Life

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BRITISH INVASION:

WE'RE TALKING ABOUT THE ONE IN ENGLAND

by Ayyan Tamjeed
STAFF WRITER
HE/HIM/HIS
art24001@uconn.edu

Hello Huskies, today I have good news and bad news: Good news is, today brings another edition of British Invasion, the column that dives into British music history! Bad news is, it's the last edition of British Invasion for this spring semester. I know you're about to, but don't cry just yet.

Considering the last two weekends of Coachella, the emerging sunny weather and the fact this festival isn't happening again until 2027, the last edition of British Invasion will be about the history of the Glastonbury Festival of Contemporary Performing Arts, often known as just Glastonbury or the Glastonbury Festival.

Held in June, the Glastonbury Festival is one of the largest performing arts festivals in Britain. Hundreds of thousands of people descend upon southwest England to camp out and partake in five days of music, art, theatre and more.

After seeing the successes of other music festivals in the U.S. and U.K., dairy farmers Michael and Jean Eavis held the first Glastonbury Festival at their Worthy Farm in Somerset, England on Sept. 19, 1970. Back then, it was known as the Pilton Pop, Folk and Blues Festival, during which 1,500 people paid £1 to see glam rock band T. Rex, after previous headliners The Kinks bowed out due to scheduling conflicts

The 1971 edition brought a host of changes; the organizing team swelled to include Arabella Churchill, the granddaughter of former Prime Minister Winston; the festival was renamed to the Glastonbury Fayre; the dates moved to mid-June to coincide with the summer solstice, because of Worthy Farm's proximity to Stonehenge; and David Bowie was among the first acts to grace the first Pyramid Stage, which closely resembled the Great Pyramid of Giza.

The organizers also made a "creative manifesto" that embedded environmentalism and spirituality into the foundation of the festival's focus and culture. These tenets guide the festival's decision-making into the present day and make Glastonbury one of the biggest symbols of hippie culture in the 21st century.

Glastonbury wasn't held in an official capacity throughout the 1970s until 1979, coming back with a three-day festival for all ages, where proceeds went to the UN's Year of the Child campaign. Despite £5 tickets and 12,000 attendees, the event was a net loss, but the reputation of Glastonbury increased among the British population thanks to the charity element of the festival.

Nowadays, most staff at Glastonbury are volunteers who get free entry and most of the profits are sent to charity, in particular Oxfam, Greenpeace and Water Aid. In 2005, Oxfam received a donation of £200,000 according to their website.

Under Michae Eavis' guidance, the modern edition of Glastonbury soon took shape. Under the Glastonbury Festival moniker, the next edition took place in 1981, with proceeds going to the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament.

The 1980s saw Glastonbury grow in size and reputation, which allowed them to start booking bigger headliners, such as The Cure, Elvis Costello and Van Morrison. But this outsized attention also drew the ire of the Mendip District Council, who were concerned about the loud, rambunctious festival being held in their idyllic villages, and they entered protracted conflicts with the organizers whenever they tried to get a festival license.

Fortunately, cooler heads prevailed and Glastonbury started appearing on television. 1994 was the first year Channel 4 broadcasted the Glastonbury Festival, which got even more eyes onto the already burgeoning event. Since 1997 it has been broadcasted by the BBC, who post performances onto their BBC Music YouTube channel and live performances on BBC iPlayer.

Starting in the 21st century, Michael Eavis stepped back from organizing to let his daughter Emily and her husband Nick Dewey take the wheel. The couple had a rocky first decade, as they faced terrible weather and public safety concerns from the tens of thousands of people who gatecrashed the festival (1994 was the most attended festival to date with 300,000 people, despite only 80,000 tickets sold).

But the couple managed to square the gatecrashing problem away, the summer weather soon returned and they went back to delivering on the festival's ethos of environmentalism and counterculture. Several measures were introduced to reduce the amount of litter in Worthy Farm, from biodegradable tent pegs, adding water refilling stations and eliminating single-use plastic bottles.

Musicians soon began using Glastonbury as a stage to promote political action. In 2016, festivalgoers woke up to the news that the U.K. would leave the European Union, which prompted many artists to respond to the news during their sets. In 2022, after the U.S. Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade, American artists who travelled to Glastonbury took a moment to speak up about it. Last year's festival was famous for rap duo Bob Vylan leading the crowd in an anti-Israel chant.

2026 will see Glastonbury take its first break in eight years, minus the two festivals that COVID cancelled in 2020 and 2021. Every five years, there is a planned fallow year to let the local land, population and organizers recover from the stresses of planning a five-day festival that now attracts over 100,000 people and some of the biggest artists in the world.



The Glastonbury festival in June 1994. 1994 saw the biggest crowd in Glastonbury to date with over 300,000 people in Worthy Farm.

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