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MARIPOSA '66
a musical orgy

MODERN PILGRIMS AT A MUSICAL SHRINE

BY JOHN MACFARLANE

PHOTOGRAPHS: GRAHAM BEZANT



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The Mariposa Folk Festival is what Marshall McLuhan would call an all-at-once happening: everyone's involved in everything. It's a surrealist, open-air revival meeting at which the faithful wear hikinis and Carnaby Street and the priests all carry guitars.

Mariposa '66 — three concerts, a half dozen workshops — a 40-hour musical orgy for which an estimated 11,000 folk buffs made the pilgrimage this month to Innis Lake, a 100-acre private park about 40 miles north and west of Toronto.

There, gathered around a canopied stage, they heard Pete Seeger, Tom Paxton, Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee, the Staple Singers, Doc Watson, the Beers Family, Gordon Lightfoot, Carolyn Hester, Ian Tyson, Joni Mitchell and Sunnyland Slim, Big Walter Horton and Johnny Young.

There, by day, they sat on the grass in the corner of a field where blue-jeaned, sandaled performers conducted informal workshops on guitar styles, the autoharp, fiddle, banjo, harmonica, international folk music and the blues. Or they endured the mid-afternoon heat in a stuffy pavilion where Pete Seeger was showing home movies of Negro inmates singing work songs in a Texas penitentiary.

Singing, talking, swimming, walking, strumming, looking, learning. Girls, boys, men, women, children, police gathered in this pastoral setting where the only traces of that other urban world were the jets descending on Malton airport, 30 miles to the south, and the trucks vending cold drinks and raw hotdogs.

They came to this sixth Mariposa festival to learn flat-picking guitar from Doc Watson. A couple of hundred of them brought their own instruments — guitars.

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A harmonica and Big Walter Horton, a name synonymous with Chicago's postwar blues resurgence

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Tom Paxton's fans weren't all concerned with his difficulties in entering Canada from the United States



MODERN PILGRIMS AT A MUSICAL SHRINE

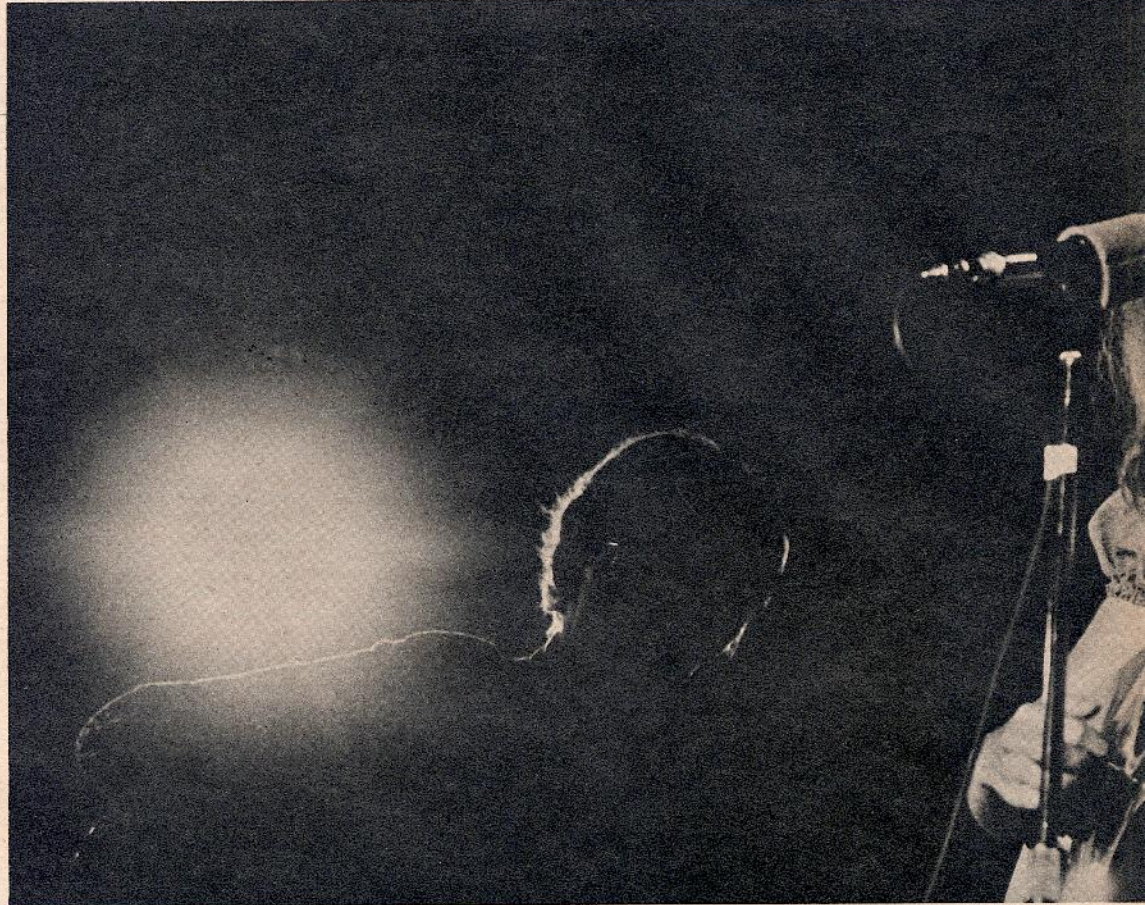
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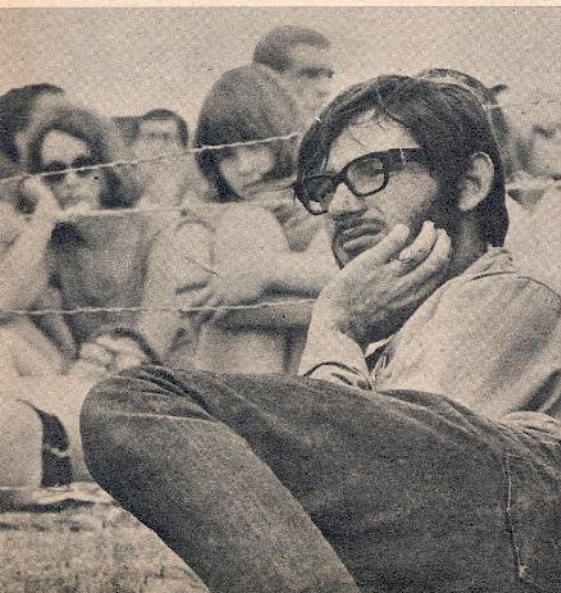
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banjos, mandolins, dulcimers. They sat in the shade of an old oak while Pete Seeger's brother, Mike, talked about the auto-harp . . .

"If you don't learn from nobody it sounds like you don't learn from nobody . . . It's like this: down with the thumb, down with the thumb, up with the finger . . . bum diddy bum diddy bum . . ."

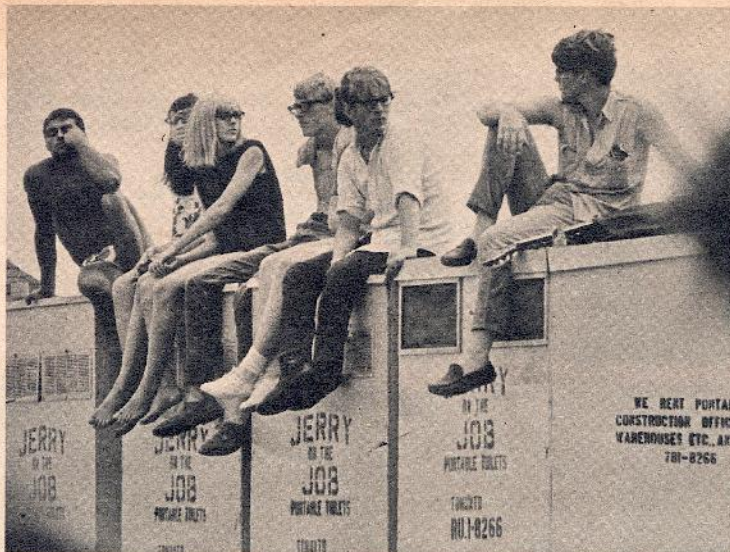
They came to be entertained; to hear Pete Seeger sing *Down By The Riverside* with the Staple Singers at the close of a Friday night concert at which Joni Mitchell, a willowy Canadian, painted lyrical pictures of life on the Prairies . . .

"And I get the urge for goin', when The meadow grass is turnin' brown, and Summer time is fallin' down, and Winter's closin' in."

They came to hear Sunnyland Slim, whose weathered features tell the story of the Mississippi folk blues, sing *Johnson Machine Gun* and *Harlem Can't Be Heaven*; to hear Sonny Terry, now walking with a cane, turn his harmonica to *Hootin' Blues*, a song he played every night for two years on Broadway in *Finian's Rainbow*.

They came to call for encores from Orillia-born Gordon Lightfoot, to clap hands to the throbbing gospel music of the Staple Singers, or to laugh as Tom Paxton, whose difficulties in gaining entry to Canada couldn't have concerned them less, sang a spoof called *Talkin' Death of God Blues*.

Rain never more than threatened, although during the hot, soggy afternoons it might have been a welcome relief. Doc Watson, a blind minstrel from the hill country, opened his Sunday afternoon set with a warm-hearted, "We got it a little cooler up here (on the stage) than you



Urban inhibitions dissolved easily: folk music and musicians were the sole interest

folks down there. I know; I've been out in that sun!" Only there wasn't any sun. The sky was overcast and had been for about 15 minutes.

During the day, when the workshops were in session, performers and spectators mixed informally. Without as much as a turn of the head, boys cast on the image of Bob Dylan with guitars slung over their backs would brush elbows with Pete Seeger, wearing a faded pink shirt, green crewneck sweater, beige slacks, desert boots and looking for all the world like a college professor in a supermarket.

Others stopped to listen as this father-figure of American folk music told a couple of reporters that "folk music is a little like sailing. Have you ever been sailing? Well, if you've ever sailed into a thick fog you'll know that when you can't see where you're going it sometimes helps to look back and see where you've been".

In these informal surroundings, in which Seeger's little girl swam in the lake with the children of some of the spectators, the distinction between performer and spectator disintegrated. Everyone

became part of a community whose interest, above and beyond all others, was folk music and folk musicians.

Thus, Ian Tyson (he of Ian and Sylvia) told the audience at the Friday night concert that his guitarist, David Rea, was celebrating his successful evasion of the draft. And the following evening, Carolyn Hester brought news that two days earlier Bob Dylan had suffered neck and head injuries in a motorcycle accident.

Urban inhibitions dissolved easily in the queues outside the dozen communal out-houses. A young man courteously offered his place to a young lady standing nearby; she, concealing a blush, replied: "Thank you, no. I've already been."

For some it was a fashion show — a chance to parade the latest in non-conformist uniforms. For others it was an excuse to spend a weekend away from home, to pick up a girl, to do a little clandestine drinking.

A special detachment of 103 Ontario Provincial Police were constantly checking cars, handbags, food hampers and blankets for alcoholic contraband. There were no serious incidents, although on Saturday night one drunken festival-goer began chopping up tents in the nearby field where several hundred spectators were camped for the weekend. The police had come prepared for the riots and orgies that had occasionally marred previous festivals.

Financially, it was the most successful festival ever. The festival management plans to plow about \$10,000 profit into preparations for *Mariposa '67* — a five-day Centennial special — and a year-round program to promote public interest in folk music.

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