Lunenburg Folk Harbour Festival

by Mary Dixon

Now in its seventh year, the Lunenburg Folk Harbour Festival has become a regular and much-anticipated event in this picturesque seafaring town on Nova Scotia's South Shore. Following the appearance of two Lunenburg musicians at the Gloucester Folklife Festival in 1985, the seed was planted to attempt a similar event in Lunenburg, which already had a history of rivalry with its Massachusetts counterpart. From their common ties to the fishery, international dory races and the golden age of sail, where great schooners like the Bluenose raced the east coast, it seemed natural to continue the connection through the shared musical heritage of our maritime neighbours.

A small group of enthusiastic volunteers formed the Lunenburg Folk Harbour Society, and the first festival was held in 1986, to rave reviews. Our audience has grown over the years, as has the variety and scope of our performers. While sea shanties and ballads rooted in international maritime traditions still form a focus for Folk Harbour, you can now hear a full range of musical styles which are in keeping with the folk genre, from contemporary blues and African-American influences to Appalachian drolleries, cowboy songs, South American panpipes, Breton dance tunes, Newfoundland fiddling, modern love songs and political satire.

The festival opens with its evening concert on Thursday, which is followed by both afternoon and evening concerts on the succeeding three days. Afternoon performances take place on the scenic and historic waterfront at the Fisheries Museum Wharf, and also at the Heritage Bandstand in the centre of town. Evening concerts are held in a large marquee tent on the top of Blockhouse Hill, which overlooks the front and back harbours of Lunenburg.

With all events taking place in the middle of this picturesque seaport, visitors have the convenience of restaurants, inns and bed-and-breakfasts close at hand, not to mention motels, campsites and other amenities in town and in the neighbouring towns of Bridgewater and Mahone Bay. A few food concessions are also available at the evening site, and T-shirts, tapes and CDs are for sale on-site.

Along with our dedicated volunteers, our festival's success is due in great part to the generous support of local citizens and businesses and many corporate and government sponsors. Over the years we have enjoyed the assistance of Communications Canada, the Secretary of State, the Canada Council, Nova Scotia's Department of Tourism, the C.B.C., Air Canada, Air Nova, National Sea, Clearwater Fine Foods, Sun Radio and many others. The C.B.C. recorded the festival for three years, and has broadcast this music both regionally and nationally. A video was also made, and was shown on Adrienne Clarkson's Summer Festival.

We hope to welcome visitors from all across Canada to our intimate and very special festival.