

# Marvellous Mariposa



by Billy Altman  
Music Editor

—Cohen

Another year at Mariposa, the folk festival that attempts to work on a "no stars" principle. So who shows up for this three day gathering at Toronto Islands? Well, do the names Jackson Browne, Gordon Lightfoot, Neil Young, Joni Mitchell or Bob Dylan ring any bells?

Yes, they all were there and other than Dylan, they all played unscheduled surprise sets, much to the amazement and delight of the thousands who were there. I guess you could think of it as a giant bonus for all the faithful-folkies who come each year to take part in a festival that places more importance on the people that attend it than on the money that they spend.

While that first paragraph is sinking in, I'll backtrack and try to reassemble the festival as best I can. Arriving in Toronto a bit behind schedule late Friday afternoon, we went over to the island on the old ferry boat that somehow fits in perfectly with the whole spirit of things at Mariposa. It's a friendly, somehow personal ride even though there's lots of folks on the boat.

#### Programs, programs

There are six workshop areas at Mariposa, and they run simultaneously from ten each morning till dusk, which can drive you nuts if you don't have a program, but that only costs a quarter so everybody buys one. Then you know for sure that you're missing Bonnie Raitt while you're seeing Taj Mahal or vice versa. Really everybody plays at three or more workshops, so you do get to see everyone by the time the whole thing's over.

The first person I saw Friday when I got there was Michael Cooney, which figures, cause he plays at at least half of all the workshops. He's a jack of all trades at Mariposa, hosting anything cause he knows everything.

The first big surprise of the weekend was a band of thirties barroom singers, Martin, Bogan and Armstrong. Guitar, mandolin, fiddle and standup bass. The fiddle player had three different pairs of sunglasses, one for each day. They did outrageous versions of "Tiger Rag," "Downtown Strutter's Ball" and "La Cucaracha." Every time they'd finish a set, the mandolin player would say "The sun's gonna go down now, cause more stars have gotta shine." Each time they played, people went crazy. Now I know where Dan Hicks stole all his hot licks.

Taj Mahal was around doing a concert, and it was great. He really got people happy, and he's really coming into his own as a solo performer. "Ain't Nobody's Business (but your own)" was a big

favorite, as well as "Fishin' Blues" and "Corrina." Unfortunately, he sang a few and it started raining pretty hard. We lost our fortunes on Yonge Street, Toronto.

#### After Murray, yet!

Saturday began on a good note. The Pennywhistlers did an inspired set of amazing Balkan songs that conveyed their meaning without translation. In one slow song, the people began dancing in a circle around the stage and it was very moving. Utah Phillips and Fred McKenna did a workshop on guitar playing on his lap, walking on his fingers, and he's got thousands of miles of his adventures hitchhiking through Canada. The train man himself, with a husky voice, did a set of bad jokes.

It was only after Michael Cooney's workshop that I found out that Joni Mitchell played a few tunes. She came on with a piano, McLaughlin, whom I can't stand. She played songs, "Clouds," "Woodstock" (she played piano with her), and some others. There was an African band, who played electric guitar. I possibly have heard her distinctive voice at the other end of the island. Needless to say, it was ruined.

After a workshop on Hank Williams, which featured McKenna playing his amp, John Prine forgetting all the verses of "I'm a Man" and attempting, it started pouring. After Woodstock, we left as quickly as possible.

Somehow, it cleared up Saturday night and was sunny and hot on Sunday. The fiddler's workshop, hosted by Michael Cooney and Rambler Tracy Schwartz.

#### Bob who?

Around this time, some friends informed us that a certain Mr. Dylan was around with his pal David Bromberg. They were to play at a singaround in a bit, so we went in case. Also at the singaround were John Prine and Leon Redbone, who was decked out in a bowler, white shirt, vest and slacks. He was falling asleep as usual, revived every now and then by some inane number like "Marie" or "Top of the World" in that absurd way of his.

As I said, we knew Dylan was there, but the question of when he'd jump on a stage was on your toes.

Bonnie Raitt was scheduled to play, but she ran over to see her. Instead of her playing, she was doing an impromptu mini show.



# uriposa delivers



—Cohen

—Prusansky



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how he got over there so fast. Anyway, Bonnie came on after a bit, and announced that Jackson Browne was going to play a little. We all went nuts, and everyone looked at us (guess they don't know him yet up north). Joni Mitchell was hangin' out, encouraging him to get up there and play. I think they're going out together. Miss Raitt showed off her incredible slide playing on her old National Steel, and after a few tunes, Jackson came out.

He's shaved off his moustache so he looks like his picture on the album cover. Very cute, indeed. He sang a song about rednecks as Bukka danced around him. Then he did "Sweet Little Sixteen," with Bonnie on slide. And he knew all the words. Good to know he can rock if he has to. Then "Jesus in 3/4s" and ah, yes, "These Days," which was first recorded by Nico many years ago when Jackson played guitar for her.

It was a great treat to hear him play, especially since I missed him when he was here. The rumor about Neil Young had brought thousands to area five, and sure enough, Bruce Cockburn, an excellent songwriter, brought him out. Neil did a candy set, with "Harvest," "Helpless," "Sugar Mountain," and "Heart of Gold." A real wimp bunch, but it was neat to see him without a flannel shirt on. These country hippies, God.

Speaking of country hippies, a hot tip led us to the performer's area, and there's Bob Dylan! A real legend, thirty feet away. Click, click Bob. Give us a pic, huh? His hair's getting long again, with a red bandanna around his head and a pair of jeans on. He looked pissed, and we found out why. He had planned to play at that singaround with Prine and Bromberg (he's also a good friend of Redbone's, so there's still hope), but Cooney was afraid a riot would start, so he told him he couldn't.

He left around six thirty, but then he came back, I guess convinced that he should try to sing a few tunes. Some yo yo announced that he would be at area three, and Dylan got caught in a crowd that was rushing to see him. He tried to get through, got halfway around, gave up and left on a special water taxi. Personally, it was more fun to see him than it would have been to hear him, because he just would have done some cobwebs anyway.

Through all of this mayhem, Gordon Lightfoot had parked himself under a tree and began playing for a few hundred people. Atta way, Gordon.

We finally left around nine, our heads swimming. With Leon Redbone and Bob Dylan sharing the same common space, I was sure it was the apocalypse, but I'm still here, I think. I was disappointed that that great jug band, the South Happiness Street whatever, didn't play. Well, maybe next year.

