

The Performers' View

by Grit and Judith Laskin

Workshops would be best if
there were only 2 or 3 performers/acts participating

One frustrating aspect of being a regular performer on the folk festival circuit is seeing many of the same mistakes being made over and over again year after year by festival planners. My wife Judith (as a past staff member of the Mariposa festival and festival audience regular) and I (as a performer at most and audience at some festivals) both find it amazing that ways of organizing and planning a weekend event that seem so painfully obvious to us rarely appear to be even considered.

So, as a vent to our bitching (normally saved for our nearest and dearest), here follows a listing of our suggestions. It is neither a complete list nor one aimed at any particular festival. It is a collection of what we feel are the ingredients of a delectable "folk" festival.

1. A MINIMUM OF PERFORMERS. I've had it with being one of ten performers in a one hour workshop. Each performer is lucky to squeeze in one song and the audience gets no sense of any of the musicians.

2. WORKSHOPS TO HAVE ONLY 2 OR 3 PERFORMERS/ACTS PARTICIPATING. This way the audience might actually walk away with some tangible knowledge/memories. After all, entertainment value aside, these are "workshops."

3. MAXIMUM 3 DAYTIME STAGES PLUS A CHILDRENS AREA. More areas confuse people and limit what they can see and hear.

4. MIX THE MUSICAL STYLES REPRESENTED ON EACH STAGE. Too often the same groupings of performers

are seen in workshops; i.e., all singer/songwriters or all british performers. This is boring for the performer and the audience. We suggest for example, putting a blues singer, a british ballad singer and an oldtimey musician together under the heading love songs or bawdy songs or sex roles in song OR WHATEVER! Then just watch what happens as the people on and off stage discover the common threads in the most diverse traditions and styles.

5. INDIVIDUAL PROGRAMMERS FOR EACH AREA OVERSEEN BY ONE ONLY ARTISTIC DIRECTOR. This offers the benefits of more than one person's likes, dislikes and experience without the restrictions of committee debates and decision making. The programmers should be VERY familiar with the abilities of the performers hired. Often artistic directors have only a general idea of what the musicians can do and consequently put them in workshops without confirming that they haven't played banjo in 6 years or have never had a protest song in their repertoire.

6. FRIDAY EVE. DURATION. Two days of daytime programming are plenty for audience and performer. Just think back to the performers' haggard looks and short concentration spans in that 11:00 Sun. morning workshop....

7. A WINTER FESTIVAL. There are only so many weekends in a Canadian summer and Feb. could use some excitement.

8. IF A SUMMER FESTIVAL: Have it in a park setting but with large tents to house the day and eve. stages. If the

tents have roll-up sides, the picnic feel can be maintained with rain protection.

9. FOUR ACTS ONLY IN THE EVENING CONCERTS. This leaves a longer set length (3/4 hr. or so) and gives the performer time to establish a rapport with the audience and the audience to experience more than one dimension of the performer.

10. CONTINUE DAYTIME CONCERTS. Aside from providing the opportunity for those without eve. concerts to do their stuff, it also removes the restrictions that topic workshops often place on performers; not giving them ample chance to do what they do best.

11. INCLUDE JUGGLING, MAGIC ACTS, MIME AND CABARET IN WORKSHOP PROGRAMMING. We've had enough of the "medieval type" wandering/spontaneous performances. Let's learn some of the ways they do those things.

12. INTEGRATE THEATRE INTO THE FESTIVAL. To us many types of theatre are as much a part of the folk tradition as singing a song or playing a fiddle. "Street" theatre (an old idea) or mummer's plays could be under this heading. You might also go as fully theatrical as formal plays that relate to some of the workshop themes or there's Peter Bellamy's ballad opera The Transports just itching to be produced here. Try the idea of theatre, you'll like it.

13. LOTS OF DANCE. Demonstration-Participation-In Performance-No. matter how it's sliced, dance adds so

much to the flavour and variety of the weekend. We say have some of all 3 types.

14. ALLOW THE CRAFTS TO PLAY A MAJOR ROLE. Think on the popularity of craft fairs. This could be a major draw to the festival if you present a large selection of good quality work. If you also include the craftspeople in demonstration workshops and treat them the same as a performer (meals, bio. in the program, etc.) they'll offer you all the co-operation and help you'll ever want.

15. DIVERSE STYLES OF MUSIC REPRESENTED. A mix of French Can., S. American, country, etc., etc., makes for more exciting times for everyone concerned.

16. A "COMMUNITY" STAGE. All the groups within the local folk community; dance groups, folk clubs, storytellers, etc., could be encouraged to book an hour or so each day and have a platform to do their thing.

One final point for that which is very near to our hearts; our stomachs!:

17. THE FESTIVAL MUST MAINTAIN CONTROL OVER FOOD. Do not operate in a park where the residing hot dog chain has the monopoly on food sales. A good example to follow is London, Ont.'s Home County Festival. It approves and oversees a number of local groups and restaurant owners who make meals on the site in their own booths. Among the offerings were: fellafel, baked goods, sandwiches, cooked dinners, pizza and best of all, packaged lunches and dinners that were so smart in a park setting.