

# Folk Festival There—Mariposa

Paula Stone

1966

“To meet, to talk, and to sing with people on a human basis, this is the unique offering at Mariposa,” Mike Seeger mused while listening at the open-air concert Saturday night amongst a crowd of some 6,000 young people. “You can say something about the physical setting; it had good balance, good musical balance, but the main thing is the spirit—which is hard to generate at a large festival.”

The Mariposa Folk Festival is one of the most outstanding of its kind. This would exclude Newport, which most old-guard hippies wouldn't touch with a ten-foot pole for all its circus-like teeny bopper fare. The people were the thing that made Mariposa something special. The median age of the participants was about twenty-two, and the majority attending were knowledgeable and included a great many professionals and semi professionals). The people were mainly Canadians, predominately from Toronto; although some came from such remote places as Nova Scotia, Quebec and Vancouver. There were American representatives from the Boston, New York and Chicago scenes as well as various other cities of lesser folk renown. There was a camaraderie which was immediately apparent, from the first concert to the last workshop. The performers were at their best—knowing that they were playing for perhaps the most appreciative and at the same time the most critical audience for a long time.

This year the Festival was held in Caledon East, the kind of town which, if you close your eyes for a moment, you pass on the road. The particular place was Innis Lake, a magnificent private place rented for the Festival. With many acres of rolling hills, a lake for swimming, camping grounds and refreshment trucks scattered liberally, the setting was idyllic for folk music. It was not always as pleasant as this year however. In 1965 the Festival was plagued with rain and drunken crowds. The rain was eliminated by luck—or perhaps the performing Canadian-Indian dancers. The drunks, however, were weeded out in a very sticky way. Each car entering the Festival grounds was checked by a squadron of Canadian police which would put the Tactical Mobile Units to shame. Also, the price of tickets was very steep for a folk festival—\$3.50 and \$3.75 for concerts, and \$3.00 for the workshops on Saturday and Sunday afternoons.

This, it seems was the most peaceful year yet. In 1961, 1962, 1963, the Festival was held at Orillia, Ontario for which the gathering is named. A renowned Canadian author, Stephen Leacock in his “Sunshine Sketches” did a story on Orillia calling it Mariposa. The words mean summer mood in French, butterfly in Spanish. The third year in Orillia, rumor has it, author Ed MacCurdy (of “Last Night I Had The Strangest Dream”) got drunk and led an all-out rip-roaring town-bursting brawl. The following year the farmers threatened that they would kill any more folksingers trying to hold a meeting there and actually stationed guards on the road complete with pitchforks and shotguns. That year the program was held at the Maple Leaf Gardens and needless to say certainly lacked any feeling of closeness, camaraderie or warmth toward which the Festival is aimed.

The feeling generated by all was that America is a pretty lousy place to be from, with anti-American cracks coming from everyone; from both the Canadian and American performers and participants in general. In fact, at the Saturday night concert Carolyn Hester did a song about the draft and some Americans were hard put to explain the intricacies of the Draft to bewildered Canadians.

One important bit of in-group gossip was confirmed at the Saturday night concert. Before her closing song Carolyn Hester made an intense, personal plea for all those riding motorcycles to please go out and buy helmets for themselves and their friends. Her song was "Pack Up Your Sorrows" by Richard Farina who was recently killed in a motorcycle accident. She then told how Bob Dylan had injured two vertebrae of his neck and sustained a fractured skull when involved just a few weeks ago in a very serious motorcycle accident.

The calibre of entertainment was magnificent, with performers representing every phase of folk music from blues to gospel to ethnic to rock. There was no doubt about the fact that the contemporary music composed within the folk idiom is accepted by the hardiest traditionalists, including Mike Seeger and the Beers Family who gave their affirmation to the new music.

One rather wry incident arose along this line. Ian Tyson (whose Sylvia is baby-making) comes on like a cross between a riverboat gambler and a Marlboro cowboy. He's slick and sure; and he talks with a cigar clenched between his pretty, even teeth Mike Todd style. Ian was the master of ceremonies both Friday and Saturday nights. He said that he believed folk-rock to be a valid title for this type of music because the material was "folk derived."

He continued to say that it definitely belonged in such a festival as Mariposa because "it is the direct musical descendent of our urban folk revival of a few years ago." About five minutes later, while interviewing Ray Perdue of "The Stormy Clovers," a Toronto-based folk-rock group, I received a quote from one of the group which would have knocked poor Ian back on his well-heeled heels. Mr. Perdue estimated that folk was definitely not the major influence in his music. "If anything," he said, "the music is folk-rock-blues-western-classical-yakety-yak; so you may as well abbreviate it to folk-rock."

Other writers in the field veered more to the middle of those two extremes. Both Gordon Lightfoot and Detroit's own Joni Mitchell said that their material is definitely within the folk idiom. Both Joni and Gordie have contracts to do groovy song-films in Canada. Joni's is going to be done in Alberta for CBC; Gordie's will be for the Canadian National Railway as a documentary. Joni's song "The Urge For Going" is fast becoming traditional, as is Gordie's "Early Morning Rain." He sang this number and the most outstanding part of the rendition was the fantastic detail work by his hand-picked accompanists, Red Shea on guitar and Paul Weidman on bass.

Carolyn Hester was the most honest about her attitude toward the new songs and the old traditionalists which brought her recognition in the beginning. She sheepishly smiled when I asked her why she wasn't singing any of the old songs, and said she guessed she just had gotten caught up with the new. She expressed the attitude that soon the contemporary singers and writers will even out their repertoires with some of the old traditional songs—as soon as the thrill of new material wears down. She herself has been writing, and one of her songs, "I'm Not Sayin'" is done by Baez on her forthcoming folk-rock album.

So, the physical setting was like a storybook. The performers were excellent, and the program was broad in scope. But the most outstanding element of the entire weekend of song was the human, living quality of the folk behind the music.

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