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# 'Old men' of folk are often big-city products

## Music by Gary Mullinax

It used to be that the old men of folk music were the folks who learned "authentic" folk ballads in the backwoods of their mother's knee, and the young ones were the ones in the cities who discovered those songs, rediscovering them, adding new lyrics.

But that wasn't always the case at the Philadelphia Folk Festival, held last weekend near Schwenksville, Pa.

Three times, and among the "old men" at the festival were folk blues and Oscar Brand. Both made their mark in cities, and both acknowledge that what they do is a lot different from what the "traditional" musicians did.

Both Gibson and Brand were part of the New York City folk scene in the '50s, which led up to the folk boom of the early part of the next decade, when youngsters like Bob Dylan and Joan Baez made folk people the dominant form of popular music for a while.

Actually, Brand's work in New York goes back to the mid-'40s. Gibson, growing up in New York, says Brand's popular folk music radio show which is still on.

"When I started in 1955 there were only a few people to learn from," said Gibson, who wrote songs for folk clubs and other young folk singers in the '50s and introduced folk to his home in the '60s.

"I learned a lot from a few people like Erik Darling and Pete Seeger. But that was before the big folk festivals.

"These were the days of the Washington Square folk scene in New York's Greenwich Village. Roger Sprung who was at the festival with his Progressive Bluegrass Project, and Woody Guthrie used to come to the park every Sunday, and Brand used to come to the park and show us things."

The folk scene was even broader when Brand, who also grew up in New York, began his career.

"I knew all the folk singers in New York then," said Brand. "There were Lotzky, Barl, live, Pete Seeger, Woody Guthrie and a few others."

"The left was supported so and did a lot in popularizing music. The audience grew larger, and then one day I saw someone walk into a coffee house with his guitar and I felt he was not in there. That's when I knew folk music had become."

The new popularity of folk music meant a certain amount of commercialization, but commercialism was a evidence even before. Gibson, for instance, spent plenty of time on the "Arthur Godfrey Television Career program slated for women by NYU."



Gambie Rogers at the Philadelphia Folk Festival: He loves to work on stage.

"Some might consider Gibson's activities to be something other than folk music, and Gibson would agree."

"I have a hard time with the term folk singer," said Gibson. "I'm doing something traditional to show off my roots, but mostly I write songs. And I was influenced by Gregorian chant and Gilbert and Sullivan as much as traditional music."

"The traditional sources only know 12 songs and do them all their lives — but they do them 12 songs better than anybody."

Brand, who has written theatrical music, is the curator of the National Academy of Popular Music. He thinks that folk and pop are similar to some important ways.

"Both of them have a way of circumventing the daily life of people," he said.

**Key Whittier of The Original Shab Band** was also talking about similarities between folk and pop.

The five-member Shab Band spent time in the '50s and '60s in country and western, blues and jazz from the '70s. "The '50s '60s Toronto group is accompanied by three women vocal harmony."

It's the kind of music that is often seen as much with pop as with folk, but Whittier notes the constant influence of folk music.

"There's the influence of folk music in country and western, rhythm and blues, which comes from gospel music," said Whittier, who notes that the music is a living thing in the hands of the folk band.

"We learn the music of records, but we never play a song the same way twice. We play a song in it, and we change each time. But the members don't have an exact part to play."

**■ ■ ■**

The trend of folk music into categories like pop or folk is taking place on Tenby, who performed at the festival's Saturday evening concert and will be at The Main Point in Bryn Mawr, Pa., Sept. 14 and 15. Silly Wizard, a Scottish group who played at the folk festival, is also on that list.

The music of Bird, a 34-year-old who came from Malawi in Central Africa, has been influenced by the music of his native land as well as by folk music and rock. He learned the latter mostly in England, where he lived from the early '60s to the early '70s, when he returned to Africa for a few years.

... his performance was one of the best at the festival — but it's also unusual, and Bird hasn't had much success in getting it across to a large audience. (Gibson, however, has thought well enough of it to release two of Bird's albums.)

"It's in the process of trying to define my direction and meet my audience," said the personable Bird, who said he isn't sure what

approach he'll take when he goes into the studio soon to record his next album.

"I'm more into live, but I enjoy playing folk festivals more than clubs. There's more communication and warmth. But a man has to make a living."

Bird, who said he was disappointed not to be able to participate in one of the festival's workshops, was with him, but a participant at the folk festival, accompanied by his guitar. For him, working on the music is essential to the creative process.

"I'd actually started on an idea, in front of an audience," said Rogers. "I had a lot of ideas, but I performed at the American South folk festival in Memphis, adding, 'As far as I know, I'm the only one in the world who has heard a chick of this species.'"

**A chick emerges**

NEW YORK (AP) — A once-occupied heron's chick received a lot of attention at the festival. The bird, which is native to the United States, adding, "As far as I know, I'm the only one in the world who has heard a chick of this species."

with workshops occurring simultaneously. It's an opportunity to learn about the music and to see the performers close up in a relaxed atmosphere.

There were also a number of craft booths at the festival — 31 according to one count — including booths displaying leather work, old musical instruments, candles, folk art and handmade brooms.

Another booth offered pairs of wooden "reaction boxes" for about \$6. Throughout the festival people in the audience accompanied the music on stage by clacking their boxes. Which is what a folk festival is all about.

Jon Mitchell held show superb. Jon Mitchell turned in one of the best concerts of the year at the Babes Head Club West Tuesday night in Philadelphia's Fairmount Park. Her singing was fantastic, while the band she has assembled for her current tour proved to be one of the sharpest anywhere.

Ms. Mitchell's performance featured her rendition of songs written for her by the late jazzman Charles Mingus as there is plenty of jazz in her career. Her several-year-old classics like "Cry" and "Black Crow" were performed jazzy than usual, though they retained the old feeling.

On the new songs, Ms. Mitchell and company turned in a show with low points was Ms. Mitchell's performance of the brand like "Shadows and Light" with the Percussionists, a rapping group which was also the opening act.

David Bromberg performed at the Stone Ballroom in Newark Wednesday night. For something completely different, he played at Philadelphia's Spectrum Friday night.

overall, mixing folk and catchy pop songs.

Tal Malal was scheduled for workshops Saturday and Sunday night concert. He performed a mix of blues and West Indian sounds and featuring two songs, the last accompanied by Cambridge's Raji Rai Kotto and Dumbo Kotto, who plays the most enthusiastically received of the three.

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All 6,000 of the three-day camping tickets were sold for the festival. Approximately another 3,000 to 5,000 people showed up for each of the three evening concerts, while some people came to the Old Point Farm for the workshops and morning the performers gave them at one of three smaller stages on the grounds.

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7:00 a.m.	WDEL	7:00-7:30 a.m. News
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