



Joni Mitchell

by Billy Altman  
and  
Woody Graber  
*Spectrum Staff Writers*

The tenth Mariposa Folk Festival took place on Centre Island in Toronto last weekend. Mariposa is probably the only festival that accomplishes its goal, that is, bringing people together. Being a folk festival, Mariposa is considerably quieter than the rock rip-offs we're all so used to. The mood is relaxed, the people friendly. People from all walks of life and of all ages gather together for the enchanting ferry boat ride that takes them to the island. No 15-mile traffic jams, no seven-car accidents. Everyone knows they'll get to the music and they also sense that the music is waiting for them.

Once you're on Centre Island, you begin to get this strange feeling that you're in paradise. Trees and grass all around, smiling faces on all sides and, of



South Happiness Street Society Skiffle Band

# Mariposa: 'A Lone in an Onion Patch' of festivals

course, music. During the afternoons, one never quite knows where to go. The workshops go on simultaneously, the very best musicians and folklorists from Canada and the U.S. opening themselves up and entrancing the hundreds of devoted listeners. All gaps between performer and audience break down. You don't need a big name or a Sunn amplifier to draw a crowd at this gathering. Just stand under a tree, take out your instrument, be it flute, washboard, harmonica, mandolin, dobro, or even quitar and suddenly, people are circling around you, interested in what you have to offer. They don't care if you're famous, how many albums you have out, who you know. They're here for one thing — music. And there's more good music at Mariposa than there is anywhere.

#### Folk culture

There is one regulation for coming to Mariposa. You should like folk music. Folk is the only musical

branch that continues to grow all the time. It is a form based on culture, true culture. Songs and stories passed down for generations, through whole countries, and across continents. It's the music of the world. You find the same song sung hundreds of different ways, depending on who's singing it and where he's from. Contrasts of life styles are evident, but somehow we bring it all together and form one huge circle and feel the same things as those whom we have never even met.

So much for the geography of paradise. The performers at Mariposa come here from all over the world to give us their impressions of life and love. Some don't even play any instruments; some play four or five. But they're all worth the small admission price.

Friday night's concert set the mood for the entire weekend. Most of the acts weren't star-studded, but the music was. Michael Cooney, the folksinger's folksinger, the Pete Seeger of fun,

David Rea



l to r: David Bromberg, Jack Elliot, David Rea



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#### Warm soup fo

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#### Guthrie's prot

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—Sheedy

James Taylor



Fred McDowell

# Lonely Little Petunia

working hard, as he put it "to avoid commercial success." Elizabeth Cotton, playing her guitar upside down, drawing an ovation for her rendition of "Goin down that road feeling bad," and shyly saying: "I guess you want to hear 'Freight Train' now." The Pennywhistlers, six angel-like voices in intricate harmonies doing Slavic songs. The Perth County Conspiracy, dazzling the crowd with Stratford theatrics and Mothers-type humor, while their cohorts run through the crowd with lit sparklers. Rosalie Sorrels, accompanied by one of the festival's surprise guest stars, guitarist David Bromberg, who played so brilliantly on the Paul Siebel and new Dylan "Self-Portrait" albums. Her plain, soft country style hypnotized the entire audience. And finally, Odetta, the soul queen of folk music, filling up the whole island with her powerful voice as she sang "Easy Rider" and that old favorite, "Home on the Range."

## Warm soup for warm hearts

Friday night ended with everyone crowding around a small campfire singing songs and eating some Indian corn soup prepared by a troupe of Cree Indians flown in from Manitoba. The Indians spent the entire weekend exchanging ideas and their culture with the people.

By Saturday afternoon, the festival was in high gear. The highlight of the day was the blues workshop, where Mississippi Fred McDowell, J.B. Hutto, James Taylor and the Olympia Brass Band sent the scattered hundreds into a frenzy. As the afternoon concert ended, the Olympia band, one of the last New Orleans marching bands, led the people off the island with a rousing version of "When the Saints Go Marching In."

The night concert Saturday started off with the Olympia Band marching through the audience and up onto the stage. Their foot-stomping set was one of the high points of the entire festival. Lovely Indian lass Alanis Obomsawin held the crowd captivated as she sang some of her tribe's songs. The Cree Indians, led by their joke-cracking chief, danced to a hearty reception. Fred McDowell and J. B. Hutto handled the blues part of the show with an amazing display of dexterity and feeling. Hutto and his Hawks were called back for two encores as they ran through many fine Chicago standards, such as "Dust My Broom." Hutto made all of us feel like we were in one of the South Side bars on a Saturday night in the windy city. In sharp contrast to the electric city sound, McDowell took us back down home to the Delta with country picking and a mellower sound.

## Guthrie's protege

Jack Elliot (or Ramblin' Jack, as you will) came on dead drunk and stole everyone's heart. The legendary "singing cowboy from Brooklyn" rambled through a few tunes, most notably "If I were a carpenter", "God on our Side", and "Sadie Brown", on which David Bromberg showed he could pick with the best of them. Doug Kershaw, complete with velvet suit and electric violin, stomped through the Louisiana swamp tunes that have made him "the Cajun king of the Bayou." His running argument

with the ferryboat whistle made us aware that the outside world was still there trying to crash in on the beauty of the festival.

The Sunday afternoon shows were simply unbelievable. Ramblin' Jack did a two hour show on Woodie Guthrie that had everyone in a dream state. As soon as he could tear himself away from the screaming crowd, Jack went off to another two hour session, this time with Bromberg and Toronto's own David Rea. The three swapped songs and harmonies with Bromberg filling in with guitar and dobro licks. Meanwhile, over at the bluegrass workshop, Eric Nagler, a fine banjo player, hosted some very inspiring music, finishing up with my (Billy's) band, the South Happiness Street Society Skiffle Band, drawing a crowd of five hundred people to "How Come You Do Me Like You Do."

## PA troubles

As with any good festival (and there aren't too many of those), the best was saved for last. Sunday night's concert covered quite a lot of ground musically. Owen McBride, Sunday's host, did a magnificent impromptu set (Merle Travis had cancelled) with some innocently off-color Irish drinking songs. Sara Grey, an Appalachian lady, had everyone floating with her soft, clear voice. During her act the PA system broke down, but Sara braved through the storm, waited for everything to straighten out, and carried on beautifully.

The last half of the show was beyond criticism. David Rea played magnificently for the hometown crowd, his magic fingers flying over the fretboard. He did two exceptionally fine guitar songs, "I'm in Love with a Woman for the Way She Walks" and "David and Goliath." The latter, a fast and loose "hip Bible" song, was the funniest thing all weekend. Norman Kennedy, a Scottish singer, brought the audience to its feet with his acapella singing. Going from Scottish ballads to Irish jigs, the reaction he got showed just how good the crowd was. That one man, without a single instrument, could leave ten thousand people clamoring for more, is indeed a phenomenon. And it can take place only at Mariposa. Next to last was James Taylor. Most of the people had never seen James before, and he really knocked them out with his shy, self-mocking approach. Playing songs like "Fire and Rain", "Country Road", "Carolina in My Mind" and "Sweet Baby James", Taylor conveyed his sensitive, probing words and music to the audience. Coming back for his second encore with an "Aw, shucks folks", Taylor enthralled each and every person within earshot.

## Climax to a beautiful weekend

Finally, the princess herself, Joni Mitchell, came on. Joni had not played before an audience for six months. Her last American appearance was — remember — at Kleinhans in December. Then, Joni, emotionally stirred, was almost crying during songs like "Cactus Tree" and "Willy." Now, after a much needed rest in Greece, she shyly approached the microphone. She was very nervous and she cautiously went through "Big Yellow Taxi." Next came "Marcie" and "Nathan La Freniere" and Joni

relaxed a bit. The audience, on her side all the way, responded vigorously to each song. Joni's added the dulcimer to her instrumental array and she did a song called "California" which she wrote in Spain, while she was "wishing I was home." The people joined in on "Woodstock" and her first encore "Circle Game." Called back for a second encore, Joni responded to a request for "Chelsea Morning." She was wailing away, smiling happily, and gently swaying back and forth.

Time had, unfortunately, run out. Owen McBride bade us goodnight and, with our heads in the clouds, we slowly departed. Any bad thoughts, like the few hundred who tried to crash the gates Saturday and Sunday nights, were easily forgotten. We went to the ferry, played on the line, sang on the boat, and continued even after we were back on the city proper. Mariposa was a dream come true, heaven on earth, peace.

Norman Kennedy

