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B1

# Citizen Wenner Presents

I wonder — You put all this together — What would it spell?

—From the "Citizen Wenner" syndicated article by Norman F. Mac-

By Tom Zito

SAN FRANCISCO—Jann Wenner's mother—the some of the writers who work for the 29-year-old founder and editor of Rolling Stone—half playfully and half seriously calls her son "Citizen Wenner." And like William Randolph Hearst, the publishing tycoon on whom "Ken" is based, Wenner has dramatically underscored his name in media circles—if only by proving there were and still are millions of dollars to be made from lusting journalism, in this case Ken, very personal journalism, to the whims and passions of people under 30.

He's done this with a kind of brilliant, unpredictable, sometimes arrogant, compulsive, even manic attitude that's managed in eight years to turn Rolling Stone into The Wall Street Journal of pop music and the counterculture, with a circulation of 400,000, 2-million-plus readers, a gross last year of about \$9 million and a projected gross for this year ending June 30 of \$9 million.

All this has not happened with the laissez-faire malloyness often attributed—however inaccurately—to California youth culture on the surface a wildly controversial character: fiercely loyal to and generous with his friends; often ruthless with his enemies, and so protective of his personal life that even to many of his staff members he remains a mystery man. He won't say what he pays his staffers (the top appears to be about \$20,000 a year), speaks explaining how he determines fees for freelancers (ranging from \$35 for a record review to as much as \$2,000 for a major feature), and characterizes former associates who criticize him as jealous bad-mouthers and, in fact, some are). Hunter Thompson, the magazine's contemptuous chronicler of the 1972 presidential campaign, who largely helped break Rolling Stone's hippie rock 'n' roll image, sees Citizen Wenner more as a Henry Luce—the founder of Time and Life.

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"Many in the journalism business agree that Jann Wenner has an extraordinary sense for giving his rock-oriented readers what they want well before they get it anywhere else. But some are beginning to question his growing fascination with politics and his business acumen."

Photo by Tom Zito—The Washington Post



WENNER, From B1

"Wenner has a lot of Hearst in him," says Thompson, "but it's really that Luce contempt for writers, in part based on their unwillingness to cave in. Luce believed logos and layout were more important than writers. So does Wenner. And maybe he's right. He's been there a long time and he's getting richer and richer. But it's a different magazine than it was three or four years ago. It's run for the accounting department now, rather than for the editors and writers. The masthead has gotten very bottom-heavy—all sorts of business types."

*You want to know what I think of Charlie Kane? Well, I suppose he had some private sort of greatness. But he kept it to himself. He never gave anything away. He just left you a tip. He had a generous mind. I don't suppose anybody ever had so many opinions. That was because he had the power to express them, and Charlie lived on power and the excitement of using it.*

"I've always felt Jann was 12 years old going on 75," says his mother, Simi, recovering in a Honolulu hospital bed from minor surgery. "He's certainly the most conservative member of our family. He's old-fashioned, terribly protective. I always joke about him being afraid of getting kidnapped or something. I don't think public opinion matters that much to him. He thinks he can make it. He's a man of high intentionality. You know how he met his wife? He saw her in the office at Ramparts magazine, where they were both working, and he walked up to her and said, 'I'm going to marry you someday.'"

Whatever his endeavor or intent, Wenner carries it off with meticulous panache. He's short (about 5 feet 6, which prompts one of his editors to quip, "I think Jahn has a Napoleon complex."), slightly pudgy, wears designer suits, drives a Mercedes (as does his wife Jane), carries an attache case, drinks Margaritas. His home, a stately old Victorian built of wood in 1900 and listed in "The Great Houses of San Francisco," is kept immaculately trimmed with flowers. He and his wife (together they are the principal stockholders of Straight Arrow Publishers, the corporate parent of Rolling Stone) bought the place in May, 1973, for \$127,000.

Wenner has a sizeable though not staggering record collection, "all the standards you'd want to listen to," says a friend, "with a heavy emphasis on rhythm 'n' blues." Former music editor Jon Landau is convinced that "if Jann got up once to play a record in the last two years, it had to be Al Green"—a melodic yet biting soul singer. Wenner rarely goes to the

movies. He owns two electric guitars (which he sometimes plays), two dogs and an Advent VideoBeam, the \$2,800 TV device that projects a four-by-six-foot color image on a special screen.

His office, revealed only when, after much protest, he consented to a five-minute, two-shot photo session recently, harbors an antique circular oak desk, an antique book shelf, a modern leather couch and a stereo, which was playing an album by the Rolling Stones. Wenner got up and started dancing reservedly to the music, "I love rock 'n' roll," he said.

Wenner's social life is certainly secondary to his business dealings, and even then, say friends, his fraternizing is usually an adjunct of publishing interests. "He's got a lot of friends who are musicians, a lot of friends who are record company executives, a lot of glamorous people," says Landau. Wenner himself, in the course of a one-hour interview in a swanky hotel bar, mentioned having lunch in New York recently with premier until 4 in the morning with "Truman." (Capote, who was commissioned three years ago to write on the Rolling Stones for Rolling Stone. He didn't come up with a story, but was then interviewed about the experience by Andy Warhol — on assignment from Wenner.) He jets around the country frequently and is spending more and more time in New York, where he just rented an apartment, and in Washington, where Rolling Stone is about to move into larger quarters. For vacation he and his wife head to Denver or Salt Lake City for skiing, or take two-week jaunts to Spain or the Caribbean.

Jann Wenner's interest in publishing began, his mother recalls, in their San Francisco neighborhood "when he was very young, 10 or 11. He and a bunch of other boys put out a mimeographed newspaper. I worked with

Jann when he started to write." (She has published three books.) He was sent off to Chadwick, a private school near Los Angeles, when he was 13. Later he enrolled at Berkeley, where he began writing a music column for the school's Daily Cal, "Something's Happening," that was signed "Mr. Jones." The title and pen-name were borrowed from Bob Dylan's "Ballad of a Thin Man," a put-down of shortsightedness with the classic refrain, "Something is happening but you don't know what it is/Do you, Mr. Jones?"

While in college Wenner had also done some reporting on student demonstrations and drug dealing for a local educational radio station, his mother remembers. This prompted the society editor of The San Francisco Chronicle to accuse him of social climbing by fabricating stories, particularly, she wrote, tales of drug use by

the children of some of San Francisco's best families.

After dropping out of Berkeley, Wenner spent a week "pulling up weeds in a concrete piling yard," his mother says, then hooked a job as a traffic reporter with the local NBC-TV affiliate station. When a San Francisco newspaper strike sparked the creation of Sunday Ramparts, a weekly spin-off from the monthly, radically oriented feature magazine, Wenner took a job there as arts editor.

*What makes these fellows think that a newspaper is something rigid, something inflexible, that people are supposed to pay two cents for? There's something I've got to get into this newspaper beside pictures and print. I've got to make the New York "Inquirer" as important to New York as the gas in that light.*

In November, 1967, at the age of 21, Jann Wenner started Rolling Stone on an initial investment of \$7,500, most of it borrowed. The first edition (issue 190 has just come off the presses) sold 6,000 copies and carried this statement of purpose:

"We have begun a publication reflecting what we see are the changes in rock 'n' roll and the changes related to rock 'n' roll. We hope we have something here for the artists and the industry and every person who 'believes in the magic that can set you free.' Rolling Stone is not just about music, but also about the things and attitudes that the music embraces."

This was written six months after the Beatles' "Sgt. Pepper" album had been released; at a time psychedelic drugs were the primary energy source of San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury subculture; nine months before the Rolling Stones' song "Street Fighting Man" was banned from Chicago radio stations by Mayor Richard Daley, who feared it might cause more trouble in the already riot-ridden streets surrounding the 1968 Democratic National Convention; 22 months before more than 300,000 young people gathered for the countercultural watershed of Woodstock; and 4½ years before five men wearing surgical gloves were arrested for breaking into Democratic National Committee headquarters in the Watergate complex. American society careened on a sociological roller coaster: Yesterday's cause became tomorrow's forgotten frivolity. Wenner was a kid in blue jeans when the magazine started; for the last two years he's usually worn a tie in the office—a change of appearance that mirrors an acute perception of cultural trends.

"Jann has one of the best journalistic antennas in the United States," says Clay Felker, editor of New York magazine and The Village Voice, whose pages frequently delve into the same topics Rolling Stone expounds on. "He has an incredible sense for knowing what's going to be hot. Whenever things change, he's

there—usually before most other people even know it's happening."

Rolling Stone itself has changed drastically. Its original volunteer staff has grown into 80 full-time employees. Landau recalls writing letters from his Boston home to Wenner in San Francisco because they couldn't afford telephone expenses. Wenner still thinks the most exciting day in his life was when the presses rolled and he held the first issue in his hands. "We were drinking champagne and I was crying and I thought, 'We'll never do better than this.'" At first Rolling Stone set its own type; that was discontinued but now it's beginning to do its own color separations to increase from 16 to 32 pages of color per issue. In its early days the magazine offered as a subscription bonus a free roach clip—a holder for smoking marijuana cigarettes to the bitter end.

Cocaine has since become America's vogue drug, but Wenner denies an anecdote reported in a Columbia Journalism Review piece on Rolling Stone that has him snorting the stuff in the midst of an interview. "I was putting the guy on," he says. And while the office exudes keen professionalism, a publicist can hand out an impressively packaged press kit touting the magazine's sales potential and ad rates (\$4,480 for a full-page, black-and-white ad; \$6,720 in color) and simultaneously say, "Jann's a Capricorn, which explains a lot about him."

Many in the journalism business agree that Wenner has an extraordinary sense for giving his rock-oriented readers what they want well before they get it anywhere else. But some are beginning to question his growing fascination with politics and his business acumen. A book publishing company he began three years ago folded recently and a lecture bureau are, however, increasing steadily, an editor says.

"Small book publishing is a very marginal business," Wenner comments. "You've got to have a best-seller every year or a very low overhead. We didn't have either, partly because the book division wasn't clearly enough identified with the magazine by the public."

Rolling Stone softened its almost exclusive emphasis on music about the time of the Kent State killings in 1970 and increasingly featured articles on politics and general culture, now about 50 per cent of the magazine. The ideological change was clearly manifest in Wenner's own contributions. Until 1970 his two major pieces had been interviews with Bob Dylan and John Lennon. The third came later, a gargantuan question-and-answer repartee with Daniel Ellsberg.

In some ways Rolling Stone's politi-

cal focus seems almost contemptuous of its own readership profile: average age, 23; 84 per cent own musical instruments. The average reader bought, in the past year, 61 record albums and five pairs of jeans, attended 22 movies, camped out four times overnight, spent \$54 on books—not exactly a portrait of the political scientist.

"I've told Jann—and it's strictly a personal opinion—that there's an over-emphasis on politics," says Landau. "We could do 100 per cent music and lose maybe 5 per cent of our readers; print more than 50 per cent politics in the magazine and there'll be a big drop-off."

Thompson, whose feud with Wenner involves expenses and Thompson's being cut off the payroll, thinks Wenner's introduction of politics to Rolling Stone paralleled his own interest in politics. "He decided it was hipper to hang out with politicians than with rock 'n' rollers," Thompson says. "There's no doubt that he wants to run for office. I mean, isn't that the ultimate power trip?"

Wenner won't deny that he has political ambitions. All he'll say is, "I'm too young to run for office now." Recently he flew around California with Tom Hayden and Jane Fonda as Hayden announced his candidacy for the Senate.

*The trouble is, Mr. Thatcher, you don't realize you're talking to two people. As Charles Foster Kane, who has 82,631 shares of Metropolitan Transfer—you see, I do have a rough idea of my holdings—I sympathize with you. Charles Foster Kane is a dangerous scoundrel, his paper should be run out of town and a committee should be formed to boycott him. On the other hand I am the publisher of "The Inquirer." As such it is my duty—I'll let you in on a little secret, it is also my pleasure—to see to it that the decent hardworking people of this city are not robbed by a group of money mad pirates because, God help them, they have no one to look after their interests!*

For every admirer of Citizen Wenner, there are probably 10 critics—something Wenner himself is all too painfully aware of.

"I think people find a certain excitement in the bravado of trying to explain why people failed at Rolling Stone," he says. "I can only say one thing: You look at the people who've stayed there, and you look at the people who've left, and I think we're in very good shape. Have people here been unreasonably let go. It's a staff of young people, largely people who are not settled in their lifestyle. There's enormous volatility. And remember, I started runnin' git when I was 21. I lack a sense of foresight sometimes.

And when somebody attacks me and I don't say anything, it makes me seem erratic."

Rolling Stone has been through a series of managing editors and even a corporate president, none of whom are still on the staff. Last year Wenner hired former Kennedy and LBJ aide Richard Goodwin to run his Washington office, with hopes of eventually spinning off a separate political magazine. "He told me he thought politics was going to be the rock 'n' roll of the '70s," Goodwin says, "and invested \$900,000 in the project."

But Goodwin left after his initial six-month contract. His major complaint was a common one made of Wenner: He promises writers generous fees for articles, then cuts back drastically when it's time to pay. "It got to the point where I felt like I needed signed affidavits that he was going to pay for commissioned pieces," says Goodwin. Wenner only says there were some misunderstandings and claims Goodwin frequently offered writers too much for their work.

Perhaps this is a problem of evolution. Contributing editor Jonathan

Cott, whose wondrously perceptive interviews with Henry Miller and Glenn Gould, among others, are among Rolling Stone's finest offerings, notes that "When the magazine started we were just happy to have a place that would publish our work." Now that it's grown into a multi-million dollar corporation, some are convinced Wenner exploits his authors and still thinks he's doing them a favor by printing what they write.

"Personally I have a great deal of respect for Jann, partly because he trusts me," says Cott. "I'll tell him I want to do a long piece on somebody like Gould, whom he's never heard of, and he'll say, 'Go right ahead.'"

"Lots of people have terrible stories to tell about Jann," adds Landau. "All I can say is that I was in the hospital and then incapacitated for five months recently, and he carried me. I don't know many people who'd do that."

Says 25-year-old staff photographer Annie Leibovitz: "Jann has inspired me and supported me and let me do whatever I've wanted to photographically. I can't think of anyone else who would have done that with an art student who had no credentials."

Still, Wenner can be a very tough nut to crack. When his mother came to him last year with a book she'd written, he refused to publish it. "His cup is full," she says, "but it doesn't exactly runneth over."

*One hundred thousand trees, 20,000 tons of marble are the ingredients of Xanadu's mountain. Contents of Xanadu's palace: paintings, pictures, statues and more statues, the very stones of many another palace. Enough for 10 museums—the loot of the world.*

Two hundred and four miles south of San Francisco lies San Simeon, the towering palace William Randolph Hearst built on a mountain to house his \$40 million art collection, a palace renamed Xanadu in "Citizen Kane."

Though San Simeon is a pleasant single day's excursion from San Francisco, Jann Wenner has never visited this monument to a publishing empire.

"I've always wanted to wait for the right time," he says. "I've always wanted to be able to drive there and buy it."

*(All italicized passages are from the "Citizen Kane" shooting script by Herman J. Mankiewicz and Orson Welles.)*