

# LOU ADLER

**“I never really looked for an act.  
I was living the life and keeping my  
eyes and ears open.”**

*By David Wild*

**L**ou Adler’s name is instantly recognizable to most people. He is one of the most successful and well-known music producers of all time, an entertainment legend in his own right, identified inextricably with Los Angeles’ musical culture. Often spotted at Los Angeles Lakers games sitting alongside his pal Jack Nicholson, this seriously cool figure has long been a pivotal pop-culture force in his own right. Whatever your California dream happens to have been over the past half century, chances are he was somewhere behind the scenes, helping make it come true.

Since the fifties, Adler has been many things to many artists – songwriter, manager, publisher, producer, record company boss, venue owner, and a defining figure of the West Coast entertainment scene. He has had extraordinary success as a key collaborator with some of the major musical greats of our times, from Sam Cooke to the Mamas and the Papas, from Carole King to Cheech and Chong.

Time and time again, what Adler did was provide an open and creative environment for artists to do what they do best. As Carole King wrote in her 2012 autobiography, *A Natural Woman*, “Lou Adler was one of the most effective producers in the business. Among his many attributes, for me, the most valuable was his ability to give his artists a safe space in which to be creative. Lou had ideas of his own, but he saw himself mostly as a facilitator. Like all great sidemen, he knew when not to play.”

Born in 1933, Lou Adler grew up in the rough, melting-pot section of East Los Angeles called Boyle Heights. He was a prize-winning essayist and a student sports writer for the *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner*. “I grew up on R&B and jazz,” he noted. He gravitated toward the wide-open West Coast music business, finding early success collaborating with another



With Sam Cooke, 1960



Surrounded by Jan and Dean, 1962

**“When I first started out, you could do everything. You could run a label, oversee the artwork, set up the marketing, and really do things your own way.”**

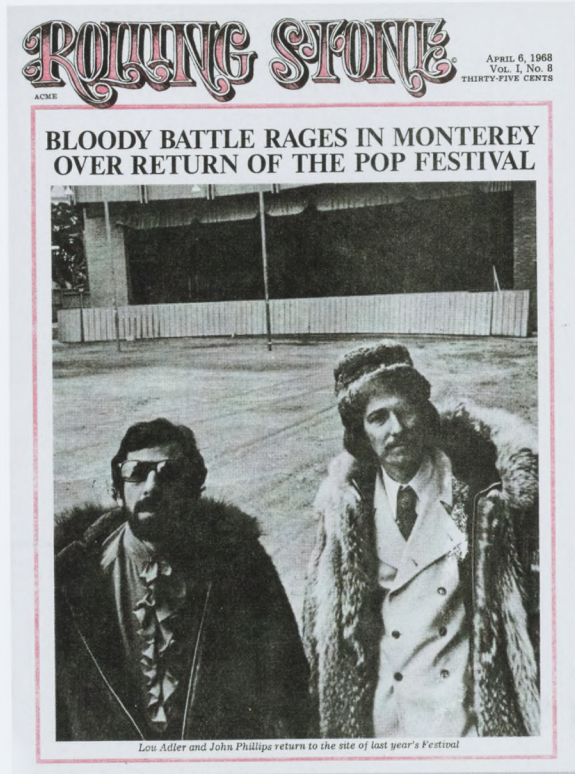
Adler (center) with the Mamas and the Papas, 1966



future legend, Herb Alpert. The pair worked for Bumps Blackwell at Keen Records, where Adler became close friends with Keen's biggest asset, Sam Cooke. Bumps gave “me an education in almost every area of the record business,” Lou recalled. “Producing, publishing, arranging, A&R-ing. He was a teacher who taught me everything I needed for what I wanted to do.”

Adler and Alpert grew restless and left Keen after Cooke signed with RCA. Together, they met a pair of high school students, Jan Berry and Dean Torrence, and became their producers and managers. “Baby Talk,” their first single, became a Top Five hit. Jan and Dean turned into surf-rock royalty. Adler and Alpert wrote with Sam Cooke, including the 1960 classic, “Wonderful World.” Adler, whose close friendship with Cooke lasted from their 1957 meeting until the singer's death, recalled Cooke's impact on him personally: “Sam Cooke was a very special person, and his beautiful voice was the greatest instrument ever. He taught me a language on how to speak to musicians. I had no musical or recording experience, but between Bumps and Sam is where I learned. The big advantage that Sam had as a pop singer is he could call on his gospel roots to reach back and give a little more. He was just a stunning talent as well as a beautiful person.”

**I**n 1962, Adler was tapped by Don Kirshner to head the new West Coast branch of Kirshner's publishing company, Aldon Music. “That was really my education in the publishing business,” Adler has said. There, he got to work with numerous notable songwriters (including Carole King, Gerry Goffin, Barry Mann, and Cynthia Weil). “Lou had a great sense of songs,” according to legendary engineer Bones Howe. “He knew how to cast particular songs for particular artists . . . He knew what he wanted a record to sound like.”



Lou Adler and John Phillips return to the site of last year's Festival



After his time with Aldon Music, Adler formed his own company, Dunhill Productions. Adler produced the Johnny Rivers album *At the Whisky A Go-Go*, one of the first live rock albums in history, and kicked off the go-go craze of the sixties. Adler produced a string of Johnny Rivers hits, including "Memphis," "Secret Agent Man," and "Poor Side of Town," which he cowrote with Rivers.

Then, in 1964, Adler became a founder of Dunhill Records. By the next year, Dunhill had a Number One hit with a controversial protest song written by P.F. Sloan and Steve Barri called "Eve of Destruction," recorded by former Christy Minstrel Barry McGuire. McGuire introduced Adler to John Phillips, Michelle Phillips, Denny Doherty, and Cass Elliot. "John was the tallest, Cass the biggest, Denny the handsomest, and Michelle the most beautiful rock & rollers I had ever seen," according to Adler. "They had just come down off about eighty acid trips, they were funky and dirty and grizzly, and yet they sang like absolute angels. It gave me the inspiration to title their first album *If You Can Believe Your Eyes and Ears*."

The group quickly became successful, scoring six Top Five hits in 1966 and 1967, including perennial favorites "California Dreamin'" and "Monday, Monday," which appeared on their debut album. Their colorfully hip image helped define the increasingly popular hippie lifestyle taking hold in Los Angeles, and their sound, which continues to resonate to this day, was well-crafted and produced by Adler.

"John Phillips, like Brian Wilson of the Beach Boys, was without a doubt one of the greatest vocal arrangers of the last fifty years," Adler noted. "John was one of the greatest troubadours ever. He could tell a story with a sense of passion and adventure."



Adler and Carole King, making *Tapestry* in 1971



**“It was all about the music, and the music was amazing.”**

Adler found he liked running a record company in a hands-on manner. “At Dunhill, I got to do signing, marketing, producing. When I started out, you could do everything. You could run a label, oversee the artwork, set up the marketing, and really do things your own way. I guess the biggest staff I ever had was five people. So I did touch everything, and I only really stopped when it became impossible to be a part of everything.”



With Cheech Marin and Tommy Chong, 1977

After Adler sold Dunhill to ABC Records in 1967, he formed a new boutique label, Ode Records, which enjoyed a massive international hit with another era-defining gem written by John Phillips and produced by Adler: Scott McKenzie’s summer-of-love anthem, “San Francisco (Be Sure to Wear Flowers in Your Hair).”

That same year, with “San Francisco” now an omnipresent anthem and a calling card for the West Coast scene, Adler became a key figure in producing the Monterey International Pop Festival. The three-day event, held June 16–18 at the Monterey County Fairgrounds, was the first widely promoted major rock festival, and has often been cited as a groundbreaking moment for the music business. (Adler also coproduced the film of the event, *Monterey Pop*, directed by D.A. Pennebaker.)

“It certainly was the first major pop-rock festival,” Adler remembered. “And never before or since has there been one event that uncovered the amount of talent that would become iconic, which included Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, the Who, and Ravi Shankar.

“That time was magic,” Adler continued. “Together, Monterey, the beginning of FM radio, and *Rolling Stone* magazine [which began publication that November] created a cultural explosion. It was all about the music, and the music was amazing.”

After Monterey, Adler signed a small but varied group of recording artists to Ode, including the adventurous rock



Courtside with Jack Nicholson

band Spirit, the future comedy sensations Cheech and Chong, and, most famously, Carole King. King's *Tapestry* – produced by Adler – became one of the most beloved and best-selling albums of all time, and won Grammys for Record and Album of the Year.

"*Tapestry* really did become the soundtrack to so many people's lives," said Adler. "For me, the inspiration for the *Tapestry* album was Carole's songwriting demos. I [had] worked with Carole first as a publisher before I was her manager and producer, and it was always hard to get her demos back when I sent them out to artists and producers. . . . Carole's piano playing on the demos dictated the arrangements for vocals and instruments. What I was trying to do with *Tapestry* was to re-create those demos in the sense of staying simple and keeping Carole the center focus of everything – her voice and her piano playing, because she had it all."

Others on the *Tapestry* album include James Taylor on acoustic guitar and background vocals (with Joni Mitchell on "Will You Love Me Tomorrow?"), guitarist Danny Kortchmar, drummers Russ Kunkel and Joel O'Brien, bassist Charley Larkey, and engineer Hank Cicalo. Adler went on to produce several more King albums, including *Carole King: Music* (1971), *Rhymes & Reasons* (1972), *Fantasy* (1973), *Wrap Around Joy* (1974), and the acclaimed *Really Rosie* soundtrack (1975).

During this same era, Adler was also moving into the film world. Continuing his rock & roll roots, he produced the enduring cult classic *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975), and directed Cheech and Chong's surprise 1978 box-office hit, *Up in Smoke*. "I thought they were rock & roll comedy," Adler said. "And I loved it." Later, he also directed *Ladies and Gentlemen, the Fabulous Stains*, a 1982 big-screen drama about an all-girl punk rock band that featured notable performances by the very young actresses Diane Lane and Laura Dern.

**S**ince the mid-1960s, Adler had been a habitu  of the Sunset Strip nightclub scene. He came up with the name for the Trip, as well as the design of its facade. In 1973, he became co-owner of the Roxy Theater with Elmer Valentine of the Whisky-A-Go-Go, backed by original partners David Geffen, Elliot Roberts, and Peter Asher. Adler continues to own the world-famous music venue with his son Nic, the oldest of his seven sons. He and his wife Page cofounded with Paul Newman the Painted Turtle, an innovative camp for children with chronic or life-threatening illnesses.

Tonight, Lou Adler enters another hallowed hall as an Ahmet Ertegun Award honoree of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, alongside Quincy Jones. "It's a sweet moment to be inducted, even sweeter having it happen with a great like my friend Quincy and in Los Angeles," Adler said. "When I was first told, I flashed back on all the great musicians, engineers, and artists I've worked with over the years. And I felt very thankful to have just been a part of it." With all his many achievements to date, Adler said that making his way into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame is a thrilling new chapter in his remarkable West Coast story. As he put it, "This really is the cherry on the top of a very big cake." 🍷



On the Strip with Elmer Valentine



Adler in 2006



# THE LOVE CROWD

## THE ENDURING LEGACY OF MONTEREY POP

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*By Joel Selvin*

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**O**ver the course of a mere three days, June 16–18, 1967, as a procession of thirty-three rock, pop, and folk acts traipsed across the stage at the historic Monterey International Pop Festival (“Music, Love & Flowers”), a big gear clunked into place and the giant wheel of culture turned, a watershed moment that forever transformed pop music and its place in American culture.

More than simply the sudden, dramatic emergence of monumental talents such as Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, or Otis Redding – artists who arrived in Monterey little known or slightly celebrated, but left as giants – the festival was also a turning point, one way or another, in almost every other career on the stage. Pop music was never the same. Monterey functioned as a graduation ceremony for the new rock music, brilliantly conceived and executed by Hollywood rock & roll rajah Lou Adler (who deservedly joins the inductees tonight as part of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame class of 2013), along with his partner, John Phillips, of the Mamas and the Papas.

All of this transpired largely outside the bright glare of mainstream media, in a small California seaside town, roughly midway between Los Angeles and San Francisco, in front of a relatively small audience. The show itself was held at the Montgomery County Fairgrounds in an arena normally used for horse shows that held about eight thousand reserved seats. Another several thousand tickets were sold for the fairgrounds outside the arena,

**Arguably one of the most iconic images in rock history: Jimi Hendrix burns his Fender Stratocaster onstage at the Monterey Pop International Festival, June 18, 1967.**





THIS PAGE, FROM TOP: Otis Redding; a powwow at the Monterey Pop offices: Andrew Loog Oldham, Tom Wilkes, John Phillips, and Lou Adler (from left).

and a few thousand more people without tickets hung around outside the gates, sleeping overnight in a nearby football field. The police expected problems, given the drunken revelries of the annual Monterey Jazz Festival held at the same site since 1958. They were astonished to encounter none. As Otis Redding said on Saturday night at the arena, this was "the love crowd."

**T**hat weekend marked the beginning of the Summer of Love. *Sgt. Pepper's* was everywhere. The festival was so much an idea whose time had come that it was originally thought up – and booked at the fairgrounds – by the heir to the Sweetheart Paper (maker of drinking straws) fortune Alan Pariser, connoisseur pot dealer to the stars; and Benny Shapiro, the Hollywood music business manager and booking agent who handled, among others, Ravi Shankar. Adler stepped in when Pariser and Shapiro approached John Phillips about having the Mamas and the Papas headline the event. Adler re-envisioned the festival as a charity fundraiser at which all acts would perform for free, to be underwritten by money from the sale of a television special that would be produced that weekend. (The would-be special morphed into the Monterey Pop documentary directed by D.A. Pennebaker.) Adler quickly picked up crucial support from Paul McCartney, Paul Simon, and others, bought out Shapiro, and went about organizing a program that would reflect the broad tapestry of the new, exciting music bubbling up everywhere from the underground, especially in London and San Francisco.





Janis Joplin of Big Brother and the Holding Company

As unlikely as it seems all these years later, Jefferson Airplane was the most hotly anticipated act of the weekend, the first representative of the new, LSD-fueled San Francisco ballroom scene to go national earlier that year. The band's second album, *Surrealistic Pillow*, had already broken out behind the Top Ten hit "Somebody to Love," with the single hovering at the top of the charts that very week, and with "White Rabbit" poised to follow. None of the other San Francisco bands that performed at Monterey – Grateful Dead, Quicksilver Messenger Service, Big Brother and the Holding Company, Country Joe and the Fish, Moby Grape, the Steve Miller Blues Band – had appeared much outside the immediate Bay Area. None of the power contingent at the festival – not the record executives, the DJs, or the press from Los Angeles and beyond – had seen these bands before.

From London came the Jimi Hendrix Experience, recommended to Adler by McCartney; the Who, a popular English rock band, then only slightly known in the States; a folksinger called "Beverly" (later known by her married name, Beverley Martyn), who was a talent pick of festival board member Paul Simon; and Eric Burdon and the New Animals, a band of acid-drenched British musicians that the veteran vocalist put together in Los Angeles. Burdon used the same band to commemorate the weekend later that year, in their pop hit tribute to the festival, "Monterey," complete with electric sitar solo:

"Three days of understanding/Moving with one another/  
Even the cops groove with us/Do you believe me, yeah/Down  
in Monterey."

The Beach Boys bowed out at the last minute, after they got involved in a fractious internal debate about whether or not to participate. The other groups coming from Los Angeles – the Mamas and the Papas, the Byrds, Buffalo Springfield, and the Association – represented the hip aristocracy of the Hollywood rock scene that Adler helped create. But by the end of the weekend, these kings of Top Forty were suddenly very much last year's model. Canned Heat was the sole representative of the growing underground rock scene in Los Angeles, and, suitably enough, the band was the only L.A. act on an almost all-San Francisco new rock Saturday afternoon program, culminating with the debut performance of Electric Flag. The band, newly formed by guitarist Mike Bloomfield, featured a winning, unknown 19-year-old drummer named Buddy Miles.

The Byrds, who practically invented folk rock, were on their last legs and almost foundered onstage Saturday night. David Crosby blurted out some babble about the assassination of President Kennedy, to the obvious dismay of bandmate Roger McGuinn. Crosby slapped an STP sticker on his guitar that weekend, a not-so-secret nod to the new designer drug – an ultra-powerful psychedelic – developed for the occasion by chemist Augustus Owsley Stanley III, who also brought a potent batch of LSD capsules of lavender powder dubbed "Purple Haze." Crosby, who was fired from the Byrds four months later, subbed for absent guitarist Neil Young on Sunday night with Buffalo Springfield, another Los Angeles-based rock group that would dissolve the following year. The festival's closing act, the Mamas and the Papas, were then on a hot streak with six smash hits but would never have another Top Ten record: They were undone, in a sense, by the underground rock the festival helped usher in. Scott McKenzie joined the group to sing "San Francisco (Be Sure to Wear Flowers in Your Hair)," the commercial John Phillips wrote for the festival that blared out of AM radios everywhere that month.



Grace Slick and Marty Balin of Jefferson Airplane



THIS PAGE, FROM TOP: Buffalo Springfield, with David Crosby (left) filling in for Neil Young, with Ritchie Furay (center) and Stephen Stills; Brian Jones (left) with Nico (center) and Dennis Hopper.

**“We were pushed by what was happening in the world and the culture. It was not calculated in the least.”**

Adler also tried to land one of the Motown stars – Smokey Robinson belonged to the festival board – but the groups couldn’t see the point in performing for free. Plus, with Adler scrambling to put his program together in six weeks, these acts were among the few at the time that were already booked. But even with only Otis Redding and the supper-club soul of Lou Rawls on Friday to carry the banner for the immense vitality of contemporary black music, Adler managed to piece together a near-perfect snapshot of the extraordinary transition popular music was going through at almost that exact moment – a caterpillar shedding its cocoon over three days.

It was a fairytale festival. Brian Jones wandered through the crowd in full Rolling Stones regalia, blonde princess Nico at his side. Indian classical sitar master Ravi Shankar cast a spell over the crowd the entire Sunday afternoon. The freshly minted Monkees, Micky Dolenz – wearing an Indian head-dress – and Peter Tork, mingled backstage at the Hunt Club. Poor Tork was dispatched to interrupt the Grateful Dead’s set on Sunday night to officially announce that the Beatles were *not* coming, contrary to rumors, and had to bear the brunt of Phil Lesh’s sarcasm. In an exhibit hall on the festival grounds, inventor Robert Moog demonstrated the first synthesizer. Somewhere in the audience, a teenager named Sammy Hagar, from hardscrabble Fontana in Southern California, watched Hendrix and decided to become a musician. The cops wore the flowers the hippies gave them.



Beyond the acts that appeared in Pennebaker's landmark 1968 film, *Monterey Pop*, so many other great musicians played that weekend. Festival stage manager Al Kooper did a set backed by members of the Paul Butterfield Blues Band, who also appeared Saturday afternoon. Moby Grape, fresh from a drug bust the night of the band's record release party two weeks earlier, opened the Saturday night show. Steve Miller experimented that Saturday afternoon using tape recorders and gear hot-rodged for him by hippie engineer John Meyer, who would go on to build the world's most advanced loudspeakers. Laura Nyro ran offstage in tears after her sleek, uptown Saturday night show clashed with the general sensibilities of the weekend, although she was not actually booed off the stage, as some have said.

Within three years, the midsummer's dream of Monterey would evaporate: first, in the mud at Woodstock, and, finally, four months later, at the apocalyptic Altamont — a black spot that would punctuate the end of the Sixties. Those events were about the emergent youth culture. But, as Lou Adler recently said, "Monterey was about the music."

**"T**here were things about Monterey we couldn't take credit for," Adler added from his home in Malibu. "We were pushed by what was happening in the world and the culture. It was not calculated in the least. We only had six or seven weeks [to put it together] — we couldn't calculate. But we were definitely on a roll." 🎸



THIS PAGE, FROM TOP: Mickey "Big Chief" Dolenz of the Monkees; the Grateful Dead's Jerry Garcia with Mountain Girl.

**"Monterey was about the music."**



