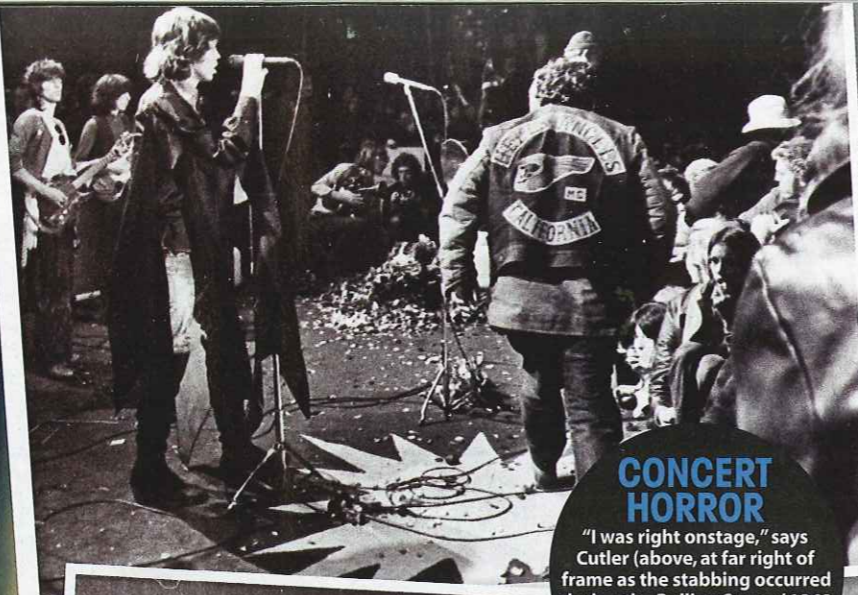
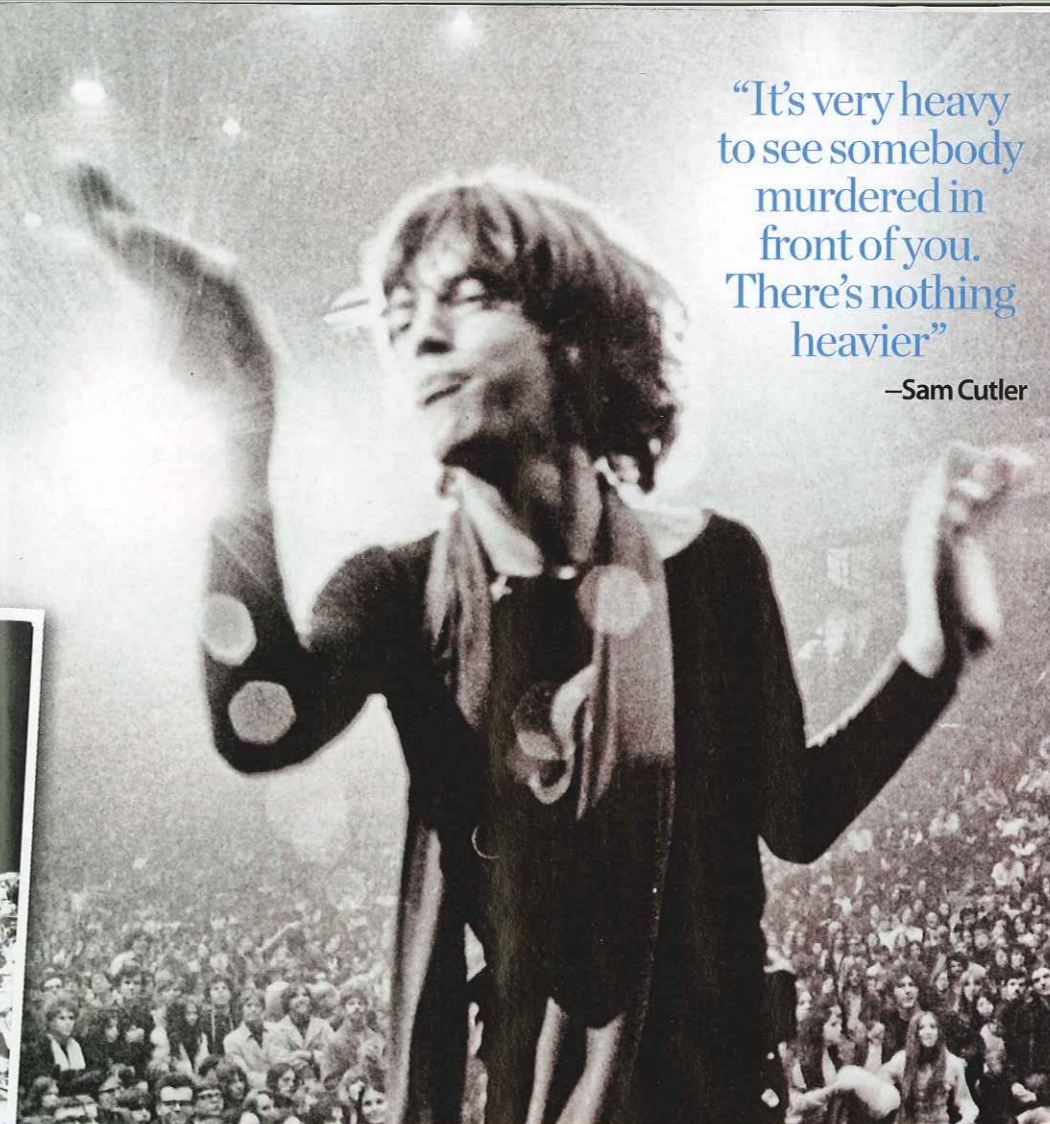
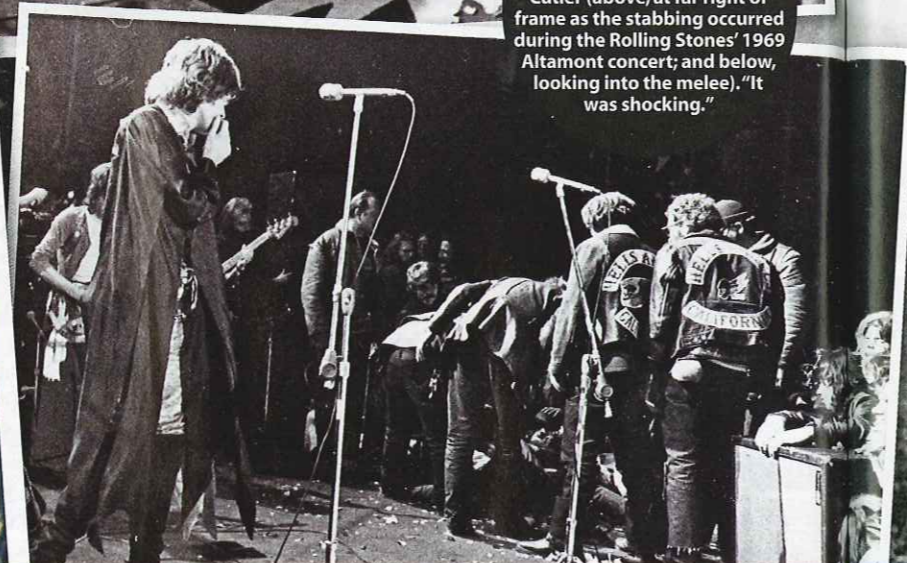


WHO IS SAM CUTLER?
Cutler was tour manager for the Rolling Stones for some of their biggest gigs, including the famous free concert in front of 500,000 people in London's Hyde Park in July 1969.



CONCERT HORROR
"I was right onstage," says Cutler (above, at far right of frame as the stabbing occurred during the Rolling Stones' 1969 Altamont concert; and below, looking into the melee). "It was shocking."



"It's very heavy to see somebody murdered in front of you. There's nothing heavier"

—Sam Cutler

big fist fights, huge fights. It was a nightmare. **What was the extent of your dealings with the Hells Angels?**

The deal was they were going to sit by the generators. On the day, there were no police there—the only people with any power and authority were the Angels.

What happened when the Rolling Stones took the stage?

They started to play and immediately it went off. It just got worse.

How were the Stones reacting?

Keith [Richards] was cool. He was concerned, but once he got onstage he was livid, furious.

What took place in the lead-up to the murder of Meredith Hunter?

It happened right in front of me. The first I saw was a bunch of Hells Angels actually running towards the stage, away from a guy who had a gun. He pulled it out, got some shots off. Then one of the Angels, instead of running away, ran towards the guy and there was a brief scuffle and the guy got stabbed, many times.

You were on the stage at the time?

Yeah. I ran down to see what was happening. The guy was lying on the ground, blood pouring out of him, and I ran back to the stage and told Keith and Mick, who were going mental. It's very heavy to see somebody murdered in front of you, killed. There's nothing heavier.

INSIDE THE GIG FROM HELL

Sam Cutler lifts the lid on rock and roll's most infamous concert—the Rolling Stones' deadly free show at Altamont

Though it took place in the relatively early days of festival-style rock concerts, the free show headlined by the Rolling Stones at a disused desert speedway at Altamont, outside San Francisco, on Sat., Dec. 6, 1969, lurched into the history books for all the wrong reasons. The gig featured Jefferson Airplane, the Flying Burrito Brothers, Santana, Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young as support acts to the Stones, who were at the end of a month-long US tour. About 300,000 fans turned up to a site that was woefully inadequate, and a clutch of Hells Angels Motorcycle Club gang members had been drafted to protect the generators that powered the lights and sound system. The Stones' then tour manager, former schoolteacher Sam Cutler, stood on the tiny stage as the bands played, aghast as the music festival descended into blood-soaked chaos.

By the end of the night, one man, 18-year-old Meredith Hunter, had been stabbed to death by a Hells Angel (Hunter had fired a pistol about 10m from the stage when he was set upon), two more were killed in hit-and-run accidents and a fourth had drowned in an irrigation canal. Although the entire debacle was captured on film and became the seminal documentary *Gimme Shelter*, no-one closely involved with the concert has spoken about it on the record. In his book *You Can't Always Get What You Want* (William Heinemann Australia, \$34.95), British-born Cutler, who quit working for the Stones in 1970, relives the terror of one of rock and roll's most menacing gatherings. Still involved in the music business, Cutler, 65, lives in Brisbane and has two sons, Bodhi, 13, and Chesley, 11, with his Australian-born academic wife, Sally. He spoke to Craig Henderson.

Tell me about the lead-up to Altamont.
It was just chaos. I never saw [the site] until the day before the concert—it was in the middle of the desert and a completely inappropriate place. But there was no turning back. By the time I got there, there were 100,000 people there. It was all f--ked [laughs]. It was an example of how not to do a concert.
How did the musicians feel?
We started off with everyone feeling great, but as soon as the music started the whole thing just turned to shit.
Can you remember the first eruption of violence?
There was violence on the Friday night! It just got worse with lots of people on bad acid trips, lots of people drunk.
Then on the Saturday...
The music started about midday. It just got worse and worse—there were small fist fights,



Mick Jagger fronts the Stones at Altamont on Dec. 6, 1969. "There was no planning for this [concert]," recalls Sam Cutler. "It was all done in a great spirit by all of the hippies who wanted it to happen. But it was chaotic. It changed everything."

How much longer did the band stay onstage?
They played until the end of their set [for fear of more violence breaking out]. They played about another five or six numbers.

What was your involvement in the aftermath?
I was called as a witness [in the case against Alan Passaro, the bikie who stabbed Hunter], although I never appeared at the trial. [Passaro said he acted in self-defence and was found not guilty.]

When the gig ended, you left on a helicopter.
The pilot didn't want to take off because the helicopter was overloaded. He was screaming, "There's too many people." And I'm saying, "No, no, no! We can't f--king throw people out here, man." [On the flight] nobody said a word. Everybody was in shock ... especially Mick, he was freaked out completely. It was the heaviest experience of my life, and I'm sure it was the heaviest experience of the Rolling Stones' life. ■