

= Mantra @-@ Rock Dance =

The Mantra @-@ Rock Dance was a counterculture music event held on January 29 , 1967 , at the Avalon Ballroom in San Francisco . It was organized by followers of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) as an opportunity for its founder , A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada , to address a wider public . It was also a promotional and fundraising effort for their first center on the West Coast of the United States .

The Mantra @-@ Rock Dance featured some of the most prominent Californian rock groups of the time , such as the Grateful Dead and Big Brother and the Holding Company with Janis Joplin , as well as the then relatively unknown , Moby Grape . The bands agreed to appear with Prabhupada and to perform for free ; the proceeds were donated to the local Hare Krishna temple . The participation of countercultural leaders considerably boosted the event 's popularity ; among them were the poet Allen Ginsberg , who led the singing of the Hare Krishna mantra onstage along with Prabhupada , and LSD promoters Timothy Leary and Augustus Owsley Stanley III .

The Mantra @-@ Rock Dance concert was later called " the ultimate high " and " the major spiritual event of the San Francisco hippie era . " It led to favorable media exposures for Prabhupada and his followers , and brought the Hare Krishna movement to the wider attention of the American public . The 40th anniversary of the Mantra @-@ Rock Dance was commemorated in 2007 in Berkeley , California .

= = Background = =

A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada (also referred to as " Bhaktivedanta Swami " or " Prabhupada ") , a Gaudiya Vaishnava sannyasi and teacher , arrived in New York City from his native India in 1965 and " caught the powerful rising tide " of a counterculture that was fascinated with his homeland and open to new forms of " consciousness @-@ expanding spirituality . " After establishing his first American temple in New York City at 26 Second Avenue , Prabhupada requested his early follower Mukunda Das and his wife Janaki Dasi to open a similar ISKCON center on the West Coast of the United States .

Mukunda and Janaki met up with friends from college , who would later come to be known as Shyamasundar Das , Gurudas , Malati Dasi , and Yamuna Dasi . Teaming up with them , Mukunda rented a storefront in the San Francisco Haight @-@ Ashbury neighborhood , which at that time was turning into the hub of the hippie counterculture , and stayed to take care of the developing new center .

= = Preparation and promotion = =

To raise funds , gain supporters for the new temple , and to popularize Prabhupada 's teachings among the hippie and countercultural audience of the Haight @-@ Ashbury scene , the team decided to hold a charitable rock concert and invited Prabhupada to attend . Despite his position as a Vaishnava sannyasi and some of his New York followers objecting to what they saw as an inappropriate invitation of their guru to a place full of " amplified guitars , pounding drums , wild light shows , and hundreds of drugged hippies , " Prabhupada agreed to travel from New York to San Francisco and take part in the event . Using their acquaintance with Rock Scully , manager of the Grateful Dead , and Sam Andrew , founding member and guitarist of the Big Brother and the Holding Company ? who were among the most prominent rock bands in California at the time ? Shyamasundar and Gurudas secured their consent to perform for charity at the concert , charging only the " musicians ' union minimum " of \$ 250 . Malati Dasi happened to hear Moby Grape , a relatively unknown group at the time , and she convinced the other team members to invite the band to play at the concert as well .

Another leading countercultural figure , the beatnik poet Allen Ginsberg , was a supporter of Prabhupada . He had met the swami earlier in New York and assisted him in extending his United States visa . Despite disagreeing with many of Prabhupada 's required prohibitions , especially the

ones pertaining to drugs and promiscuity , Ginsberg often publicly sang the Hare Krishna mantra , which he had learned in India . He made the mantra part of his philosophy and declared that it " brings a state of ecstasy . " He was glad that Prabhupada , an authentic swami from India , was now trying to spread the chanting in America . Along with other countercultural ideologues like Timothy Leary , Gary Snyder , and Alan Watts , Ginsberg hoped to incorporate Prabhupada and the chanting of Hare Krishna into the hippie movement . Ginsberg agreed to take part in the Mantra @-@ Rock Dance concert and to introduce the swami to the Haight @-@ Ashbury hippie community .

As for the choice of venue , the team considered both the Fillmore Auditorium and the Avalon Ballroom , finally settling on the latter as its impresario , Chet Helms , appeared to be " more sympathetic to the spirit of the concert " and agreed to let it be used for a charity event . Artist Harvey Cohen , one of the first ISKCON followers , designed a Stanley Mouse @-@ inspired promotional poster with a picture of Prabhupada , details of the event , and a request to " bring cushions , drums , bells , cymbals . " To generate interest among members of the countercultural community of Haight @-@ Ashbury , Mukunda published an article entitled " The New Science " in the San Francisco Oracle , a local underground newspaper specializing in alternative spiritual and psychedelic topics . He wrote :

The Haight @-@ Ashbury district is soon to be honored by the presence of His Holiness , A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami , who will conduct daily classes in the Bhagavad Gita , discussions , chanting , playing instruments , and devotional dancing in a small temple in the neighborhood Swamiji 's use of the Hare Krishna Mantra is already known throughout the United States . Swamiji 's chanting and dancing is more effective than Hatha or Raja Yoga or listening to Ali Akbar Khan on acid or going to a mixed media rock dance .

Ginsberg helped plan and organize a reception for Prabhupada , who was scheduled to arrive from New York on January 17 , 1967 . When the swami arrived at the San Francisco Airport , 50 to 100 hippies chanting " Hare Krishna " greeted him in the airport lounge with flowers . A few days later the San Francisco Chronicle published an article entitled " Swami in the Hippie Land " in which Prabhupada answered the question , " Do you accept hippies in your temple ? " by saying , " Hippies or anyone ? I make no distinctions . Everyone is welcome . "

= = Event = =

The Mantra @-@ Rock Dance was scheduled on Sunday evening , January 29 , 1967 ? a day of the week that Chet Helms deemed odd and unlikely to generate substantial attendance . Admission was fixed at \$ 2 @.@ 50 and limited to door sales . Despite the apprehensions of the organizers , by the beginning of the concert at 8 PM an audience of nearly 3 @,@ 000 had gathered at the Avalon Ballroom , filling the hall to its capacity . Latecomers had to wait outside for vacancies in order to enter . Participants were treated on prasad (sanctified food) consisting of orange slices and , regardless of the prohibition on drugs , many in the crowd were smoking marijuana and taking other intoxicants . However , the atmosphere in the hall was peaceful . Strobe lights and a psychedelic liquid light show , along with pictures of Krishna and the words of the Hare Krishna mantra , were projected onto the walls . A few Hells Angels were positioned in the back of the stage as the event 's security guards . Prabhupada 's biographer Satsvarupa Dasa Goswami thus describes the Mantra @-@ Rock Dance audience :

Almost everyone who came wore bright or unusual costumes : tribal robes , Mexican ponchos , Indian kurtas , " God 's @-@ eyes , " feathers , and beads . Some hippies brought their own flutes , lutes , gourds , drums , rattles , horns , and guitars . The Hell 's Angels , dirty @-@ haired , wearing jeans , boots , and denim jackets and accompanied by their women , made their entrance , carrying chains , smoking cigarettes , and displaying their regalia of German helmets , emblazoned emblems , and so on ? everything but their motorcycles , which they had parked outside .

The evening opened with Prabhupada 's followers ? men in " Merlin gowns " and women in saris ? chanting Hare Krishna to an Indian tune , followed by Moby Grape . When the swami himself arrived at 10 PM , the crowd of hippies rose to their feet to greet him respectfully with applause and cheers . Gurudas , one of the event 's organizers , describes the effect that Prabhupada 's arrival had on the

audience , " Then Swami Bhaktivedanta entered . He looked like a Vedic sage , exalted and otherworldly . As he advanced towards the stage , the crowd parted and made way for him , like the surfer riding a wave . He glided onto the stage , sat down and began playing the kartals . "

Ginsberg welcomed Prabhupada onto the stage and spoke of his own experiences chanting the Hare Krishna mantra . He translated the meaning of the Sanskrit term mantra as " mind deliverance " and recommended the early @-@ morning kirtans at the local Radha @-@ Krishna temple " for those coming down from LSD who want to stabilize their consciousness upon reentry , " calling the temple 's activity an " important community service . " He introduced Prabhupada and thanked him for leaving his peaceful life in India to bring the mantra to New York 's Lower East Side , " where it was probably most needed . "

After a short address by Prabhupada , Ginsberg sang " Hare Krishna " to the accompaniment of sitar , tambura , and drums , requesting the audience to " [j] ust sink into the sound vibration , and think of peace . " Then Prabhupada stood up and led the audience in dancing and singing , as the Grateful Dead , Big Brother and the Holding Company , and Moby Grape joined the chanting and accompanied the mantra with their musical instruments . The audience eagerly responded , playing their own instruments and dancing in circles . The group chanting continued for almost two hours , and concluded with the swami 's prayers in Sanskrit while the audience bowed down on the floor . After Prabhupada left , Janis Joplin took the stage , backed by Big Brother and the Holding Company , and continued the event with the songs " The House of the Rising Sun " and " Ball ' n ' Chain " late into the night .

= = Reaction and effect = =

The LSD pioneer Timothy Leary , who made an appearance at the Mantra @-@ Rock Dance along with Augustus Owsley Stanley III and even paid the entrance fee , pronounced the event a " beautiful night " . Later Ginsberg called the Mantra @-@ Rock Dance " the height of Haight @-@ Ashbury spiritual enthusiasm , the first time that there had been a music scene in San Francisco where everybody could be part of it and participate , " while historians referred to it as " the ultimate high " and " the major spiritual event of the San Francisco hippy era . "

Moby Grape 's performance at the Mantra @-@ Rock Dance catapulted the band onto the professional stage . They subsequently had gigs with The Doors at the Avalon Ballroom and at the " First Love Circus " at the Winterland Arena , and were soon signed to a contract with Columbia Records .

The Mantra @-@ Rock Dance helped raise around \$ 2 @,@ 000 for the temple and resulted in a massive influx of visitors at the temple 's early morning services . Prabhupada 's appearance at the Mantra @-@ Rock Dance made such a deep impact on the Haight @-@ Ashbury community that he became a cult hero to most of its groups and members , regardless of their attitudes towards his philosophy or the life restrictions that he taught . The Hare Krishna mantra and dancing became adopted in some ways by all levels of the counterculture , including the Hells Angels , and provided it with a " loose commonality " and reconciliation , as well as with a viable alternative to drugs . As the Hare Krishna movement 's popularity with the Haight @-@ Ashbury community continued to increase , Prabhupada and followers chanting and distributing prasad became a customary sight at important events in the locale .

At the same time , as the core group of his followers continued to expand and become more serious about the spiritual discipline , Prabhupada conducted new Vaishnava initiations and named the San Francisco temple " New Jagannatha Puri " after introducing the worship of Jagannath deities of Krishna there . Small replicas of these deities immediately became a " psychedelic hit " worn by many hippies on strings around their necks .

Since the Mantra @-@ Rock Dance brought the Hare Krishna movement to the wider attention of the American public , Prabhupada 's increased popularity attracted the interest of the mainstream media . Most notably , he was interviewed on ABC 's The Les Crane Show and lectured on the philosophy of Krishna consciousness on a KPFK radio station program hosted by Peter Bergman . Prabhupada 's followers also spoke about their activities on the San Francisco radio station KFRC .

On August 18 , 2007 , a free commemorative event dedicated to the 40th anniversary of the Mantra @-@ Rock Dance was held at the People 's Park in Berkeley , California .