

Mariposa: Music among the trees

By LORIN LABARDEE

In a time when large festivals are dying out there is one that lives on. On Centre Island off Toronto in Lake Ontario the Mariposa Folk Festival enjoyed its 12th consecutive year of success last weekend.

The artists who drew the largest crowds at this Canadian happening were not even on the schedule. These were the "surprise" appearances by the big names. Whether or not they were truly unscheduled remains in doubt but the people weren't complaining. Joni Mitchell walked on stage and announced that she was going to play a few songs and the crowd went wild. The word spread throughout the island and in a short time the field around the stage was hidden beneath the crowd that had gathered.

But the real peak of the weekend was Neil Young's appearance. The first song he played



was "Helpless helpless" was obviously chosen from their plastic tarps and blankets to dance with each other amidst a cold, driving rain.

Another star who lent unexpected pleasure to the concert was Jackson Brown whose "Sweet Little Sixteen" brought the crowd to a handclapping frenzy. Jackson Brown is best known for his song "Doctor My Eyes."

One of the most important elements which contributed to the spirit of Mariposa was its island location. Arrayed with willow and pine trees, thick grass and a beach, Centre Is. was an ideal setting for the concert. It was the perfect expression of the peaceful, languid, together atmosphere which pervaded the entire concert.

The only damper on the festival was the rains that came on Friday and Saturday. The dirt became mud and blankets once used for sitting on were quickly converted into tents. But the spirit would not die.

Artists performed through out the downpours and preserved the crowds' mood with gay songs and handclapping tunes. The performers were reassured their

magic was working when the people came out from their plastic tarps and blankets to dance with each other amidst a cold, driving rain.

The design of the festival setting was unique in that there was no single central stage. Rather there were six separate stages where performers played constantly. The result was that during every hour of the festival there were six different acts going on at the same time, a situation which was the cause of unendless indecision for avid folk enthusiasts.

Most of the performers who played to the people were folk artists of limited fame from throughout the U.S. and Canada. There was John Prine, a Kris Kristofferson discovery from Chicago who sounds very much like Bob Dylan. Also at the concert was Bonnie Raitt, a bottleneck guitarist who has done much with the material of Sippie Wallace, Stephen Still and Stevie Winwood. Others who played were: Taj Mahal, Leon Redbone, Charles Bromberg and Owen McBride, a singer with origins in Ireland known for his Irish drinking songs.

Trying to emphasize a total

experience the festival promoters featured not only musical artists but also craftsmen of every sort and displays of the native peoples of Canada. Booths and displays were often extravagant productions where workers demonstrated a wide variety of crafts. Some of these included: candle-dipping, leather engraving, macrame, pottery, and weaving.

Many of the people that came to Mariposa were the traditional concert wayfarers, some living in tents and vans where they could, others living in local co-ops. Much of the crowd were easy people with a definite vent for folk music, some were leftovers from the rock concerts in search of live music in the open air.

Another distinct element in the crowd were families. Mothers, fathers, and children from the area who came to enjoy a day in the country with their favorite folk artists.

The people came in droves. The ferrys came to the island overflowing with passengers well into the afternoon. At night the lines to return home were winding, snaking masses.

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