

POP SCENE

The songs of the island, Mariposa Festival style



Steve Gillette: called a folksinger with stardust in his future.

By RITCHIE YORKE

Folk festivals are not what they used to be. Once upon a time, performers would give their last dime just to get up there on stage and say what had to be said, in the way they wanted to say it.

All that has changed since several folk stars reached international status and the dollar-seeking managers moved on to the scene. Sincerity has, in many cases, been abandoned in favor of a guaranteed fee plus 60 per cent of the box office.

This is reportedly one of the main reasons that this year's Mariposa Folk Festival—the eighth and the first to be held on Toronto's Centre Island—does not include names like Judy Collins, Joan Baez, Gordie Lightfoot or Peter Paul and Mary on its lengthy guest list.

The big artists apparently figure the financial return (Mariposa is an authentic folk festival, non profit-making, paying its performers scale fees) is not sufficient to warrant spreading the gospel to a few thousand fans. The festival starts tomorrow at 1 p.m. and continues until Sunday night.

Fast-expanding and increasingly influential, Mariposa has however not yet reached the proportions of a Newport, where virtually any artist will appear for next to nothing, because of the vast numbers of booking agents, college concert organizers and other talent buyers in the audience.

A total of 114 performers will appear at Mariposa this year, headed by Joni Mitchell, Oscar Brand, Mike Seeger, Gilles Vigneault, the Travelers and Howlin' Wolf.

Just about every conceivable form of folk music — from sleazy Chicago blues to wispy Elizabethan ballads — will take its turn on the centre

stage. Quality, and not necessarily names, is what the organizers say they have aimed for.

According to festival president, Tom Bishop, a young mild-mannered engineer, this year's Mariposa will be the best ever, in terms of the total program. "We've budgeted \$23,000, printed 31,000 tickets and we need to sell 12,000 of them to break even.

"Last year's Mariposa, which was held at Innis Lake for the third consecutive time, was not well-attended. We only managed 7,000. So we figured that if you can't get the people to the action—Innis Lake is 40 miles outside Metro—then you bring the action to the people," said Bishop.

"We feel that a folk festival should be more than a series of concerts," continued Bishop, "and this year, we have a full daytime workshop program scheduled."

Tomorrow's lineup includes an all-comers-welcome ad lib instrumental session from noon to 5 p.m., a poetry seminar, and a workshop session on The Ballad as a Literary Form. The evening's concert lineup, to be hosted by Oscar Brand, features Mike Cooney, Joni Mitchell, Bukka White, The Beers Family, Henry Crowdog and Son, and Tony and Irene Saletan.

On Saturday, there will be further instrumental sessions. Bawdy Songs with Oscar Brand and Tom Kines. Dances of India presented by the Know India Cultural Society. Leadbelly with Mike Cooney, Fiddling with Mike Seeger, and Folksong as Communication with David Rea. The evening concert, hosted by Joe Lewis, presents Murray McLauchlan, Bill Monroe and the Bluegrass Boys, Tom Kines, Judy Roderick, Steve Gillette, Bukka White, Mary Jane and Winston, and the Howlin' Wolf Band.

Sunday's daytime activities will again probe various aspects of the folk field, from religious music to new songwriters. The concert that

evening features David Rea, the Young Tradition, Mike Seeger, Jim McHarg's Metro Stompers, Gilles Vigneault, Joni Mitchell, Sara Grey and The Travellers.

All of the concert performers will take part, at one time or another, in the daily workshop sessions. In addition, post-concert happenings are planned.

This is the first time that Mariposa has run a full three-day-and-three-night festival. Tom Bishop predicts that people will be rather pleasantly surprised by the afternoon offerings.

A key performer at the Festival will be Gilles Vigneault, a Quebec nationalist singer-composer who hasn't appeared in Ontario for four years.

Usually Mariposa manages to provide the launching impetus for a rising young star. Coincidentally or not, the success of Havens, Joni Mitchell, Lightfoot and the Kensington Market closely followed their appearance at past Mariposa Festivals.

This year, festival organizers predict that Steve Gillette, a young Californian, is the one who seems headed for stardom.

The success of Mariposa, handily located in a giant metropolis, is something which will be keenly watched by folk festival observers everywhere. The city, in return for lending Centre Island to the festival, receives 15 per cent of the gross receipts. The Toronto location has, above all taken a great deal of worry away from the organizers. Normally, half their time was spent sorting out accommodation for thousands of people. This year, it is up to the individual to find his own lodging.

"I believe we've now established ourselves artistically," said Bishop. "The folk craze of a couple of years ago has passed on. Now folk music has to be proved a timeless idiom such as jazz or ballet."