

VANITY FAIR

Cannes Film Festival

[Tripping on Taking Woodstock at Cannes](#)

by [Julian Sancton](#)

May 18, 2009, 1:50 PM

Ang Lee's *Taking Woodstock*, about the small town that played host to the historic festival in 1969, has gotten a [somewhat bad rap](#) since its Cannes screening on Saturday. That's too bad. It's lighthearted, smart, and inoffensive, much like the twee stand-up routine of its lead, comedian Demetri Martin. But Lee's film suffers by comparison to the aura of Woodstock itself. By showing millions flocking to the concert but remaining in its sidelines, *Taking Woodstock* feels like a tease. As a result, we feel there's somewhere else we'd rather be.

Nevertheless, the movie has several things going for it, including a beefy Liev Schreiber squeezed into a summer dress, Imelda Staunton's Oscar-worthy performance as a feisty Jewish mother, and the best visualization I've ever seen of an acid trip. Lee hints at sex, drugs, and rock and roll, but cuts away before the characters can enjoy any of them, except for one entrancing scene in which Martin shares a stamp with Paul Dano and Kelli Garner in the back of a van. A bright, liquid flow of colors and sounds, it could have been a stand-alone art film. When I ran into Lee at the after-party, I asked him whether he'd ever taken L.S.D. He giggled and sheepishly said no.

"He was fourteen at the time," said a dazed Emile Hirsch before denying he'd ever dropped L.S.D. either and dumping his drink into the sand of the Majestic beach as if to prove his own questionable sobriety. Hirsch was born sixteen years after Woodstock, so to help him prepare for his role as a shell-shocked Vietnam vet, Lee gave him a list of books and movies, including *Platoon* and *Apocalypse Now*.

But for all the groundwork, the movie lacks the authentic feel of, say, *Almost Famous* which was steeped in director Cameron Crowe's personal experience. By way of illustration, the band at the afterparty for a movie celebrating 60s rock n' roll played mostly 70s disco.

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