

Mariposa's future safe, but past fading

DUST TO DUST / Before 35 years of history can be properly stored, someone must pay for cataloguing.

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THE Mariposa Festival has secured its future, at least for the time being, but the venerable Canadian music festival's past is still very much in doubt.

After several money-losing years, including last summer's disastrously underattended season, Mariposa was hovering on the verge of going entirely out of business, until the communities of Bracebridge and Cobourg agreed to act as hosts for this summer's offerings. Meanwhile, the festival's archives — 35 years of business documents, correspondence, programs, posters, promotional materials, press clippings, film, photographs, slides, and video and audio tape, including early performances by such stars as Leonard Cohen, Gordon Lightfoot, **Joni Mitchell** and Neil Young — is stored in a basement room in downtown Toronto, trapped in an archival Catch-22.

There are several interlocking problems: no one knows for sure what's in that room; the festival has no money for sorting and cataloguing; the video and audio may still be sound, but some of it is nearly 30 years old and magnetic tape is prey to a host of problems; the room is dry and reasonably secure, but is not really suitable for long-term storage; such institutions as the National Library of Canada, which might be willing, even eager, to house the collection, can't take it until it is catalogued and evaluated. Which brings us back to money.

Mariposa president Lynne Hurry, having found sites for next summer's festival, is now turning her full attention to the problem of the archives. She has approached the CBC, in the person of archivist Pat Kellogg, for advice and more tangible aid, and Kellogg has agreed to provide equipment and help in the search for a suitable space, and to recommend the archives as a project for a newly formed consortium of private and government groups concerned with Canada's audio-visual heritage. But money is definitely a problem.

(The consortium, which is the result of a Heritage Ministry task force on audio-visual archives, is no help financially because it is searching for funds to do anything more than pay its director.)

Tim Maloney is both a member of the Mariposa advisory board and director of the music division of the National Library of Canada. Speaking from his Ottawa office, he says: "One of the hopes is for some monied person to come to the rescue. They need a sugar daddy who might pay a sum of money to Mariposa for the archives, and then turn around and donate to a national institution for the tax credit. Of course, before any of that can happen, it has to be evaluated, and that can't happen until it's catalogued."

"A number of people are knocking on the door to get a piece of the archives," Hurry says.

Jeanine Hollingshead, a long-time Mariposa volunteer and a member of the festival's advisory board, recently took *The Globe and Mail* on a short tour of the archives, located in an old building in the King and Dufferin area, in a whitewashed stone room divided from other, similar rooms by drywall dividers. The centrepiece is a large cupboard, with the two doors padlocked together but the hinges popped off, stuffed with dozens of reels of audio tape. Most of the other material is stacked on the floor and on 15 or so industrial-strength shelves.

Hollingshead says the festival is glad to have the room, for which they pay only a nominal sum. "But there are some things about it that are scary," she says, gesturing upward toward the sprinkler system. "If there's a little fire somewhere, there's going to be a lot of water."

The written material includes a 1965 letter from the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation, signed John Edgar Hoover, responding to Mariposa's request for crowd-control information. (The FBI would not share its knowledge; the FBI's letter says demand for its booklet *Prevention and Control of Mobs and Riots* had "necessitated a policy of restricting its distribution.") There are T-shirts, copies of vinyl records made by Mariposa participants, and issues of the magazines *Sing Out* and *Hoot*, as well as the festival publication *Mariposa Notes*. Recently discovered in an ancient box were 50 brooches in Mariposa's smiling sun logo, designed by Murray MacLachlan in 1967.

"There's tons of video, and boxes and boxes and boxes of photographs," Hollingshead says.

Material from the 1970s and early 1980s, when the festival was at its healthiest and most successful, is reasonably well documented, since in those years there were lots of volunteers around willing to come in and keep the records. Even from the best of years, however, boxes are scattered throughout the room, and significant chunks are missing.

"The last 10 years or so are a shambles," Hollingshead says. "There are some boxes just marked 'tape,' with no other information, no year, no artists, nothing, like the technician just took it off the recorder and threw it in the box."

For Hollingshead, the major problem is the possible fragility of the tapes. Mariposa, even in its present reduced circumstances, could probably command enough volunteer help to sort the material, assuming the space and equipment could be found. But the



Songs and paraphernalia relating to Mariposa festival performers, who include Bob Dylan and Gordon Lightfoot (above, 1972), are in danger of disappearing the longer they sit in disarray in a basement storage unit.

cataloguing can't be done until the tapes can be played, and playing them is risky even under optimum conditions.

"We've got 30 years of audio tapes, but we've been told not to play them until we know it's safe to do it," she says. "The wall of the room where the CBC technicians do their work is decorated with ruined tapes. There's a tape with rat turds on it, and with dust bunnies and chrysalises, tapes that are shredded. . . . You don't want to play it until you can digitize it at the same time."

The recordings are certainly worth preserving. Singers who have per-

formed at Mariposa over the past 35 years, most of whom are on video and/or audio tape, form a virtual who's who of North American folk music, including The Travellers and Ian and Sylvia, both of which groups performed at the very first festival, in Orillia in 1961. Subsequent years saw Bruce Cockburn, Arlo Guthrie, Richie Havens, Murray MacLachlan, Pete Seeger, James Taylor, Stompin' Tom Connors, Rita MacNeil, Tom Paxton, Colin Linden, Jane Siberry, Kate and Anna McGarrigle, Buffy Sainte-Marie, Emmylou Harris, Melissa Etheridge, Shirley Eikhard, Bonnie Raitt, John Hiatt, Lyle Lovett, Loreena McKennitt,

Holly Near, Tracy Chapman, Moxie Fruvous and the Bare Naked Ladies.

Apart from the historical and cultural value of the archives, 35 years of big-name acts, there is also a considerable commercial potential. There have been five recordings over the years, two LPs, made in 1975 and 1976, and three compilation CDs made during the past three years. But there's no way to capitalize on the archives until the work gets done.

Hollingshead and Maloney agree that a lot of material has gone missing, loaned to other groups and institutions or simply "borrowed" by individuals.

How much would it cost to get the cataloguing done? "Hiring an expert to do the work would be ideal," Maloney said. He said a contract archivist doing a basic job would probably take two to three months and command about \$10,000 in salary.

Jerry Sherlock, a dealer in rare books and documents and a 30-year member of the Canadian Archival Appraisals Board, "took a glance" at the Mariposa collection about a year ago. He says it is nearly impossible to place a value on the collection without first having it sorted and catalogued.

"It's supposed to be fair market value," he says, "but with a lot of that stuff it would be very hard to say. Some things, under the best circumstances, could fetch a lot of money. . . . You might see posters that would fetch \$25, \$75 or \$100, then you see that they have 300 of them. It could add up. A lot of the collection is film, which is really tricky [to evaluate]."

"It's hard to imagine that [the collection] is worth less than \$25,000, and it might be three or four times that."

In any case, most people would agree that the records of a 35-year-old, world-renowned Canadian institution have a value that transcends both the evaluation and the commercial use that can be made of them. Something needs to be done to preserve such a priceless collection before something sets off that sprinkler system.