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## Washing away the mud of Woodstock

By Edna Gundersen, USA TODAY

NEW YORK - The stage is set for Sheryl Crow to join the elite ranks of the pope and Pocahontas.

Tuesday's concert, a starry pop gathering featuring cameos by Crow's contemporaries, is only the third free, ticketed event in Central Park history. It follows a pair of 1995 headline grabbers: the premiere of Disney's animated *Pocahontas* for 70,000 fans and a Mass led by Pope John Paul II that drew 130,000.

Tickets to Crow's appearance in the East Meadow are limited to 25,000, but the event will capture a far larger audience via the first "trimulcast" of a live concert:



**Going live:** Grammy winner Sheryl Crow will headline a free concert in Central Park on Tuesday.

▶ Starting at 8 p.m. ET, the show will be syndicated nationwide on the SFX Radio Network and fed on line at an American Express Web site ([www.blueconcerts.com](http://www.blueconcerts.com)), where surfers can choose among six camera angles.



▶ The second hour, spotlighting Crow in duets with Eric Clapton, Chrissie Hynde, Sarah McLachlan, Stevie Nicks and surprise guests, airs live at 9 p.m. ET on Fox.

▶ The full concert will be broadcast from 8 to 10 p.m. ET Sunday on FX.

Street crews are distributing free tickets in all New York boroughs. Proceeds from merchandise and sponsors will go to the Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation.

"It's a challenge that brings a lot of pressure," says Crow, 36. "Since I've known about this thing, I've had a constant twinge of nausea. There's no overdubbing, no second chance. What I do onstage goes directly out there."

Crow's chief concern is that TV-mandated commercial breaks will disrupt the show's flow.

"I want the feeling of a rock concert, not a television variety show," she says between sips of cranberry juice in the Four Seasons Hotel lounge. She's unwinding after a harried news conference that found her mobbed by photographers and flanked by city authorities and American Express executives. Tuesday's concert is the first in a series of five underwritten by the corporation as part of a campaign promoting its new Blue credit card.

"You always have reservations when a corporate entity is looming," Crow says. "In this day and age, it's hard to escape that. But I was excited when they asked me. Opportunities to do massive concerts, particularly a free one, are few and far between."

Pontiffs and Indian maidens aside, Crow is delighted to join the elite club of Central Park headliners, including Janis Joplin, Diana Ross and Simon & Garfunkel. She sees Tuesday night's music club as a celebration capping a year of triumphant touring, and she is determined to recapture the rapture of Lilith, not repeat the defeat of Woodstock.



During this summer's third and final installment of the all-female Lilith Fair, Crow consistently generated the warmest crowd response and highest critical praise. Her '98 album, *The Globe Sessions*, jumped 50 notches in *Billboard*. "My first reaction was 'God, how far *down* were we?' Lilith was a testament to the difference the right tour can make."

Crow's Woodstock appearance, ahead of DMX, The Offspring and Korn, was less satisfying.

"I didn't expect that mood," she says of the unruly throng. "A large part of the audience fell into a mob mentality. From the stage, you internalize it to mean it's about you. But I don't think it had anything to do with me or anyone else on the bill. They were already in a vitriolic mind-set.

"Within three songs, I was dodging mud. My guitar and arms were covered. And all I could think was 'This is an air base, not an open field, and it's not raining. Where's the mud coming from?' They had actually dragged it from the latrines. They were throwing something other than mud.

"Putting cameras on people brought out the worst in them. They were taking their clothes off, flipping off the camera, just crazy, notice-me behavior. I looked out and saw a lot of kids who had no pride in themselves and no sense of fellowship. For the first time in my career, I felt I was no longer a part of the youth of America. I was no longer speaking for any generation."

While Crow blames promoters for the high prices and harsh conditions that agitated hostilities, she was dismayed by malevolent forces in the audience.

"Even though the Woodstock name now represents something more corporate, you still think of it as a romp in the pasture," she says. "If the first Woodstock represented the '60s movement of peace and love and some higher cultural cause, then what was represented in Woodstock 99 is also true and valid and an immediate reflection of the time. I think kids spend too much time in front of computers. They don't feel

connected as a generation."

Crow won't let the experience stain an otherwise victorious year. *Globe* won this year's rock-album Grammy. She produced four tracks for Nicks' upcoming album. Lilith reaction is prompting her to add four weeks of touring this fall. She's being lauded for her acting debut as a drug addict in *Minus Man*, starring her boyfriend, actor/writer Owen Wilson (who co-penned *Rushmore* and *Bottle Rocket*).

"The phenomenon of being the new kid is behind me," she says. "That creates a lot of panic and fear, because in this climate you're only as good as your last hit. But I'm enjoying my career so much more."

After years of nonstop struggle, she's easing into a slower lane, relishing the scenery and keeping her eyes averted from the sales odometer. She's not tormented that *Globe* went ignored by many radio programmers and failed to match sales of her 1993 debut, *Tuesday Night Music Club*. Industry pundits say the waning numbers may reflect a backlash against female singer/songwriters, who continue to struggle for parity.

"All this talk about women ruling radio is propaganda," Crow says. "If you listen to pop radio, women don't even represent 50% of the play roster. What's really happening is angry, young, white rap music, and a lot of it's misogynistic. A monstrous mind-set is prevalent. Those fans are not buying records by women and are perhaps creating and exacerbating the mood against women."

It's not the first time an industry hurdle has discouraged her. After moving to Los Angeles in 1986, she landed the role of backup singer on Michael Jackson's Bad tour. Though grateful for the break, she was troubled by the greed and manipulation she witnessed behind the scenes.

"I was really naive," she says. "I believed that if you worked hard and stayed on course, great things would come along. I lost touch with that after seeing things on that tour that told me making it was about buying it or selling out or doing things

that didn't line up with your integrity. It was a crash course in a particular side of the music industry. I wasn't sure I wanted to stay in music, because it seemed like such a crummy, disgusting business."

Her views changed as she formed healthier allies in the industry and found her creative footing. "Now I'm back to believing that if you work hard and contribute to the universe and your spirit is seeking a higher communion and blah blah blah, then good things will come," she says. Those rewards may not match her wish list, but she has learned to be philosophical in accepting destiny. "All of it is out of my control, which is actually comforting, though I'm still grinding my teeth at night."

Her year-long bond with Wilson seems to disrupt the pattern of failed relationships chronicled in *Globe*, yet Crow isn't certain she's on the path to goals of matrimony and motherhood.

"I was just talking to my mom about getting married and having children," Crow says. "She said, 'You really have to be grateful for what an incredible life you've had.' So I'm letting myself off the hook. If my relationship works out with Owen that way, great. If I don't have children, that's all right, too. Life is never without love."

