

Public Policy and the Mariposa Folk Festival: Shared Ideals in the 1960s and 1970s

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Abstract: The Mariposa Folk Festival's most well-documented decades are the 1960s and 1970s, during which it was known for its support of budding Canadian talent and its openness to diverse musical traditions. However, its early programming decisions have not been examined within the context of broader trends in Canadian society. Given the era's climate of "Canadian content" and "multiculturalism," was the MFF's artistic direction merely a reflection of newly-established government policies, or can the musical programming be attributed to progressive decision-making on the part of festival organizers? This paper addresses such questions by examining early MFF programming against a federal policy timeline.

In July of 2010, the Mariposa Folk Festival celebrated its 50th anniversary. Founded in 1961, the festival began in Orillia, Ontario, operating with strong ties to Toronto's Yorkville music scene. Historically, the event is perhaps best known for its early support for Canadian singer-songwriters who would later achieve international success, such as Gordon Lightfoot and Joni Mitchell. However, these singer-songwriters represent only a fraction of the artistic representation that the festival has hosted over the years. While a few publications (Posen 1993; Keillor 2006; Mitchell 2007) give us some sense of the event's artistic scope, their references to Mariposa are relatively brief. Given that this folk festival has entered its sixth decade, perhaps it is time to give a closer examination to some aspects of its history and cultural significance. As already stated, the MFF was an early outlet for up-and-coming domestic performers. Many are aware that the festival's so-called "stars" (such as Gordon Lightfoot) are the same artists whose names often come up in discussions of the early days of Canadian content regulations. But to date, no writers appear to have documented the numerous other Canadian performers who par-

anticipated in the festival, or explored the nature of the festival's administration which pushed it to encourage Canadian talent the way it did. Furthermore, no one has examined to what degree the festival was influenced by trends in government policy, particularly the discourse leading up to implementation of CanCon in 1971.

In addition to its Canadian programming, the MFF has been acknowledged for its musical diversity. As Mitchell has noted, this diversity is known to have been a divisive topic among its administrators. While the first three years of the festival featured predominantly Anglo-and Franco-Canadian line-ups, the late 1960s and 1970s saw the programming open up to blues, First Nations music and local immigrant musics. As with the subject of Canadian programming, this expansion of "ethnic" programming (as they called it) happened to develop alongside another new government policy at the time—in this case, multiculturalism in 1971. But as of yet, there have been no studies examining the festival's relationship with this trend.

In this paper, I use these two aspects of the MFF programming (i.e., Canadian content and diversity), to explore how the festival acted in relation to social shifts of the 1960s and 1970s, examining to what degree it was simply responding to governmental trends, and to what degree it may have been acting proactively and progressively. This discussion will be presented as a preliminary paper stemming from recent archival research. The main materials referenced will be the festival's 1961 operational notes, archival interviews, and festival programs obtained from the Clara Thomas Archives at York University. These will be supplemented with recent interviews conducted by me, as well as literature relating to Canadian popular music.

Canadian Programming

The significance of Canadian programming at the MFF becomes clearer when prefaced with some context regarding the way domestic artists were viewed in the broader music scene forty to fifty years ago. Robert Wright (1991) has outlined the state of the Canadian music industry in the 1960s and 70s, describing the latter as a nascent one whose development depended on the willingness of broadcasters to play more Canadian music; hence the building discourse at the time regarding the necessity of Canadian content quotas. Various implications of these quotas have been explored by Grenier (1990) and Henderson (2008), but one well-known fact among many Canadian music scholars is that the quotas sparked a particularly contentious debate between broadcasters and record companies. Record producers saw the new policy as a

way to stimulate the growth of industry infrastructure, while many broadcasters were pessimistic about the amount of quality domestic talent available to fill the quota. The final lobby of the latter group at the 1970 CRTC hearings was observed as follows by the journalist Ritchie Yorke:

The broadcasters' trade association tried to protest the proposed legislation as being unconstitutional, a foolish stand which resulted in some stations breaking away from its membership. Hundreds of excuses were presented to prove that the programming of Canadian records would cause enormous hardship, financial and otherwise for the stations and their listeners. (Yorke 1971:10)

In short, the proposition was very controversial, and in the eyes of its detractors, the programming of Canadian musical talent thus carried significant financial baggage.

In light of this context, I now turn back to the Mariposa Folk Festival, which, in 1961, was staged with an all-Canadian lineup. This was nearly ten years before Canadian broadcasters and record producers would be sparring over the possibility of legislated Canadian programming. This fact alone serves to paint Mariposa as a progressive event, though a close reading of archival and interview material reveals a more nuanced process leading up to the inaugural festival. The first apparent reference to Canadian programming in the planning period appears in an entry of the 1961 operational notes, which reads:

Mar. 1 ...Settled on dates 18-19. Festival to be held in community centre where admission can be charged... Edith Fowke wants to see real Canadian atmosphere prevailing. (Jones 1961)

Edith Fowke, the folklorist mentioned above, was well-known for her championing of Canadian folk music, and was involved with the festival in its early years. However, the priority for Canadian talent was shared by other administrators. In my conversation with the festival's founder, Ruth Jones-McVeigh,¹ she told me,

It was my dream, originally. To have it as a platform for Canadian talent. And...I still feel very strongly that way. In fact, before there was ever an American Idol, or a British equivalent of...I proposed that we should have a folk music competition in each of the provinces, and bring the winners to Mariposa. (Jones-McVeigh 2010)

But regardless of the strong support for Canadian artists displayed early in the planning stages, the board members apparently explored other ideas before reaching their final decision. The March 3rd entry of the operational notes reads:

Mar. 3: ... We may be able to get NYorkers [*sic*] to come up on a transportation and accommodation deal –no fee. [unclear] advised to enlist enthusiastic Maritimers to participate. Aim at balance –American talent to attract Canadians –Canadian public. (Jones 1961)

This entry shows us that the organizers toyed with concerns of financial stability before arriving at their final all-Canadian lineup. When I spoke with David Major (another early festival organizer), he confirmed that from the very first festival, committee members indeed discussed the potential necessity of booking big-name or American performers down the road to ensure financial stability in future years.

Nevertheless, the final lineup for 1961 was comprised solely of Canadian performers (see Appendix 1). The program lists 12 featured artists, including singer-songwriters (e.g., Ian and Sylvia), traditional singers (e.g., Finvola Redden), popular folk groups (e.g., the Travellers), bluegrass (e.g., York County Boys), and fiddle players (e.g., Jean Carignan and Al Cherney) (MFF program 1961). The programs for the subsequent two years of the festival list many of the same performers, with additional artists from other provinces, as well as Gordon Lightfoot's duo in 1962. The closest reference to a non-Canadian artist concerns a duo of European immigrants in 1963 (MFF programs 1962 and 1963).

The first three years of Mariposa programming were therefore predominantly Canadian and this fact prompts the question of whether the festival was receiving any kind of government assistance at the time. There is no reference to the latter in early programs, and former organizers have told me that no federal or provincial funding was received. Indeed, the Canada Council had only been founded four years prior, and was not yet funding folk music. According to my interviewees, the first Mariposa was primarily funded by Ruth Jones-McVeigh's husband Casey Jones, who contributed \$5000 of his own savings. The role of the municipal government remains somewhat nebulous. One interviewee stated that the town of Orillia may have matched Jones' funds, while another maintains that they received no support from the municipality. In any case, it is evident that for three years in a row, MFF set out without

government instruction to host a program that was nearly 100% Canadian—a far cry from what broadcasters would be pushed to accomplish in 1971. Some may question the comparison between a live folk music event and broadcasted popular music; but it is important to remember that the 1960s folk scene, popular music, and the broadcasting milieu were not operating in separate realms, and that the lines between folk and pop were frequently blurred. Some folk-oriented performers (e.g., The Travellers) had recording contracts by the early 1960s; and many Mariposa artists and administrators frequently crossed paths with rock musicians, journalists, broadcasters and record producers in the Yorkville music scene (see Jennings 1997 and Mitchell 2007 for a summary).

All in all, the MFF's final decision to launch the event with an all-Canadian lineup was not simply a whimsical experiment; rather, it occurred after some amount of debate and consideration of financial implications. The planning process of the earliest festival could therefore be viewed as a primer for the future debates on CanCon that would take place in the broadcasting milieu in 1971.²

Musical Diversity

In addition to Canadian programming, the theme of musical diversity at the MFF also gains a particular significance when examined in relation to public policy. The presence of expanded ethnocultural representation in artistic programming of many kinds is often attributed to multicultural legislation. A recent example from popular music studies is Pegley's 2008 study, which found that Much Music programming displayed a wider ethnic and cultural diversity than the American network MTV, which did not face the same regulations on cultural inclusion. Pegley's conclusions are of interest to this study in that they highlight the *degree* to which programming diversity may depend on legislation. With this in mind, I now turn to the MFF's own history of musical diversity, which developed somewhat synchronically with federal multicultural policy.

The roots of the latter date back to 1963 with the Canadian government's establishment of the Royal Commission of Bilingualism and Biculturalism, initiated to better recognize the cultural dualism implied by English- and French-speaking Canadians. By 1969, the notion of "biculturalism" had been dropped in favour of "multiculturalism," a term which more effectively recognized the cultural diversity of people living within Canada. This was officially adopted as a policy by the federal government in 1971.³

The programming of MFF from the mid-1960s and early 1970s similarly demonstrates a new engagement with the notion of diversity. In the early 1960s, the MFF had largely featured music derived from Anglo- or French-Canadian (or American) traditions. However, festival programs from 1964 to 1967 indicate that in the middle of the decade, the event began to feature more African-American blues performers (such as Mississippi John Hurt and Son House), as well as First Nations artists (such as Buffy Sainte-Marie and Alanis Obomsawin). The 1967 program also makes reference to the University Settlement International Folk Dancers, though its description of their repertoire is rather vague. However, subsequent years would come to display a clearer notion of ethnicity in the programming. In 1972, festival organizers announced the beginning of the MFF's "Ethnic committee," whose members were charged with seeking out music and dance ensembles from immigrant groups around Toronto. As a result of their efforts, the 1972 festival featured performers of Arabic music, Turkish music, and Hungarian music. It also featured several dance groups, with representation from Lebanese, Turkish, Macedonian, and Portuguese communities. The years 1973 and 1974 featured many of the same artists, with the addition of the Chinese and Mexican groups. While the MFF "Ethnic Committee" appears to have been dissolved in 1975, the programming nevertheless featured a solid contingent of artists from non-western traditions in subsequent years. First Nations artists in particular had strong representation throughout the 1970s, as can be seen in the "Native Peoples' Area," whose programming included a Cree storyteller, Inuit throat singers, artists from the Dogrib nation, and aboriginal singer-songwriters, to name a few (MFF programs 1972-1979).

At first glance, it seems very easy to attribute this newly diversified programming to direct guidance from the federal government, which had recently placed multiculturalism on its agenda. But the festival programs of this period do not indicate any signs of federal funding provided to the festival. And as Mitchell has noted, Mariposa's diversification throughout that decade has been attributed to the decisions of Estelle Klein, who served as artistic director from 1964 through the late 70s. In an interview with Radio York from circa 1972, Klein did in fact speak directly about the festival's relationship to government funding, as well as the reasons for diversification. In response to a question about arts council funding, she replied:

We never applied—we never had the time, you know. I heard... that the university of Buffalo has a course on...grant applications, and I thought, gee, if we could only afford to send someone there...it would be worth our while...to have them do noth-

ing but fill out grant forms. [But] there's a part of us that's very proud...that we've really made it on our own. (Klein ca. 1973)

Regarding her choices for artistic representation, Klein simply stated,

I think Mariposa attempts a spectrum, a broad spectrum of folk... it also does include folk dance and crafts, so that's a whole other aspect... And it's meant to be as broad a spectrum of possible... from traditional to contemporary things in the folk idiom. (Klein ca. 1973)

In the same interview, she later commented, "...when I agreed to do that job, I said that I did *not* want to limit it to Canadian, because folk music is really a whole world of things, you really can't separate" (Klein ca. 1973).

The comments provided by Klein in this interview speak to the progressive slant that she lent to the festival throughout her tenure. While present-day event programmers and broadcasters may still rely on government-enforced quotas or funding criteria to ensure inclusive representation, the 1970s Mariposa Folk Festival was in fact acting proactively in its representation of multiple musical traditions.

Thus far, these archival findings identify two ways in which the MFF was contemporaneous with (but working independently of) trends in Canadian public policy, these being, 1) its high percentage of Canadian programming and 2) its openness to cultural diversity. These two facets lead to another interesting question, notably: what effect did the cultural diversity have on the Canadian content at the festival? According to Mitchell (2007), these two goals were seen by some administrators as being in opposition to each other. The answer, however, is more complex when one considers the shifting definitions of "Canadianness" at the time, as well as the fluid identities of many performers hired by Klein. Taking the 1973 program as an example, First Nations artists comprised 16.2% of the artistic roster, and performers from the local immigrant community comprised 6.8%.⁴ But while these artists (totalling 23%) may have formed the *de facto* "multicultural" contingent,⁵ they were all based in Canada (or in the case of the First Nations artists, born in Canada). I therefore include them in my general tally of Canadian representation, which reaches a total of 62%. It should also be noted that this tally includes several musicians born in the U.S. and the U.K. who (likely because of their Anglo-Saxon-derived repertoire) are not usually categorized as part of any "diversity" contingent in folk music programming, despite their own status as immigrants. The remaining 38% of the programming from 1973 con-

sisted largely of U.S. musicians who were still based in their home country. Thus at 62%, the “Canadian content” at Klein’s Mariposa represented a definite drop in domestic musicians from the festival’s Orillia days (which usually approached 100%), as well as a diversification of traditions considered “Canadian.” But it should be noted that 62% Canadian programming at this live event was nevertheless more than twice the amount required for broadcasters in the newly-implemented Canadian Content regulations.⁶

Context and Conclusions

The two themes of Canadian content and musical diversity point to an important aspect of festival programming; notably, that it can partly be attributed to the personal beliefs of individual administrators, as we’ve seen in the cases of Ruth Jones-McVeigh and Estelle Klein.⁷ Further research might therefore give a closer investigation to the careers of these individuals to explore the genesis of their musical ideas. For example, it is worth considering Estelle Klein’s ties to the Newport Folk Festival, which may have provided her with a framework for some of her artistic decisions. However, it is also important to consider the broader social forces that may have shaped certain aspects of Mariposa, as well as to view this festival in the context of other historical events and movements. As stated earlier, this is a merely a preliminary paper of archival findings, and a detailed review of historical context is beyond the scope of this study.

But as a quick summary, we can place the MFF on a continuum alongside notable events of the 20th century which help us identify items for future discussion (see Appendix B). These include the CPR festivals of the 1930s (McNaughton 1981; Henderson 2005), which functioned along the concept of diversity;⁸ the Miramichi Folksong Festival, which predated Mariposa by three years (Butler 1986); the Massey report of 1951 (Berland 2000), which stimulated discourse on Canadian identity; and the folk revival, blues revival, and ethnic revivals of North America, which interacted with music festivals in many ways and which have been written about by various scholars who have touched upon themes of authenticity, appropriation, nationalism and aesthetics (Cohen 2002; Mitchell 2007; Titon 1993; Slobin 1983). Thus, the historical context of the MFF reveals that events like itself have a wide range of social implications which place them in a busy web of potential theoretical considerations, inviting perspectives from popular music studies, folklore, ethnomusicology, and Canadian studies.

To conclude this paper, I would like to consider the following comment by Philip Bohlman:

Folk music festivals are essentially revivalistic; the donning of symbols that redirect cultural awareness to the past contributes to the spirit of revival. National music and nationalism overtly channel the revival of the past by suggesting a continuous connection to a historical stage of protonationhood. (Bohlman 1988:131)

This passage demonstrates the tendency of music scholars to frame folk festivals as events which are preoccupied with the past. While this may be partly true of the Mariposa Folk Festival, the progressive nature of its programming of the 1960s and 70s has shown us that perhaps it is time for scholars to also begin treating folk festivals as events which look to the future. 🍁

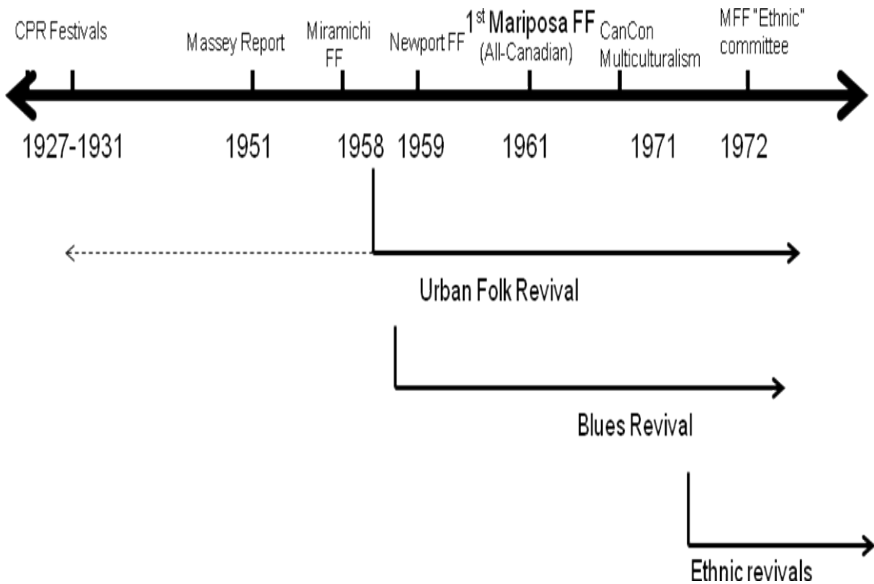
Appendix A

Mariposa Folk Festival: 1961 Artists

1. Jacques Labrecque, with Clement Laplante & Emma Caslor (Montreal)
2. York County Boys (Toronto)
3. Ian and Sylvia (Toronto)
4. Alan McRae & Peter Wyborn (Vancouver)
5. The Travellers (Toronto)
6. Alan Mills & Jean Carignan (Montreal)
7. Bonny Dobson (Toronto)
8. Omar Blondahl (Cornerbrook)
9. Finvola Redden (Halifax)
10. Al Cherney (Toronto)
11. Mary Jane & Winston Young (Oakville, ON)
12. Merrick Jarrett (Toronto)

Appendix B

Timeline: Mariposa Folk Festival in context of notable 20th-century events and movements



Notes

1. During her early involvement with the festival in the 1960s, Jones-McVeigh went by the name of Ruth Jones. Today she assumes the name Ruth Jones-McVeigh; therefore I refer to the latter version of her name when speaking of her in the present, and the former version of her name when citing materials associated with her in the 1960s (e.g., the 1961 operational notes penned by herself).

2. Despite their reputations for championing Canadian musical representation at the MFF in the early 1960s, neither Ruth Jones nor Edith Fowke would be involved with the development of Canadian content regulations in the 1970s. (Fowke, however, had given airplay to domestic folksingers as early as the 1950s, through her CBC radio program *Folk Song Time*—see Kirby 1998).

3. <http://www.canadianencyclopedia.ca/index.cfm?PgNm=TCE&Params=A1ARTA0000741>.

4. This tally includes both musicians and dancers (but excludes craftspeople). It is interesting to note that the First Nations and "Ethnic" performers were listed in separate sections of the program, apart from the "regular" programming (e.g., Anglo-/French- derived traditions or singer-songwriters). This was a common trait of MFF programs from the 1970s. A possible reason for this organization is the fact

that performances from these groups were generally centered on designated areas or stages (a fact which deserves more detailed treatment in a separate paper).

5. There was, however, one non-Western artist listed in the “Regular” programming (i.e., Bai Konte, a Gambian *kora* player).

6. Canadian representation at the Mariposa Folk Festival would continue to fluctuate in future decades. Since the 1980s, the percentage of domestic artists has sat variously at 49% (1989), 94% (1997), and 79% (2008) (MFF programs 1989, 1997, and 2008).

7. The influence of individual administrators has also been examined in the context of the Winnipeg Folk Festival, in previous studies by me (Tsai 2008) and MacDonald (2008).

8. In addition, see Diamond (2000) for a discussion of some of the ways cultural diversity has been conceptualized in Canadian music studies, more generally speaking.

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