

Gatecrashers shake Mariposa's future

By JACK BATTEN

Michael Cooney, the personable young folk singer who served as M.C. for the Saturday concert at this year's Mariposa Folk Festival, had something to say to the audience on Saturday night that might be just as crucial to Mariposa's future, if any, as all of the music played during the long and frequently volatile weekend.

Cooney was talking about the gatecrashers, the kids who avoided paying their way in by storming the bridge to Olympia Island or by rowing or by swimming across the narrow (and polluted) lagoon from Centre Island, and he said that "I have a feeling that the people gettin' in without payin' have a lot more money in their pockets than most of the performers here, more than the Indians, more than the old blues men from the south, more than a lot of singers up on the stage, and I have an idea that maybe those people comin' in don't care about the singers and this festival."

Cooney was right. Mariposa is not a profit-making event, not like the big rock festivals, not in the words of the street a "ripoff" and yet the middle-class kids who crashed on Saturday and in even bigger and more vicious numbers on Sunday night treated it like another Woodstock or Festival Express.

The crashing grew so intense by 9 o'clock last night, and the active assistance from people inside the grounds so concerted, that the Mariposa officials opened the gates and let everyone in for free. The outsiders arrived with cheers and whoops right in the middle of a David Rea song.

"Who do you want to listen to?" Rea said from the platform. "Me or those?"

"What breaks my heart," said Dick Fiol, the festival public relations chief, as he

stood watching the happy invaders, "is that they don't give a sweet damn about the music. This is all fun for them, but I don't know, we may have seen the last of the whole Mariposa thing if this keeps up."

So the festival that began on Friday with the customary Mariposa warm feelings and generous atmosphere now seems, at least threatened by a lot of misdirected, and maybe malicious, political carryings-on—"Let my brothers in to hear the people's music," one kid hollered Sunday night—but in the meantime, for this year, there was, as usual at Mariposa, plenty of good music.

Saturday night (which drew a crowd of about 8,000) was blues night, to make a wild generalization, while last night (with swollen crowd of close to 10,000) was a conventional folk night, and the blues triumphed over the folk.

In strict fact, Saturday brought only two blues performers, J. B. Hutto and Mississippi Fred MacDowell, but their performances were so dramatic and so honest that their music tended to wipe away the memory of Sunday's better known and more glamorous folkies, Joni Mitchell and James Taylor.

MacDowell, a thin man in his mid-sixties with a surprisingly powerful voice, came on as the traditional southern blues man, and he sang familiar and ancient tunes in the rough, committed manner of all the Delta blues people. Hutto was an altogether different stylist. He's a South Side Chicago man, singing and playing electric guitar and working with a fender bassist and drummer, and he offered blues of a really astounding purity.

Hutto's guitar solos were uncluttered and perfectly logical, and he sang with a magnificently clear cry in his voice, but his blues, for all their perfect logic, were as earthy as MacDowell's. He preached all over again, for anyone who's forgotten it, that the blues can be anything a great performer makes of them.

Among the weekend's other performers, Jack Elliott on Saturday night probably came across with most impact. He was alternately droll and campy and warm and moving, and he ran through his usual eclectic repertoire, some Dylan, some Hardin, some other good composers. And as a special bonus, he brought on a guest singer, Bobby Newirth, who proceeded to perform in hillbilly

nonsense style a song about Paul Gauguin and Van Gogh ("His parents all called him Vincent") that may have been an oldie but was also hysterically funny.

As for the rest, Doug Kershaw seemed rather too show-biz oriented this time around, and the Indian dancers and singers too wearing

in a set that ran too long and offered no climax. David Rea was alternately stomping and sweet, a beautiful all-round singer and guitarist. Miss Mitchell and Taylor were appropriately glamorous, and a man named Alexandre Zekin from Montreal registered as the perfect gypsy with just the right head (bald), chin

(whiskered), eyebrows (flattering), voice (stentorian) and repertoire (sometimes funny, sometimes dynamic).

But, with all the fine singers, it was hard to forget something else. Michael Cooney said to the crashers: "You people over there, you'll turn this into a garbage festival."

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