

# Mariposa: grown up now and still the people's choice

By ROBERT MARTIN

THE RAIN had stopped by the time the 12th annual version of Canada's biggest folk festival got under way yesterday morning, and while there were large pools of water and the grass was soggy the blue denim crowd couldn't have cared less.

They wandered in bare feet between the six stages where every brand of folk music was playing continuously. And if your pants got wet sitting on the grass, they were only patched jeans anyway. Fortunately, by afternoon the sun had burned away the mist and the site began to dry out.

The folk crowd appears to be growing up. The majority of Friday visitors were between 20 and 30 and many of them brought along small children strapped papoose-style to their backs.

There's plenty of rapport between performers and audience: during a harmonica workshop, a call for a fiddle, a guitar and a banjo was instantly supplied from the audience. In fact, the fiddle was supplied by John Allan Cameron, one of the performers who happened to be part of the audience at the time.

On another stage, Bukka White, a veteran blues man, crashed a set of his old friend Roosevelt Sykes, piano player and writer of blues classics like Driving Wheel. White did a little dirty-boogie dancing to Roosevelt's slamming piano, first solo then with a flaming redhead. The audience was delighted, not only with the dancing but also with the music of their folk favorites playing their own compositions.

As folk music has changed its emphasis from protest to quiet affirmation, many entertainers emphasized humor and a very relaxed delivery. When a dog fight interrupted a set, Bill Vanaver incorporated it into the act. (He also told an amazing bilingual tale in Albanian and English about a man and his dog.) In a workshop on humorous songs, Utah Phillips delivered some Aussie sheep-shearer's songs of dubious morality and undoubted hilarity.

Those who preferred to make their own music, rather than just listen to it, started their own "stages" on pic-

nic tables where people gathered round for rousing singalongs.

In the heat of the afternoon, some took a flying leap into the lake to cool off while others folded up under a shady tree with a cold beer. When the sun finally started going down and the sunburns started coming up, those with enough energy left joined in square dances and singalongs.

Most preferred to sit quietly for concerts like that given by Taj Mahal. But the tall black blues singer did not allow them to remain passive for long. He got them going with a Leadbelly holler that brought people to their feet shouting and dancing.

Then he conducted them like an orchestra, moving their voices up and down and making them clap their hands in various rhythms, even using them as an off-beat counterpoint to his guitar. He ended his set with a 15-minute gospel shout that exercised the devil from all present and left the audience shouting for more.

New at Mariposa this year is an alternative to the hotdog and hamburger fare at the island's concession booths. You can now get peaches, strawberries, sunflower seeds and carob walnut brownies.

Although there are no headliners, some of the better known names appearing are Bruce Cockburn, Murray McLachlan and Adam Mitchell; bluesmen Bukka White and Taj Mahal and some up-and-coming performers, that Mariposa is famous for presenting before they become inaccessible superstars—Bonnie and Raitt, David Bromberg and John Prine.

This year has been smooth traveling—exceptional for Mariposa. Its four-year stay in Orillia, where it got its start, ended abruptly in 1964, when it was evicted one day before the festival was to open. Estimates that 20,000 people would descend on the town alarmed the Medonte Township council which feared a recurrence of the food and accommodation shortages and the incidents of rowdiness that marred the previous year's show.

The festival moved hastily to Maple Leaf Stadium, taking with it only its name, Mariposa, the name Stephen



Blues man Bukka White, left, took time off to dance with Roberta Richards to the piano sounds of Roosevelt Sykes.

Leacock gave Orillia in Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town, and a lot of bad feeling.

After an interim two years at Innis Lake, in 1968 the festival found what has become its permanent home, Toronto Island. "Tommy Thompson loves us," crows Dick Flohill, publicity officer for the festival. Thompson, the Metro Parks Commissioner, "even gave us a big financial break by changing the terms of rental from 10 per cent of the gross to a flat \$300 a day. You know, he actually opened the first festival at the island in 1968 by singing a folk song."

Success came with the move to Toronto and almost ruined the festival. There is a delicate balance between too small an audience, which means financial disaster, and too big, which destroys the sense of intimacy between performer and audience that Mariposa has always sought to achieve.

The concept of having a large number of people at a single event ended with the disastrous closing night concert in 1970. People swam in the lagoon and stormed the bridge to get in free to see James Taylor and Joni Mitchell.

"It was our own fault," says Dick Flohill. "We tried it and it failed. Now there's no star nonsense and no special treatment."

"Actually, a lot of the trouble comes not from the performers but from their management. One performer was happy to come for our fee of \$75 a day plus expenses, but then his agent phoned and wanted us to pay for him and a record company man and a press man and a few other hangers-on. We passed on that one. Somebody else wanted us to lay on a special boat to get an act over to the island. No way." Said Buzz Chertkoff, a Mariposa director, "It horrified us and we refused to make any statement about it for a long time. We wondered if it was really worthwhile to work so hard for so little to put on a beautiful festival like Mariposa for people who obviously didn't appreciate it."

"Then we started getting letters from people who had crashed the gate. They sent money and apologized for what they had done because they had heard rumors that the festival was going to be cancelled. So we decided to continue it."

But because of the trouble the festival was radically altered. No more superstars, no more evening concerts, no more acres of folding chairs around a huge central stage. Now there are six stages with acts going continuously and simultaneously from 10:30 a.m. until 8:30 p.m.

"One of the biggest complaints in the 500 letters we got after last year's festival was that you miss five-sixths of the show," said Flohill. Actually it's not as bad as it sounds since the festival is spread over three days. Thus, if you missed Taj Mahal yesterday, you can still catch him tomorrow.

"Despite the drawbacks," says Flohill, "90 per cent liked the new format. And even though you miss so much, the amount you do get is mind-numbing. Ten hours a day for three days is enough to give anybody a case of music overload."

The new format has yet to prove itself financially sound. Last year, the first for the all-day sessions, the festival lost \$5,000. A lot of people who came just for the big names have been lost, but those connected with Mariposa feel they are well lost.

The directors say they're not upset about the money; after all, it certainly is not the first time Mariposa has gone into the red. In fact, says Buzz Chertkoff, the festival has made money only twice—1969 and 1970—and "most of the profits went to pay off debts, some of which were 10 years old. We paid people who thought they never would be paid."

The directors decided that a big enough group of hard-core folk fans exists to keep Mariposa going without headliners. And they were right if advance sales are any indication. Mail orders were up from 279 last year to about 600 by mid-week.

One fan wrote to explain that his ticket order "has been delayed while I try to recover my house from the flood. I was a block from the Susquehanna in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania," scene of recent flooding disasters.

Through relocation, power failures, rain storms and other disasters, Mariposa has never cancelled. "The show goes on, rain or shine," says Flohill. "However, since we've started including a native peoples' section in the program (in 1970), there's been no rain—until yesterday. I'm certain they've had something to do with it."

Fans have taken a responsible attitude toward seemingly minor things—the site itself, for example. "The people who come are litter-conscious," says Chertkoff. "The Metro Parks Department says we're the cleanest event on the island. We leave the site in better shape than it was before we arrived."

Another appealing aspect of the festival is its peacefulness. With the exception of the 1970 gate-crashing incident, Mariposa has been quite tame since it moved to Toronto.

Dick Flohill laughs as he says, "This festival is so trouble-free, it's ridicu-

lous. Last year we had three plainclothes police. There were no uniformed cops on the site and there were no busts. In fact, it was so quiet that Saturday the plainclothes men asked if they could bring their wives on Sunday."

Why do people like Flohill and Chertkoff bother with Mariposa? It can't be for the money; last year fees for the five directors—who spend a total of a month or two over the year working on the festival—was \$4,000.

Nor does it seem to be for the glory. Explains Chertkoff: "None of us is on an ego trip. We prefer to stay in the background. In fact, few people who go to the festival know who actually runs it. I do it first because of a love of folk music I've had ever since I learned how to play a guitar years ago. Secondly, there is a certain amount of pleasure derived from bringing something as beautiful as Mariposa to a lot of people."

Many performers are equally dedicated. Bruce Cockburn, for example, whose standard fee for a single concert is about \$2,500 will do a show and conduct three workshops for \$75 a day plus expenses.

He will be there, explains Cockburn, because "It's a bit of a tradition with me. I've done it for about the last four years. I really get into all the different things you can do. There are a lot of people there you get to hear nowhere else except on records, like Jean Ritchie, who plays the dulcimer. This year they're having a real cajun band—the Balfa Freres."

For blind singer-guitarist Fred McKenna, this will be his first Mariposa and he says he looks forward to "mixing with other entertainers in my own range. (He is 38.) I want to talk to guys like Utah Phillips to see if their experiences were the same as mine."

The music at Mariposa divides broadly into two main areas, Canadian and other. The Canadian section is well represented: French Canada by Jean Marcoux, and Les Dancours du St. Laurent; native peoples by Alanis Abomsawin and the Dog Rib Indian Dancers; and down-east by the Wareham Brothers.

The Wareham Brothers is a new Mariposa discovery. The five brothers grew up in the classical folk tradition because of the isolation of their home on an island off an outpost in Newfoundland. There were no radios on the island and everything they learned was handed down orally. They were discovered when they moved to the mainland in Premier Joey Smallwood's relocation program.

The rest of Mariposa's music is an attempt to bring together all the various roots and branches of folk music. The Country Rebels with bluegrass music and Bukka White, the blues; John Allan Cameron, with Scottish and Irish traditions, and Hazel Dickens, country and western.

John Prine sings religious music; Mike Seeger, songs about hard times, and Fred McKenna promises a few ditties on his favorite subject, beer.

In addition to concerts, workshops are offered on a multitude of instruments: guitar and slide guitar, banjo, mandolin, fiddle, dulcimer, autoharp, even flutes and whistles.

The emphasis this year is on control and organization. Organizers say they have planned for every contingency that 11 years of experience, often unhappy, have taught them to expect.

Approximately 5,000 people attended the festival yesterday, despite the soggy footing and early evening downpour. Bigger crowds are expected to day and tomorrow.



Having fun? Anya Sigin, 4, beams the answer to her mother, Linda.



Edith Butler strums away—one of the many music makers at Mariposa.