

= Canadian drug charges and trial of Jimi Hendrix =

In 1969 , American rock musician Jimi Hendrix , who was then at the height of his career , was arrested , tried , and acquitted in Canada for drug possession .

On May 3 , 1969 , customs agents at Toronto International Airport detained Hendrix after finding a small amount of what they suspected to be heroin and hashish in his luggage . Four hours later , after a mobile lab confirmed what had been found , he was formally charged with drug possession . Released on \$ 10 @,@ 000 bail , Hendrix was required to return on May 5 for an arraignment hearing . During a performance at Maple Leaf Gardens later that night , he displayed a jovial attitude , joking with the audience and singing a few lines of mock opera for comedic effect .

At a preliminary hearing on June 19 , Judge Robert Taylor set a date for December 8 , at which Hendrix would stand trial for two counts of illegal possession of narcotics , for which he faced as many as 20 years in prison . While there was no question as to whether the drugs were in Hendrix 's luggage , in order for the Crown to prove possession they had to show that he knew they were there . In his cross @-@ examination of Canadian customs officials , defense attorney John O 'Driscoll raised doubts about whether the narcotics belonged to Hendrix , who had no drug paraphernalia in his luggage or needle tracks on his arms . After a trial that lasted for three days , the jury deliberated for 8 hours before returning a not guilty verdict , acquitting Hendrix of both charges .

The incident proved stressful for Hendrix , and it weighed heavily on his mind during the seven months that he awaited trial . Two weeks after the arrest , he told his friend , journalist Sharon Lawrence , that his fear of needles discouraged him from using heroin and that associating with junkies had convinced him it was not a drug he wanted to use . Both of Hendrix 's Experience bandmates , Mitch Mitchell and Noel Redding , later stated that they had been warned about a planned drug bust the day before flying to Toronto and they believed that drugs had been planted in Hendrix 's bag . Although Hendrix was one of the biggest stars in North America at the time , and the world 's highest @-@ paid performer , only a couple of Toronto newspapers carried the story . His public relations manager , Michael Goldstein , later revealed that he bribed a member of the Associated Press with a case of liquor in an effort to prevent the story from going out on the news wire .

= = Background = =

In late 1968 , the members of the Jimi Hendrix Experience were living in a rented house in Benedict Canyon , Los Angeles . One night bassist Noel Redding was warned about a pending visit from law enforcement , so he immediately phoned drummer Mitch Mitchell , who was at the nightclub Whisky a Go Go , and asked him to come over to the house so that they could search for and remove any illegal drugs . They found a large assortment of substances in Hendrix 's room that had apparently been given to him by fans . Soon afterwards , they were paid a visit by three detectives who told them that they were under police surveillance by officers living in a nearby house .

On May 2 , 1969 , the Experience performed at Cobo Hall in Detroit . According to Mitchell , while they were getting ready for the show the band and their entourage were informed about a possible drug bust planned for the following day . The group 's road crew warned everyone to take precautions against any potential for drugs to be planted on them . Mitchell responded by wearing a suit without pockets and not wearing any underwear . Tour managers Gerry Stickells and Tony Ruffino expressed their concern to Hendrix and asked him if he had any drugs on him to which he replied : " No . " After arriving in Toronto , he was awoken by concert promoter Ron Terry who told him : " Whatever you got in that bag , get rid of it . " Terry then took him into the plane 's bathroom and dumped anything that might be mistaken for illegal drugs into the toilet . Terry commented : " I thought he was clean . "

= = Arrest , performance , and arraignment = =

After landing at Toronto International Airport on May 3 , 1969 , Hendrix and Terry were the last to

exit the plane . Ruffino was carrying Hendrix 's bags , and he placed them on a counter at the customs station . An agent immediately chastised him , shouting : " If that 's not yours , keep your hands off it " , to which Ruffino replied : " I work for him . " The agent repeated the order before asking Hendrix if they were his bags ; he confirmed that they were . At 9 : 30 a.m. , authorities detained Hendrix after finding a small amount of what they suspected to be heroin and hashish in his luggage . A mobile lab was set up to determine what had been found , and at 1 : 30 p.m. Metro police detective Harry Midgley arrested him for illegal possession of narcotics . After being booked and photographed , he was released on \$ 10 @,@ 000 bail and required to return on May 5 for an arraignment hearing . While they awaited the lab results , Stickells attempted to make contact with Hendrix 's manager , Mike Jeffery , who had traveled to Hawaii and was unavailable .

When Stickells expressed concern that the arrest might jeopardize the concert that was scheduled for that night at Maple Leaf Gardens , the booking detective assured them that he would " get it done as quickly " as he could because his children had tickets for the event ; he commented : " they 'll kill me if I don 't get [Hendrix] out . " Management at the Gardens pressured the Toronto police department to release him , complaining that the sell @-@ out crowd of 18 @,@ 000 fans might riot if they canceled the show . He was released by 8 p.m. and escorted to the venue by the police , who remained at the arena throughout the performance . He displayed a jovial attitude during the concert , joking with the audience and singing in a mock operatic style for comedic effect . In light of the arrest , he altered the lyrics to " Red House " , singing " soon as I get out of jail , I wanna see her . "

Rolling Stone magazine reported that during the arraignment hearing , which lasted for three minutes , the courthouse was filled with young fans who had come to show their support for Hendrix , who " entered wearing a pink shirt open to the waist , an Apache @-@ style headband , a multi @-@ colored scarf around his neck and beads . His manner was dead serious . "

= = Preliminary hearing = =

On June 19 , 1969 , Hendrix flew to Toronto for a preliminary hearing . He wore a business suit for the first time since before the formation of the Experience in late 1966 . Judge Robert Taylor presided over the hearing , setting a date for December 8 , at which Hendrix would stand trial for two counts of possession of heroin and hashish , for which he faced as many as 20 years in prison . More serious potential charges of drug transporting and trafficking , which had been discussed at the time of the arrest , were not filed .

= = Second Toronto arrest = =

In preparation for the trial , Hendrix had his hair cut , and he purchased new clothes . One of his defense lawyers , Bob Levine , commented : " I took him to a number of stores that specialized in tailored suits . We found a conservative suit that looked great on him . It was hilarious . He was like a hick , awkwardly fidgeting around and trying to loosen his tie . I didn 't care how uncomfortable he was ; the suit was perfect . "

On December 7 , while Hendrix and Levine were travelling by limousine to a New York airport for their flight to Toronto , Levine noticed that Hendrix was putting some personal items into his guitar case . Levine then reminded him that they would be going through customs and that they had better not bring anything inappropriate . He reassured Levine , but as they approached their destination Levine confronted him : " Jimi , I know you have something in that guitar case . I don 't know what it is , and it 's not normally my business to interfere , but I know we will be searched at customs . " Hendrix insisted that he had nothing to worry about , stating : " Trust me , Bob , no one is going to recognize me " , to which he replied : " Recognize you ? They will be waiting at customs for you . " Soon after their arrival at the Toronto airport , Hendrix was arrested by customs agents who found a capsule of an unknown substance in his guitar case . He spent the night in jail , waiting for it to be tested . Later that day , the Toronto police department dropped the charges when the pill was determined to be a legal medication .

= = Trial = =

While there was no question as to whether the drugs were in Hendrix 's luggage , in order for the Crown to prove possession they had to show that he knew they were there . Judge Joseph Kelly presided over the trial proceedings , which began on December 8 , 1969 . Crown counsel John Malone called as witnesses the officers who discovered the drugs and the lab technicians who identified them as heroin ; the prosecution rested after three hours of testimony . In his cross @-@ examination of Canadian customs officials , defense attorney John O 'Driscoll raised doubts about whether the drugs belonged to Hendrix . Mervin Wilson , the customs agent who discovered the drugs , agreed with O 'Driscoll 's assertion that Hendrix had drawn attention to himself at the airport by wearing what O 'Driscoll described as " obviously mod clothing " . Wilson stated that Hendrix had no drug paraphernalia in his luggage , and Constable W. J. Matheson confirmed that Hendrix had no needle tracks on his arms .

The Hendrix defense team did not dispute that the drugs were found in his bag . They instead developed a strategy intended to demonstrate that he was not aware of its contents . Further , they offered substantiated accounts of how common it was for him to receive gifts from fans , which often included drugs . Hendrix was called as the first witness for the defense ; he testified that fans showered gifts on him , including teddy bears , scarves , clothing , and jewelry . He explained that while in Beverly Hills , California , a female fan had given him a vial of what he thought was Bromo @-@ Seltzer ? a legal medication ? which he put in his bag without knowledge of the illegal substances contained therein . Malone countered : " You are charged with a serious offense , and your evidence is you don 't really know how it got there , or who put it there " , to which Hendrix responded : " Yes . " The prosecutor then held up the aluminum tube in which the hashish was found and asked Hendrix to explain what he thought it was , he replied : " A pea shooter " , drawing uproarious laughter from the court . When asked about his drug use , he denied that he had ever used heroin or amphetamines , but admitted to smoking cannabis and hashish . He also admitted that he had used cocaine twice and LSD five times . He testified that his cannabis use had declined over the previous year , stating : " I feel I have outgrown it " . Hendrix admitted that he had seen people use heroin , but denied any further knowledge of the drug . He testified that he was given some gifts at a fan club meeting for the Beatles that were intended for the English group ; when he opened them he found several joints as well as what appeared to be doses of LSD .

The second witness called by the defense was United Press International (UPI) journalist and Hendrix 's friend Sharon Lawrence , who testified that she was with Hendrix in California when , after complaining about feeling ill , an unnamed fan gave him something . When Malone suggested that her memory was suspiciously acute , she explained that her training as a reporter prepared her to notice fine details . Hendrix 's manager and producer , Chas Chandler , was called next , and he corroborated the defense 's assertion that rock stars , particularly Hendrix , would regularly receive gifts from fans and that those gifts often included drugs . In its closing argument , the defense reiterated that in order to be guilty of possession of narcotics Hendrix had to have knowledge of the illegal drugs . After a trial that had lasted for three days , the jury deliberated for more than eight hours before returning a not guilty verdict , acquitting Hendrix of both charges . Torontoist 's Kevin Plummer wrote : " As the all @-@ male jury announced its acquittal , the courtroom ? crowded with young people ? erupted into applause . " In remarks to reporters after the verdict was announced , Hendrix commented : " Canada has given me the best Christmas present I ever had " , while flashing a peace sign .

= = Impact on Hendrix = =

The incident proved stressful for Hendrix , and it weighed heavily on his mind while he awaited trial . His limousine driver and a witness to the arrest , Louis Goldblatt , described him as " genuinely dumbfounded by the whole affair . " Tour manager Eric Barrett said that he looked " as if there had been a plane crash " . Hendrix biographers Harry Shapiro and Caesar Glebbeek described the incident as " a nightmare which ... plagued " him for seven months . According to Redding , " the

bust knocked any positive feelings Jimi was holding onto out of him " and that he was in " agonised suspense " from the arrest until the trial . In 2012 , Plummer wrote : " The real possibility of prison hung over Hendrix like a spectre ... a threat to his career and the cause of much brooding and rumination . " Journalist Charles Shaar Murray asserted that the incident jeopardized what he described as " Hendrix 's increasingly fragile peace of mind " .

Two weeks after the arrest , Hendrix told Lawrence : " Whatever I have done ... getting hooked on heroin is not one of them . " He explained that his fear of needles discouraged him from using the drug and that having known junkies convinced him that it was not something he should get involved with . Soon after the story of his arrest became public , he drew a connection between the bust and anti @-@ establishment sentiments : " All of that is the establishment fighting back ... Eventually , they will swallow themselves up , but I don 't want them to swallow up too many kids as they go along . "

According to Shapiro and Glebbeek , in 1969 there was little confidence in the staying power of rock stars ; it was assumed that their careers were going to be short , and industry insiders operated under a " take the money and run " mentality . For this reason , they speculated that had Hendrix been convicted it would have ended his music career . After the trial , his management announced to the British press that they were planning a farewell tour for the Experience . However , the US tour during which the arrest occurred was their last . The band played their final concert on June 29 , at Mile High Stadium in Denver (less than two months before Hendrix 's iconic solo performance at Woodstock) . There were no new album releases from them during 1969 . Hendrix 's management later stated that concert promoters were apprehensive about booking him until after the matter had been resolved .

= = Initial suppression of media coverage = =

According to Cross , " By far the most extraordinary aspect of Jimi Hendrix 's drug bust in Toronto on May 3 , 1969 , was how little press it generated . " Despite the fact that Hendrix was one of the biggest stars in North America at the time , and the highest @-@ paid performer in the world , only a couple of Toronto newspapers carried the story . Sharon Lawrence was informed of the incident by a London reporter working for UPI who told her that people were speculating that he had been set up . She commented : " There was nothing about the Hendrix arrest in the Los Angeles papers . " However , The New York Times ran a brief story about the arrest on May 5 . Four weeks later , Rolling Stone published a sympathetic article written by rock journalists Ben Fong @-@ Torres and Ritchie Yorke that included speculation that Hendrix had been framed .

In January 1970 , Rolling Stone asked Hendrix about having testified that he stopped using cannabis ; he laughed and replied : " At least , stop it from growing " . When pressed he answered : " I 'm too ... wrecked right now . " His management was concerned that the incident might provoke cancellations during the concurrent tour , but the story stayed largely unknown until after the tour had ended . The public relations manager , Michael Goldstein , later revealed that he had bribed a member of the Associated Press with a case of liquor to prevent the story from going out on the wire . Goldstein commented : " I knew that a million dollars was riding on that story not getting on UPI and the AP wire ... By his nature , a press agent shouldn 't have to determine someone 's future . "

= = Conspiracy theories = =

Wayne Kramer , a guitarist for MC5 , suggested that Hendrix had been set up as part of a wide @-@ scale crackdown on rock musicians : " I don 't have any doubt in my mind that the right @-@ wing government forces were behind all of that ... There was an effort , a movement , to stop this threat that rock and roll represented . " Hendrix was not the only prominent rock musician who found himself in legal trouble during May 1969 . On May 16 , the US embassy in London revoked John Lennon 's visa in response to his 1968 drug conviction , describing him as " an inadmissible immigrant " . That same day , Jefferson Airplane bassist Jack Casady was arrested for possession of marijuana , and on May 28 , Mick Jagger and Marianne Faithfull were arrested at their London

home for marijuana possession .

After the arrest in Toronto , the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) opened a file on Hendrix , which grew to seven pages , including documents related to his previous arrests for stealing cars at the age of 19 . Yorke and Fong @-@ Torres wrote , " The populace of Toronto are a very conservative lot , and tend to look with suspicion upon anybody who looks and dresses a little different from themselves . Hendrix looks a lot different . " Lawrence commented : " The prevailing political attitude in Canada regarding Hendrix was ' We have to make an example of this fuzzy @-@ haired black weirdo ' . " Shapiro and Glebbeek asserted their suspicion regarding the presence of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) , who did not typically make arrests at the airport . They also speculated that Canadian authorities had anticipated a public spectacle , intentionally searching the Hendrix entourage in plain view of people at the airport .

According to author John Hagen , Toronto 's then Mayor , William Dennison , was openly antagonistic to the influx of American hippies , draft resisters , and those who supported them who were coming to Canada in large numbers during the height of the Vietnam War . In his 2001 book , Northern Passage : American Vietnam War Resisters in Canada , Hagen wrote : " The mayors of Canada 's largest cities used the (War Measures Act) in a backlash against American war resisters . " Dennison stated : " a few hippies and deserters are Toronto 's only problem . " Mayor Jean Drapeau of Montreal asserted that military resisters were part of a " revolutionary conspiracy . " Vancouver 's mayor , Tom Campbell , commented : " I don 't like draft dodgers and I 'll do anything within the law that allows me to get rid of them . " While all three men supported use of the War Measures Act to harass war resisters and hippies , Campbell was the most aggressive ; he told the Toronto Star : " I believe the law should be used against any revolutionary whether he 's a US draft dodger or a hippie . " According to Hagen , the RCMP and the FBI cooperated in their effort to harass American war resisters during the late 1960s .

Although several people expressed the opinion that Mike Jeffrey had set Hendrix up in an effort to control him and create dependency , Shapiro and Glebbeek dispute this theory based on Jeffrey 's severe risk of significant financial shortfall had Hendrix been convicted . Jeffrey 's assistant , Trixie Sullivan , speculated that the drugs had been planted by a fan who became disgruntled after Hendrix refused his sexual advance . Both Mitch Mitchell and Noel Redding later wrote in their autobiographies that the entire Hendrix entourage had been warned about a planned drug bust the day before flying to Toronto ; both men also stated that they believed the incident had been set up and that the drugs had been planted in Hendrix 's bag . According to author Ritchie Unterberger , although Hendrix " took his fair share of drugs " , the commonly accepted view is that he did not use heroin regularly and was not an addict ; his drug use was typical of his peers , but not excessive . Mitchell wrote : " Contrary to what some people have said , Jimi was never a junkie ? that is he was never addicted to any drug , particularly heroin , which he tried once or twice but didn 't like . "