

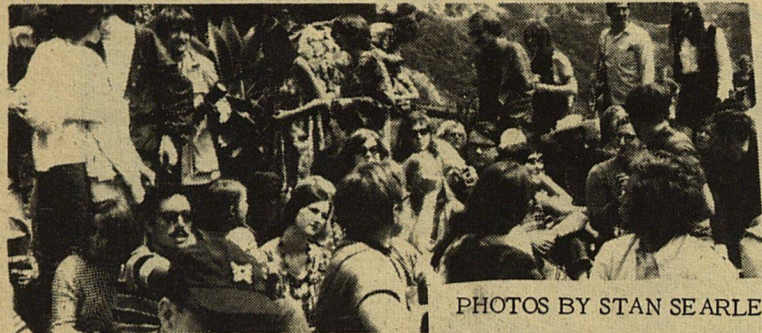
A Gathering At Sur

DAVE BAUMGARTEN

It is hard to believe that Big Sur is in the same world with Chicago, much less the same country; yet the two are bound by nationality and it is my duty to report on a convention that illustrated love

a cross between early Dylan and rhubarb.

Rita Gatti, a local singer, followed Guthrie with a strong alto country style, and then composer-singer - instrumentalist John Hartford, an unexpected perfor-



PHOTOS BY STAN SEARLES

rather than Democracy in Action.

The Sixth Annual Big Sur Folk Festival was held over the past week-end at the Esalen Institute in Big Sur and featured Joan Baez (co-founder of the event with producer Nancy Carlen), Judy Collins, Arlo Guthrie, The Charles River Valley Boys and surprise appearances by a host of other top-line performers.

The Festival was set in one of the most beautiful spots in the world and was completely unmarred by commercial trappings, unruly crowds or the fuzz. Overlooking the ocean the Esalen Institute, famous for its human encounter sessions, has a large grass area and a pool on the ocean end. A wooden floor was laid next to the pool and served as a stage. Large batiks with soaring doves painted on them and the distant ocean below served as the backdrop.

The Festival began unofficially Saturday morning with the wedding of Mimi Farina, Joan Baez's sister and widow of poet Richard Farina, to Mylan Melvin, a San Francisco head and record producer. All the participants in the Festival attended the wedding and later dedicated the entire event to the young couple.

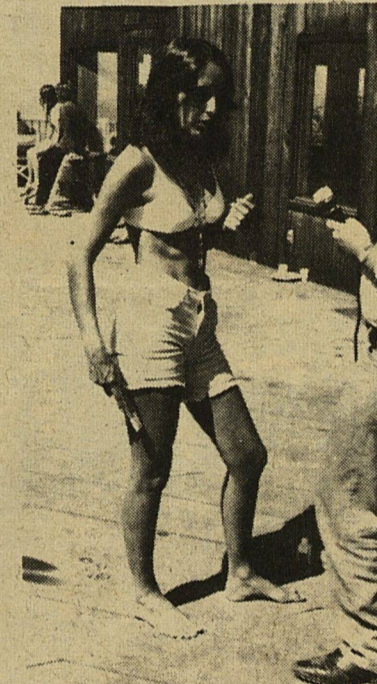
Immediately after the wedding the crowd of four thousand people was let down the hillside onto the grounds where they ate lunch, sang, played and danced on the grass until the official festival got under way. The number of tickets sold was limited to the comfortable capacity of the grounds and everyone had a good view and could hear well due to the natural acoustics and an almost perfect sound system.

The Festival got underway promptly at two o'clock and what a session it was. The country and Blue Grass sounds of the Charles River Valley Boys got it off to a stomping and picking start and was followed immediately by the first surprise performer, (she even surprised the Festival officials when she showed), Joni Mitchell, who was later to become the undisputed hit of the Festival. Her delicate and child-like voice enchanted with three of her own songs, "Met You On The Fairway," "She's So Busy Being Free," and "Your Gallery."

Arlo Guthrie opened his set by saying, "I make records so I won't have to sing certain songs in performance." So "Alice" was relegated to her last resting place in Stockbridge in a film shooting next week under the direction of Arthur Penn, and instead, Arlo invited the audience to join him in "Sing like you just squashed a cop"

mer, held forth with "Gentle On My Mind," and a very funny ditty about the impending Southern California earthquake. The first half of the afternoon was closed by a long and rewarding set by Judy Collins.

Judy Collins is a singer in transition. She started her career with plaintive songs which constantly brought her comparisons with Joan Baez in which she usually came off second. She went through a period singing dramatically effective material, but often the effect diminished after several hearings. She began using a back-up group in her concerts and recordings with some good effect but it still wasn't a total expression of Judy as an artist. She had always been an extraordinary performer in front of an audience, but she was never quite as effective on record-



herself in her latest work, a place that seems to be more related in material and performance to the art song than to traditional folk material. She introduced the songs of Leonard Cohen and Joni

Mitchell to the general public and their poetry and music have greatly influenced another composer that is joining them as an equal, Judy Collins herself. Her songs "Albatross," "Since You've Asked," and the newly composed "My Father Promised Me," were the high points of her performance at the Festival, and she brought an ability to involve her audience that is shared by few singers in our time. Her voice was hushed, breathy and remarkably easy in these songs, and they seemed truly a personal expression, as did her renditions of Mitchell's "Both Sides Now" and Cohen's "Suzanne" both sung very differently from her recordings. She still retains all the versatility of the past, but there is a new Judy emerging and it was a unique and more sensitive artist that left the audience crying and finally cheering, Michael Saul heads up a back-up group which is completely in unity with her purposes.

The performers for the rest of the afternoon included: Penny Nichols, whose material seemed too light in comparison to the others, but who is an interesting performer; a surprise visit by Jim Hendrix who's "Going Back to the Colorado Mountains" was memorable; the newly-wed Mimi Melvin who only sang two songs the first afternoon and seemed understandably distracted; an unexpected running entrance down the hillside by "Mom" Cass Elliot who joined the others in some group songs; Dave Crosby of the Byrds and Steve Stills of the Buffalo Springfield joined for several exceptional songs; numerous other combinations, including Baez, Collins, Melvin and others; and finally Joan Baez by herself.

Almost everything has been said before about this unique artist. The beautiful landscape that is Big Sur is surely her element and she seemed truly a part of it. Her voice seems stronger and more steady (if that is possible), her technique never getting in the way of the pure joy that is her singing. No one will ever forget the sound of her unaccompanied voice ringing off the sides of the mountains in Dylan's "Tears of Rage." Much of her material these days is related to her peace and resistance activities, and since it is so much a part of her fiber she makes it into an artistic experience instead of a preaching. One particularly moving song was "Anyday Now, I'll Be Released." She had composed a sensitive and moving song about her sister Mimi called "Sir Galahad" and she sang it in honor of the wedding. It told of sadness of the past three years since Richard Farina's death and the final joy of building a new relationship.

The afternoon closed with the entire group singing an extended version of the old Hymn "Amaz-

ing Grace" with Baez's voice soaring high above the rest in an obligatto. The crowd was visibly moved and quietly left until Sunday morning.

One very conspicuous absence during the entire festival was that of the Monterey Fuzz Department. Oh, there were two or three cops seen sipping some wine in the Esalen dining room and one was seen asleep in a patrol car late at night, but there was absolutely no interference with the Festival. Even a small unpeaceful incident that occurred during the Sunday session was quieted quickly by the Esalen staff and no clubs or red lights were seen in the area. Whoever arranged this must have worked a miracle, and the crowds and performers responded gratefully.



One other absence that was felt was Bob Dylan's. Still in some sort of seclusion, he is sorely missed by everyone in the folk field, and although many of his songs were sung during the Festival, both Joan Baez and Judy Collins mentioned how much he was missed as a performer.

Saturday night featured a reception for Mimi and Mylan, followed by an extended rap session with Joan and her husband David Harris who is facing a three year prison sentence for draft card burning, beginning in

February. Only the festival participants and the FREE PRESS were permitted to attend. A future article will cover this heated discussion.

Sunday's festivities got under way informally in the morning with a bong and fluge session up in the artists area which gradually grew into a two-hour freakout. The mood spread to the gathering crowds below on the grass and even though the sun was blazing hot many danced into a frenzy.

Sunday's concert featured two new performers, a young girl from New York named Susan Hoover, who's nervousness and faulty pitch may one day make her the Florence Foster Jenkins of folk music, and Mark Spolestra who is a co-founder of the festival and an able performer.

The entire afternoon seemed more relaxed with the performers achieving a real communication with each other. Joan and Judy joined together in many numbers as did Mimi and the Charles River Valley Boys. Mimi really became involved here and showed a genuine affinity for country music. Van Dyke Parks aided a number of singers from the piano and Steve Stills did the same on bass. Joni Mitchell had the crowd on its feet cheering three times and she was clearly the sensation of the festival as she sang "Both Sides Now" and an a cappella song called "The Fiddle and the drum" which asks America why it has replaced music with destruction and weapons. The performers mingled freely with the people in the audience. Children were constantly at Joan Baez's side and Cass Elliot held a baby (not her own) through most of the concert. Cass, noting the dominance of female performers, retitled the event the "Big Sur Ovary Festival." After Joan Baez's final set the entire company closed singing "I See My Light Come Shining," which sent the crowd away in a completely satisfied but somber mood, linking the performer and listener together in some unspoken cause.

It is difficult to communicate the total effect of the Festival to the reader, for it was not really a performance, but rather a total involving experience with lessons for the outside world in brotherhood and peace.

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in an anti-song called "I Don't Want A Pickle, Just Want to Ride My Motor Cycle." Arlo works easy with his audience and never milks his humor. He also proved to be a surprisingly able guitarist as the Festival progressed. His voice is