Three Nights of Music at the New York Folk Festival

THE coop
THE FAST FOLK MUSICAL MAGAZINE

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Cover Illustration by Jeff Schneider

by Nancy Talanian

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I was pleasantly surprised to see that all performances I heard were well attended; surprised because many were on weeknights, and tickets were more expensive than weeknight performance tickets usually are--avering $7. I wonder where all those people are the rest of the year, when many equally good, and some even better, performers and songwriters play to much smaller gatherings. How can we inform those people that good musicians (including those who participated in the festival) perform in New York City year-round, not just from August 5 through August 13?

The first performance I went to featured two singer-songwriters I had never heard before--Eric Bogle and Nancy White. Ms. White, from Canada, opened, and performed several fairly light political songs that she had written, accompanied by her own guitar and by Doug Wild's piano. Most of her songs made light of quasipolitical topics. One example was "Happy Mouth, Happy Can," whose title refers to the English translation of the Chinese translation of Coca-Cola, the first American product to be sold in the People's Republic of China. Another example was a song about Roy Rogers being stuffed, called "Triggermortis." Most of these songs introduced potentially provocative subjects, but did not provide morals.

But White also offered a few songs that showed real perception and that were very moving. The one I liked best was about a woman who works at a video display terminal, and no longer has any contact with the other people in her company--just her terminal:

> My name is Mary.
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In the song, Mary mentions that the woman who had worked at the next terminal during her pregnancy had miscarried, but that the company's management had said there was no connection. This song demonstrated Ms. White's ability to write a thought-provoking song. I wished she had offered more of them in her set. But perhaps her experience has shown her that the lighter songs are more popular with her audiences.

I had looked forward to hearing Eric Bogle for years--ever since I first heard his song, "No Man's Land," sung by Priscilla Herdman. This song, which preceded Bogle (who is from Scotland and now lives in Australia) to many countries, was inspired by a visit to a graveyard in France of World War I casualties, the oldest of whom was 27 at the time of his death. One of the graves was that of the soldier Willie McBride, aged 19, of whom Bogle asks many questions, including these in the song's chorus:

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jo, and vocals; and Grant Miller on guitar and vocals.

The next night found me at Folk City again to hear Rosalie Sorrels and Paul Seibel. The house was not quite as full as it had been the previous night, but I enjoyed their performances better. Neither singer presented any pap. All songs (and Ms. Sorrels's stories) were emotionally rich; all their topics were worth covering.

Nancy Talanian

Paul Seibel

Seibel, accompanied by Joe Henderson on electric guitar, gave a good, sincere performance of what a long-time fan might describe as the same old songs, but which were mostly new to me. There were some noteable exceptions to my ignorance, however. I recognized "Louise":

> And everybody knows sometimes she cried,
> But women like Louise, well, they get by;.

"Any Day Woman":

> If you don't love her, better let her go.
> You'll never fool her, you better let it show.
> Love's so hard to take when you have to fake everything in return.
> You just preserve her when you serve her a little tenderness;

and his encore, "He Was a Friend of Mine."

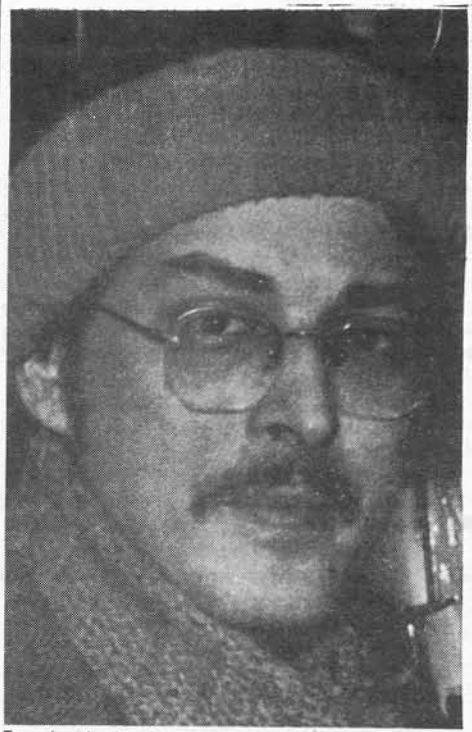
Next up was Rosalie Sorrels, who sang a few of her own songs and some well chosen songs by others, and told some great stories about her parents to introduce some of her songs. For example, she told us about her mother, who is now a widow and living alone, and read us a poem her mother had written for her, as an introduction to her own song, "Mama" (The CooP, October 1982). She told us a humorous story about how her father came to give up drinking as an introduction to a song by Stan Kelly of Liverpool. In that song, the singer answers simple questions about her father, showing him to be a plumber who was poor but a fine and loved man.

These and most of the songs Ms. Sorrels sang were pretty and moving, including Roosevelt's song about Woody Guthrie, and Dave Van Ronk's "Another Time and Place" (The CooP, September 1982) in which the singer happily recalls a love affair that has ended: "If now I wander on alone with no place to abide/I'll be content, for I was sent those wanderings at your side." Ms. Sorrels's encore was a country blues song about a hobo who went to a preacher for refuge and a kind word, and was driven away with angry words. On the lighter side, Sorrels's set included one very funny song called "Waltzing at Night," about how Uncle Walter sneaks out at night to go waltzing with bears. The song culminates in Uncle Walter's capture by the bears, each of whom demands at least one dance each night.

Nancy Talanian

Rosalie Sorrels

My last festival evening found me covering sets at both Folk City and SpeakEasy. I attended the first set at Folk City, where I heard Frank Christian and Dave Van Ronk, and the second set at SpeakEasy, where Megan McDonough and Rod MacDonald were performing. I discovered that I wasn't the only one who was running from club to club between shows: Mark Dann (The CooP's recording engineer) played stand-up bass for both Frank Christian and Rod MacDonald that night. He even backed up Megan McDonough on the last song of her second set, so technically he did five shows that night, which must be some sort of record.



Bob Zaidman

Frank Christian

I was pleased to see that Frank Christian, who was opening for Dave Van Ronk that evening, had improved quite a bit since I first began hearing him perform solo. His guitar playing has always been good, but this evening he showed better stage presence than I recall from previous performances. Several of his songs were quite well done, with music, lyrics, guitar, and vocal working well together. Examples were his lively opening number, "Walking," "Brother, Can You Spare a Dime," and "Waiting for that Steamer," which featured a nice, double-time break of facile fingerwork and pretty trills, and a dramatic return to tempo for the ending.

In a few cases, however, Christian seemed to be so into his guitar arrangement that his vocals neglected to show that the songs were sad. These included "Leaning Against the Lamppost" and his encore, "Where Were You Last Night," in which the jazzy, spirited beat did not fit well with the lines, "And I wonder will I ever forget the pain/Where were you last night?"

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New Year's Eve

by Richard Meyer

There's a lot of talk these days around the Village scene about the quality and timeliness of the work we do. In a commercial market that does not respond readily to the type of music we make we fight lethargy looking for the elusive songs, ideas, and issues that will be fresh and new. Each of us searches in our own way, looking back to the traditional styles or becoming more academic, while others move from style to style trying on one and then another until one fits. We try all these things out on each other at Cornelia Street, at hoots, on the street, and in performance because we are the mirror in which our companions see themselves.

I moved to Los Angeles in the late seventies because I thought it was the place for a songwriter to go and I wanted a change. I went, I played, I saw, I did not conquer. While I was looking to obscure records and old songs for stimulation I made friends with some of the area record-collector dealers. After a while I headed back home to the East Coast. While I have not conquered, things are better.

There was a Beatlefest last week in northern New Jersey. Some of my dealer friends were working there, so I went to visit. The event featured films, artwork, books, lectures, sound-alike contests, and trivia contests all based on the career of the four lovable moptops from Liverpool. There was even a representative from the Liverpool department for tourism. There was a flea market that offered a vast array of Beatle-related merchandise, new and vintage (vintage being 20 years old, that is). Let me set one thing straight: I love the Beatles; I did not love the Beatlefest. Even though one could indulge any Beatle-related whim there, it seemed sterile.

I felt very little joy at the Beatlefest and sensed an overemphasis on the value and vicarious pleasure of objects that, when they first appeared, changed the attitudes of a great portion of the living generations of the world by virtue of their content, not their shape or corporate origin.

I saw very little spontaneity and even less sense of discovery, as if the audience at the Beatlefest came so familiar with the records and films that made the Beatles what they were that they were coming there looking for each other. The Beatlefest differs from the more general record collectors conventions where there is a real search to find obscure musical gems and where growing, continuing musical interest fuels the search.

Consumption is an anonymous trait, while productivity distinguishes people by the creative energy that they channel into something tangible. The Beatles distinguished themselves by recycling American and British musical styles with freshness and an energy that conveyed their enthusiasm for their own work. Now in the museum that sells and resells the spoils of their work, and the trash of hangers-on who followed, the impact of their music is gone. It seemed to me that there were a lot of people scratching at these things for some of the joy they once experienced but have subsequently lost. When beautiful things are bought and sold, and studied without regard for their impact on the people who react to them, the beauty they hold is irrelevant. They become dead things.

The Beatlefest attendees seemed to be voraciously grabbing at straws. Sales were brisk. The atmosphere of tenuous involvement with the Beatles extended to a scrounging for autographs of Beatle best friends, biographers, and things that had somehow been close to them. The desire to find one's self through the accumulating of momentos of times that made one happy is a strong one. It is as if these things retain some of the original joy and that it can be revived. Having flirted with the dealer/collector routine myself, I understand it well. The genuine enjoyment of finding a rare piece of music is made completely irrelevant in an event dedicated to the institutionalized sale of music that is still so familiar as to be part of the common memory of most of us and easily accessible if one goes out looking for it.

The difference with the Beatles and others who were key to the culture of the fifties and sixties is the impending real investment potential of putting away our childhood until it becomes valuable enough to support us in old age. The clutter is disconcerting even if amusing. The collectors instinct and drive for something unique becomes lost in a variety of international repetitions of the same thing. Nostalgia is not the driving force when the material is still accessible. The musical force is lost, the inspiration that changed a generation becomes a totem dressed in repetitious commentary and critical overviews. Real accomplishment gets lost in hype; and although this is not a new idea, living in the face of it can be disconcerting. A gray area develops where the thing being hyped is lost on those who follow it. When the commentary and the trappings of art become more important, the art is no longer absorbed in the immediate way it was intended. Classical works are often avoided because there is such a load of cultural baggage to get through that we don't bother.

Freud is often quoted and read much less often, Presley is deified, and the influences that allowed him to create his style are often ignored. Dylan scoured folk traditions to build a style of his own, while the tradition he used is largely forgotten. Art is concerned with the present and forward movement. It thrives on the inspirations and the broad interrelations we all have. What happens in the Beatlefest generation, the Walkman world and other reductionist habits is that we no longer go to the sources of our art. We find our culture sold to us in a one-dimensional manner. We are told that we can find art anywhere, and so there is a tendency to stop looking. We stop looking because without the need to make choices there isn't much development of a discriminating taste on which to base choices.

In modern folk/acoustic/pop music, the challenge is to avoid blind repetition as if one were ignorant of the whole atmosphere of nostalgia that such music is crushed by. The audience that is attracted to any cultural movement comes to it with preconceptions that often have nothing to do with the practitioners of the art. The mythology that accompanies Dylan, the Beatles, Elvis, and others was created after the fact. We view and participate in events that center around other people, and it is our reactions to them with the help of the media that create the lasting cultural impression seen by others who come later.

If talent is taken as a given, I believe that artists do what they do, what they must, and although they may be encouraged by an audience, they follow their muse independently. I'm talking about artists, not manufacturers. We look to the successes for a secret. We may love the art, music, or dance, and we go to Beatlefests of various kinds to get more

and more trappings as if they hold the secret. It is a little like the obligatory New Year's Eve party where one must have fun, and think the fun is the noisemaker or the glass.

Artists simply do what they do, and we must take them at their word when they say they simply wrote something or painted it without regard for the implications that are piled on later. Modern mythologies grow in direct relation to our inability to tap into our own sources of inspiration. We begin to respect the artist's reputation more than the art, forgetting that at one time the artist had to struggle alone to create the work he is now scrutinized and revered for.

When we go about exposing our own talent we immediately put ourselves in competition with our own myths. The audience we seek to attract is the one that has been brought up in the same culture as we have been. They go to the same folk festivals, museums, TV guides, and Beatlefests, even New Year's Eve parties. We have to tell them something they have not heard before or they will put the same expectations on us as the mythologized product we are trying to replace. This is the "Next Bob Dylan" syndrome.

Art can tell us a great deal about ourselves. When we make temples to creators and lose sight of the creating, the work no longer lives. A buyer of an artistic product risks nothing but disappointment, which will leave him with a tendency to be more cautious and perhaps narrowminded next time. The artist risks everything--material, spiritual, and theoretical--when he or she goes about creating something he or she feels is new. A combination of intellect, feeling, and inspiration drives a creator. Luxury collectors' editions mean nothing unless the art is there to back it up. And if it is that good, then the other things are just cute touches supported by the art, not the luxury.

When art is anything that is promoted heavily or slickly done, even the ability of an artistically cognizent public to discriminate becomes weak. It also becomes difficult for the artist to remain uninfluenced by trash in the face of its overwhelming success. The risks that artists take therefore are twofold: they must face their own devils or delights, and come out with the product of their dreams without trying to shape it to commercial whims for commercialism's sake.

In the Beatlefest manifestation of the world a quip in an interview, a pose of an album jacket, or an inflection on a TV show can become the basis for an audience member's whole style. People bring to popular culture a need for substance that is strong, and the apparent success of popular artists destroys a person's individual nuances. As we stop cultivating our own initiative, the influences of our cultural leaders become overwhelming and we as a culture suffocate.

As audiences become more and more suffocated by the media critiques and secondary products of today's art, they no longer see what is quality and what is not. When the average person's life becomes pale in their own eyes, compared to their heroes, it is the tendency of would-be heroes to acquire the trappings of success before they build a catalogue of material to back it up. The temptation to become imitative for both performer and audience is strong, but that kind of conformity eventually breeds contempt by artist for audience and audience for a lazy artist. ■

coop

The CooP is looking for energetic volunteers with an interest in music to help with typing, accounting, advertising, and marketing.

Contributions to the magazine in the form of photographs, songs, drawings, articles, letters, and suggestions are heartily encouraged.

Please contact The CooP:

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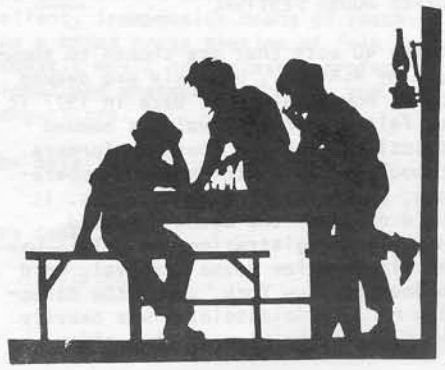

N.A.C.A. and the Coffee House Festival

History and Alternatives

by Angela Page

What is now the N.A.C.A. (National Assocation of Campus Activities), formerly the N.E.C.A.A. (National Entertainment and Campus Activities Association) and N.E.C. (National Entertainment Conference) began in 1968 as the Block Booking Conference. Its primary purpose was to promote block booking.

Today N.A.C.A. has grown to one thousand educational institutional members and over 600 associate members, that is, firms or agents whose functions are related to campus activities. Each year N.A.C.A. brings together students, performers, and these firms for a few days of showcasing and educational workshops. The association also maintains a library, sponsors competitions, and bestows awards. There is an annual conference, always in February. Next year's conference will be in Kansas City. There are also eleven regional meetings. New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Washington, D.C., and Maryland make up part of what is called the East Coast Regional. That conference will be held in October this year, at Grossinger's in Liberty, New York.

Since 60 percent of the colleges in the United States belong to N.A.C.A., it is highly advantageous to performers to showcase at one of these conferences. To showcase a performer must: (1) be a member of N.A.C.A. (dues run about $300 yearly); (2) fill out an application by the deadline (July 29th for the October festival); and (3) be chosen by the showcase selection committee. Selections are made from videos, albums, and any other means by which a performer can represent him or herself without actually being present. Those not chosen to showcase may still exhibit at a booth. Fees for these run between $150 and $175.

COFFEE HOUSE FESTIVAL

Of the 40 acts that are chosen to showcase by N.A.C.A., only six are deemed coffee house material. Back in 1977 it was felt that a festival was needed strictly for coffee house performers. It would unite musicians, club operators, and school representatives. It would downplay the agent hype and charge low registration fees. This was the first Coffee House Festival, held in Oneonta, New York, under the direction of Jeri Goldstein. I was heavily involved at the time as the coffee house coordinator for Oneonta. N.E.C. (then) provided financial assistance for the festival. Musicians were heavily involved in workshop planning and total evaluation of the festival. Showcasing performers were chosen at random from the applicants after a given deadline. Those not selected were free to take part in the "round robin workshops" or to perform during the free times as "roving artists" on the school grounds. All performers paid the same fee. In 1978 the festival was repeated, again in Oneonta.

In 1979 the festival moved to W. Paterson College in Paterson, New Jersey, under the direction of Drew Cullen and Greg McCue. More emphasis was placed on private clubs. N.E.C. again provided financial aid; however, the association wanted to see more musicians involved in their organization. Registration fees were increased for non-N.E.C. members.

In 1980 the festival was moved to Bloomsburg State College with the same two directors. When the festival actually made money, N.E.C. got more interested. The regional steering committee wanted a say in who the director was going to be and where the festival was to be held.

In 1981 the festival moved to Rensellaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, New York. In 1982 it was in Alfred, New York, and this year it was held at Geneseo and called the "Coffee House and Cabaret Festival."

The trend seems to be to move towards more "Holiday Inn lounge acts" and away from original seasoned folk performers. Musicians are less involved, and clubs are not encouraged to attend. More business occurs.

THE PARTIES INVOLVED

In evaluating conferences of this type, there are three interests involved. To the agents wishing to make money off the booking and promotion of their performers' talents, N.A.C.A. is almost a necessity. How else can they reach so many prospective bookers? There is a feeling, however, that their acts don't stand much of a chance if these agents do not become involved in the hierarchy of the organization. There is a regional director, a conference coordinator, and several subcoordinators, not to

mention the showcase selection committee chosen by the formers. Obviously a place in the ranks is beneficial. They must also be prepared to play the hype game, treating college students like royalty, handing out posters, albums, flyers, t-shirts, and even Frisbees.

The performer is at the mercy of the college showcase selection committee. After deciding to pay dues and become a member, applying for a spot, spending money on video, album, and other promotional paraphernalia, they must hope that the sum total accurately represents their work and talents and that something will grab the group of viewers, who see one video after another, sometimes for hours upon hours. Being chosen for the Coffee House Festival is another problem. The "random" selection means there is no quality control, and as a result the acts range from the very good to the very, very bad. Here again the pool is the only musicians who know about the festival and who are willing to apply.

To the student reps, the N.A.C.A. or Coffee House Festival plays a valuable role. However, they must be willing to cope with the money and the hype, and to place them in perspective. Who exactly has been chosen for their review? And who are these people who chose them? And what were their criteria for choosing? To what extent do the performers they see represent available national or regional talent? Are these performers ever in front of an audience, or are they masters of the studio or living room video or demo tape? To what extent does money replace ability? As Hamish Henderson asks about folk music,

> How does money come into the picture and how, for christsake, can we occasionally keep it out of the picture?

The first Coffee House Festival of '77 was organized to de-business the folk and music scene. The changing of this year's name to include "and cabaret festival" and the continuously increasing involvement of N.A.C.A. are indications of the lessened effect of the festival as an alternative.

THE ALTERNATIVES

Wouldn't the student reps be better off taking the registration fees and dues and traveling to key festivals and areas of the regions seeking out the current active and growing acts? I was asked once to speak at an N.E.C. conference for a workshop on successful coffee house management where I proposed such an idea. After all, that was how I was handling my successful program. I traveled to the Toronto Mariposa festival where I heard someone named Stan Rogers, and brought him to our coffee house for his first United States gig. I traveled to Greenwich Village and booked a newly organized trio of three sisters called the Roches. To me, it was important to seek out quality acts and growing talent and help them to get the recognition they deserved.

Of course, this takes actual dedication and interest on the part of the school rep. Perhaps this is part of the problem. What student can and/or wants to spend his or her evenings listening to demo tapes and albums, and holidays and weekends traveling to folk clubs or festivals? Another inherent problem in the college scene is the turnover of students. A union is only as strong as the people who work within it. At best a student is involved for three years, and only in the capacity of booking responsibilities for the last one or two years.

Since a majority of the students with the ability to spend money continue going to the N.A.C.A. or Coffee House Festivals, how can you convince a performer that he or she would be better off continuing to perform than entering the hype and promotion game? ■

Gabriel Yacoub

by John Kruth

Gabriel Yacoub, the founding member of the popular French folk group Malicorne (which included Celtic harp wizard Alan Stivell), just completed his second tour of Canada and the United States. Performing his songs on acoustic guitar and singing in an unusually clear and powerful voice, Gabriel entranced his audiences with his moody melodies despite a language barrier.

I saw him perform at the Bear Mountain World Music Festival last July with Scottish fiddler Johnny Cunningham in support, and though the sound system hampered their performance somewhat, they still shone through. Gabriel sang in French, but introduced each song in English, making sure his audience got the basic idea of what he sang about. He played a variety of tunes that ranged from droning medieval-like ballads to folk-rock numbers. His voice and guitar were capable of changing style from song to song. For the most part, I found his guitar style reminiscent of John Renbourn's (of Pentangle fame) modal fingerpicking patterns. On reflective ballads and love songs, one could hear shades of James Taylor as Gabriel punctuated each verse with Taylor's trademark hammer-ons. Then in "Papa-Loi, Maman-Loi" Gabriel could be heard pounding out punchy power chords a la Pete Townshend.

While Gabriel was in New York, he played at the SpeakEasy on two occasions. The first was an after-hours set of four of five songs which included "Paris, Paris," a sarcastic depiction of the City of Love in which he compares it first to a desert and then to hell. This song moves along with a steady rhythm and catchy melody. It was the first song I heard Gabriel perform, and it stuck like glue. It didn't matter that I didn't understand the words.

Most of the time Yacoub tours Spain, Italy, and Holland, playing his home town of Paris only once a year. He explained that the club scene there is rather small and people are somewhat blase. Records in France are quite expensive, too. The government adds a "luxury item" tax of 33 percent.

Gabriel Yacoub can be heard on the July/August issue of The CooP performing "Bon An, Mal An" with Mark Dann on bass. According to Dan Behrman of Immigrant Music, Gabriel will return to the United States for another tour within the next year. Check him out. ■

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THE COOP

178 W. Houston Street, Suite 9
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No Commercial Traffic

Or, Folkies Don't Take No Toll Roads

record review

by Sherwood Ross

Rod MacDonald was driving back from Boston, avoiding the toll roads, explaining as he did that other highways were just as fast and that you could save $4.

After giving three performances in as many days, MacDonald was tired and whenever I took the wheel he pillowed his old black jacket up against the window and dozed in the right front seat. Friday and Saturday nights he played with John Lewis in the Lion's Den in Stockbridge, Massachusetts. The next afternoon he played two originals at the Harvest Moon Folk Festival, near Concord, New Hampshire. Sunday had been a brilliant day, with no more atmosphere than the Sahara Desert: cool in the morning, baking hot in the afternoon, and blanket-wrapping cold at night. The festival's directors had given Rod a complimentary t-shirt. His name was emblazoned on its big brown maple leaf, together with the others who played: Loudon Wainwright, John Prine, Tom Rush, Jerry Jeff Walker, Steve Goodman, and Pegosus.

He was knocked out driving back from Boston that Monday afternoon because he had slept poorly the night before. He was on a roll, unable to sleep, because the excitement he had brought to the crowd had affected him. "When I was a kid," he said, "I got so excited over the last day of school that I would get sick."

The nervous stomach apparently lingers, and so does the nervous excitement MacDonald brings to his performances. Whereas the other performers got to do an extended set, Rod had been booked for only two songs, almost as a musical pinch-hitter. But he was the first performer to bring to life the crowd of 3,000 looking down from a ski slope. Even before he sang the first line of his opening "You Butter My Bread on Both Sides," the folk-rock beat ignited the audience. It may have been the appreciative roar that went up afterwards that cost him a night's sleep. "A Sailor's Prayer" (The CooP, September 1982), which he sang with Pegosus, got a like reception. Since the festival had not made any money, a common hazard in folk music performances, it would be doubtful that MacDonald would walk off with anything more than his brown maple leaf rag.

No matter. Over the years he has learned the virtue of sleeping on bedrolls in the living rooms of friends, finding the cheapest vegetarian restaurants, and avoiding the toll roads. "A Sailor's Prayer," for instance, was written one stormy winter night in Chicago in somebody else's apartment. At the festival Rod chatted with a promotor who had let him crash whenever he played Boston.

Such friends abound. The realization that he has been helped on his way up over the years has not been lost on him, and his first album, No Commercial Traffic, deals with giving, not just getting. As we drove back to the city, MacDonald reflected that the song, "On the Road in New York Town," was written "from the point of view of those who have no clout, people without air-conditioners in the summer. What I've always wanted to do is broaden my viewpoint, to sleep outside in the park with a bunch of bums. I entertain myself, like Thomas Wolfe in You Can't Go Home Again, by walking the streets of New York."

He veered off the highway just south of Hartford, tooling past his boyhood home in Southington. The typical white two-story frame house, he found, was much the same, right down to the mountain laurel bush his mother had planted on the front lawn. It was still there, although the baseball field next door was gone and there were many more houses. Rod slept on cold winter nights in a front upstairs bedroom under a pile of blankets; summers down on the screenporch.

He slowed the car to a stop in front of the house. He could see a small boy playing back near the garage and he whispered, "Hi, kid." Maybe the boy's mother was encouraging him to play a musical instrument the way Rod's mother had. He gave her a lot of credit, recognizing her contribution. From the time he was eight he had a plastic guitar to perform on. "I've been playing the guitar most of my life," he says, and for the past ten years since quitting journalism (The Hartford Courant, Newsweek) it's been full time.

Asked why he hadn't made an album earlier, MacDonald replied, "Because nobody ever asked me before." Of course he had thought of it, but not seriously until Joseph Zbeda of Cinemagic (and the owner of SpeakEasy in New York City) suggested it to him.

"We didn't try to make anything that sounded like what's on the radio. It's an album of songs, more than sounds." MacDonald went on to say, "We didn't want to make an album that conformed to everybody's view of what an album should sound like." He adds, "As soon as somebody comes down the pike with the capability of being popular, guys with straight haircuts start telling them everything they can't do." Nevertheless, the new work admittedly is very much in the folk mainstream; its roots reach back to the works of Woody Guthrie, Elvis Presley, and Bob Dylan, even though the material is totally different.

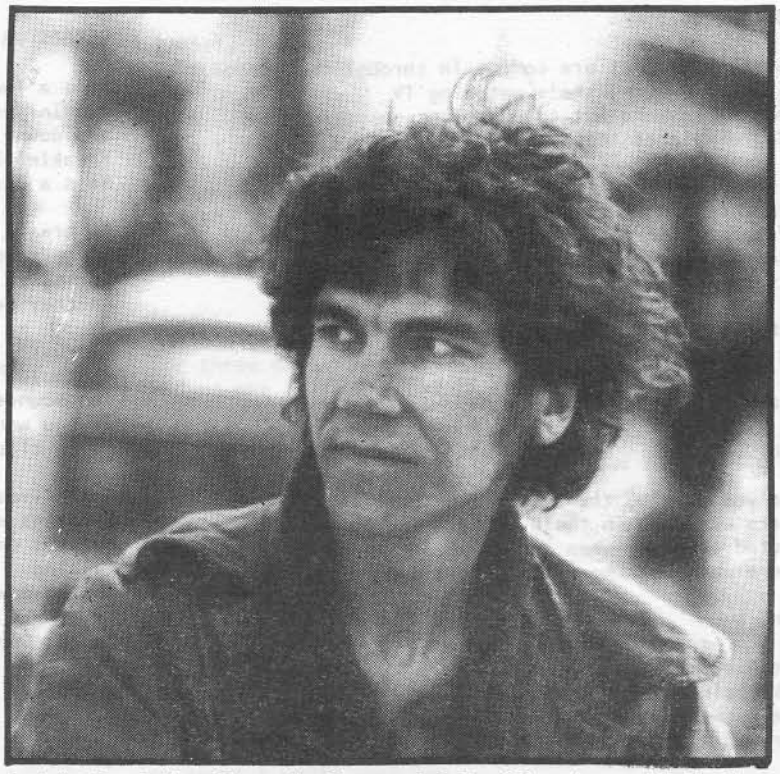
While No Commercial Traffic will likely surprise a lot of listeners, much of its material is already familiar to folkies. "American Jerusalem" (The CooP, Dec.'82/Jan. '83), which has the power of an anthem, has been played repeatedly over WRVS for a couple of years. Since John Hodel became the first musician to play it in the Village, it has been performed so often that it is now a standard. Typically, it reveals MacDoanld as a top-flight writer: the song begins, the way a song should, with the first line, a line designed to make listeners listen: "New York City rain/I don't know if it's making me dirtier or clean." As the song progresses, poetic visions pop like Jacks-in-the-Box: "Then shadows lick the sun/the streets are paved with footsteps on the run" and "Somebody must've got double 'cause I got none."

This quality of fine writing persists throughout MacDonald's works. In "Every Living Thing" the poetry betrays some profound questions of individual rights: "Seems like there ought to be a way/to separate the freedom from the flag/to see what's real and what's illusion/sometimes a beauty walks around in rags." MacDonald says, "This is a reference to anything that opposes the structure of freedom. An individual is free not because he or she is an American but because freedom is. It shouldn't be dependent on a government issuing it." The song, written for the June 12 rally

against nuclear weapons last year, also takes up the question of humankind's stewardship for other creatures on the planet. Many eastern religions, MacDonald says, emphasize such a responsibility. Hence the lines: "No matter what you say/there has to be a way/every living thing/is reason enough."

The combination of fine writing and strong musical lines is what gets MacDonald's music played so often. "A Sailor's Prayer" was recorded by Gordon Bok, Happy Traum, Ed McCurdy, Jean Redpath, and Lisa Neustadt before No Commercial Traffic was pressed. Elaborating on the work, MacDonald says, "It's a crisis situation: 'I'll see this through.' The act of singing that song is what it's all about. You tune yourself into a real nice space and you invite other people to join you." Singing a song about not giving up is apt to leave the singer with an elevated feeling; the allegory fits a lot of situations, not only sailors in distress.

> And I will not lie me down
> This rain a-ragin'
> I will not lie me down
> In such a storm
> And if this night be unblessed
> I shall not take my rest
> 'Till I reach another shore.



Bob Zaidman

Rod MacDonald's album, No Commercial Traffic, is available by mail for $8 from Up for Grabs, 114 MacDougal Street, New York, New York 10012, or in person at SpeakEasy.

A word needs to be said about the tone of several love songs on the album. There isn't a drop of anger in the cup for women: no get-even songs, no snuff songs, none of that garbage. "What I Wanted To Do Tonight," "It's Gonna Take Some Time," and "You Butter My Bread on Both Sides" treat women with both realism and respect. (The night after we got back from Boston Rod turned on his MTV for me and I watched some hilarious commercial characterizations of women: either as idealized creatures standing on mountain tops with their diaphanous gowns blowing in the breeze or as panting hellions.)

"It's Gonna Take Some Time" makes an interesting point about love: it takes up the question of what happens when a person says those magic words to you and you don't believe them. "It's going to take some time/for you to believe it too," the song runs. As a writer, MacDonald in this, as in his other works, challenges the listener. One line presumes his audience is familiar with at least one medieval philosophical debate: "I love you, yes I do/All the angels on the head of a pin can't compare to you." Moon-June it ain't.

"You Butter My Bread on Both Sides" is a song that again reflects gratitude for others; it is, in short, humanizing. The song also is rich in description about the poverty of folk musicians: "Send the roaches back into the wall" and fix the toilet down the hall.

In "What I Wanted To Do Tonight," MacDonald again approaches relations between the sexes in a realistic way, and the words are worth noting:

> What I wanted to do tonight
> Was to spend my time
> With the one who's been calling me
> Been on my mind
> Didn't matter that much to me
> If we talked or kissed
> Just being somewhere with you
> That's what I missed.

Two songs on No Commercial Traffic evoke a deeper philosophical mood than even the defiant "A Sailor's Prayer." These are "Dear Grandfather" and "The Unearthly Fire." In the former, MacDonald regards himself as an instrument to tell anew a very old story. "I started out writing a song for an Indian elder, but Grandfather is the Creative Spirit," he says. The song addresses the spirit. "Instead of being expressed in Christian symbolism," he says, "it's expressed in terms of the direction with which you face the space and say, 'Here's something I can do here.' It's a searching song, a spiritual song, and a key song on the album." In this work, the singer addresses the Creative Spirit and describes himself as 'an orphan who's come home to you in my heart." MacDonald, who is sensitive to the despoliation of the planet, comments on it in this way:

> And Dear Grandfather
> Our rivers have suffered the worst
> And I learned to drink
> Before I learned to think
> And still I am dyin' of thirst.

After describing the situation, so to sing, MacDonald gets to the heart of the matter:

> And I call to you, wishing to serve you well
> Is there a way to hear what keeps us apart
> For I am an orphan who's come home to you in my heart.

This song, I believe, is a plea for reconciliation, perhaps on a number of levels. I could be wrong, but the author is asking what is needed to reconcile himself with the generation that came before. It is an appeal to the power structure (again as in "No matter what you say/there's got to be a way" to prevent nuclear disaster) to work something out. It is, I think, the post-Vietnam War generation saying, "What can we do about the mess we've

(continued to page 18)

ROCK BREAKS SCISSORS

Sounds of the street are coming in through the window
While she is ironing she's watching TV
Calling the answers out to questions on game shows
Dreaming of places that she'll never see.

Refrain:
And its rock breaks scissors, paper covers rock
All of the children playing down on the block
They know you ain't got nothing if you don't have a dime
And its rock breaks scissors every time.

Well things were different when she was younger
Riding to Coney to have a good time
Of all the boys she knew well, he was the one
Who shared his dreams and put his heart on the line.

Refrain

When he was working the future looked bright
And there was cash in their pockets and love in the night
He started drinking when the first one was born
And there were four more coming, it didn't take long.

Refrain

He lost his job on a summer's day
He took their savings and he pissed them away
Silence between them and the kids were wide-eyed
She threw him out when she got tired of the ride.

Refrain

Woman of the Road

any port in a storm
you've heard it before
from those whose lives are storm
the eye of the storm
to keep the heart warm
the hurricane shield and the torch
all the waves come crashing through the door
electric heat upon the veins
all the clothes go tumbling to the floor
when will i see you again

ball and chain
you've heard it before
they're planning to leave
they already left
they can't live without you or with
all they say is old and stale
these are not honorable men
yet you light the candle the same
when will i see you again

old and gray
you've heard it before
when as a child you played roles
but all of the men
were boring "good friends"
and all of their love was so cold
please don't stay, please don't go
i am the woman of the road
night and day are much the same
when your eyes have closed
when will i see you again

GEZA'S WAILING WAYS

He's a local yoyo who roams this part of town
Runnin' numbers for the old folks, he's had his ups and downs
Freakin' by in his two-tones, a little too much ozone
He's a cartoon boy in an aging, dreamless world.

He breaks into a solo that cuts through the traffic's din
And everyone who knows him knows its Geza checkin' in
Strangers turn in wonder, start to laugh but hold it under
As they get a load of Geza's wailing ways.

Chorus:
I shouldn't laugh but I do, I do
The sounds are for himself and not for you
If you were to listen well I don't think he'd mind
As he clicks, whoops, and hollers away the time.

Geza lives at home now, though his hair has gone away
Evenings sweeps the newsstand near the business of the day
Hollers only when he's walking when he stops he starts talking
To those who know of Geza's wailing ways.

Repeat Chorus and First Verse

SISTER REAL

Paperback novels remind me of you
The girl on the cover - a literary deja vu
Down by the seashore I shoulda listened to Lou
'Bout you and your captain - your captain and his crew
You know you hurt me - more than you know
You can desert me - but I'll never go
'Cause I'm always dreaming of Bethlehem snow
Of animals waiting - down in New Mexico
For Sister Real - Sister Real

The men of the old world meet the women of the new
armed with apologies - they retreat to the zoo
But that was on TV - so that means it's true
Bookstores were empty - libraries too
Took my education - took it down to the bank
Expecting revalations - all I got was thanks
'Cuase I'm always dreaming - of New York sky
Of big jets waiting - of my turn to fly
To Sister Real - Sister Real

You an your hero - he and his wife
enthralled in the promise of a sisterly life
Up on the mountain - a vision came to me
Of a golden Goddess - on a beach in Waikiki
You know you love me - more than you know
More than you feel it - more than you show
'Cause I'm always dreaming - your legs in the air
Circles of passion - designs in the hair
Of Sister Real - Sister Real

Words and Music by Elliott Murphy & Ernie Brooks

DIAVOLI IN AVIDO AMORE

Sono qui su questa sedia
che da ore aspetto te
fuori il vento soffia forte
spero ti conduca a me
ma la tempesta l'ho nella testa
crea un immenso vuoto
che divide te da me

Ritornello:
Ma la luna la luna dov'e' eh?
da tre giorni non fa che piovere
e nessuno si cura di te
nonche' diavoli in avido amore

La tua gloria l'hai acquistata
dagl'eroi del caffe'
un bicchiere e una partita
e non c'e' due senza tre
il muso duro ti fa da scudo
ma son quelle quattro mura
che dividon te da me

Ritornello

Come l'uva sulla vite
t'innalzavi verso il ciel
maturasti nella luce
cosi' dolce ti vorrei
ma come il vino tu stai'nvecchiando
nel cantone di quel fondo
dove il sole piu' non c'e'

Ritornello

Translation:
DEVILS IN AVID LUST

Here again seated on this chair
in a timeless waiting
out there the ghostly wind is whistling
my hope is it will carry you to me
but the storm is in my soul
creating this immense emptiness
between you and me

Chorus:
And tonight where, where is the moon, huh?
for three days I've seen rain
and no one is loving you
but devils in avid lust

From the heroes of the bar
you've gained your glory
a drink or two and a game
and always one for the road
a shield is your hard brow
but those four walls
are what's dividing you from me

Chorus

As grapes on the vine
you rose to the sky
ripened by the sun
so sweet I would want you
but as old wine you're aging
in the corner of that cellar
where a ray never enters

Chorus

MUSIC LIKE THE WIND

There's something stirring me that's in the breeze tonight--
Sometimes I think the mountains know my name.
The whispers in the wind can make me freeze tonight
And call me but they never speak of fame.

I'll wish upon the first star for a seasoned life,
One that lets me know I'm still the same
As anyone who merely needs to rest at night
And leave the other fools to call the names.

Chorus:
I listen to the nightingale sing.
I listen to the nightingale sing.
I hear a tune like an old sweet song
And I can't think of a sweeter thing.

So distance disappears into appearing night
As sure as I'm alive it will remain,
That on my disappearance I will join the wind
To find another voice that needs to sing.

Chorus

There's something stirring me that's in the breeze tonight--
Sometimes I think the mountains know my name.
The whispers in the wind can make me freeze at night
And music like the wind can fade away.

HOLY MOSES

Egypt was a country club compared to this wilderness
And if the Jordan is deep and wide
We won't make it to the other side
And to tell you the truth, I'd rather die in peace.

Chorus: Holy Moses take me back
I was never meant to be free
Holy Moses take me back
I never asked to be free.

There's a number of laws in the good Lord's cause
I could follow them every day
But I miss my old TV
It never asked very much of me
And when you follow a plot, at least you know where it leads.

Chorus: Holy Moses take me back
I was never meant to be free
Holy Moses take me back
I never asked to be free.

Lord it looks like you're gonna have to waste another generation
Though it's easy enough to submit to your regulations
Well I don't want to know the answers if I have to ask the questions.

Egypt was a country club compared to this wilderness
And if the Promised Land's this rough
I'll be the first one to say enough
There's a limit to how much a couple of choices are worth.

Chorus: Holy Moses take me back
We're a little off the beaten track, Moses
I didn't really get a chance to pack, Moses
Do you think the Lord will blow his stack
If we mosy on back, Moses, Moses?

DANCE TO YOUR DADDY

Chorus:
Dance to your daddy, my little laddie
Dance to your daddy, my little man.

Thou shalt have a fish and thou shalt have a fin
Thou shalt have a coddlin' when the boat comes in
Thou shalt have a haddock broiled in a pan
Dance to your daddy, my little man.

Chorus

When thou art a man and thou shalt take a wife
Thou shalt love a lass and love her all your life
She shall be your lass and you shall be her lad
Dance to your daddy, my little man.

Chorus

Thou shalt have a fish and thou shalt have a fin
Thou shalt have a coddlin' when the boat comes in
Thou shalt have a haddock broiled in a pan
Dance to your daddy, my little man.

Chorus

Traditional

KILKELLY

Kilkelly, Ireland, 18 and 60, my dear and loving son John,
Your good friend the schoolmaster Pat MacNamara's so good as to write these words down.
Your brothers have all gone to find work in England, the house is so empty and sad.
The crop of potatoes is sorely infected, a third to a half of them bad.
And your sister Bridget and Patrick O'Donnell are going to be married in June.
Your mother says not to work on the railroad and be sure to come on home soon.

Kilkelly, Ireland, 18 and 70, dear and loving son John.
Hello to your missus and to your four children, may they grow healthy and strong.
Michael has got in a wee bit of trouble, I guess that he never will learn.
Because of the dampness there's no turf to speak of and now there's nothing to burn.
And Bridget is happy you named a child for her, you know she's got six of her own.
You say you found work but you don't say what kind, oh when will you be coming home?

Kilkelly, Ireland, 18 and 80, dear Michael and John, my sons.
I'm sorry to give you the very sad news that your dear old mother passed on.
We buried her down at the church in Kilkelly, your brothers and Bridget were there.
You don't have to worry, she died very quickly, remember her in your prayers.
And it's so good to hear that Michael's returning, with money he's sure to buy land.
For the crop has been poor and the people are selling at any price that they can.

Kilkelly, Ireland, 18 and 90, my dear and loving son John,
I guess that I must be close on to eighty, it's thirty years since you're gone.
Because of all of the money you sent me I'm still living out on my own.
Michael has built himself a fine house and Bridget's daughters are grown.
Thank you for sending your family picture, they're lovely young women and men.
You say that you might even come for a visit, what joy to see you again!

Kilkelly, Ireland, 18 and 92, my dear brother John.
I'm sorry I didn't write sooner to tell you that Father passed on.
He was livin' with Bridget, she says he was cheerful and healthy right down to the end.
Ah you should have seen him playing with the grandchildren of Pat MacNamara, your friend.
And we buried him alongside of Mother down at the Kilkelly churchyard.
He was a strong and feisty old man considerin' his life was so hard.
And it's funny the way he kept talking about you, he called for you at the end.
Oh why don't you think about coming to visit, we'd love to see you again.

JUST ANOTHER WAR

The bitter snows of June across the dock are thundering
Like bullets from a gun
For seven frozen weeks this soldier has been wondering
Will I ever see the sun?

Now you can call me "Pete" or you can call me "Pedro"
What's the difference in a name?
One leader calls them "Falklands," the other says "Malvinas"
To them both it's just a game.

Chorus:
They say, "It's war, war, war,
It's just another war
It's not the end of the world."
But if there's one too many wars
Then there won't be any more
No more wars, women, men, boys, or girls.

The politicians cheered and waved us into battle
To save the national pride
But they never breathed the smoke or heard the cannons rattle
Or took a bullet in the side.

Governments, flags, borders all are fleeting
In an hour they disappear.
But somehow the drums of war never stop their beating
Year after bloody year.

Chorus

The Man Who Built Carnegie Hall

He was a man who never danced he never sang
He never played on a stage when the crowd gave a roar
But he sat all alone as he laid out his plans
With sketches all over the floor
And he envisioned the stage as he measured each line
And he could hear how the echos would fall
He was a man who took all of his greatest ideas
And put 'em into Carnegie Hall

He was a man who never wrote down a chord or a note
He never played on a flute or a horn
But he'd worked through the night 'neath the glare of a light
As the balcony slowly took form
And he designed every door, every ceiling and floor
And he could see every last curtain call
He was the man who took all the hope in his heart
And he put it into Carnegie Hall

He framed his ideas as a painter would frame
A painting suspended in time
He'd laid out dimensions in phase after phase
As a poet would lay out a rhyme

He was a man who never danced he never sang
He'd never spoken a line in a movie or show
But he could hear every pause and every round of applause
As his imagination let go
And he put all his dreams into girders and beams
And spotlights that hung on a wall
He was a man who had a gift and it came to be known
As a building called Carnegie Hall

DOWN IN BARBADOS

Somebody pull the plug out
On this cold and wintry sky
Ken is trying to get back to the island
Where his heart and his home still lie
Down in Barbados

Big Ken he tells the stories
How he lived the life of ease
He's just cultivating the memories
Of his life in the Caribbean
Down in Barbados

Chorus:
Somebody told a lie once
And he believed it
Somebody crossed a line once
Chasing some fools' gold
Someone's lost their lifeline
Someone's lost at sea
It's all lost time
When the heart's not where
It should be

In his spare time Ken is a poet
Though he does not finish much
He knows he needs a change of scene
Or he'll surely lose his touch
Down in Barbados

Ken left a women behind there
She looked straight into his soul
She knew what made him laugh and cry
Now she's just there growing old
Down in Barbados

LYRICS side 2

New York Folk Festival III

by Ned Treanor

The New York Folk Festival...9 days! 12 venues! Over 40 individual acts! And many more performers!

From August 5th through August 13th, 1983, the Apple hosted the third and best yet in a series of annual music festivals, presenting a comprehensive array of the finest in traditional and contemporary folk, jazz, bluegrass, country, blues, children's music, rockabilly, doo wop, rock & roll, and combinations thereof, in an effort to "reach across traditional boundaries to embrace all of the world's true folk music in one festival."

To kick off the event, Tony-nominated Stephen Hanan, one of Broadway's successful Cats, who got his own start in show biz as a street performer, hosted "Sing for your Supper," a street concert in Times Square, featuring some of the city's best street musicians, including the musician's cooperative's own Roger Manning, Grant Orenstein, Judy Zweiman, Darryl Cherney, and Ben Silver.

Between this event and the "finale," eight days later, with veteran folk legend Odetta and relative newcomer from Canada, Ferron (so that's the secret...one name!), we enjoyed such a potpourri as Peter Stampfel and the Bottlecaps, Marc Black, Christine Lavin, the Bermuda Triangle, Marcia Lane, Tommy Joe White, and Southern Cookin'. Also "cookin'" were the Happy Traum Band, Robert Ross, ex-Band members Levon Helm and Rick Danko, Australia's Eric Bogle, Canada's Nancy White, Rosalie Sorrels, Paul Seibel, Tracy Nelson, blues legend John Hammond, Paula Lockheart, the Whites, New Grass Revival, Dave Valentin, the ever-Ramblin' Jack Elliott, Jim Wann (creator of Pump Boys & Dinettes and Diamond Studs), John Sebastian, NRBQ, Dave Van Ronk, Frank Christian, Ray Baretto, and a flock of "special guests" such as Elvis Costello, who gave an added air of spontaneity to the occasion.

There were also special presentations, such as Bob Wilbur and the Bechet Legacy's "Tribute to Fats Waller and Sidney Bechet;" "Jazz Greats" with Maxine Sullivan; Dick Wellstood & the Tiny Grimes Trio; "Doo Wop at the Lone Star," featuring Randy & the Rainbows, the Harptones, Johnny & Joe and others; and "From the Sidewalks of New York: A Celebration of the City's Many Musics," with the David Amram Quintet and a special presentation of the New York Experience.

This was also SpeakEasy's first year of participation in the festival, presenting "Rod MacDonald and Megan McDonough on MacDougal Street." Other featured venues included that other club around the corner, Folk City; O'Lunney's and the Lone Star Cafe, which were also both participating for the first time; and Town Hall, the Village Gate, and Top of the Gate, Prospect Park, Coney Island, and the Trans Lux Theatre.

Produced by Folkworks, the nonprofit public interest production company, the New York Folk Festival is a remarkable event, not just because of the lineup of talent or showcases, but because this is all made possible via volunteer effort--another cooperative idea that works! Everyone from producer Ted Geier, and his associates Andy Orta, J. Piscioneri, Jeff Tractman, Diane Magnuson, and Steve West, to the 50 or so staff coordinators of such areas of responsibility as hospitality, tickets, sound, graphics, concessions, security, promotion, photography, public relations, legal, bookkeeping, data processing, and fundraising; to the hundred or so volunteers from all walks of life who gave these coordinators a helping hand, such as the young people from Project Return, who so generously contributed their services in the area of security, contribute every hour of their time and energies, talent, merchandise, food, advice, and lots of elbow-grease, to ensure the success of this festival... the primary purpose of which is to promote the important work of its sponsor, Impact on Hunger. It is truly a "People's Festival," where the veteran and newcomer combine to bring all of the peoples' musics together to old and new audiences in all parts of New York City.

Several of the events are free of charge, so that everyone is able to participate, regardless of financial or social status, to help "raise public awareness about the avoidable tragedy of hunger in the world," that alone is responsible for some 15 to 20 million deaths annually. Thanks to the additional support of such commercial entities as Nathan's Famous; ConEd; Chemical Bank; Bozel & Jacobs; Ruder, Finn, and Rotman; Pete Fornatale's "Mixed Bag" on WNEW-FM; and WHN, to name a few, this partnership among such socially conscious businesses, social activism, and culture makes the further growth of the New York Folk Festival possible, and in the light of the times, perhaps more necessary and relevant than ever before. ■

Thom Wolke

From left, Kenny White on piano, Jonathan Edwards on vocal, Robin Batteau on fiddle, and Marshall Rosenberg at the first Waterloo Folk Festival Concert (see article opposite).

Notes from Waterloo

by Peggy Atwood

On Saturday and Sunday, September 3 and 4, the first annual "Waterloo Folk Festival" took place. Produced by John Scher, the event was more of a concert than a festival. Both days were a real smorgasbord of performers, ranging from Judy Collins to Richie Havens, all for the modest ticket price of $10 a day. Waterloo village was a perfect setting, with the grounds and buildings restored to their 18th century construction.

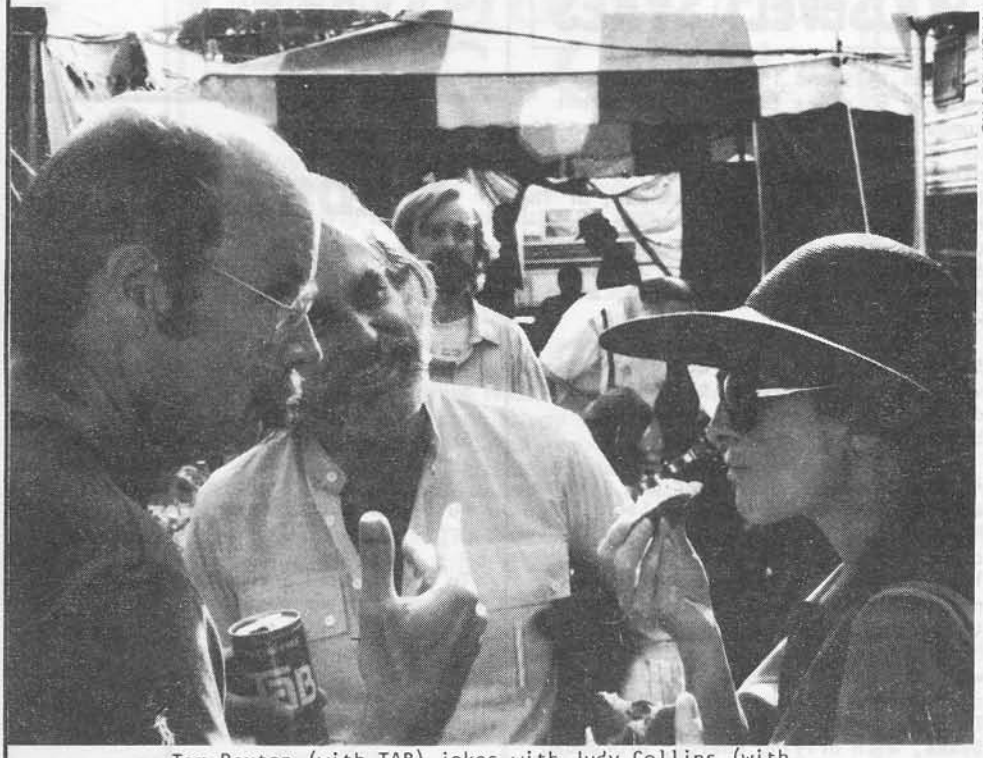
Day One (and Day Two, by popular demand) was kicked off by Buskin and Batteau, a duo many of us have come to know for their harmonies and backup work. Henry Gross went on next, giving an incredible performance that would be hard to follow. Jonathan Edwards' high energy combined with achingly wistful ballads always tears up the audience. Jorma Kaukonen displayed loads of talent, meandering through his miasmic guitar melodies for all the rabid Kaukonen nuts. Tom Paxton was more charming and politely disarming than ever; when someone yelled out "Arlo," he responded with "I don't think that's ever happened before; must be the hair." Tom Chapin, smooth and richly melodic, started with his own songs, and proceeded to do beautiful renditions of his brother Harry's ballads. To top the day off, Judy Collins graced the stage in sequins and satin, with an air of grandeur that befitted the magic of glitter. The force of her strength and clarity was not lost on anyone.

The lineup for Day Two was equally as impressive. Livingston Taylor and his nervously witty charm were great for a Sunday afternoon. Odetta, the grand lady of soulful folk, can send shivers down the spine on a hot afternoon with her field hollers. Roger McGuinn still plays great 12-string guitar. And Loudon Wainwright, the Third...Hoo, Boy! Nutszoid. Then, with amazing rhythmic pyrotechnics, Richie Havens proceeded to plumb the depths of passion and exited with a dervish-like gymnastic finale, in which his guitar flew out of his hands, and returned to them, unscathed. Melanie had the job of following that performance, and after a few tentative numbers, proceeded to play the longest set of the weekend, to the delight of the crowd. And very last, but certainly not least, Don McLean's deceptively powerful voice cut the cool evening like the first smell of autumn.

Thom Wolke

Jorma Kaukonen

The concert seemed to be a complete success, but can an annual event continue on the same scale for very long without introducing "new" performers to the main stage? At sixteen "name" acts per weekend, it won't take long to go through the roster of folk performers. With the enthusiastic crowd response, however, it would be very easy to see this as an annual event for years to come. ■



Thom Wolke

Tom Paxton (with TAB) jokes with Judy Collins (with peach) and friend Louis Nelson backstage.

Roosevelt "Honeydripper" Sykes

by Joe Lauro

Some time during the winter of 1981 I wandered into a local blues club. Expecting to find the usual Long Island-based electric power trio, I was surprized to find, perched at the baby grand piano, a rotund, ancient black man. With stogey in mouth, dressed in a cheap tweed double-breasted suit and fedora tight on his skull, this man proceeded to stomp out the purest, hottest, boogie-woogie piano this boy had ever heard.

> "I want everbody to listen to Mr. Roosevelt boot that thing. When I tell ya, I want ya all to crawl on the floor and mess around."

And "mess around" we did. This man had the local hard-nosed blues enthusiasts jumping in their seats. Not bad for a 75-year-old, armed with nothing more than a baby grand, a gin and stogey barrelhouse voice, and ten well-trained fingers.

Roosevelt Sykes was a first generation master of the now-dying style of barrelhouse piano. Born in Elmer, Arkansas, he taught himself piano in 1918 and ran away from home in 1921 to begin his life as a traveling, iterate barrelhouse piano man. From 1921 on, Sykes played countless turpentine mills, lumber camps, gambling houses, and local dives.

During the early 1920's, Sykes heard the piano playing of such legendary, unrecorded men as "Red Eye" Jesse Bell and "Pork Chop" Lee Green. These men and other obscure and unknown players greatly influenced Sykes's rough and ready, eight-to-the-bar style. At the lumber camps and turpentine mills Sykes would be the only source of entertainment for the poverty-stricken, overworked black laborers who clamored into the camp "juke joint" for a Saturday night "function." Men like Sykes, Little Brother Montgomery, Speckled Red, Pinetop Smith, and Walter Roland developed the rollicking, rhythmic style of piano playing, later known as "boogie woogie," within the walls of these "camp meeting" halls.

In June of 1929 Sykes was summoned to New York City by the Okeh Record Company. At Okeh's Union Square studios Sykes waxed his first discs. During this session "44 Blues" and five other titles were recorded. "44 Blues" was a classic barrelhouse blues, which displayed all the off-beat rhythms and embellishments of the juke joint piano men. "44 Blues" was originally created by Eureal "Little Brother" Montgomery and taught to Sykes in the mid-1920's by Lee Green. Montgomery recorded his version for Paramount in 1930, but the Sykes interpretation remains the standard treatment of this classic blues.

ROOSEVELT SYKES

Between 1929 and 1934 Sykes recorded roughly 60 sides for seven different companies. Often he recorded as a solo using either his own name or various other pseudonyms such as Willie Kelly, Dobby Bragg, Easy Pappa Johnson, or The Honeydripper. Sykes appeared on many other records as an accompanist for blues singers such as Edith Johnson, Mary Johnson, Charlie McFadden, and Washboard Sam.

Surprisingly, Sykes's recording activity continued through the 1930's and did not let up until a few months before his July 1983 death.

An influence on such later day players as Fats Domino, Otis Spann, Leon Redbone, and Memphis Slim, Sykes never ceased playing in his original, undiluted barrelhouse style. A true original, perhaps a man lost in his own time warp, Sykes never abandoned his "juke joint" roots. Listening to him was the closest a 1980's audience could come to experiencing true piano boogie. Even during that 1981 winter evening Sykes, with driving energy, proceeded to deliver his extinct brand of whorehouse piano playing to a surprised and delighted New York audience.

It saddens a purist like myself whenever I hear of the death of an old master. Roosevelt "Honeydripper" Sykes was an important piece in the traditional blues puzzle. It is necessary for folk music enthusiasts and performers to keep in touch with the pre-B.B. King roots of original Black American folk music (blues, jazz, ragtime). A sturdy knowledge and appreciation of players like Sykes is necessary if we want folk music to develop in a direction that is an offshoot of a traditional style rather than as a product of the "oversaturation" level of current popular music.

When the young guitarist hears a recording of Reverend Gary Davis and says, "Wow! That old black guy sounds just like Jorma," we realize that there just isn't enough contemporary listening and appreciation for old masters like Roosevelt Sykes.

For those interested, much of the "Honeydripper's" recorded material is currently available on LP reissues. Yazoo Records (245 Waverly Place) has an album, Roosevelt Sykes, which presents a selection of his 1930-32 recordings, and Delmark Records (Chicago) has a selection of later day material that is still in print. ■

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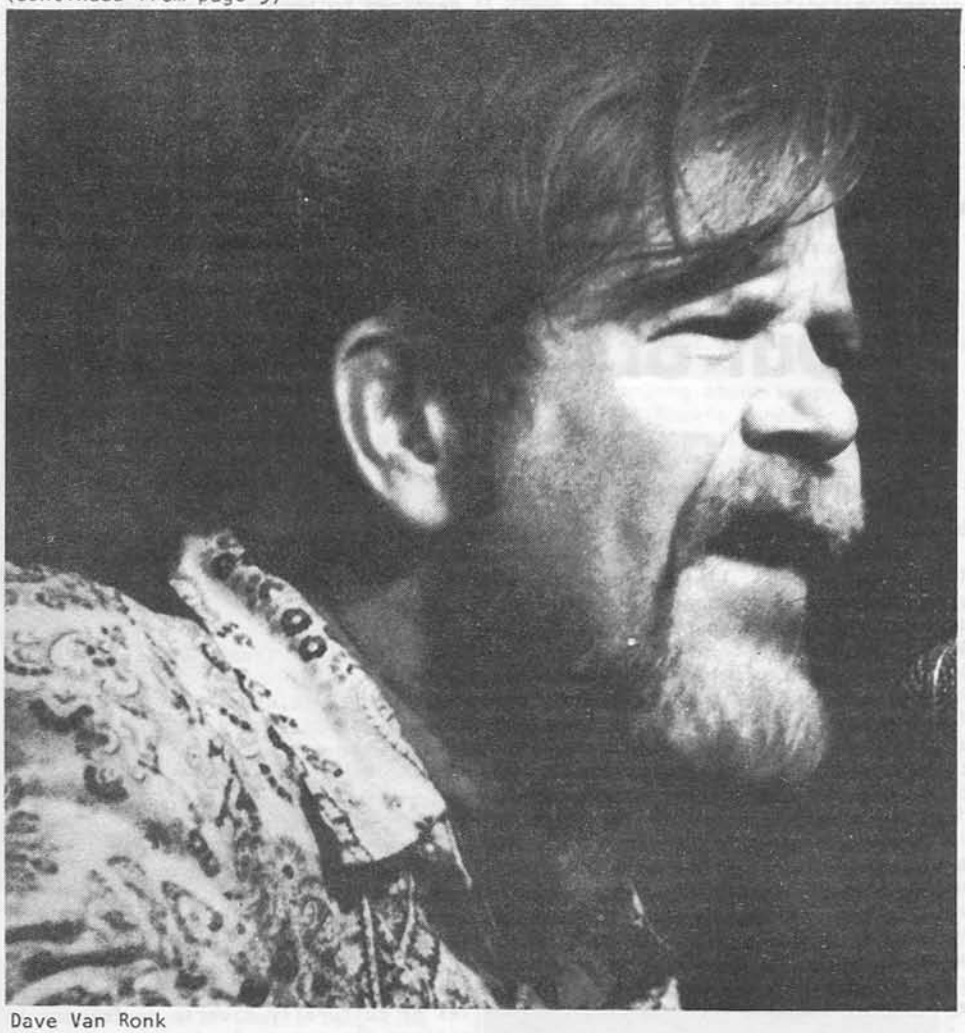


Nancy Talanian

Dave Van Ronk

Dave Van Ronk followed Christian. Van Ronk's performances are always fun, partly because he is so at ease before an audience. At best, he seems to be sitting in his living room (or favorite bar) with a bunch of friends, talking and playing whatever tune pops into his head.

On that particular evening, some tunes that were popping were "Blue," which received a simple, sincere rendition. Either the song reminded him of his boyhood dog, Fritz, or his dog reminded him of the song, but we got to hear a funny story about his dog who preferred eating the neighbor's babies to Gainesburgers.

No Van Ronk show would be complete without a growling of "St. James Infirmary," and this evening was no exception. We also heard a slow, bluesy instrumental called "Left Bank Blues," prior to which Van Ronk described the depressing Paris hotel room that inspired the song, and commented, "The theory is, if you can't make self-pity work for you, what the hell good is it?"

Among my favorites in the set were the slow, sexy "Rock Me, Momma," a sincere, jazzy/bluesy rendition of "God Bless the Child," and the two encores --"Let's Talk It Over One More Time," and "This Sporting Life Is Killing Me."

From there it was on to SpeakEasy to catch Rod MacDonald's second set. This was among the most enjoyable for me of the entire festival. MacDonald played guitar and harmonica and was accompanied on various songs by Mark Dann on stand-up bass and guitar; John Kruth on mandolin and flute; Chuck Hancock on saxophone, Jew's harp, drum sticks, and tambourine; and George Dropeau on fiddle.

This set featured several lively numbers that the crowd got up for-- "Blues for the River," a bluegrass number with the chorus: "Lord preserve us and protect us/We been drinking whiskey for breakfast," "I Don't Believe You Don't Want to Dance," and the closing "Summer in the City."

More thoughtful numbers in the set were an assortment from MacDonald's rich store of political songs, love songs, and would-be love songs. These included "American Jerusalem," "On the Road in New York Town," "What I Wanted to Do Tonight," and "A Sailor's Prayer," all of which are described in Sherwood Ross's review of MacDonald's album, No Commercial Traffic, in this issue. One unfortunate wrinkle over which MacDonald and his band had no control was that there were too many harmonies on "A Sailor's Prayer." MacDonald had invited a few people on stage for that song, which should mean that the audience should just listen. Unfortunately, due to the song's popularity, nearly everyone in the audience sang along, and we heard some discords resulting from so many harmonies.

All that aside, however, MacDonald's set, the last set I heard at the New York Folk Festival, had everything that I think a musician should strive to provide--enjoyment and some redeeming value.

(continued from page 9)
been left?" It's environmentalists writing for an audience with Interior Secretary Watt. It's a C.O. saying to a general (as MacDonald was a C.O.) "I want to understand you, but I also want to do something constructive to bring about change."

As for "Unearthly Fire," it also flows from the same River of Questions. The song is based on a poem written in 1978 to which MacDonald and John Kruth later gave a primitive musical overlay based on their experiences on western reservations. MacDonald says, "I tried to get a musical framework that contained the essence of the land." Musicians writing in many genres have taken inspiration from Indian music, including Dvorak, who derived his "American" string quartet from Indian rhythms. Of all the works on No Commercial Traffic this cut is the most surprising. "We used a leather-skinned drum for percussion. (John) Kruth used the mouthpiece of a silver flute for a coyote howl." (Kruth's playing is a beautiful flight of musical imagination.) "The ambient sound is a Fender Stratocaster --a combination of primitive desert instruments with urban technology."

Attempting to put it all together, Rod MacDonald and his music are at one: like it or not (and I do), it is as straightforward an expression as you can get. The title of the album is no accident. MacDonald is unhappy with the profits of the military-industrial complex that President Eisenhower warned about but which grows nevertheless; with polluted rivers and the profiteering that take place on "the high plains of greed." His warning in "Unearthly Fire" is that, if humanity doesn't alter its course, the earth will "crack its great seed." After listening to the album five or six times, I kept thinking back to the Harvest Moon Festival, and how devoid so much of it was in content. MacDonald shows that there are new ways to look at love, giving his love songs content; he shows that he is not afraid to tackle the big subjects, approaching them from a fresh viewpoint, endowing his message songs with power.

To take these subjects on successfully requires a lot of musical talent, such as few musicians possess. Indefatigable work over the past decade has enabled MacDonald to do so. Whether you agree with his message or not, MacDonald is an impressive performer and writer, in the tradition of Dylan. He is also prolific and has sufficient material for two or three more albums. After years of work, it might well be that he is on the verge of a breakthrough in his career. If stubborn, uncompromising persistence, tens of thousands of hours of practice, poetic vision, exceptional talent, and a monk's vow of poverty is what it takes to achieve that, Rod MacDonald has it.

All that aside, No Commercial Traffic contains some of the most beautiful folk music I've ever heard. It seems destined to become a folk music classic.

(Sherwood Ross has written on subjects political and musical for such magazines as The Nation, Frets, Christian Century, and The Progressive.)

Out of the Limelight

Town and Country Festivals

by Gerry Hinson

The summer of 1983, like the past few summers. brought a bumper crop of outdoor folk festivals to the Northeast. Some of these have been rather well publicized and reviewed: the Clearwater Revival and the Bear Mountain and Philadelphia Folk Festivals, to name a few, drew sizable audiences from throughout the region. At the same time, folk musicians make countless "whistle stops" at townships and villages that are more memorable for their scenery or ambience than for major media coverage. However, there are still good times to be found away from the larger tribal gatherings that deserve to be mentioned. Here are two afternoon festivals sampled this summer by some friends and me.

THE ITHACA FOLK ARTS FESTIVAL

This is an annual village celebration of local musical and handcraft talents, featuring both new collaborators such as the women's group Lorelei and old Fox Hollow veterans such as Mark Rust, co-producer of this festival. The performers present a melodic smorgasbord against the backdrop of a beautiful mountain lake grove. Stages set on three fields are ringed by booths with samples of handiwork ranging from needlepoint to stained glass, with a pretty fair thicket of woodworkers making furniture, fifes, and flutes. A good representative is Jens Wennberg, a New York City expatriate who returned here about ten years ago to become a therapist and broommaker in a healthy setting, while his partner Nancy became an excellent windchime maker. Both were intimates of many denizens of the late, lamented Fox Hollow folk festivals, sharing reminiscences of such performers as Dorothy Carter and Gordon Bok with Nancy Hershatter and me. Typical of many of the mainstays of this weekend festival, they have decided that the hard work involved in living far from the urban "main line" is worth the chance to live the healthy life of their dreams.

UNTERMEYER PARK (Yonkers on the Hudson)

Something quite different: rather than homegrown, "Culture Comes to Yonkers; Performance 1: Folk Music." On July 10, the Hudson River Sloop Singers, in a "homecoming" from their tenth anniversary show at the June Clearwater Festival in Croton, New York, played to a scattering of picnickers, die-hard folkies, and some curious tourists among the splendid restored Greco-Roman edifices of the Untermeyer garden estate. The Yonkers Parks Department, which administers the estate, brings in a series of culturally diverse performers to enliven the summer landscape--a wise move, since homegrown talent looking for a fertile growth medium or other ripening musical exposures usually settles elsewhere as soon as possible. With the sloping trees and dale of the Hudson River Valley behind them, the likes of Paul Kaplan, Ned Treanor, Jon Stein, and Lydia Davis alternately led the chorale; they were joined by old friends The Belles of Hoboken (Janet Stecher, Susan Lewis, and Marcie Boyd, who herself is an intermittent Sloop Singer) and Abby, whose extraordinarily expressive sign language interpretations were the concert's most distinctive feature (and deserve a showcase of their own, in my opinion). For many Yonkers natives this was a refreshingly different experience, in spite of the determined heat of a cloudless midsummer day. Nancy and I interviewed several of the listeners, but got the same comments so often that it was like a well-timed chorus: "Hey, those folksingers sounded great; this was really nice--so different from that loud rock music!"

Today Yonkers-on-Hudson, tomorrow the Seven Seas!

on the record

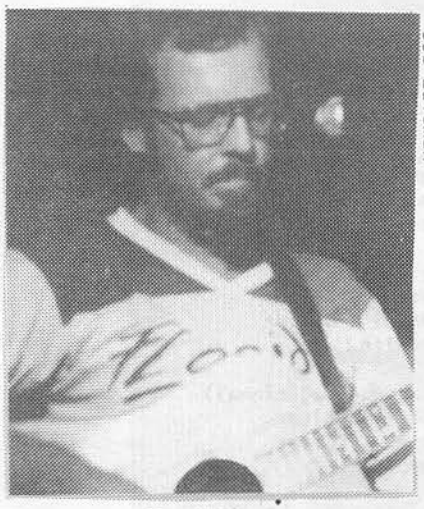
HUGH BLUMENFELD left homes in Boston and Chicago and is now teaching writing and trying to be from New York. Singing helps.

SUZY BOGUS and LISA SMITH are from southern Illinois and appeared at SpeakEasy while touring the coffee house circuit.

ERNIE BROOKS was an original member of the Modern Lovers of Boston; has recorded albums with the Necessaries and his soon to be released debut of The Flying Hearts. He drives a green Volvo station wagon. For information: Sleeping Bag Records, P.O. Box 613, Canal Street Station, New York, NY 10013.

LAURA BURNS and ROGER ROSEN are based in Boston. Laura began her musical career playing drums in a rock and roll band, and Roger performed as a street singer for three years. They first played together in a six-person political string band called Countrydiction. They have been working as a duo for almost four years. Laura plays electric bass and six-string guitar; Roger plays six and twelve string guitar.

LYDIA DAVIS has been writing and performing original country and folk since coming to New York fourteen years ago. Her harmony arrangements can be heard on Joe Heukerott's album Bittersweet. She teaches music at Riverdale Country School and sings with the Hudson River Sloop Singers.



Bob Zaidman

Tom McGhee

JOHN GORKA is an intense white guy from New Jersey. He currently lives in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.

JACK HARDY first came to Greenwich Village in 1974. He has five albums out on Great Divide Records as well as Pastels, in Germany. He is the current editor of The CooP, The Fest Folk Musical Magazine.

ELMER HAWKES is a songwriter/performer living in Cambridge, Mass. He has released two albums: Boston Serenade and Songs for the Stagehands, both available from Sidestreet Records, 885 Mass. Ave., Suite 19, Cambridge, Mass. 02139.

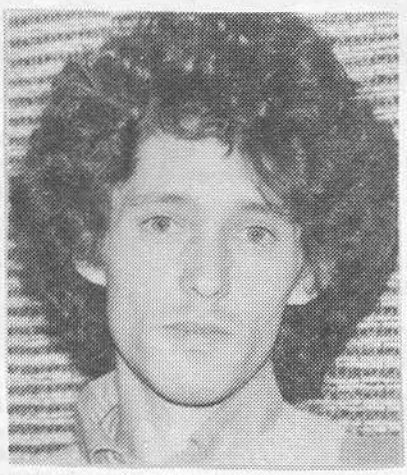
PAUL KAPLAN has had many songs published in Broadside magazine. He was the producer of the posthumous Phil Ochs albums for Folkways Records.

LUCY KAPLANSKI, 23, is primarily an interpretive singer, concentrating on local writers. She is featured on the Cornelia Street album and performs alone and with the Roommates.

TONY MACHINE (percussion) has sustained a reputation as the quintessential downtown stickman for more years than he might wish to remember. He plays regularly with Elliott Murphy, David Johansen, and the legendary bluesman, Buster Poindexter.

For the uninitiated, Rock Breaks Scissors is a children's game. TOM MCGHEE lives in Brooklyn and drives a truck.

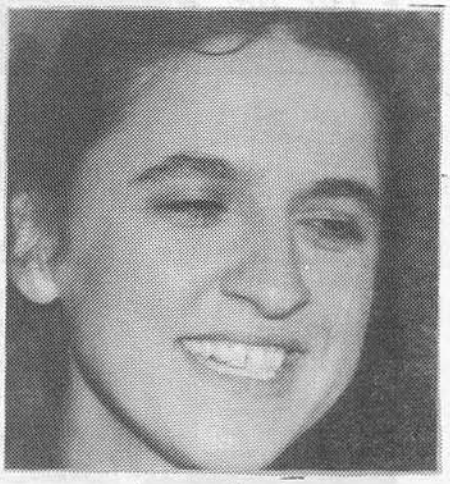
RICHARD MEYER believes that living a double or triple life is the healthiest thing for him. He is a painter, songwriter, theatre designer and technical director, etc. He is a member of Shakespeare & Co. of Lenox, Massachuseets, and is currently looking for an apartment in New York (ha ha ha).



Bob Zaidman

Richard Meyer

ELLIOTT MURPHY has recorded six albums in ten years. They are Aquashow, Lost Generation, Night Lights, Just a Story from America, Affairs, and the latest, Murf the Surf. Elliott lives in New York City but tours extensively in Europe, and this situation suits him just fine. For information contact: Courtisane Records, 107 East 88th Street, New York, NY 10028.



Bob Zaidman

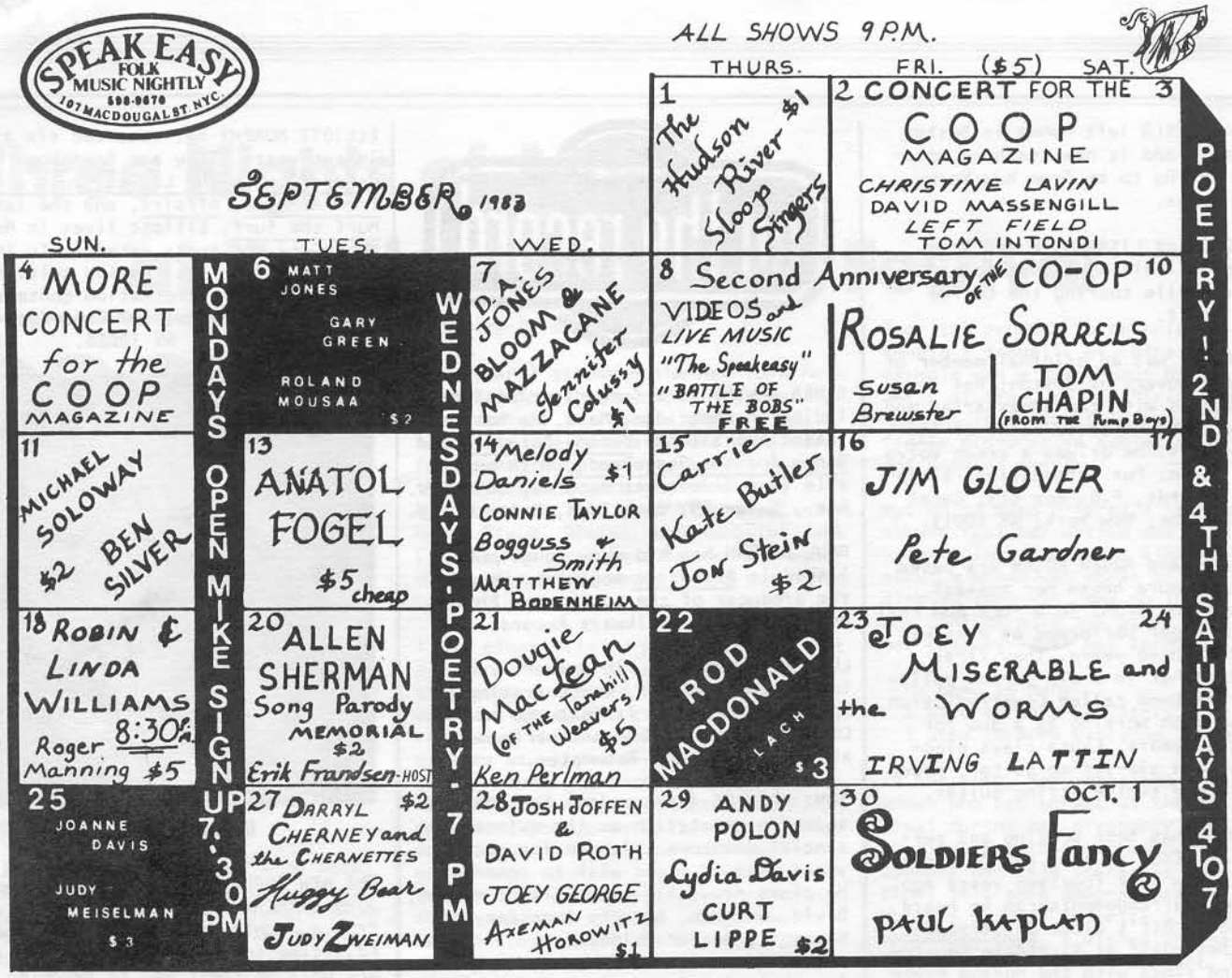
Germana Pucci

THE NEW ENGLAND EXPRESS is ROB and JOHN STRACHAN. They are originally from a country town in Connecticut. Adjusting to city life, they say they are well on their way to becoming utterly depraved.

GERMANA PUCCI was born in Italy to a family of singers and farmers who lead singing in the fields and are hired to sing the Maggio (peasant's opera) after harvest. Germana moved to New York in 1977. She loves cooking.

Bob Withers

L to R- Lydia Davis, Marcie Boyd, Paul Kaplan and Ned Traynor.



credits

side one

1. Rock Breaks Scissors (Tom McGhee)
   - Tom McGhee/Vocal & Guitar
   - Mark Dann/Bass, Drums & Guitar
   - Lucy Kaplanski/Vocal
   - Jack Hardy/Vocal

2. Woman of the Road (Jack Hardy)
   - Lucy Kaplanski/Vocal
   - Jack Hardy/Guitar
   - Mark Dann/Bass & Keyboard

3. Geza's Wailing Ways (John Gorka)
   - John Gorka/Vocal & Guitar
   - Mark Dann/Bass, Drums & Guitar

4. Sister Real (Elliott Murphy & Ernie Brooks)
   - Elliott Murphy/Guitar, Harmonica & Vocals
   - Ernie Brooks/Vocals & Bass
   - Tony Machine/Percussion
   - Mark Dann/Percussion

5. Diavoli in Avido Amore (Germana Pucci)
   - Germana Pucci/Vocal & Guitar
   - Jill Burkee/Mando Cello
   - Giancarlo Biagi/Jew's Harp
   - John Caulfield/Fiddle
   - Jeff Hardy/Bass
   - Mark Dann/Keyboards

6. Music Like The Wind (Richard Alan Meyer)
   - Richard Meyer/Vocal & 12-String Guitar
   - Jack Hardy/Background Vocals

side two

1. Holy Moses (Hugh Blumenfeld)
   - Hugh Blumenfeld/Vocal & Guitar
   - Mark Dann/Bass

2. Kilkelly (Peter Jones)
   - Laura Burns/Vocal & Guitar
   - Roger Rosen/Vocal & Guitar
   - Mark Dann/Mandolin

3. Dance to Your Daddy (Traditional)
   - Suzy Bogus/Vocal & Guitar
   - Lisa Smith/Vocal & Guitar
   - Mark Dann/Mandolin

4. Down in Barbados (Rob Strachan)
   - New England Express:
     - Rob Strachan/Vocal & 12-String Guitar
     - John Strachan/Vocal & Guitar
     - Mark Dann/Keyboard

5. Just Another War (Paul Kaplan)
   - Lydia Davis/Vocal & Guitar
   - John Guth/Lead Guitar
   - Mark Dann/Bass
   - Background Vocals: Marci Boyd, Paul Kaplan, Ben Siebert, Ben Silver, Ned Treanor
   - * Recorded "live" by Jay Rosen.

6. The Man Who Built Carnegie Hall (Elmer Hawkes)
   - Elmer Hawkes/Vocal & Guitar
   - Mark Dann/Bass