



BY CHARLES PERRY

FIDDLIN' IN BERKELEY

The Thirty-Fifth Annual Berkeley Fiddler's Convention, held in Berkeley's Provo Park on June 8, was the first banjo and fiddle contest of its type. It was the first such contest in Berkeley, the first First Contest ever numbered Thirty-Fifth, and the first totally bullshit competition in a public place. Named after a particularly influential recording of an old line of young traditional folk musicians together in a twangy un-amplified freckout that had a noticeable attendance of rock musicians.

It was a clear, warm day in Provo Park, that little city block of lawn and trees that was known as Constitution Park until the Provo, Berkeley's Diggers, started to give out free food there last year. The downtown Berkeley location is a bizarre one for such a concert, overlooked as it is by the City Hall and Courthouse, the Educational Testing Service offices and the WPA-style bas-reliefs of the Berkeley High School Auditorium. Rock concerts are common there on weekends, but on this occasion electrical cords were strictly "no-fair."

Most big names in rock and roll were folk musicians at one time or another—even Paul Butterfield's first album was presented as folk blues, to the point of containing a note of

apology in the liner notes for the band's use of electrified guitars. At Provo Park there was a distinct affinity between the representatives of the Grateful Dead, Country Joe and the Fish, Jefferson Airplane and suchlike bands in the audience and the folk lineup with names like the Finger of scorn, the passey and cowboys-and-indian motif in clothing, the underground attitudes expressed in an occasional song, the musical play and spaced-out grins were all from the same spectrum.

What would appear to be the enduring core of the folk music scene, apart from the liberal political sympathies, is the conception of music being made by folks, for folks. Corry as this can get at times, it has revolutionary implications for an age in which most music is not artistic communication but a consumer good. A down-to-earth, relaxed quality and a sense of musical tradition and a community of peers, rather than an audience, have been the essence of folk music, despite the aberrations of super-folkloremanship, folk romanticism and mechanical-monster Bluegrassery.

The importance attached to in-

strumental technique in the hippie folk scene five or ten years ago was distinctly played down. The bluegrass craze had left a relatively small mark, and in fact contest competitiveness was mocked throughout. First prize was five pounds of rutabagas. Second prize, six pounds. The judges

one of the judges assured the crowd that there was nothing to worry about because the winners had been picked weeks before and their names were in a sealed envelope.

Musicians were more likely to get points for a well-developed and personal style than for playing in a protest vein or at breakneck speed. The Poison Coyote Kid, for instance, got a point for his good country name. It is not clear, however, what the points meant in evaluating the winners.

The banjo contest winner, Winnie Winston, took the prize even though being from New York cost him a point. Skip Buehling picked up four points altogether, between being short and putting a sock in his banjo (Rowan and Martin Award). The Tiny Tim Award went to Dave Kicker for missing in his approach to the microphone. Unfortunately, the sec-

ond-place winner in the banjo contest could not be found when the winners were announced, and his six pounds of rutabagas were distributed among the audience.

In the fiddle contest Susan Drabain gained ½ point for being a lady and Colleen Allen two points for being properly impressed by the bench, but they lost to Naomi Eisenberg. The Family Cow was the biggest hit of the fiddle contest, with

"Catch a Falling Star," which featured a drum midgette twirling a baton. However, although the twirler was awarded ½ point for no slight, the band was disqualified for unlawful assembly.

The Diesel Ducks were standouts in the band division of the contest, with their "Grocery Store Music," a parody of Kwesi's "Jug Band Music." "Sounds so fine—hum—I can't stop buyin'" — with interludes of Muzak favorites such as "Pennies from Heaven," "Tiptoeing through the Moonlight" and "Canadian Sunset." The Golden Toad was also notable for its fiddle and bagpipe duets and obstreperous medieval fanfares.

No notes exist for the band contest though, since by that part of the afternoon the judges were completely uncooperative.

