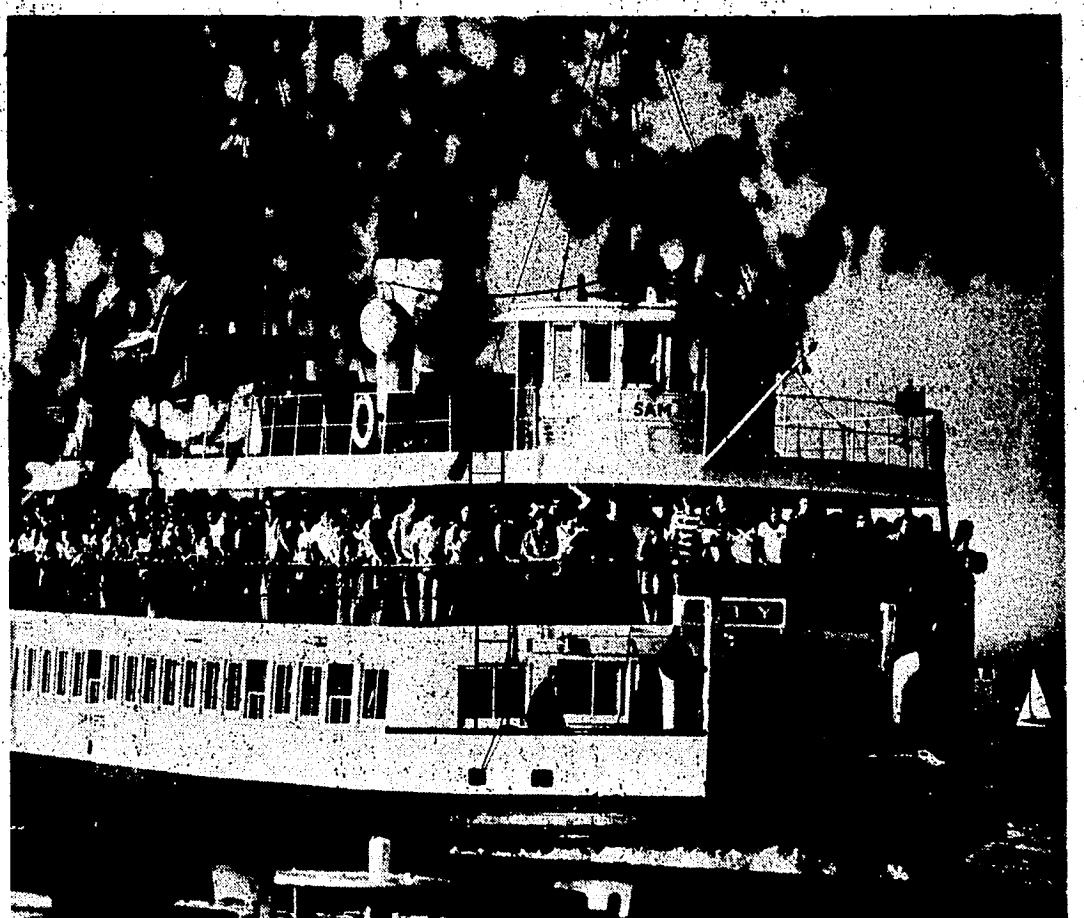




JONI MITCHELL giggles before her performance at the ninth annual Mariposa Folk Festival on Centre Island last night. About 9,000 attend.



GILLES VIGNEAULT took the audience by storm, bringing them to their feet with a 'jig' called La Danse a St. Dion. The Quebec chansonnier headed the opening night program with Miss Mitchell and Ian and Sylvia.



THE S.S. SAM McBRIDE and its fellow ferries started carrying festival fans across Toronto harbor before 10 in the morning to attend the instrumental workshops. All the performers at the three-day festival participate in the workshop sessions, showing folk enthusiasts how it's done. Yesterday a heavy rain drenched the afternoon workshop proceedings.

That lovin' spirit returns to the Mariposa Festival

By GRAHAM FRASER
Star staff writer

It was the kind of thing that is supposed to happen at Mariposa. The new songwriters' workshop was nearly over and Dave Bradstreet, 18, a fluid baritone who sounded like a smoother, more melodic Gordon Lightfoot, had just finished singing. The M.C., Kim Calloway, rushed out onto the stage, and with a wide grin said: "I have a big surprise—something that Dave doesn't know yet. John Posner of RCA Victor is in the audience, and Dave, they are definitely committed to record YOU in the very near future!"

It was real, it was true; his agent was ecstatic. And soon, John Posner was talking expansively about RCA's new studio opening in September, and telling Bradstreet how a designer could do wonderful things with his name on an album cover, and saying that they didn't want to turn him into something plastic, and that he saw Bradstreet doing for RCA what Lightfoot did for Warner Brothers, which, he had heard by the grapevine, was great things.

Folk festivals, which bring together newcomers and veterans, traditionalists and innovators, journeymen and stars, provide a sudden glimpse of the vast continuum of tradition and change, continuation and renewal in folk music. The ninth annual Mariposa Folk Festival, which began yesterday morning at Toronto Island with instrumental workshops and continues until Sunday night, has always been a place where Canadian folk-singers got a start, and a place where they have kept coming back.

This year brings back Ian and Sylvia, Gilles Vigneault and Joni Mitchell; the Tysons and Mitchell after long association with the Festival in the past, and Vigneault after a successful first visit last summer. Either because the audience was tired, or because they were dissatisfied with the Tyson's country-rock backed up by a rock group, their reception was polite; however, Gilles Vigneault and Joni Mitchell both had the crowd of 9,000 on their feet, shouting for more. The Festival continues with Taj Mahal, the New Lost City Ramblers and Doc and Merle Watson tonight, workshops today and Sunday, and, headlining Sunday night's concert, Joan Baez.

With 9,000 people at the opening concert last night, it looks as if this will be the most successful festival of the nine. Festival organizers have been somewhat irritated by the comparisons with Toronto Pop Festival's attendance of 40,000 a month ago. Dick Flohil, a festival organizer and publicity director, was very emphatic:

"We don't WANT 35,000 people in a football stadium. I mean, that's fun, and all—but it's not for us. We're a friendly, intimate scene, man—I don't want to sound like a p.r. flack, but there's a spirit of love at Mariposa! There's no other word for it!"

Where this spirit was most evident yesterday was at the Workshops. With a workshop given by Paul Cadwell, a New England classical banjoist now in his 80s, another organized by the Toronto Area

Bluegrass Committee, and instrumental workshops bringing many of the performers together, it was a connoisseur's delight.

Cadwell, his face soft with age, and his voice stammering occasionally, sat surrounded by 50 people spread out on the grass, all of whom were in awe at what he was doing with his banjo, and charmed by his quiet comments about banjo-playing. Playing a classical style popular at the turn of the century, (he's the last surviving member of the Society of Classical Banjoists. Cadwell gave the instrument an almost Elizabethan sound, rippling delicately. Behind him, adolescent geese skittered on the beach, and children played on nearby swings.

Earlier, before lunch, people had been able to watch Toronto guitarist David Rea jamming casually with Doc and Merle Watson. You could see people peering intently to see how Merle does those runs and licks, what kind of strum or pick Doc or David used.

The afternoon workshops were interrupted by rain; as the sky opened up, and it became difficult to see the Toronto Dominion Centre through the driving rain, hundreds of people huddled under picnic tables, trees, bandstands, or refreshment area roofs, many of them to strike up impromptu sing-songs.

But the rain didn't last, and the Workshops started up again.

At a smaller bandstand, operated by the Toronto Area Bluegrass Committee—a group of 30 enthusiasts led by committee chairman Doug Benson, a Toronto high school teacher who edits the magazine Bluegrass Breakdown—a session on bluegrass went on all day. (It continues throughout the festival). In the afternoon the workshop featured Don Reno from Canton N.C. on banjo, with Bill Harrell on guitar, backed up by Jerry and Del McCoury on bass and second guitar, and fiddler Buck Ryan.

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Reno, a thick, affluent-looking man, his white hair smoothly in place, was wearing his brown slacks belled high on the belly, and white boots; according to Benson, he is one of the top two bluegrass banjo pickers playing anywhere. The McCoury Brothers, with thinner, harder faces, came forward for a solo. Singing a tenor harmony, they sang high and almost harshly, slipping into a harmonic white, their vowels flat and high and hard: "It's kinda sa-a-a-ad, but it's true life."

It was a country sound; as pure and hard as country life. Bluegrass is one stream of the various forms of revision and transformation that affected Irish jig music and Scottish reels and ballads—

making it a cousin to both the charming Cape Breton fiddling that opened the evening concert last night, and Gilles Vigneault's 'jig' La Danse a St. Dion, which took the festival by storm.

The Cape Breton Fiddlers proved to play quite differently from bluegrass fiddlers—with a strong, more vigorous highland burr to the fiddling than the Appalachian humming.

But the first emotional crest of the evening was the power of the welcome given to Gilles Vigneault, the lean, hawk-nosed chansonnier. Caught up by the enthusiasm of the crowd, he led the audience in choruses of Qu'il est difficile d'aimer (how difficult it is to love)—prompting one Vigneault admirer to comment later, "Qu'il est difficile de faire chanter les Anglais! Et il l'a fait!" ("How difficult it is to make the English sing! And he did it!")

Laughing and frolicking, stamping his feet and leaping in his wild 'jig', Vigneault was totally at ease—in contrast to his nervousness and restraint a year ago. The audience adored it; later, Vigneault commented: "I was immersed in the excitement!"

But the warmest welcome of the evening was reserved for Joni Mitchell, the tall girl from Saskatchewan with the wail-like eyes who made her first major appearance at Mariposa—and has come back every year since—this year from her new home in California.

She is as gentle as a poet—but reveals herself, for better and for worse in her songs, with a ruthlessness that shows her strength. As she sang, there was a battery of photographers in the pit before the stage, trying, like birdwatchers, to capture something that the others couldn't see.

From the shyness there was a breathiness—a hesitancy as she spoke, a nervousness which made her contact with the audience seem more, not less, intimate.

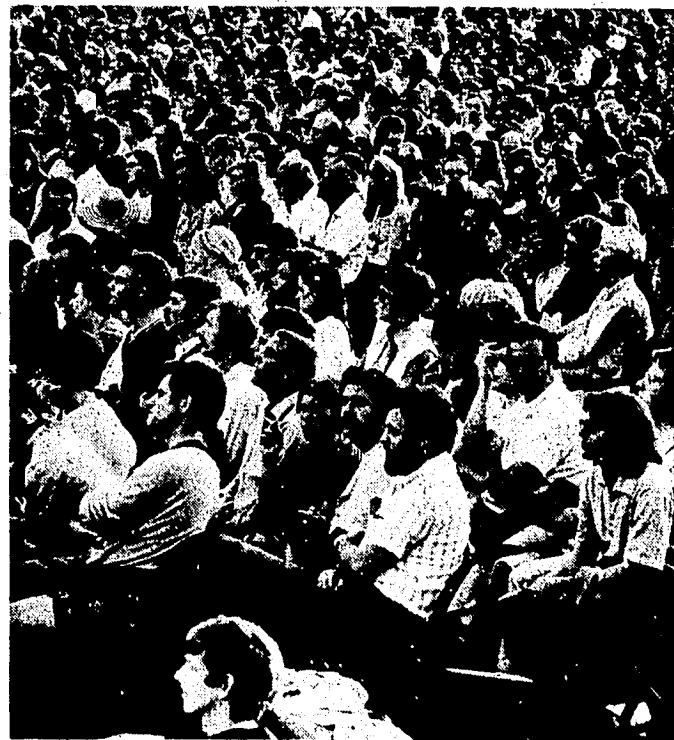
"Since the last time I was here, I've, uh, learned to play a little on the piano—and I'd like to play something now," she said. "It's kind of a country-western, Dale Evans-Roy Rodger, Happy Trails To You swing thing."

She said she wrote it after seeing a man on a street-corner in New York, playing his clarinet to passers-by who weren't listening; she said she called it "He played real good for free," because he did—until someone jostled him and broke his clarinet.

It was a sweet, lilting song with warmth and compassion. She sang a few more songs, her voice dropping and rising, shifting an octave suddenly for a burst of pure soprano power, full-throated and beautiful.

Then she told a long, involved story about going to the dentist, buying a pair of shoes and feeding a stray cat. At the end of it, half-smug for having got all these people to listen to her story, and half self-conscious, like a shy girl who finds, in a coincidence of silence, that everyone at a party is listening to her, she said, "That's all, folks!"

And when she finished, the audience rose as one, enraptured by a bundle of melody, insight, wisdom and intimacy, and begged for more.



THE EVENING AUDIENCE spilled onto the grass to hear Oscar Brand introduce Ian and Sylvia, Joni Mitchell, John Allan Cameron, Bonnie Dobson, Alanis Oeomsawin and Gilles Vigneault. Evening admission is \$3.50, daytime \$2.



SALLY PATERSON was among the people listening to the banjos, the guitars, the fiddles — and those pure country voices.



AT NIGHTFALL, with the crowds jamming onto the boats, a few lingered on to savor Mariposa's "spirit of love," as one organizer called it. There'll be more of the same tonight and tomorrow night, climaxing with a performance by Joan Baez. All things considered, it looks as if it'll be about the most successful Mariposa festival since the first one in 1961.

Star photos by Boris Spremo, Doug Griffin and Fred Ross