“I was in San Francisco earning a living as a photojournalist, working for anybody who would pay me to take pictures. That’s how Rolling Stone Magazine came into my life.” Baron Wolman

Baron Wolman not only witnessed what is without doubt the most important period of change in popular music and popular culture but his photographs helped shape it. Rolling Stone magazine encapsulated and distilled the most important events and changes as they were taking place. Each issue would speak to this evolving youth culture in a language that was all their own and Baron’s photos captured the events and personalities and visualized the music.

Dave Brubeck
In 1965, my wife, professional ballet dancer Juliana, and I moved from Los Angeles to San Francisco. She wanted to dance with the San Francisco Ballet and I needed to get out of LA where the combination of bad air and endless driving was making me increasingly cranky. Plus, I had fallen in love with San Francisco during my first visit in 1959 and was ready to return. We settled in the Haight-Ashbury; soon enough she joined the ballet company and I started hunting for freelance photo assignments.

One of my regular clients was Mills College in Oakland, California. I took pictures for their catalogues and brochures, and in the process became quite attached to the school and its activities. Mills had an advanced, highly respected, music department which in April 1967, held a weekend pop music industry seminar. The subjects were the emergence of the San Francisco concert scene and how and why popular music had become so important in the Bay Area.

Mills invited some of the biggest names in music at the time: local concert promoter Bill Graham and “Big Daddy” Tom Donahue who was the driving force behind KMPX, one of America’s first underground FM radio stations. These radio stations had no playlist; the DJs could spin whatever music they wanted for as long as they wanted – if they wanted to play for 20 minutes without an ad they could play for 20 minutes without an ad, something unheard of in the radio business. The legendary Phil Spector – already a widely-acclaimed writer, producer, manager and music publisher – flew in from Los Angeles. Other local music luminaries were there, too, including Jefferson Airplane, who played a set during which the attendees were treated to a liquid light show.

Ralph Gleason, the hugely respected music writer for the San Francisco Chronicle, was on the panel; if Ralph gave you his blessing as a musician, you had been anointed, you had it made. Also in attendance – at my invitation – was the young journalist, Jann Wenner.

...That’s how Rolling Stone came into my life.
Jann and Ralph had come up with the idea to start a newspaper about music, not a trade publication like *Billboard* or *Cashbox*, but another sort of periodical. Jann expanded upon the idea to me. The problem, as he saw it, was that the music media of the time was too focused on the music industry alone; articles were business related rather than music or musician related. Both he and Gleason saw the need and opportunity for a journal which would reflect the greater, more personal, interests of those of us who listened to music and for whom music had become such a big part of our lives. Furthermore, the publication they envisioned would be professional in every sense, from its appearance to its editorial excellence. They pointedly did not wish this nascent publication to resemble the well-intentioned but often naïve – in look and feel – “hippie” publications which had become ubiquitous around the San Francisco Bay Area during the mid and late Sixties. At Mills, Jann asked me if I would like to join the team as its photographer, and, if so, did I have 10 grand to invest. I could tell Jann was a smart kid; I mean, he was only 21 at the time. I was the old guy at 30. I didn’t have that kind of money but I said, sure, I was interested and agreed to hook up with him, adding that I would shoot for free, asking only to be reimbursed for film and processing – digital was an unknown concept at the time – and be given stock in the company as payment for my services. Without understanding its ultimate importance, I also specified that I would own all the photographs I took although the still unnamed publication would have unlimited use of them, on covers, inside on the editorial pages, for advertising, promotion, whatever. The deal seemed like a fair exchange at the time and it was. And that’s how *Rolling Stone* came into my life...

The actual spark for *Rolling Stone* started long before I met Jann; he and Gleason had been talking about it for quite a while. But it was at Mills in April of 1967 that he introduced the idea to me and articulated the need for a staff photographer. That seminar itself was ground-breaking in its own right. For a university to acknowledge the importance of rock music when the economic potential of the industry had only just begun to show up on corporate radar was very forward-thinking.

The first issue was printed in October 1967 and dated November 9, 1967. On the front page it featured a PR photo of John Lennon in the film, *How I Won The War*. 
Inside, as my first assignment for the fledgling magazine, was a spread of my photos of the Grateful Dead, some of whom had been busted for allegedly dealing the “killer weed” marijuana. As the photojournalist I considered myself, I photographed the band posting bail and then posing on the steps of their house at 710 Ashbury Street following a delightfully memorable press conference where the band members articulated their position vis-à-vis the arrest.

During my tour of duty at the magazine I resisted having a space in the office or even going in every day. I did then and still do run solo – that was the way I liked to live, one of the many reasons I liked photography. I always preferred to work one-on-one; as soon as you introduce a team of other people into the photographic experience it is no longer intimate and it is no longer one-on-one.

So in one sense I never really felt a part of Rolling Stone even though I felt a part of Rolling Stone. Jann was a bit dismayed that I chose not to have a room in the office but everything I needed professionally was at home: my darkroom was at home, my dry mounting press was at home, everything; why should I come in every day? Of course, I would come in with the pictures, it wasn’t that I wouldn’t come in – it was like, “Why do you need me all the time? You’re not paying me, I gotta earn a living.” So that’s why my office was at home. I had other work to do; I needed to pay the bills. Perhaps for that reason I never felt an intimate part of the Rolling Stone family, even though everyone else might have felt otherwise towards me.

Juliana and I were friends with Jann and his wife Janie; we hung out a lot together, and the two of them had great taste. That’s one thing about Jann – he had great editorial taste, he had great design taste, he had great decorating taste. The guy is taste on steroids.
Jimi Hendrix was one of my absolute favorite photographic subjects; he dressed well all the time. Even when he was at rest, between his clothes and his looks, he was photogenic. When Jimi was on a stage he was such an incredible performer. The genius of his musicianship aside, he just looked so good on the stage – his facial expressions, the way he would cross his arms to play, he’d play behind his back, he’d play with his teeth, he’d make love to his guitar. For a photographer, shooting Jimi at work was like hitting the mother lode... or, as they say, shooting fish in a bowl.

In the days of film if you shot a roll of 35mm and you ended up with two or three great shots on that roll you felt you nailed it. But I look at the contact sheets of Hendrix and on a contact sheet of 36 exposures there’ll be 20 great shots minimum. Guess that says something about him or me, or a little bit of both.
For the issue of Eye which included a story on both Janis and Grace, I asked Grace to pose for me in her Girl Scout vest. From that session I got one particularly perfect, really cool photo of her, one that years later, when she started painting, she used as the basis for one of her canvases as well as her website logo.

Eye also needed color pictures of Janis performing for the same story. Because I didn’t have any color pictures of Janis, I called her up to see if she had any concerts scheduled so I could shoot her singing in color. Unfortunately – or fortunately as it turned out – she didn’t, so I suggested she come over to the studio in the house. I told her I would set up the lights as if she was on stage and asked her to bring a microphone so we could simulate a real performance. I told her she could lip-sync, she didn’t have to sing at all. To create the right environment she also brought along a little player with a Big Brother tape; she wanted...
some accompaniment. I switched on the lights and, as I had suggested, she started lip-synching – for about 30 seconds, then she started actually singing – very quietly – for about three minutes. But Janis being Janis, a few minutes later she was singing full-tilt, literally performing as if she were actually on stage. I don’t know what goes on in the head of performers; maybe they either perform or they don’t perform. But as I recall Janis could not “not” perform, so for an hour she gave me the gift of a Janis Joplin live performance. I call it “The Concert For One.” I was taking pictures and she was singing just for me alone. Toward the end of the shoot Juliana came home from ballet practice, and because the studio was upstairs she heard the music but could tell it wasn’t a recording. So she came up, peeked in and saw that Janis was singing and I was shooting. She ran down to Haight Street, bought a red rose, then raced back to the house and presented the rose to Janis.
Tom Morello, Audioslave, Warfield Theatre, San Francisco, 2003
Rock music, fashion, lovely young women, and gritty street photojournalism.

It’s a wonderful life...