

Folk Festivals: The Second Installment

Compiled and Edited by
Tim Rogers

All of us participate in rituals that stem from our folk heritage. Be it how we celebrate Christmas or a wedding, or the uniquely Canadian rites surrounding the Grey Cup, there are times and places where our behaviour is ritualized by folkloristic traditions. These traditions have been learned orally or by example from others and form a significant aspect of what makes us what we are.

Within the folk music revival, there has been the gradual evolution of a ritual that we have come to know as the "folk festival." More or less since the '30s this term has become applied to annually sponsored performances of folklore, generally folksongs and dances. These typically have a seasonal celebration associated with them, and are a time when people get together to "have a time" using music and dance as the focal activities. They also mark the most significant public performances of folk/traditional/acoustic music in the country, given the relative size of the audiences that gather at these events. It is not surprising, then, that the festival is a hotly debated topic within the inner sancta of performers, academics and those involved in organizing them.

The July 1982 Bulletin published a feature entitled "Focus on Festivals" which contained a series of articles discussing various aspects of the folk festival in Canada. Specific events, the singers', performers' and spectators' perspectives as well as several other contributions were included. A number of interesting observations emerged from these articles with perhaps the most notable being that it appears to be very difficult not impossible, but very diffi-

cult - to make traditional music "look good" in the festival context.

Both the nature of these contributions and the response to the feature reaffirmed the importance accorded the festival by our readership. The festival seems to be some combination of "whipping boy" and musical feast for some, and a total conundrum for others. A neutral attitude seems to be the exception. So too was it clear that this first feature only scratched the surface as far as the festival is concerned. There are many aspects of this type of event that need further discussion and elaboration. But the article did open up a dialogue about festivals - which, I believe, was its most important contribution. In keeping with this dialogue, then, we have determined to publish a second feature on festivals. This "second installment" is intended to indicate some of the reactions and thoughts that have emerged from this discussion and to continue this dialogue about what appears to be the most controversial aspect of folk music performance in the country.

There are three basic types of articles in this feature. First we have four general articles, discussing various aspects of the festival. *Lanie Melamed* discusses the issue of the size of festivals, with particular reference to the history of the Mariposa Folk Festival of old. Some thoughts on festivals from the performers' view - with particular emphasis on workshops - is presented by *Grit Laskin*. Folklore student *Janet McNaughton* offers some interesting thoughts on how a folklorist can contribute to a festival. And finally, *Ian Robb* presents some arguments regarding the actual role of

festivals and how this relates to the "folkies'" evaluations of them. An interesting variant of these general articles is a song *On the Trail of the Festival* provided by *Don Freed*.

In addition to these general articles, we have a series of shorter pieces dealing with specific festivals. These vary from basic promotional blurbs through to detailed presentations of financial and artistic information. Included here are *Owen Sound Summerfolk* and three western festivals (*Calgary*, *Regina* and *Canmore*). Of particular note is the results of a questionnaire study conducted by *Sandi Hackler* which is reprinted from the *Solstice News*. This article is a treasure of comparative data among some of the better established festivals. London's *Home County* festival have graciously provided detailed financial information to compliment their contribution in the first festivals feature. These articles provide important and interesting insight into how festivals are planned and executed.

The third class of article in this feature is notable by its absence. The earlier *Bulletin* feature discussed the so-called mega-festivals to some degree. The *Winnipeg* and *Vancouver* festivals are the most prototypical examples of this type, with some of the newer ones showing movement in this direction (e.g. *Edmonton*). As indicated in that feature (and clearly underscored in Ian Robb's article in this issue) these very large, internationally oriented festivals are qualitatively (and quantitatively) different beasts from the more regional ones. Because of this, the artistic directors of these mega-festivals were contacted and

asked to discuss their festivals. Sadly, none submitted articles, and only one (Mitch Podolak of Winnipeg) acknowledged the request and reminder that was sent to each. I was looking forward to

It seems evident that there is some degree of affect attending the views of these mega-festival directors, which suggests some interesting exchanges over the next while

Mitch's article as he indicated: "I would be glad to contribute an article.... I must say that most of what was written about Festivals in your July issue made my teeth grind because of what I think is a genetic myopia on the part of some of the players and an essentially elitist concept about who 'owns' folk music.... It would give me real pleasure to, for once, dialogue, diatribe and debate with some

of the narrow minded idiots in the business about the role of festivals." It seems evident from this response that there is some degree of affect attending the views of these mega-festival directors, which bear promise of some interesting exchanges over the next while. Clearly there is need to open up channels of communication with these people (I've encountered similar rhetoric from Vancouver's Gary Cristall - e.g. in "from the Cutting Board", Feb 1982, Volume 2) and am most sorry that these directors have chosen to not state their positions. Only with open dialogue can we begin to understand the fabric of the folk festival in Canada — perhaps in the third installment.

The various contributions follow. In them you will find a treasure house of information and thoughts about festivals in the Canadian context. The summary section of this feature will provide some observations drawn from the various articles and end up with some suggestions that may help foster greater communication among the people interested in festivals in Canada.

