

*Tenth
Anniversary
Islands Folk Festival*



July 22, 23 & 24, 1994

at

Providence Farm

Duncan, B.C.

SPONSORED BY THE COWICHAN FOLK GUILD • PHONE/FAX 604-748-3975

History of the Islands Folk

Early in 1985 Mike Ballantyne approached me about having a few friends over from Vancouver to sit around the campfire and sing a few songs. As the farm on which I then lived was not feasible Mike approached Devon Mills about the site at Providence Farm. The project rapidly grew from a quiet private affair to a fundraiser for Providence Community Association with invited performers

for two days. Mike then went on a three month road trip giving me a list of performers to invite. So with little to offer than a beautiful setting, a worthy cause, a good feed and a bit of travel money, I

called these total strangers and managed to convince a few that this was the best offer they would receive all year! Word filtered out through the musical nooks and crannies and soon performers were calling inquiring about playing the festival. Then too were the performers I came across at the Victoria Folk Club. Pretty soon we had a good two days worth of local entertainment with a couple of off-Islanders as added enticement. Relying heavily upon the volunteer resources of Providence and a rather ad hoc group of interested folk musicians, the first Cowichan Folk Festival took shape and was executed with all the energy of a good party. We had two stages, one on either side of the stairs leading up into the

big building. Cable 4 was conveniently ensconced in the middle of the circle drive directly in front of the stages. The beer garden was well placed far from the action in the small field. First lesson from the first festival – if you want the music to be heard make sure the audience is within sight. Three hundred people came out to the first festival, the rugby club ran the beer garden and did security, friendly nurses volunteered first aid services, nuns ran the gate and musicians shared their music. All in all it was a great bash! I believe we even made a little bit for Providence that year as well.

With inspiration in our hearts following the festival a group of local folk musicians decided to form an official society, meet on a regular basis through a monthly coffeehouse and carry on with the folk festival. Thus was created the Cowichan Folk Guild a non-profit society whose mandate it was "to preserve and promote folk music in the Cowichan Valley". We held our first coffeehouse at St. Peter's Church hall and about 100 people attended. Over the years and three venues later the Guild has a membership of 120 and monthly coffeehouses average 80-90 people consistently.

Year two, Expo year – 1986. There were all sorts of grants available if you associated yourself with the "fun to sea islands" tourism push that year. It seemed like a fine time to change the name to the Islands Folk Festival with a vision of performers from islands all over the world. A group of Acadian performers from the Maritimes approached us about performing at the Festival to supplement their appearances at Expo and the Vancouver Folk Festival. We moved the stage to the north end of the small field, fed an army of volunteers, their mothers, aunts, cousins and dogs and learned two more lessons – issue food coupons and move the stage out of the cross wind. Again more local musicians came out

of the woodwork, interest was expressed by performers from Vancouver and the Seattle area and we extended the festival to Friday night, and a kids stage with puppeteers, storytellers and singers. Just like Topsy the Festival grew and about 500 enjoyed the three day event.

1987 saw the first stages of the later to be permanent stage at its present location. Caravan Theatre Company had overwintered at Providence and left behind huge canvas murals which we used as backdrops for the stage. RARE AIR the wild, world beat, bagpipe/funk group from Toronto were the headliners. Again interest in performing at the festival grew beyond the provincial scene. It was beginning to develop a reputation as a good "down home" festival

that was both a pleasure for those who came to listen and those who came to perform. Lesson learned in year 3? – Always have someone on staff who can release ladies locked in the porta-potties.

In 1988 the stage was further developed with a permanent cover and adequate power supply. Up and coming young Canadian artists STEPHEN FEARING and JIM KEELAGHAN were the featured performers of the 4th Islands Folk Festival. Workshops in finger picking, song writing, blue grass fiddle and squeeze boxes were offered in addition to the expanded kids stage and fair. The Saturday gate ticket was \$5! Such a deal.

The 5th Islands Folk Festival saw further development on the grounds, improved camp sites and yet more work on the stage. LOS GAVILANES from Mexico, Canadian DAVID ESSIG and songwriter T.R. RITCHIE from Seattle highlighted the programme. By now the Cowichan Folk Guild was growing, adding a considerable number of volunteers to assist with the running of the Festival. Both the Guild and Providence Community Association were endeavouring to use the Festival as a fundraising vehicle for their various projects.

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*...a stepping stone for artists, a place for honing skills, a time for sharing –
10th Islands Folk Festival!*

DEB MAIKE

Providence had a covered riding ring for handicapped riders to build as well as developing their greenhouse operation, sheep flock and resurrection of the big building. The Guild, in addition to the

monthly coffeehouse, sponsored various concerts, a Mid-winter Blahs Festival and a radio show. Lots of projects, dreams far greater than the gate receipts. Never-the-less, attendance grew as word spread.

TONY BIRD, WILLIE P. BENNETT, DIAMOND JOE WHITE and HOLLY ARNTZEN joined longtime festival

performers SCOTT PARSONS, JENNY ALLEN, FULL CIRCLE, GALLAHER & GAILBRAITH and about 75 other performers for the 6th Festival in 1990. By now a few "traditions" had developed, such as the early Sunday morning climb up Mt. Tzouhalem as a band of chorus angels sang gospel down below or the pre-festival swim in the beautiful Cowichan River and the late night jams long after the crowds had dispersed for the day.

MUSIC 91 saw the inclusion of the festival in its programme to bring big name performers to small events throughout the province. BUFFY ST. MARIE, VALDY and PAT TEMPLE AND THE HIGH LONESOME PLAYERS were the headliners for the largest and dampest festival to date. Barring the inclement weather 2700 people passed through the gates that year. My fondest memory is of Buffy St. Marie in one of the back sheds fashioning a mouth bow from a twig she'd collected from nearby St. Peter's graveyard, wearing a multi-coloured and many buttoned jacket purchased from one of the craft booth vendors.

In April of 1992 I retired as the Artistic Director of the Festival and Guild and handed the reins over to the storytelling team of Richard Wright and Cathryn Wellner. Grasping the bull by the horns and facing a semi-programmed festival, Richard and Cathryn leapt into the fray and pulled off another successful event. A third stage was added to accommodate the endless stream of performers including storytellers, celtic and blues jammers, traditionalists and songwriters. FRED J. EAGLESMITH made his festival debut sharing the stage with DIAMOND JOE WHITE, ST. ELMO'S CHOIR and the VANCOUVER MORRIS MEN. The festival had established itself as a great place to bring the family for a weekend of eclectic folk music suitable for all ages.

Richard and Cathryn carried on with the traditions of the Guild in 1993 in all areas including the monthly coffeehouse, house concerts, theatre concerts such as THE KINGSTON TRIO and

TOM PAXTON and of course the 9th Islands Folk Festival. DAVID ESSIG and KENT DUCHAINE got downright bluesy while SHEELA NA GIGH, LAURIE RILEY AND MICHAEL MACBEAN and SCATTER THE MUD added a Celtic flavour to the weekend.

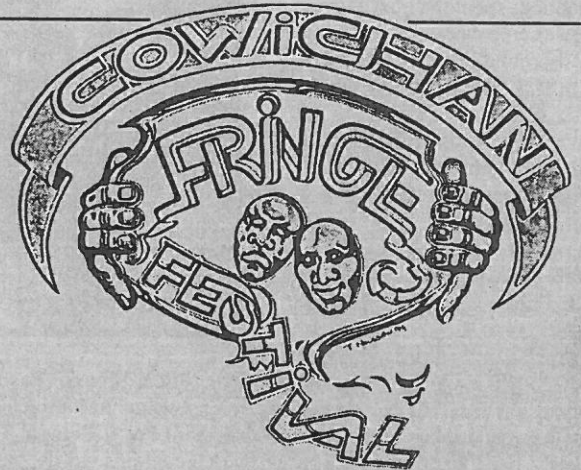
In May of this year Richard and Cathryn moved to their historic "dream" ranch near Williams Lake where they plan to carry on with furthering folk music and storytelling. Local musician and presenter BRENT HUTCHINSON willingly took up the torch by becoming the Artistic Coordinator for the Folk Guild and Festival.

This 10th Islands Folk Festival is the legacy of a small group of folk musicians and a hard working core of volunteers who came together to realize a dream. It has been a stepping stone for many artists, a place for honing of skills, a time for sharing, camaraderie and fellowship. Kudos to those who have made it work in the past - strength to those who continue the tradition.

Let the music begin!

• Deb Maike, Founder/Past Artistic Director
Islands Folk Festival

Festival



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