, conja drums and various rhythm instruments. Others were improvising dances--in the sun lite.

On a grassy spot beyond the pool, there was a children's area equipped with swings, old tires, good food and big people to care for the smaller people.

Friendly dogs ran around freely. There were a few gawking men who I assumed were employees at the chateau.

By mid afternoon there were 400 or 500 women at the festival. The majority defined themselves as lesbian. Though there were many women present who still loved and worked with men. There were several European women. Women with video equipment, women with cameras, women from a lesbian women's radio program in Seattle, women from the New York women's school who were selling copies of the Weather undergrounds *Prarie Fire*. And surprising to me no less than 10 women from Washington, D.C.



## amazon music project

## open mike / performers

Most of the women who performed were from northern California. The schedule of performances had allowed time for women who had been contacted by or made contact with AMP previous to the weekend.

Large blocks of open microphone time had been reserved for any women who had not made that previous contact and who wanted to share their music or rapping with their sisters.

Women were encouraged to support the gallo wine and Coors beer boycotts when purchasing their liquid refreshments.

Women who were involved in the Inez Garcia defense committee spoke during open mike publicizing Inez Garcia's trial. Inez is a Cuban-Puerto Rican woman who had been working with the farmworkers. She was raped by two men, killed and shot one of them. She is on trial for pre-meditated murder.

Another rap was inspired by the fine, deep voice and jazz rhythm of a Santa Cruz women's band called *Bitter Sweet*. Their set ended with the Laura Nyro song, "I'm going to kill my man." A spirited woman from the women's prison project came to the make and reported that 15% of the women in the California Institution for Women are there for killing their men. "Groovy it sounds in a song--doing three to ten ain't so groovy." She spoke of a psychological study done of women who had killed the people who they identified as the main enemy in their life and it had been found that they were well-adjusted women. Rowdy cheers in the audience. We were reminded that there were 24,000 in prisons in California and 2,000,000 in correctional institutions in the country which is more than in all the other countries in the world combined.

The music was of a varied quality and often wonderful, quiet folk, Gertrude Stein's rock and roll, blues, sweet chariots hard soulful rock, jazz, attempts to find new musical forms particularly noted in BB K-Roche.

The musical performances during open mike provided some of the most interesting impromptu jamming. Women who did not know each other blending rhythm and skill.

The way that women musicians appreciated one another's music was the highlight of the weekend. A woman from a band named The Berkeley Women's Music Collective smiled and said she just felt blown away by what she was hearing--"and its all different," she said.

I felt particularly inspired by the four women in the Berkeley women's music collective. Their energy is incredible--whimsical. They speak to collectivity. All of them write songs; singing the lead on those songs they write. They perform at benefits and struggle with each other about which political struggles to support. Though they all had early musical training, they said they would not be doing music now if it had not been for other women. Their material is varied, funk, country, blues.

They were finishing a low down blues--called the "fury it comes over me"--

*you know these days we are all trying to change our lives. and some of us try to change the way we look at life... and some of us try to change the way life actually is--the way I see it I'm going to change my life with my friends, and I know I won't get the power from following the guru. And I won't get the power from voting for Brown for governor. And I won't get the power from the fury that comes over all of us. the fury that comes over me.*

And after a last "yes, it does," one of the AMP women came up to the stage filled with rage. She had asked three bikers who had driven in to leave. And they had drawn knives and threatened to rape her. She shouted strongly, "fuck you" and one of the bikers hit her in the face. They they just drove off on their bikes. Wehn she had spoken to the owner of the property, he had offered no support saying these guys are my normal clientele.

Women in the audience were stunned and quiet--and then shouts of what are we going to do about it. At some level, there was agreement to an en masse removal of any other such men.

Music continued and at 7 women left to go to their night's accommodations. AMP had spent much time arranging for housing for people to stay at. There was a camp site where 200 women could sleep outside. And many women in the Santa Cruz area shared their homes with those of us who had travelled to the festival.

On Sunday there was a general sense that women had become completely comfortable in this forest space they were occupying. There was a free sharing of wine, beer and herbs, lavender silk-screened t-shirts of an Amazon woman, more dance and music. There was also a hassle with the owner. He was threatening to throw us all out if his "normal" clientele could not come in to spend time at the bar.

On Sunday at about 5:30 a band called Gang Band played. It was composed of six lesbian women and one man who was introduced as a lesbian. Their style was an aggressive macho rock. Even when they sang lyrics with feminist content like "I'm taking out my coil, I'm in love with a goil (girl)...I felt ripped off.

They played on. Many women in the crowd seemed to enjoy the band. Others were growing furious. One of the protesters jumped to the stage and demanded that Gang Band stop playing. An AMP woman suggested a voice vote. The crowd was split. The protesters continued their protest, voicing most of their criticism at the band's male member. He became defensive--spoke to his good intentions and was jeered and then angrily left the stage.

A woman came to the stage upset. Said she had come to the festival with her eight-year old son who had started to cry over the above incident, saying he never wanted to grow up because he never wanted that to happen to him. She started to cry.

At about this time my ride was leaving for San Francisco. I left feeling an energetic heaviness.

## support and criticism

*"Lesbians are building a strong culture. But you can't just carve out a niche. Its under attack and you have to defend it." (woman from New York Woman's School)*

The Amazon Music Festival was a fine women's celebration--fine music, an energetic sharing of selves. Some criticisms might also be offered. Because the new and revolutionary culture we are creating is under attack, we must be careful with our process. We must choose carefully which of the landlords we deal with. Perhaps Chateau Liberte was not the place to have the festival. And certainly if it was known as a bikers' hangout. Security needed to be tighter.

That women should learn to sing the music in their souls and to sing and play to/with one another is essential. However, in an attempt to respect and nurture women, we must also find new ways to be critical. Perhaps Gang Band (a band that, to begin with, chooses that name which seems to indicate a strange pun on a quadruple rape) should not have been invited.

And/or how do we offer criticism in a crowd? How do we develop the ability to speak with one another wholly when conflicts and tension occur? How do we keep in touch?

Love and support to sisters in Santa Cruz.

*"The Amazon Music party was a result of energy from past lesbian events; the energy and music generated that weekend will contribute to the next event and the development of a lesbian culture."*

by natalie reuss

