

Everybody played it cool at Mariposa

By PETER GODDARD

INNIS LAKE — In North America there have been, traditionally, three racial elements in society — youth, the Negro and the intellectual. What happens, then, when representatives of these groups are crowded into the 200 acres near this lake under the aegis of the seventh Mariposa Folk Festival? Very little.

Some hapless hippies tried to disturb the quiet atmosphere, but their iconoclastic buttons, beards, bands and behavior failed to turn the folk music fans on or the some 90 police officers off. "Everything's been so quiet," said one officer, "that they've been calling me 'Sir'."

For artistic director Estelle Klein and the festival committee it was a triumph of content over style, of message over medium. With only a passing nod to modern pop music, the festival emphasized traditional approaches to folk music in both idea and performances.

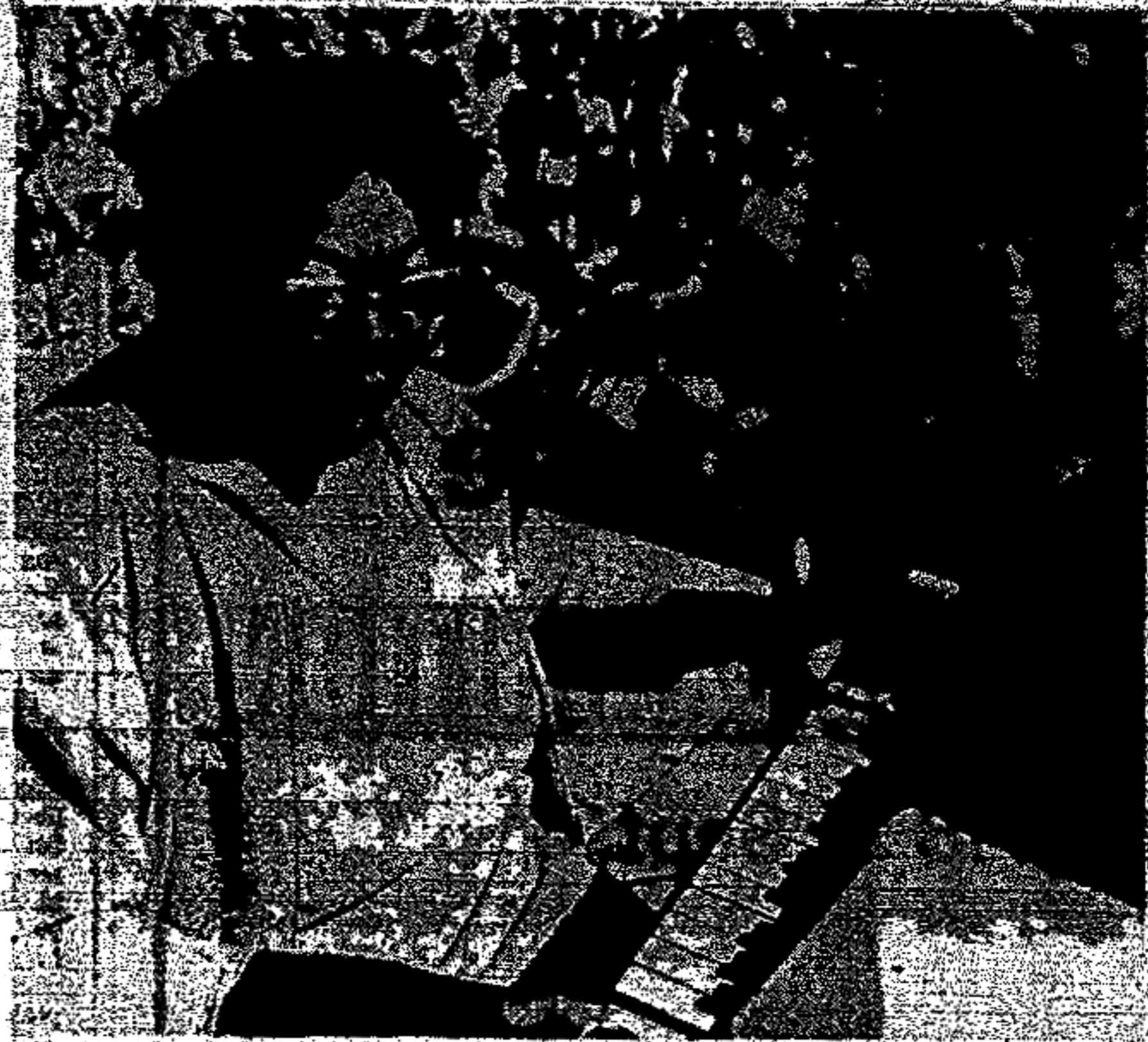
For the performers, who had been betrayed by Bob Dylan (he went folk-rock) and bewildered by the Beatles (who went folk-strange), Mariposa was an opportunity to reveal something of the backgrounds and traditions of the art. For the audience, it was an escape from a juke-box day and a Yorkville night.

For both, Mariposa was a chance to study the breadth and depth of traditional folk-music styles. It provoked few outbursts from either artists or audiences, but it was the closest Toronto will come to folk authenticity in a long time.

But sitting in monk-like reverence, the audiences watched most of the five concerts, workshops, seminars and films with the detached sensitivity of a group of sociologists watching aboriginal tribal dances. "It's been too academic," singer Tom Rush remarked. "It's really not a very festive festival."

This was not the performers' fault. Traditional folk music has come to be regarded as a relic of another era. In the new pop music the listener is to be totally involved, all his senses are immersed in the frenetic interplay of sight and sound. To quote McLuhan "in the new music, the ear favors no point of view. We are enveloped by sound. It forms a seamless web around us." At discotheques, the eye is as important as the ear; but traditional folk music requires one only to listen.

While there was this emphasis on the older styles, each of the three major evening concerts had something for everybody — even for those with no taste at all: From southern rural blue-grass (Lilly Brothers and Herb Hooven) to northern urban Negro Blues (Buddy Guy's Chicago Blues Band), music from the time of the Holy Rollers (The Staple Singers) to the rock 'n' rollers (The Kensington Market), from the pretentious folk-rock prattlings of O. D. Bodkins (Elyse Wemberg) to the soft, supple soprano of Joni Mitchell.



Sippie Wallace had more vitality in her gospel and blues than young performers did.

And after an artistically uneven Friday night concert, Saturday night's performance were well-paced.

Sippie Wallace (a blues singer who first recorded in the Twenties and whom folk music has discovered much the same way jazz rediscovered Earl Hines, brought more vitality to her gospel and blues singing than did many singers one-third her age. Like a number of other blues artists (Blind Roy Fuller or Brother Son Bonds), she was able to keep the two types apart.

Gordon Lowe showed more sensitivity at adapting (notably in Leonard Cohen's *Suzanne*) than as an originator; the Pennywhistlers, a greater instinct for complex rhythms (a in Macedonian, Bulgarian and Russian songs) than half the Toronto Symphony; and 20-year-old David Rae, more critical attitude for his guitar playing than his singing.

Following him The Travellers, Joni Mitchell and the Kensington Market were a brief catalogue of what folk music was, is and will be. And although Richie Havens' incendiary guitar playing and his broken, hissing singing took the audience on a chilling nightwalk in a Rorschachian landscape of ideas, the climax

of the evening came with arrival of Buddy Guy's Chicago Blues Band.

Sunday's concert, the first in the festival's seven-year history, was like the other two. The common denominator for all the performers was a unique and specialized approach. The result: a diversified, but consistently musical program.

After the vibrancy of English traditional singer Louis Killen's voice, Leonard Cohen's sounded emasculated. But like the early Bob Dylan, Cohen's technical inadequacy on the guitar and his penchant for stereotyped chord changes took little away from his lyrics. Novelist (*Beautiful Losers*), poet (*Spice-Box of the Earth*, *Flowers for Hitler*), his imagery is often flagrantly sexual though always in taste.

Buffy Sainte-Marie, the acknowledged star of the festival, was equal to her billing. Dressed in a flowing orange and yellow robe, she appeared on the stage like an Indian Ophelia. Her rich contralto was emotionally strong but always in full control. Her songs had a ring of joyfulness that they have not had before. This is perhaps understandable: she announced her impending marriage.