

Imaginative U.S. folk singer

By MAURICE ROSENBAUM

IN a twilight era of pop-folk whimsy, where fey singers slide around in a blancmange of pseudo-poetry, it is heartening to be reminded of the clear, hard light of genius.

This was the most rewarding aspect of the "Festival of Contemporary Song" at the Festival Hall on Saturday evening, when the power of true originality was the keynote.

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The best of contemporary song consists of largely autobiographical crystallisations of our time, and the quality depends on the creative integrity and resources of the writer and singer through whom the spirit of the time is expressed. It was all the more gratifying therefore to have Jackson C. Frank back with us.

This American song-writer and singer is one of the most profoundly imaginative to have emerged from the folk revival. He is aware of the limitations of his medium—"To sing is a state of mind that can include all frames of mind," he says, "and therein lies the danger in communicating through song alone"—and he has the prophetic attributes of humility and vision.

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Joni Mitchell, the young Canadian singer who, though she would be the last to claim it, owes little to others, also held the audience enthralled with the beauty of her voice and the poetry of her songs.

Al Stewart, himself a truly original song-writer and a very good guitarist, was in excellent form both in his own new ballad "Love's Chronicle" and in Peter Morgan's poem, "My enemies have sweet voices."

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The Fairport Convention—amplified guitars, percussion and two singers, Ian Macdonald and Sandy Denny—gave a performance of Richard Farina's "Reno, Nevada" which, I think, Farina himself would have liked, and have great promise. The Johnstons made a lively opening to a remarkable concert.