

Mariposa festival swings to the finish

By RITCHIE YORKE

The eighth annual Mariposa Folk Festival came to a screeching, free-flowing halt on Toronto's Centre Island last night, as The Travellers, Jim McHarg's Metro Stompers, assorted folk personalities and more than 4,000 people yelled the refrain of Down By the Riverside.

More than 15,000 people attended the three-day festival, held for the first time on Centre Island. Previous Mariposa festivals were in Innis Lake and Orillia.

The total does not include hundreds of spectators who lined the river bank outside the festival boundary, and the dozens who simply beached their boats on the perimeter and walked right in.

Police said crowds were orderly.

Warmth and friendliness pervaded the Festival as artists discussed their beliefs and musical ideas with anyone who cared to listen. Groups of guitar-strumming, long-haired aspiring folk singers gave impromptu concerts from picnic tables, soloists climbed trees and sang their takeoffs on Joan Baez and Garden Lightfoot, and hundreds of guitarless folk fans sat in the shade and helped the stars sing their folk songs.

The absence of top-name international celebrities did not seem to hurt the box-office, and created a rare informality among artist and audience alike. Singer Mike Seeger, a board member of the Newport Jazz Festival, said big names bring high pressure and formality.

And despite missing names like Buffy St. Marie, there was no shortage of fresh and original talent on display at Mariposa. More than 100 artists from Canada and overseas took part.

The 26 daily workshops, held under the trees, were well-attended and well-received. The most popular workshop was Saturday's examination of Rural and Urban blues, featuring the Howlin' Wolf Band, Bukka White, Judy Roderick, Bill Monroe and Mike Seeger.

Howlin' Wolf, a veteran urban-blues exponent, delighted an audience of more than 1500 young people, with his gutsy, meaningful songs, and his unusual stage antics. The huge, almost evil-looking singer fell to his knees, lay on the floor, and writhed in lyrical agony, much to the delight of those armed with cameras close to the stage.

Bukka White, from the rural blues school, displayed an upretentious wit



Howlin' Wolf whoops it up while lying down onstage at Centre Island.

and a superb rhythm in his guitar playing.

Sunday's equally successful New Songwriters Workshop, hosted by Joni Mitchell and Murray McLaughlin, was informal and presented some worthy new talent. More than 1500 people gathered on the grass to hear original material by several artists.

Vancouver's Vera Johnson, one of the country's most prolific composers and fiction writers, proved so popular she was given a standing ovation and made an overwhelming appearance on last night's concert. Her musical tribute to the Prime Minister (sample lyric: 'Pierre Trudeau is very astute, Not only that, he's very cute') was received enthusiastically.

Generally the workshop audiences looked more off-beat than the entertainers. Sleeping bags and guitar cases, decorated with travel stickers, dotted the grass. Some of the more unconventional head attire included a safety helmet painted with flowers, ten-gallon

cowboy hats, safari helmets, plumed hats, and even an elegant black top hat on a youth in jeans.

Standard dress seemed to be blue or white jeans in various stages of disrepair, denim jackets, and brightly-colored shirts. Many came without shoes.

Other workshops provide a unique opportunity to watch ethnic dancing and singing. The Saugeen Indian Dancers offered an excellent series of traditional dances, a poetry seminar gave aspiring poets a chance to air their words, instrumental sessions allowed those who'd brought their guitars along to play for an audience, and various aspects of folk music, such as Bluegrass and its Roots, were explored in off-the-cuff concerts and discussions.

Basically, the workshops were light-hearted concert sessions. If you liked one particular artist, you went to his or her workshops as well as to the night concert.

The Friday night concert was relaxed and even more informal than

usual. It was a particular triumph for Joni Mitchell (who has never sounded better) and for Bukka White. The concert wound up with Oscar Brand and several other artists offering a 30-minute tribute to Woody Guthrie. A crowd of 2,500 attended.

The Howlin' Wolf Blues Band closed Saturday's concert with a 40-minute sampling of growling and infectious blues music. Murray McLaughlin, the 20-year-old from Toronto with excellent writing talents, delighted the audience of almost 4,000 with his intriguing lyrics and catchy melodies.

Californian Steve Gillette, the dark horse of Mariposa '68, is another young singer-composer to watch. His guitar-playing was strong and vibrant, his voice full of emotion and compassion.

Sunday evening's concert was hosted by Bruno Gerussi in violet turtleneck and gold medallion.

Dixieland group, Jim McHarg's Metro Stompers, set the pace with free-swinging renditions of familiar fare. Sara Grey, called "America's authentic Appalachian singer" followed, and offered traditional folk songs in a crisp, undiluted voice.

Gilles Vigneault, famed Quebec folk singer making his first appearance in Ontario in four years, took the audience by storm during a 30-minute set. "The reason I haven't played here for so long is because I wasn't asked," he said after the concert. "But I'll be back again on the 12th and 13th of October to do concerts at York University."

At the conclusion of the concert, several hundred people gathered near the ferry wharf for informal hootenannies.

Generally, Mariposa '68 was well-organized and the artistic talent artistically selected. Perhaps there could have been more of an accent on traditional Canadian folk songs. There were some problems with a shortage of eating spots and ferries, but these are minor things.

Mariposa '68 was a spectacular triumph, for performers and organizers. It showed folk music is alive and well, and Toronto is the logical site for such a festival. The city showed foresight in allowing the Festival to be held on Centre Island, and one hopes this will be the start of a long and equally successful series of Mariposa festivals in the new location.

Zero Mostel quits APA for film