

Old and new folks mix at Mariposa festival

By Eric Alper

Springtime in Toronto brings two things you can be certain of: construction on the highways, and Mariposa.

Not only is the original folk festival back in town, Mariposa has more performers, workshops, dancers and major concert attractions than ever before. For three days (three days, man, three days, we just love yah, tell 'em who we are...), June 19, 20, 21, there are over 300 performers on the totally solar powered stage, featuring



reggae artists Fujahive, Toronto staple Days Of You, The Lost Dakotas, and 12 other bands. Mariposa has succeeded in bringing together musical styles that would not normally be shared anywhere else.

Having singer/comedian Meryn Cadell, The Texas Tornados and Taj Mahal all appearing on the same festival shows just how important taking chances and using lesser-known, or sometimes forgotten, talent is.

The importance of Mariposa cannot be understated. In some instances it brought folk performers the money and recognition they were denied playing regular clubs or releasing various recordings. In most instances

CONCERT

Mariposa Festival
Ontario Place
June 19 - 21

it gave them something equally important - the chance to speak their minds, to "sing their minds," for hundreds and thousands of enthusiastic people. This aspect of the tradition of Mariposa is one of its wonders.

One of the newly rediscovered artists at the heart of Mariposa this year is Taj Mahal. He began developing his archival interest in the roots of African-American and Caribbean music while studying at the University of Massachusetts in the early 60s. At the same time, he became a member of the Pioneer Valley Folklore Society and studied rural black folk styles.

He played blues at Boston folk clubs before moving to Santa Monica, and formed a blues-rock band with Ry Cooder called the Rising Sons in 1965. They signed with Columbia, but broke up before they recorded. Columbia offered Taj Mahal a solo deal, and his self-titled debut was released in 1968.

His first albums, including the doubles *Giant Step/De Old Folks At Home* and *The Real Thing*, were blues records laced with ragtime. On later LPs, he explored calypso and reggae. On the live circuit, he worked solo, accompanying himself with piano, guitar, bass and harmonica. Now celebrating his 50th birthday, he is definitely one performer on the weekend you won't want to miss.

In just under four years, Days Of You have played at all the major clubs in Toronto, consistently selling out, and adding to their loyal follow-

ing as far away as Montreal. Not only are they a solid headlining act, but they've also shared the bill with Paul Kantner and Wooden Ships, Blues Traveler, and the Leslie Spit Tree-o.

Days Of You donates their time and money to non-profit and humanitarian and environmental organizations. Following in the footsteps of R. E. M., the insert for their independent tape was printed on recycable paper. All posters and correspondence involves the use of recycled and/or vegetable-based inks.

Their music? Ah, let's talk about the music. Country, blues, rock, psychedelic. It's all here. In true festival style, Days Of You prefer the moment to the artifact. Barefooted audiences can sway in front of video screens whirling kaleidoscope images, and wouldn't be out of place at a Grateful Dead show.

The Texas Tornados hail from (where else?) Austin, Texas, and their blend of country music and rock and roll bring mass audiences wherever they play. The group consists of Doug Sahm, former leader of the Sir Douglas Quintet, Mexican accordion player Flaco Jimenez, country star Freddy Fender (remember "Wasted Days and Wasted Nights?") and Augie Meyers on keyboards.

Other performers include Shirley Eikhard, the Toronto-based songwriter who penned Bonnie Raitt's Grammy winning song, "Something To Talk About." Lubbock, Texas' Joe Ely just finished touring Europe with Merle Haggard. He has also toured with The Clash - and survived. Rory McLeod, a one-man band who supposedly makes Billy Bragg look laid back, is the only tap-dancing singer songwriter around. There's also Toronto's Beverly Bratty, singer of tough, funny, pertinent songs and one



Oh!... Mariposa. That changes everything!

of the best Queen Street folk artists. Edmonton's Mike McDonald brings his five-piece Jr. Gone Wild, a band who plays their spunky music, white boy.

Music festivals usually tend to verge on disaster. The combination of huge crowds, various stimulants, vague seating arrangements, inadequate sanitation and, usually, bad weather is somehow no deterrent to

festivalgoers who expect a communal experience while seeing a slew of musicians at a bargain price. Having Mariposa at Ontario Place is a gem of an idea; their professional staff will make sure all goes okay, except for controlling the weather.

I would tell you more about Mariposa, but my tie is ready to be dyed. Ummmm, can you dye paisley? Just wondering.

Bliss-inspiring Indian classical music at Burton

by Harry Rudoffs

EVENT

Indian Classical
Music Performance
Burton Auditorium
May 16, 1992

Composer and virtuoso instrumentalist Trichy Sankaran and Kathak dancer Deepti Gupta dazzled the audience in a performance of Indian classical music at Burton Auditorium.

The tenth anniversary concert by Raga Mala performing arts of Canada was presented as a tribute to the late Jon Higgins, former associate dean of

fine arts at York. Higgins was a much admired and renowned singer of South Indian classical music, and was one

of the few Westerners to ever achieve status as a musician in India. Killed in a tragic car accident in 1984, Higgins was instrumental in establishing the presence of South Indian music at York.

The evening featured traditional dancing and music, but had some innovative and impressionistic elements as well. Trichy Sankaran, professor of Indian Music studies at York

and expert mridangam player, opened with two classical pieces of the Karnatak tradition, but then unveiled his newest composition "Talamala." The work was comprised of a series of short themes employing, alternately, vocals, claves and kanjiras (a tambourine-like instrument). The elaborate interplay and overlay of rhythms were delightful and bliss-inspiring.

In particular, the vocalization in the a cappella movement seemed to evoke a strange melancholy. Perhaps Sankaran has acquired some of what Gurdjieff was searching for: music that can create emotional states far beyond the narrow confines of what is possible with Western music.

Sankaran's last piece, a mridangam solo, demonstrated the artist's incredible abilities. Sankaran played the two-headed drum like a saint, taking the complexities of the poly-rhythms to extremes, at times dropping the listener deep in a forest and at other times splashing them with water from a clear stream.

Sankaran was accompanied by his daughter Suba on marimbas, and by Andrew Craig, Oliver Shroer, Kenneth Shorley, and Robert Sims, all music students at York.

The second half of the program featured Deepti Gupta, a graduate student at York and an accomplished Kathak dancer. Kathak dance originates from the story-telling tradition of northern India which was adapted and performed as court dances for the invading Mogul emperors.

The first dance was an invocation of Saraswati, goddess of art and learning. Though highly stylized and symbolic, the dance provided for an interaction between Gupta and the orches-

tra, particularly between herself and the drummers (Ravi Naimpally on tabla and Jim Kippen on pakhavaj), in what only can be described as jazz-like rhythmic riffs. The Kathak dancer accompanies the drummers with bells that are attached to her ankles which produces an effect not unlike tap-dancing. Harmonium players Raya Bidaye and Khemchandra provided a melodic component while Bidaye doubled as vocalist on the traditional songs.

Deepti performed "Teental," a progressive development of dance phrases and "Gat Nikas" and "Gat Bhava" which are impressionistic folk tales told through mime. Her postures and artistry shone when she was whirling and flashing her arms into stylized poses, appearing for a moment as Shiva, the many-handed and catching the audience off-guard as if to say, Who's in charge here?

Deepti's nest dance was "Thumri," a romanticization of an encounter between Krishna and Rada, which serves as an allegory of the union between the ethereal and the mundane. The artist's last offering was a kind of Indian scat singing where Deepti stepped up to the microphone and jammed with the drummers using phonetic percussive sounds, then whirled away into the infinity while performing the iconic gestures.

It was amazing to see artists of such high calibre performing in the same program. Sankaran may well be, as music professor Sterling Beckwith suggests, a "national treasure" and both he and Deepti combined to convey "a complex but immediate beauty" that will long remain with this reviewer.

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