

POP SCENE

Further evidence of a boom in folk music

By JACK BATTEN

You don't have to hang around the Canadian pop-music scene too much to recognize that, these days, the country's folk music is at some kind of zenith of talent and productivity. The message is so obvious—folk is booming—that no one can miss it.

This fact can be proved this week in Toronto by visiting ei-

ther the Riverboat or Grumbles where, respectively, Murray McLauchlan and Luke Gibson are singing.

But first, consider the state of folk music today. Gordon Lightfoot, to start close to the top, has just turned out his best album ever, *Don Quixote*, an album that sounds at once effortless and elegant, filled with superbly thoughtful lyrics. The Tysons, Ian and Syl-

via, consummate pros, with a Columbia album due out any day now, haven't lost that distinctive vocal sound of theirs or their ability to write highly evocative material.

Bruce Cockburn has already, in only a couple of years on the scene, established a style that merges with a character, that of the elusive, sensitive young poet. Then there are those expatriate Canadian superstars of folk, **Joni Mitchell** (who is, like Lightfoot, at a peak) and Neil Young (whose reputation is admittedly blurred slightly by his current Top-40 single which sounds like a parody of Neil Young, both in lyrics and in voice).

Among the younger people, Keith McKie, after a couple of years in the figurative wilderness, seems to be getting himself adjusted, physically, spiritually and vocally, and Christopher Kearney is showing in his first album, just out, that he's a man with a nice, loose style and with a remarkably easy grace in songwriting.

Anyway, what all of these

performers, plus McLauchlan and Gibson, seem to have going for them in their music (Kearney less than the others since he's been out of Canada for some time) is a measurable sense of place, of locale. Maybe it's nationalism—or maybe it's a pipe dream to even imagine that country enters into their writing—but all of our current folksingers have something to say about here and now in Canada, in their images, in their sound, in the reflections they offer of the people up here and of the landscape we live in.

You could hear it the other night at the Riverboat where McLauchlan (who drew a packed house to his first set) sang, in great voice, his lyrics that celebrate mostly our special city life. (He also introduced a brilliant new song called *Just Like You*.) Down at Grumbles meanwhile, before a reasonably good crowd for his second set, Luke Gibson did his tunes that deal specifically and obliquely with life up in his beloved Killaloe. It was all-Canadian music.