

MORE THAN 10,000 persons left a large Eastern stadium on a recent summer night. Most were college types with a sprinkling of well-dressed teenagers and a few "older people"—30ish, you know.

They had just heard a concert, but from the peevish arguing it might well have been a closely fought football game or heated political rally. The music, however, was folk, and it is sometimes difficult to determine which folk-music fanatics enjoy most, listening to it or debating it.

"Peter, Paul, and Mary? Bah, strictly commercial. Songs aren't from the people, not grass roots. Just a good show-biz trio put together by a booking agent!"

That is a folk-music argument not only about Peter, Paul, and Mary but about many of the new faces and new sounds in the oldest of musical genres. Folk music started catching on more than a decade ago, but until recently the public was satisfied with traditional singers—Burl Ives, the Weavers, Josh White—and traditional songs passed down through generations from Elizabethan England, Appalachia America, and other national or ethnic groups.

Nowadays, though, the public can't get enough of the music, so innovators both in style and content have come on the scene. With them has come the "purist-versus-popular" debate at teen-agers' soda fountains, college rathskellers, and in the big-city coffeehouses.

In many ways, Peter, Paul, and Mary typify the focal point of the discussion and the "new look." In the No. 1 musical fad, they rank No. 1 in popularity with such hits as "Puff, the Magic Dragon" (written by Peter), "The Lemon Tree," and "Five Hundred Miles." But a highly articulate and intelligent trio, they don't need their millions of fans to defend them. If Mary's winsome charm and Paul's comic flair can't win you over, Peter's polysyllabic dissertations will overwhelm you:

FOLK MUSIC is communicable emotion allowing the audience to participate in a richly rewarding interpersonal relationship with the performer, rather than remain spectators . . . Yes, we translate songs into terms of today but without destroying their feelings. Folk music has always undergone in transmission certain mutations . . . Ethnic groups, for instance, lost individual fusion in America's culture because of the dispersion of common ideas through communications; their music, too, changed, but essential authenticity remained."

In other words, Mary says, "We sing for the times. Folk singers always have been contemporary and popular—balladeers, minstrels, street singers. They made the music fit the time and audience. So do we."

Paul adds: "There are 'reporters' who bring a tape recorder into the mountains to capture an age-old song, then sing it almost exactly as the mountaineers sang it. They are 'reporters' and good ones. But we are interpreters, creators. We believe in doing more than imitating."

What the purists sometimes overlook is the fact that while Peter, Paul, and Mary have brought something new to folk singing, they are not newcomers themselves. They learned the rules of their art before tampering with them.

As the precocious son of a New York City at-



PETER, PAUL,



and

MARY

Are They Really "FOLK



SINGERS"

?

The purists say no,
the public says yes,
and it all makes
for a box-office boom

By JACK RYAN

torney and schoolteacher, Peter Yarrow's interest in music was so great his mother had to discourage it. "She wanted me to go out and play ball—but I wanted only to play the violin," Peter says. "I began playing the guitar in high school because everybody else did, but it wasn't until I got to Cornell University that I discovered I was a good folk singer."

"On one occasion, Josh White was late for a concert, and I filled in. This gave me a chance to compare my performance with that of a professional. The result was not unfavorable to me. Later I left Cornell and got my first job in a Greenwich Village coffeehouse by simply telling the manager I could make money for him. I did."

Paul Stookey's father was a salesman who often took his wife and son on road trips. To pass the time, Mr. Stookey would sing. One day little Paul joined in perfect harmony, although he'd never heard harmony. "My dad wasn't especially musical, but he gave me my first guitar, and we'd sing together. When I started writing songs, my mother, a writer, would be my critic."

PAUL PERFORMED in high school and at the University of Michigan and organized a rock 'n' roll band for tours. After college he settled in New York City as a young business executive who visited the Village for coffeehouse chess games. One night, almost on impulse, he asked the manager if he needed entertainers. The answer was yes, and soon Paul was performing nightly and dragging himself to work during the day. "I had to decide on entertaining or business. It was entertaining." Soon he was appearing with such headliners as Joan Baez and doing comedy at a good salary in Village clubs.

Mary Allin Travers first remembers singing on a Louisville picket line when she was five. Both her parents were newspaper workers who later moved to Greenwich Village, where kids sang folk music instead of playing hopscotch. "Every Sunday I'd take my collie to Washington Square, where everybody sang. I would have little wars trying to outsing them. I knew Josh White's kids, and I'd go home with them after school and dig the whole folk scene. In high school I sang with Pete Seeger and made three records with him."

She was a "victim of progressive education," however, and seemed lost in young adulthood. Friends literally dragged her to a Broadway try-out, where she won a job in a short-lived musical. This brought an offer for a folk-singing job but, because she couldn't play the guitar, the manager called in a partner. He was Paul Stookey.

About this time Peter Yarrow was looking for a girl singing partner, and Al Grossman, one of the behind-the-scenes masterminds of the folk-singing business, suggested Mary. The result was not a duo but Peter, Paul, and Mary.

Despite new riches, Peter still lives with his mother in the Manhattan apartment he grew up in. Mary, divorced and the mother of a three-year-old daughter, Erica, lives in an expensive East Side apartment and buys clothes at the exclusive shop where she was once a switchboard operator. Paul, *bon vivant* of the group, also has elaborate "diggings" and an even more stylish wardrobe than when he shocked Village beatniks by appearing in Brooks Brothers apparel.

All three appear totally undisturbed by success ("I'm not a star," says Mary indignantly, "I'm a folk singer!") or the controversy they excite. They are doing what they like best—and, more important, what audiences like best.