

I rushed to ensure the helicopter landing site was rigged with lights so that we could make our getaway if it was dark.

We waited another two hours for Bill to arrive. Various bands had played and, as each of the artists had completed their set, the violence increased exponentially.

Fifty people or more had been beaten so badly they needed serious medical attention.

Hundreds of others were freaking out. The doctors had run out of Thorazine twice. The medical tent resembled a war zone.

The Grateful Dead, unbeknown to me at the time, had arrived by helicopter and been told by Santana's drummer what was happening.

They left, not wanting to play.

All of the Rolling Stones, except Bill Wyman, were ensconced in a small caravan backstage, effectively marooned in a sea of some 300,000 people.

With darkness approaching, and no sign of Bill, for the umpteenth time I made my way from the trailer to survey the scene and report back to the band.

Looking around, I saw that all the people I had got to know as volunteers in the previous 48 hours had split. The only ones I knew from the original crew were Owsley, who was looking after the sound, and Dan Healy from Quicksilver Messenger Service. Jackson and a few of the crew were watching the equipment.

Where were the people who only four days before the event had been only too keen to talk to the TV cameras and reporters?

Where were the people who had confidently said that a free concert by the Rolling Stones was possible and who had actively encouraged thousands of fans to descend on a totally inappropriate site?

Some of the same people who had organised the era-defining Woodstock festival had taken a lead role in organising Altamont.

Where were they when the going got tough?

**W**HERE were the people who had actually chosen the site and told me it was a suitable venue for a free concert with an expected attendance of tens of thousands?

Who of all the "organisers" had shown the decency or the courage to step forward and call over the microphone for calm?

Where were the cops? The lawyers? Where was Jerry Garcia, or for that matter any other members of the Grateful Dead?

What had they done to try to cool things out? They had arrived at the site, seen what was happening, turned around and split.

What kind of response was that to the challenge every one of their fans now faced?

Bill Wyman arrived and 10 minutes later I got the band on stage. It was dark and the vibe was worse than it had been all day.

I told everyone what we were going to do: the minute they finished, they were to follow me and I would lead them to the helicopter that was being guarded by the Angels.

It was ready for immediate take-off. Several of the Angels made a point of telling me not to worry, that, "Nothing's gonna happen to your band. Get 'em to play and it'll all be cool!"

With a dry mouth, I thanked them and felt truly nervous. Everyone could pick up the threat in the air.

I begged Mick not to stop once the set had started, regardless of what was happening in the crowd.

Get through the numbers as fast as possible and let's get out of here.

Mick seemed to agree, but was worried. It was an act of bravery for him to go on stage.

Mick Taylor looked scared out of his wits. Charlie and Bill stared impassively ahead.

Keith was not happy and I could tell



**Blasts from the past:** (clockwise from left) Sam Cutler, who in his new book has broken his silence about the Rolling Stones' 1969 Altamont concert at which a fan was killed; Cutler as a boy with adoptive parents Dora and Ernie at their London home; on tour with the Stones in 1969; and the Stones at a press conference upon arriving in Los Angeles, before the fateful concert. Pictures © RANDOM HOUSE.

I have never ever wanted a policeman around more than I did at that moment. Not one of the cowards was in sight.

The band played and I stood on the side of the stage, a couple of yards from Mick and Keith. I think I would have defended them with my life.

I could only think: "I have to get my band out of here. I have to get them on the helicopter."

There was about a 200m walk from backstage to the chopper pad and there was no way that we would be able to make that journey unescorted. None of Jaymes's big bad cops had bothered to stay. Flown out on the helicopters with other acts, saying they were their security.

I had to talk to the Hell's Angels and ask them to help us. Surprisingly, they agreed.

As the last notes of the performance died we rushed from the stage, frightened and distraught.

Behind a phalanx of Hell's Angels, the Rolling Stones reached the helicopter and made their escape. None of the musicians from the other bands bothered to stay for the Stones' set. Everyone had fled the dreadful scene.

As the rotors created a racket above us, no one spoke and I had some time to think.

What the hell was a young guy doing bringing a gun to a concert? You don't bring a loaded revolver to a rock 'n' roll show for purely innocent reasons.

He'd drawn the gun, fired two bullets and been stabbed to death.

The realisation that I, too, had a gun weighed heavily on my mind, and I hated myself for it, while saying a silent prayer of thanks that no one had attacked the band.

Hundreds of local, state and federal laws had been broken and not one police officer had chosen to act.

Later, there was no police inquiry into the events at Altamont and no public inquiry. Why? Because the police would have been exposed as having done nothing in the face of serious violent crime.

Nothing, that is, other than bravely to wing away hundreds of cars.

**You Can't Always Get What You Want, Sam Cutler, Random House, RRP: \$34.95.**

he was praying that the music would save us.

The Stones lumbered into their first song and the violence erupted immediately.

They played the opening bars of *Under My Thumb* as the first fights broke out in front of the stage.

A small group of men with pool cues attacked the audience, lashing out indiscriminately at anyone who got in their way.

The music stopped and Mick appealed for people to be cool.

**This has turned into a nightmare, people are getting hurt, it's going to get worse and I don't want us here playing when it's dark. There's no guarantee I'll be able to get you out of here**

The band started playing again, but each new song brought a fresh outbreak of violence.

Young psychopaths charged into the crowd with their pool cues flailing, the crowd would part, the injured would be removed and the concert would continue. It was surreal.

I began to ponder how we would escape this madness.

Mick peered from the floodlit stage into the dark mass of the audience and made an absurd plea for calm: "If we are as one, then let us be as one."

I feared for his safety as I watched several stoned people looking at him with murderous intent.

The band began to play again as if their lives depended on it.

The music momentarily stilled the crowd and I hovered at the side of the

stage, afraid of where all this might end.

Then there was a commotion and perhaps 10 Hell's Angels ran towards the stage, away from a man in a luminescent green suit, yelling, "He's got a gun!"

The man lurched forward and an Angel rushed towards him, through his retreating brothers.

The Angel grabbed at the man's wrist, and, holding his gun hand up in the air, began to stab at him. I saw the long-barrelled silver gun shining in

the stage lights and so did others near me.

People on the stage apron threw themselves down on the floor so as not to present a target.

The man with the gun collapsed under a mountain of Angels as they rushed in for the kill.

I stood there looking at it all, totally dumbfounded.

The band's music ground to a halt and Keith started shouting at the Angels: "If you guys don't stop it right now we're gonna quit!"

I ran across to Keith and spoke into his ear: "A guy's got a gun, Keith, he's got a gun. Please cool it, man, someone's been hurt real bad."

I turned back to Mick: "There's a guy with a gun. Give me a minute. I'll check on what's happening. F— cool it — somebody might have been killed."

Mick went deathly pale as I rushed down into the thick of it.

As soon as I saw Meredith Hunter, I knew he was dying. Lying on the ground, with medics in attendance, he had blood pouring from his body.

He was on his stomach and the doctors were lifting his jacket so they could get at his back.

A woman was screaming, "Don't let him die, don't let him die!"

As I turned away, holding back tears, one of the Angels spoke to me in an insistent voice: "Tell Mick he

had a gun. The guy had a gun. He got two shots off. He had a gun!"

I forced my way back through the crowd and regained the stage.

The band stood staring into the dark mass of the audience, unsure what to do.

Again, Mick fortitously appealed for calm.

I wanted to get the Stones off stage, then and there, but Mick would not be moved.

He insisted he would finish the show.

I stood as close as I could to Mick and Keith while they restarted the music, nervously eyeing the people on stage, wondering who would be next to launch an attack.

In my jacket pocket I had a derringer and wondered if I had the balls to shoot someone if they tried to hurt Mick.