



ali's CORNER

The Seventh Annual **Home Country Folk Festival** took place in London July 18-20, and by all accounts was a success. The organizers this year took the unusual step of dispensing with the paid indoor concerts, making the whole festival free and outdoors. At 7:30 each evening the workshop stages closed, and a concert continued in the bandshell until 11 p.m. The cash deficit was made up by passing

the hat, a method I believe unique in Canadian folk festivals. This worked quite successfully, and others may be interested in how it worked.

First of all, you need to be fairly sensitive to the feelings of the audience. On the one hand, they're getting a free weekend's entertainment; on the other, they don't want to find an upturned hat soliciting spare change every time they turn around. An appeal was made from the stage twice during the day: once during the afternoon and again during the evening concert. The Forest City Morris Dancers collected the money—they wear distinctive costumes and are identified with the festival—and found that virtually everyone saw the donation as a cheap ticket and gave readily. A nice touch was making the pitch for donations part of the entertainment. On Sunday evening, M.C. Mitch Podolak organized our first revival meeting. While the Home County Tabernacle Choir (consisting of most of the performers) sang inspirational songs such as "Will the Circle Be Unbroken", Doug McArthur, as a rather frantic evangelist, harangued the crowd, exhorting them to unburden themselves of their money. Well, the spirit moved a lot of people that night.

Every year before Home County, the press goes into collective convulsions, asking, "Who are these musicians?" and complaining loudly about the lack of headliners. There seems to be a compulsive need to seek out the known, rather than the unknown. This may tie in with something I wrote a few issues back about reviewers preferring to judge the familiar by pre-set standards, rather than give an honest appraisal of the unfamiliar. I guess what rankles most is the implicit assumption that headliners make better quality music than the rest. Well, that might be so, but to be a headliner in folk music means you have to appeal to popular taste, and that may be more a reflection of that taste than of the quality of the music. Yes, I'm aware of the paradox in something "popular" not being "folk", but popularity seems to be a function of

marketing these days as much as anything else. It would really bug me to book someone because their agent does a better job than they do. Besides, there are two possible reasons why a performer may not be a headliner for you: either they don't play too well, or you don't listen enough!

Well, we all waited with bated breath for the latest of the big international folk festivals, **Toronto**, to make its appearance, and sure enough it was big, although mainly on the performers' side. Audiences were disappointing. Certainly the line-up of talent was impressive, and with (at last count) around eighty acts to choose from, there should have been little difficulty finding whom you wanted to listen to. I must say, though, eighty acts look better on the poster than they do on the program. Performers don't get much chance to do more than a few songs all weekend. What they did find was an organization that, apart from a few teething troubles, drew on the experience of several Winnipeg and Vancouver festivals, and transported, boarded, fed, staged and amplified everyone very efficiently.

With that variety to choose from, the music as you might expect was first class, and some interesting comparisons were drawn during some workshops. One outstanding example was an *cappella* workshop featuring the Persuasions, Friends of Fiddler's Green, the Harmony Sisters and Margaret Christl.

The children's area was notable in that it attracted as many adults as kids, with performances from the Vanaver Caravan, Green Grass Cloggers, Fred Penner, John Allan Cameron and many others. Friends of Fiddler's Green were scheduled to do a Mummer's Play there till they discovered one of the cast had gone to Ireland with the key to the costume room in his pocket. Instead they did a concert which they felt would be suitable for children. They reckoned if they didn't explain the symbolic songs it would be O.K. CBC has recorded this event for their Saturday morning kids' program. I hope their parents aren't listening!

Throughout all this, the **Mariposa Folk Foundation** has been quietly busy. In their twentieth anniversary year, they decided to give up the big festival in favour of year-round activities. Their Mariposa Mainland series, every Wednesday at Harbourfront, has been featuring a series of concerts and theme nights all year, and has proven very successful. Through July and August they have been running Mariposa in the Parks, a series of family-oriented, free performances in parks throughout metropolitan Toronto, as well as other landmark locations in the city. Performers have included GritLaskin, Bluma, Ken Whitely, Rick Avery and Chick Roberts.

Finally, I'd like to bring a couple of albums to your attention. The first one probably qualifies as the most unusual