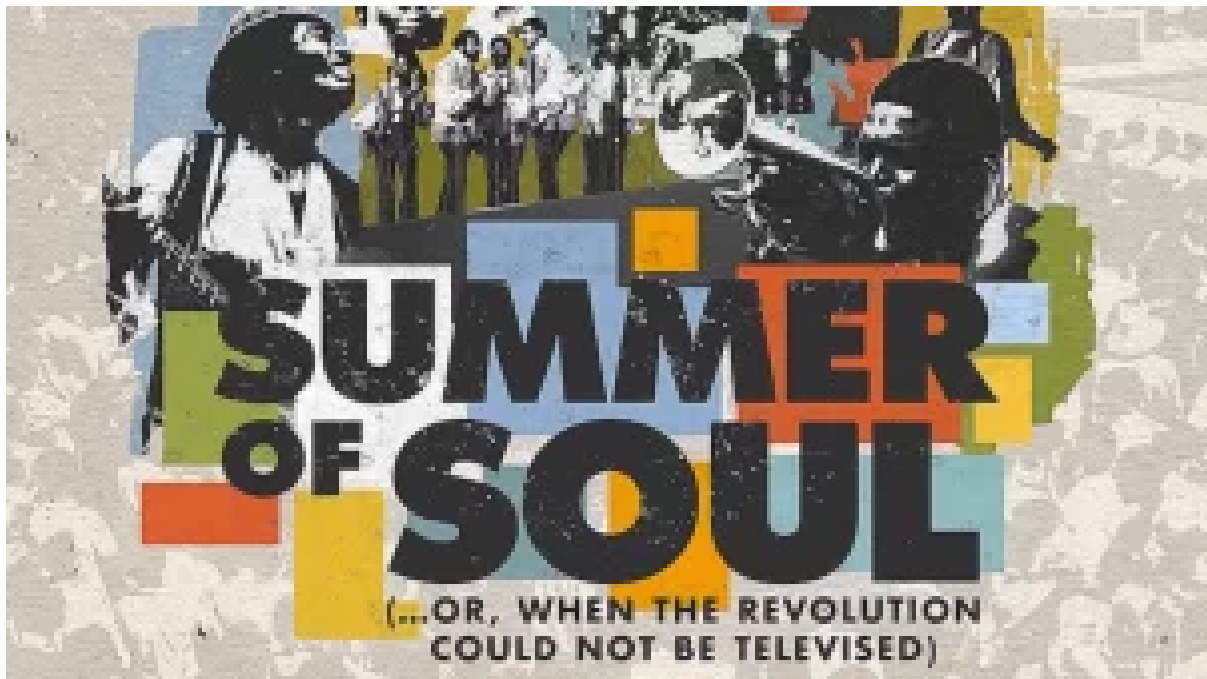


1969: The Summer of Soul



by Phyllis Chesler

Alas, alack, woe is me: I missed them both, the much memorialized 1969 Woodstock concert and, the even more amazing yet practically unknown concert in [Mt. Morris Park in Harlem](#) that took place that very same summer. Yes, footage existed but until now it had never been seen. Never seen? How is that possible? This music is such a quintessential part of my young adulthood and of our American heritage. Last night, as I watched, I sang along with so many of the lyrics, and I finally succumbed and danced in place in my living room right along with the 300,000 happy black faces doing likewise, in the rain, and under the broiling sun.

Now is your chance to marvel at the extraordinary rising talent on that summer stage, organized and Mc'ed by Tony Lawrence. Here is a nineteen-year-old Stevie Wonder; B.B. King and Gladys Knight and the Pips when they were all much younger; Sister Mahalia Jackson; Mongo Santamaria; Herbie Mann; Sly and the Family Stone; The Fifth Dimension; David Ruffin; Abby Lincoln and Max Roach; Gospel singers galore (The

Edwin Hawkins Singers, the Staples Singers)—and Nina Simone, dressed as an African queen, her lyrics daring the crowd to “action.”

Yes, the talent was mainly black—but they were also quietly, matter-of-factly integrated in terms of some white and brown Hispanic musicians and “girls” of all colors in the bands, “girls” playing trumpets and on the keyboards. (I’m using this term with affection, I know, I know: “I am Woman Hear me Roar”, etc.) Merit mattered as much as skin color and sex. Mayor John Lindsay, a white guy, was honored on that stage at a concert for which the Black Panthers provided security.

If only we could have concerts like this every year... if only we were not dealing with so many epidemics (a virus, homelessness, violence, poverty, racism, sexism), all of which make such crowds very dangerous. Anyway, how can we party when Ukraine is burning? Hey! How about a fundraising concert *for* Ukraine?

Thank you, director Ahmir “Questlove” Thompson, for keeping the faith.