

New Penelope sings an old, sad song

By DICK MacDONALD

The New Penelope Coffeehouse is no more.

After struggling for three months to shrug a heavy financial burden, Montreal's main centre for folk-oriented music has closed its doors.

Director Gary Eisenkraft made the announcement Saturday, just prior to the first set of the night by United States blues musicians Sonny Terry and Brownie McGee. The pair was ending a two-week engagement and now has the dubious distinction of being the last performers to appear in the New Penelope.

Mr. Eisenkraft had held out hope that the four-year-old coffeehouse might be able to surmount the problems, primarily through the staging of three massive benefit concerts, asking artists to appear at reduced fees and generally boosting the bill of fare in the community-at-large. The efforts were to no avail.

Large debt

Details relating to the Penelope's debts were not immediately available, but they were expected to be somewhat less than the figure of \$20,000 quoted by Mr. Eisenkraft in mid-August when he announced formation of the Society for the Preservation of the New Penelope.

"It seemed inevitable," Mr. Eisenkraft said, "that we would have to fold. Perhaps someone else will follow us. Still, I think we made a significant contribution to entertainment in Montreal."

There is little doubt the Penelope did that. From the initial tiny room on Bishop street, through larger premises on Stanley, finally to the still-larger quarters on Sherbrooke.

Mr. Eisenkraft presented such an array of performers as to represent a who's who in traditional and contemporary music.

They included Muddy Waters, Joni Mitchell, Paul Butterfield, Richie Havens, The Fugs, Gordon Lightfoot, The Greenbriar Boys, Ian

and Sylvia, John Mayall, Junior Wells, Tim Hardin, The Rabble, Sean Gagnier, The Young Ones, Jesse Winchester, Earth Opera, Bruce Murdoch, James Cotton, Mike Seegar and a host of others.

Folk, blues, pop

The Penelope was designed as a coffeehouse where folk blues and experimental pop music was given priority attention. Mr. Eisenkraft refused to accede to such money-making proposals as applying for a licence to sell liquor. This would have excluded much of the younger element frequenting the club, which was registered with the provincial government as a non-profit organization.

Impresario Eisenkraft, 23, is considering an employment offer from a major New York City talent booking agency. He said the coffeehouse has until mid-November to declare bankruptcy. Only serious intentions by an investor would grant a reprieve, and this seems unlikely.

"Hide your tears," Brownie McGee sang, "you can't win 'em all."

And that sentiment in a song from the Deep South is a one-line obituary for the New Penelope.

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