

Summary

Well there you have it! A pot-pourri of views, history and background on festivals. Several key issues appear to emerge when these articles are considered ensemble.

First, there seems to be some consensus that it is very difficult - not impossible, but difficult - to make traditional music "look good" in the large festival context. Traditional music is "small group" music, and considerable sensitivity to this is necessary to enable it to survive the large festival. Workshops and "non-main stages" seem to be the vehicle for this.

Secondly, it seems that the large festival is predominantly in the entertainment business - mostly because of the financial needs to maintain it. This is neither bad nor good - just a fact of life. But if we think about it for a minute, where did we get our interests in "folk" or traditional music? Were not many of us attracted to this music we love so much through an entertainment medium? Perhaps the Kingston Trio - Pete Seeger - Ed McCurdy on CBC-TV - Bob Dylan - Flatt and Scruggs - or any number of performers - were the factors that sparked your interest. Whatever the reason, many of those involved in folk music these days came by their interest through an entertainment medium of one sort or another. (For me it was seeing a group called "The Cumberland Three" as a warm-up act for Shelly Burman, a comedian playing in Montreal). Hence, the large folk festival can be seen to serve a most important function - for even the most pure traditionalist among us. Call it recruitment, seduction, education or outright propoganda - whatever you wish - the "mega-festival" is a major vehicle for kindling interest in traditional music forms. We must realize and appreciate this if we are to have any success in our desire to get Canadian folk music into the "public eye" - and this suggests that we must support these endeavours as strongly as we are able.

For the teacher interested in hearing Canadian folk material - for possible adoption to the classroom - the large festivals present a bit of a problem. If Canadian traditional music is available at all, it will be on the smaller stages and during the workshops. It is very hard to determine this from most of the programmes that are a part of the festival - making it difficult to know where to go. The bonus for the teacher is the kids' area where all sorts of ideas, and often quite a bit of Canadian material, are available. It has been my experience that the performers in these areas

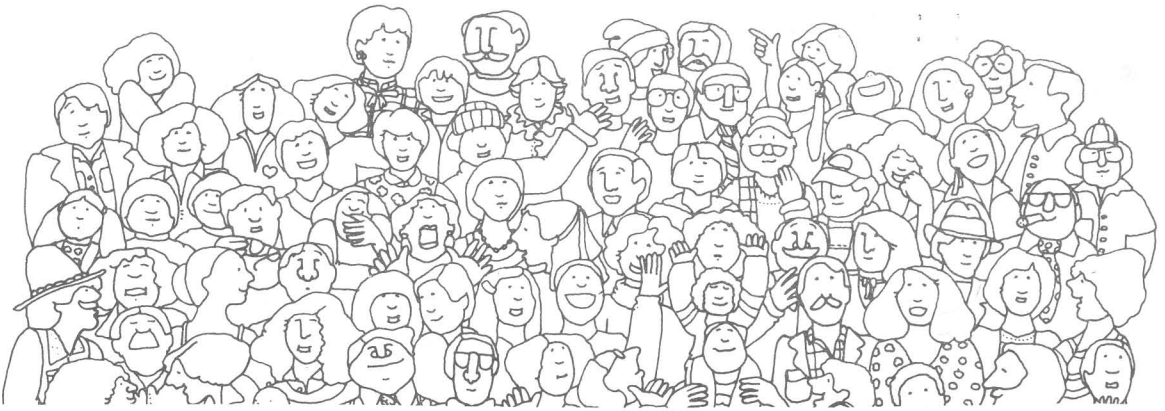
are very approachable, and the teacher can find a wealth of ideas and material simply by sitting down with the performers and chatting with them.

As we go to press with this issue Mariposa is about to embark on another direction in the larger festival context. This is the Summer Mariposa Festival that will be held June 25-27 at Bathurst Quay on Toronto's Harbourfront. This festival is dubbed "The Canadians/Les Canadiens" and will be a "three day celebration of Canadian cultural heritage." This is a truly exciting development in the festival field, as it represents the first major festival to go completely Canadian. There will be a combination of musicians, crafts-people, writers and story tellers brought together to bring to life the varying styles of the Canadian experience. The performers have been recruited from all across the country, representing a fine diversity. Certainly, the teacher looking for Canadian material shouldn't miss this one. So too does it hold promise of excitement for the festival-goer as it is a new and bold excursion into festival programming. Experience will show us whether this approach combines the strengths of the "classic" Mariposa format with the good aspects of the smaller regional festivals.

A third point that emerges from these articles is that the small festival holds considerable potential for the promotion of Canadian folk music. The Newfoundland and Cape Breton festivals, in combination with Home County and Owen Sound in Ontario, make this point fairly clear. But enthusiasm for this option must be tempered by Labelle's sobering comments on the Miramichi. Here, the grand-daddy of them all is in danger of becoming extinct as a single generation of singers becomes less available. Perhaps the more integrated folk arts festivals, like those in Quebec, are the answer. Then survival of the festival would be less contingent upon a single cohort of craftsmen in a single idiom.

Michael Cooney suggests that the university may have a role to play in the presentation of traditional music. Citing the 1963 Berkley festival as an example, he argues that the university should devote its resources to presenting high-quality, out-of-the-mainstream art to students. (The in-the-mainstream forms are aptly handled by the promoters). He emphasizes the word "good" - not just "authentic" in this argument. There certainly is food for thought here.

The articles in this feature by no means offer closure on these complex points. What is clear from them is that the festival in Canada



is a complex and important topic. Hopefully this feature has served to define some of the issues in need of further discussion. We haven't come any where near covering every view of the festival in this sampler. In fact, neither the west nor the north have been very well represented in these articles (not for want of contacting people, I should hasten to add). If we've missed your favourite - we are very sorry. Please write and let us know. All of this means that it is important for CFMS to continue a dialogue on the folk festival. To this end, the April issue in 1983 will focus on festivals again. Response to this feature, in combination with new ideas, and some detailed information about 1983 festivals will produce a very interesting issue. Please write us if you wish to contribute.

An appropriate way to conclude this feature is for us to take a moment and consider what each of us thinks folk music is all about. A way to approach this is for each of you think back on the times you've had with music that were VERY SPECIAL for you.....try it. Can you recall several fleeting - and all to infrequent - times when music came to life and represented a treasured moment - one when it was part of a special human experience? (For me, one was "up the harbour" in Heart's Content Newfoundland, another was an impromptu family musical gathering in Huntsville Ontario, while a third was a fireside musical session while angling in BC.) Have you been able to dredge up several of these times? If you have, odds are that these moments will have occurred in small groups, where there are very strong bonds between all people there. In these small gatherings, the music represented "pure" communication. There were important shared values and meanings, and these were expressed, celebrated, felt and enjoyed through the music. This is the stuff that music is made of.

One aspect of the folk festival - or performing for large numbers of people in general

- is that the chances of having this kind of very special musical experience are very low. As one moves away from the small and intimate group the degree of shared meaning diminishes, and the chances of having this kind of musical experience are reduced. In the festival context, the musical experience is removed - at least, in part - from the appropriate social and physical environment - and thereby loses a lot of its significance. Yes, the festival can provide entertainment, but not the deep experience of folk music. That is a privilege of the small, intimate group. The festival can produce a pale imitation of the experience, but not the real McCoy - the shared meaning and communication is missing. What the festival does provide is the opportunity for someone to find out where to begin looking for this most important human experience with music. Perhaps the "muted" musical experiences of the festival will help someone discover the reality of human contact. If it does, it has been a success. This sentiment was reflected very aptly by Lanie Melamed at the conclusion of the session at our last AGM:

Well, my hat's off to you for talking about this... You've mentioned the word communion and touching people and sharing. I think that's the thing that really turns people on. That's the link we have to people - somehow connecting in a very human way.... We live in a world that is so plastic that it makes connecting very hard.

Our music is a deviant music - we are deviants....we are counter everything our society stands for because we want people to connect with each other through music - their own music.... and that is very hard to do in this society. Hats off to everyone who is knocking their head against a wall, in whatever way, to connect people to each other through this medium.