

Folk festival a grand hit

By TOM HARRISON
Music Critic

One thing that folk festival-goers hear about but never see is the after-hours parties at UBC where performers are domiciled but hardly domesticated.

The parties are where the musicians meet one another and exchange ideas, and often the get-togethers become jam sessions which occasionally result in the kind of pancultural merger that happened yesterday afternoon at the Points Of Fuse workshop.

There, members of Rare Air joined The Oyster Band and,

later, Tony Bird's accompanist, Morris Goldberg, added his soprano sax to Rare Air's crazy quilt of pipes from Brittany and guitar from Electric Ladyland.

The excitement generated in that 10 minutes wasn't isolated. The atmosphere of the 10th Vancouver Folk Music Festival, which concluded last night at Jericho Beach Park, was charged with an optimism that was 180 degrees from 1986, when the three-day event dug itself a \$50,000 hole.

The attendance might match the high of 26,000 set in 1981 and, at a conservative estimate,

the festival may cut its deficit by half.

"Let's put it this way, we're going to be around for a few more years," co-ordinator Gary Cristall stated happily. "This festival felt like it might be great; the next one is going to be a pleasure."

The early folk festivals always could be counted on to present acts that would become Vancouver favorites — people such as Connie Kaldor, Tony Bird, Lillian Allen, Nanci Griffith and Queen Ida. This year it has outdone itself, with Michelle Shocked and The Oyster Band becoming instant "stars" after their main-stage performances Saturday and Friday, respectively. Billy Bragg, Rare Air, Ritmia, the Topp Twins and Alison Krauss also proved popular and Spirit of the West demonstrated it was the crowd-pleasing band that everyone else already knew it was.

In the year of Vanamanania, Bakermania, Olliemania and condomania (pick one) here were 19-year-old Michelle Shocked restoring the blues to Leadbelly's bowdlerized Midnight Special and 15-year-old Alison Krauss singing "I am a poor wayfaring stranger." Everywhere on the festival site the old, the new and the young either were fruitfully combined or provocatively juxtaposed.

Ritmia's captivating fusion of progressive and traditional forms forever erased our preconceptions of Italian music created by operatic pop songs and organ grinders. Oyster Band has given English folk-rock its second wind. Nightnoise has ripped the straitjacket off instrumental Celtic music. Eugene Chadbourne just might belong in a straitjacket. But, coming after 73-year-old Patsy Montana sang her disarming version of Your Cheatin' Heart, his wild-eyed Spike Jones-meets-Roger Miller interpretation of My Uncle Used To Love Me But She Died showed that you're going to have to catch him first.

Yesterday, Chadbourne completed a folk mosaic when he took part in a workshop devoted to the music of Woody Guthrie. Chadbourne, the maverick musicologist, sat beside Si Kahn, the union activist, and beside them sat Billy Bragg, the punk-rock idealist, Ramblin' Jack Elliott, a man who travelled with Guthrie, and Michelle Shocked, who is going where he has been. They were the unbroken circle.

■ For those who missed it, or want to hear more, Oyster Band is taking part in tonight's Rogue Folk Club bill at the Savoy.



Staff photo by Tim Pelling

Eugene Chadbourne had a 'music drill' at folk festival.