

Big Sur Folk Festivals

Seventh Big Sur Folk Festival

Saturday, October 3, 1970

Held at Monterey County Fairgrounds

1:00pm Concert:

Beach Boys

John Phillips

Joan Baez

Merry Clayton and Love Ltd.

Kris Kristofferson

John Hartford

8:00pm Concert:

Beach Boys

John Phillips

Linda Ronstadt, with Swamp Water

Mimi Fariña & Tom Jans

Mark Spoelstra

Country Joe McDonald

Tom Ghent

Joan Baez

Finale: All sing You Ain't Going Nowhere

The Big Sur Folk Festival, held from 1964 to 1971, was an informal gathering of prominent and emerging folk artists from across the United States. Nancy Carlen was working at the Esalen Institute when Joan Baez was asked to lead workshops on music. Carlen was a good friend of Baez, and they decided to invite other artists, which turned into the first festival.

Baez performed at all seven events. Well-known acts included Joni Mitchell, Judy Collins, The Beach Boys, Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young, Country Joe McDonald, John Sebastian, Kris Kristofferson, Arlo Guthrie, Dorothy Morrison & the Edwin Hawkins Singers, and Julie Payne. All of

the artists were paid union scale, about \$50. The audience paid \$3.50 to \$5.50, depending on the year. All proceeds benefitted Baez' Institute for the Study of Nonviolence.

Carlen intended it to be a friendly, low-key event that allowed artists to relax after their long summer concert series. It was held except for one year in front of the pool at the Esalen Institute on the Big Sur coast. The second-to-last year was held at the Monterey County Fairgrounds. Carlen purposefully kept advertising to a minimum to help keep crowds small. Richard and Mimi Fariña performed for the first time at the festival, which led to a recording contract.

At the September 1969 festival, many artists had performed only four weeks earlier at Woodstock. The event was later considered by some as the antithesis of the commercial Woodstock, but it was originally seen by the artists an antidote to the Newport Folk Festival.

Founding

The festival was founded in 1964 by Nancy Carlen. She was attending Boston University when she met Joan Baez. Baez at the time lived in Carmel Valley. Impressed with Baez' music and social convictions, Nancy drove cross-country and arrived in Big Sur in 1961. She got a job at Esalen and began living there.

Carlen wrote that the festival "started as a lark, Esalen Institute offering us a chance to take over that magnificent place for a whole weekend—the catch—an Esalen style seminar on "The New Folk Music".[5] She invited Joan Baez to lead the workshop. Carlen had met Richard and Mimi Farina at a mutual friend's home. She brainstormed ideas for the festival with Richard and invited both of them. It was their first professional performance.

Well, any time you found Joan Baez, Richard and Mimi Fariña, and me in the same place there had to be singing, so instead of meetings and lectures, sing we did, in the sulphur baths, on the lawns, even during meals sitting at long wooden tables in the lodge. Sunday afternoon we invited the neighborhood in general to join us, turned the deck of the Esalen swimming pool into a stage, and sang to everyone.

Carlen invited Malvina Reynolds, Mark Spoelstra, Roger Abraham, and local artists Janet Smith and Richard and Mimi Fariña. Carlen performed as well. Carlen later said she intended the festival to be a "performers' festival," where the artists could enjoy some peace and solitude together after the long summer on the festival circuit.

The audience liked Mimi and Dickson Farina so much that three record companies offered the duo a recording contract. Since Richard already had a publishing contract with folk giant Vanguard, and since Mimi's sister Joan had done well in her contract with Vanguard, they signed with them.

Later concerts

The festival was held annually from 1964 through 1969 at the Esalen Institute in Big Sur; in 1970 it moved to the Monterey County Fairgrounds and returned to Esalen for the last concert in 1971.

As the seminar evolved into full concerts, Carlen kept the events purposefully small, emphasizing "quality and atmosphere over publicity and commercial success". Even when well-known artists like the Beach Boys or Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young were scheduled to perform, Carlen kept attendance to no more than a few thousand. She preferred crowds of less than 6000, preferably

3000. In 1971, she paid for no advertising and issued no tickets, only invitations. She paid performers union scale, never more than \$50 per person. The admission charge was \$3.50 to \$5.50, depending on the year. For security, she used members of Baez' Institute for the Study of Nonviolence.

From 1964 to 1971, the Big Sur Folk Festival featured a line up of emerging and established artists including Joan Baez, Joni Mitchell, Judy Collins, The Beach Boys, Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young, Country Joe McDonald, John Sebastian, Kris Kristofferson, Arlo Guthrie, Dorothy Morrison & the Edwin Hawkins Singers, Julie Payne, and Mimi Farina. During the October 1970 festival, Kristofferson learned that Janis Joplin, with whom he had been involved with, had died of an overdose in Los Angeles.

At Esalen, the audience sat on the grass in front of the swimming pool; the artists performed on the other side of the pool with the Pacific Ocean in the distance. In 1968 the audience totaled around 5,000 each day.] In September, 1970, the crowd at the Monterey County Fairgrounds numbered six or seven thousand.

The Beach Boys' performance at the 1970 festival at the Monterey County Fairgrounds helped establish their place as a rock and roll band and their importance as a live act. Manager Jack Riley attributed their appearance at the festival as the reason the group was invited to play Carnegie Hall soon afterward. A recording of "Wouldn't It Be Nice" was included on a Live at Big Sur Folk Festival single and album.

Although the event is sometimes now regarded as the antithesis of the grossly commercial Woodstock, it was originally seen as antidote to the Newport Folk Festival. The folk festival in part inspired the first Monterey Pop Festival in 1967.

Documentary film

Main article: Celebration at Big Sur

A documentary film, Celebration at Big Sur, was made about the September 14 and 15, 1969 Big Sur festival, which featured many performers who had played at Woodstock a few weeks earlier from August 15–18.[The Los Angeles Herald Examiner reported that the performers donated their time for the concert and film in exchange for a portion of the net profits. The Daily Variety reported in April 1970 that the film's profits were divided between the Big Sur Folk Festival Foundation (88%) and the crew (12%). Another source reported that Baez' Institute for the Study of Nonviolence benefited from the film's profits.

About 10-15,000 people camped out for three miles up and down Highway One for the two-day festival. The event audience was so well-mannered that those without the \$4.00 admission price listened from the highway, even though there was no gate.

Performance dates and artists

The following artists performed from 1965 to 1971:

The First Big Sur Folk Festival

Sunday, June 21, 1964

Joan Baez

Roger Abraham

Nancy Carlen

Malvina Reynolds

Mark Spoelstra

Janet Smith

Mimi & Richard Fariña

Second Big Sur Folk Festival

September 13–14, 1965

Joan Baez

The Incredible String Band

John Sebastian

Delanie and Bonnie

Dorothy Morrison and the Comb Sisters

Third Big Sur Folk Festival

Sunday, July 10, 1966

Joan Baez

Judy Collins

Mark Spoelstra

Malvina Reynolds

Nancy Carlen

Al Kooper

Mimi Fariña

Fourth Big Sur Folk Festival

June 28–29, 1967

Joan Baez

Judy Collins

Mark Spoelstra

Jade the Mad Muse (?)

Chambers Brothers

Mimi Fariña

Al Kooper

Fifth Big Sur Folk Festival

September 8–9, 1968

Joan Baez

Judy Collins

Mimi Fariña

Arlo Guthrie

Charles River Valley Boys

Sixth Big Sur Folk Festival

September 14–15, 1969

Joan Baez

Joni Mitchell

Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young

John Sebastian

Johanna Demetrakas

Dorothy Morrison & the Edwin Hawkins Singers

Mimi Fariña

Julie Payne

Ruthann Friedman

Carol Ann Cisneros

The Comb Sisters

Chris Ethridge

Flying Burrito Brothers

Struggle Mountain Resistance Band

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Finale: All sing You Ain't Going Nowhere

Eighth (and final) Big Sur Folk Festival

Saturday, September 25, 1971

Joan Baez

Kris Kristofferson

Mimi Fariña and Tom Jans

Mickey Newbury

Big Sur Choir

Lily Tomlin & Larry Manson

Blood, Sweat and Tears

