

Richie's message to today's kids

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"Then all of a sudden *Motherless Child* came out. I hadn't sung that song in several years, but suddenly that line came out and then there was another hymn which, when I was 15 or 16, I sang with my family at church and that came out too. That was the part about brother, sister - you know - so I was composing as I went along. So finally we get off the stage and my bass player - who had decided to come on his own - arrived. If we'd been on fifth he would have made it..." says Havens still laughing at the memory.

To Havens and many others, Woodstock was "a unique celebration of ourselves as human beings coming together.

"Because of the Vietnam war, they kept making out that we were against the army. We were, of course, against the war, not the guys who had to go. And, as it happened the army, with their massive helicopters, were eventually helping the promoters bring the bands in".

On the Monday after Woodstock, the *New York Times* editorial page thundered that Woodstock was an "outrageous event" (as reported by *Rolling Stone* magazine) and asked, "What kind of culture is it that can produce so colossal a mess?"

But, just one day later, in a stunning reversal, the newspaper decided it had been "a phenomenon of innocence"... They came, it seems, to enjoy their own society to exult in a life style that is its own declaration of independence... as in Henry V they could say 'he that outlives this day, and comes safe home, will stand a-tip-toe when this day is nam'd.'"

Havens grew up within a generation where every man and his dog was supposedly doing drugs, "it wasn't as much as it was made out to be. But, my advice to kids nowadays is that people who do take drugs especially hard drugs, are people who have a problem. You don't have to take drugs to solve the problem. Better to join with friends and do something positive.

"You know, 22 years ago a friend

and I started a hands-on environmental museum for children. Now that's where I learned, as a singer, that it's the children who are the real environmentalists. Their concerns are for the whole planet and they're the only ones who include people as part of the environment although some of them don't really know that they live in the environment.

"It was about 1971 when we started the museum and I started a group called The Natural Guard where children use their own community as the endangered environment. When children start making waves, people listen. The press listens and writes about it, the kids get acknowledgement and that's all they need to clean up the whole neighbourhood. We have chapters all around the US and it's working well."

On meeting Havens, you can't help noticing his remarkable collection of rings and pendants, given to him by various people including members of native American tribes. He vaguely mentions that he's been "working" with Navaho, Sioux, Cree and others through the years.

"I've been sort of raising funds for the native Americans, for teenagers, alcohol prevention, legal funds, just to help. People from all over the world have given me things and I wear it all - it keeps all those aeroplanes I have to travel on up in the sky. I've been around the planet 28 times and, so far, I'm blessed," he says with another big laugh.

How Havens squeezes in all his 'sort of helping', plus a pretty full-time musical schedule - "four or five gigs a week usually, sculpting, painting, writing, voice overs for ads. and parts in films, is a mystery. But, if he ever gives up on all of the above, he would make a great environmental ambassador. He has a heartfelt feeling for the earth and her "problems" and given a chance he is more than happy to talk for hours on the subject.

But, it's Havens the musician we are celebrating on Friday, so groove on down to the ICC and we'll have our own slice of *Freedom* and our own mini Woodstock.