

ON STAGE: The flamboyant Bo Dollis, lead singer of The Wild Magnolias, who came from New Orleans for the event.

— Journal-Bulletin Photos by BOB THAYER

Newport festival redefines folk — again

By **ANDY SMITH**
Journal-Bulletin Pop Music Writer

NEWPORT
The 1990 Newport Folk Festival finished up last night with a horn-filled, R&B tune, *What Is Hip?* from Tower of Power, who accompanied closing act Michelle Shocked.

Well, it was hip. And it got everyone dancing. But it sure left open the question "What is folk?"

It's obvious that it ain't just acoustic gui-

tars anymore. If Saturday's part of the festival, which closed with Joan Baez, would have sounded at least vaguely familiar to a festival-goer of, say, 1962, yesterday's show demonstrated how far the boundaries have stretched.

"It all fits," said festival director Robert Jones, as Shocked left the stage — and that, apparently, is the lesson of a modern folk festival.

Attendance yesterday was about 5,500,

bringing the two-day total to 13,000. Of the two days, I'd give the musical nod to yesterday, thanks to superb performances from Richard Thompson, The Roches, Ry Cooder and Shocked.

Shocked's set encompassed both old and new. She began as a solo, with acoustic guitar, performing with great intensity and humor, making no secret of her unabashedly radical politics.

She sang about her childhood in East
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First-time, long-time attendees together form a familiar crowd

By **MARK MUELLER**
Journal-Bulletin Staff Writer

NEWPORT
When Bob Dylan shocked the music world 25 years ago by playing an electric guitar at the Newport Folk Festival, Barry Edson booed heartily, as did much of the crowd.

But at the Folk Festival yesterday, Edson relaxed under an umbrella and ate an ice cream bar, peacefully soaking up the sounds.

"It was a little more crazy then," said Edson, who came from his home in Boston to see the two-day show. "We weren't stampeding around, but there was a lot more singing and hooting."

Though the crowd's applause never reached a roar yesterday, the 5,500 people sprawled on the grass at Fort Adams State Park made enough noise to indicate that they

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ON LAND AND SEA: Festival-goers soak up the sun and the songs yesterday at Newport's Fort Adams State Park; a friendly, festive atmosphere prevailed.

FOLK FESTIVAL

Big names bring weekend to a fine finish

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Texas, did a pair of songs she learned from her father, then sang a powerful *Ain't No Justice*, about a subway graffiti writer in New York City, strangled in police custody.

Shocked's bitter, passionate indictment of injustice cut through the hazy afternoon air. She sang a Steve Goodman song, a capella, about a girl widowed by Vietnam, and even had the crowd conduct a "die-in" (everyone falls down) as a barbed comment on Rhode Island's celebration of V-J Day.

Shocked shifted gears with the arrival of Tower of Power, with its superb five-piece horn section. With TOP, Shocked moved into material from her last LP, *Captain Swing*.

Shocked swayed and danced across the stage with Tower singer Tom Bowes, obviously having a high old time on tunes like *Too Little, Too Late* and *Don't You Mess Around with My Little Sister*. During *Barefootin'* Shocked waved her socks over her head.

She appeared equally at home in both modes, and equally delightful. But her set lost much of its intimacy and political thrust when the band appeared. Her solo work was truer to folk festival tradition, and the most upfront political performance of either day.

Fans who caught guitarist Ry Cooder's amazing performance at last year's festival were eagerly awaiting his return, this time with fellow slide guitar master David Lindley.

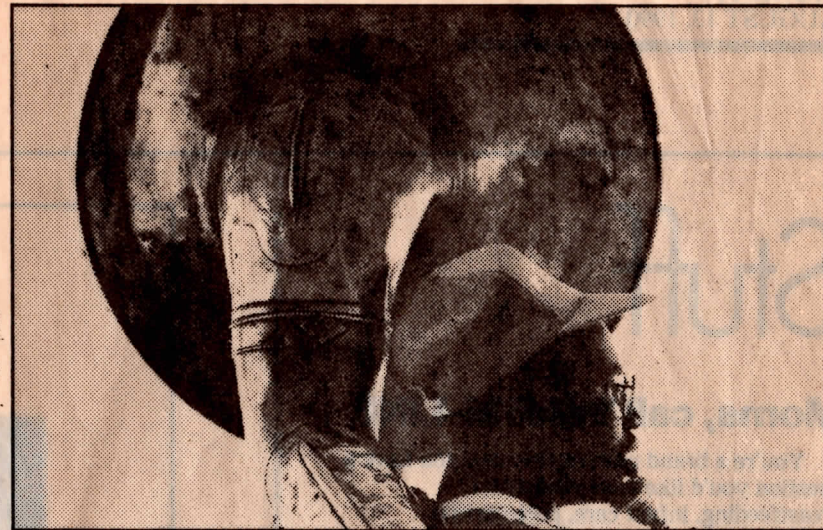
Cooder's set fell slightly short of the chills-up-the-spine appearance last year, but only slightly.



Cooder and Lindley, eventually joined by Cooder's son on percussion, sampled a vast repertoire of American music that ran from the gospel of *Jesus on the Main Line* to a rockin' *Woolly Bully* to folk standard *Goodnight, Irene*.

Choosing from a zoo of odd stringed instruments, Cooder and Lindley sent the festival into slide-guitar heaven. Cooder did a long, superb solo on bottleneck slide guitar to lead into an ominous performance of Woody Guthrie's *Vigilante Man*, while Lindley ran a bow across an electric guitar for an eerie low moan.

Cooder's talents as a instrumentalist and musicologist are well known, but he is also a fine, gutsy



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BUT RELATIVE UNKNOWNNS are a lot of what people come to see. Trumpet-player Kermit Ruffins, right, and Philip Frazier, on tuba, both are with the New Orleans-based Re-Birth Jazz Band.

singer. He jokingly referred to *Woolly Bully* as "a great American folk song" before he and Lindley played a version that had the crowd on its feet and the boats out in the harbor honking their horns.

Accordianist Flaco Jimenez joined Cooder and Lindley for their *Goodnight Irene* finale. Jimenez, who plays conjunto (or Tex-Mex) music, played his own vibrant set that included conjunto versions of country songs, among them Dwight Yoakum's *Streets of Bakersfield*.

Both the Roches and Richard Thompson were predictably brilliant. It gets boring to write about how fine they are; it's never boring to hear them.

The Roches — Maggie, Terre and Suzzy — lend credence to the theory that sibling have an edge when it comes to singing harmonies. They opened with the perfect harmonies of *Summertime*; on *Big Nothing* their voices wound intricate counter-melodies around each other. And hearing the Roches rapid-fire version of *The Hallelujah Chorus* never fails to amaze.

Richard Thompson showed just how good one man with a guitar can be. The man has a wealth of gifts — he is an intense, emotional singer, a fine songwriter and a brilliant guitarist, whether he plays acoustic or electric. Why he's not a huge star is a mystery to me.

Something for everyone