

national

West Coast Women's Music Festival

Barbara Gagliardi

As a white woman, and one actively involved in the anti-racist actions at this year's West Coast Women's Music Festival, I would like

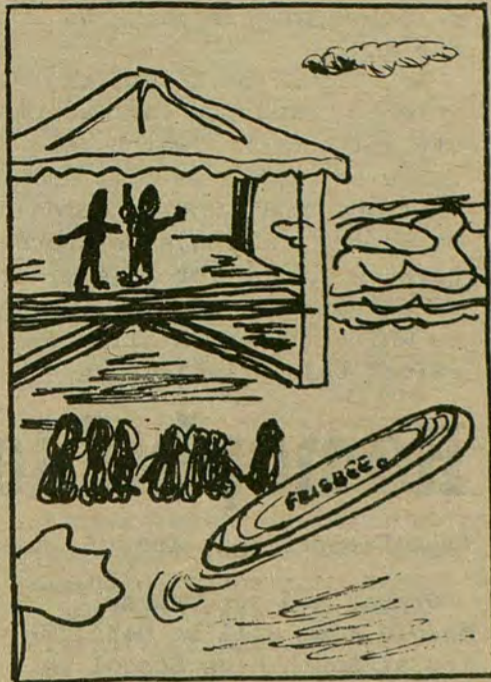
culture

to express my feelings and impressions of that event. I feel we must continue to criticize our own events and projects to insure that they may someday become what we claim them to be. As feminists, many of us state an anti-racist priority. Yet our movement continually falls short of achieving this end. I believe the events at the WCWMF mirror the realities occurring in many communities throughout the U.S., a fundamental rip-off of Third World culture and Third World womens' energies

From the outset, this was illustrated by the assumed "legitimacy" gained by calling this event a "cultural" festival, despite the token commitment to the real struggles of the Third World. It was illustrated by the rip-off of Third World womens' energies in work exchange, requiring 15 hours of work, no partial work exchange, and no provision for one-day or weekend attendance. This excluded many working class women who could not afford to take off 2 days from their jobs.

But the rip-off was most acutely evident in the supposed "solidarity day" with Latin America. Let me describe the setting. The stage on which the events of solidarity day were scheduled was located right next to the lake. It was situated in the play area, beer sold to the left, craftspeople set up nearby. Women attempting to speak of the very real struggles of people in Nicaragua, Chile, El Salvador and Argentina were drowned out by splashing, frisbee-throwing and yelling of playing women throughout the play area in front of the stage. Those of us attempting to learn something of the struggles of women in Latin America had to struggle to catch the words above the clamor and distraction.

In addition to the irony of



-Tea Schook/BMR

hearing about people dying in struggle while white women played, we were listening to white women speak of the struggles of our Latina sisters. (Two of the three speakers were white.) When confronted on the whys of the decision to have white women speak, the reply was to protect the emotional security of white women, for they would be more likely to listen to other white women. The old "let's take care of whites," when the reality was most of them weren't listening anyway. All of this was scheduled on a side stage, while the main stage remained unused.

As soon as the Latina bands arrived, however, and began to play some music, all of a sudden, there was white interest everywhere. Latinas came and gave their all, their performances were wonderful, and white women danced and sang and enjoyed. Listen to the reality of struggle and death in Latin America? NO, but when it came to the music, white women were there, for after all, this was a "solidarity day."

I sat there so angry I could barely speak. White women so willing to rip off the music, the fun, the rich cultural tradition of the Third World, to imitate in their movements their imagined portrayal of African dancing, and so unable, or unwilling, to see their lack of commitment to Third World struggle, to deaths that were occurring while they danced. It was a sideshow for white womens' amusement, for after all, they were "giving" Latin Ame-

rica a solidarity day, weren't they? The well-worn pattern--Third World women give, white women benefit, and walk away "legitimizing" their experience, because it is supposedly "anti-racist."

A small group of Latinas and supporters wrote a short statement on the racism and classism occurring at the festival, announcing a meeting the following day for those concerned. When they attempted to gain access to the main stage that night, they were met with increased security and a refusal to have their statement read. One Latina was escorted from the land. Of their efforts, only a brief announcement of the following day's meeting was allowed. When asked the next day, reason given--their statement was "inappropriate at that time."

The next day many of us met. The group was very large--women of color, Jewish women and white women expressing our concerns. In that meeting many details of the racism and classism of the festival were shared--

differential treatment of white women and women of color who had lost their tickets, avoidance and delay of contracts for the kitchen and child care staffs, differential treatment of the various performers of color, and more. The group decided to split, to write two statements, one from the women of color, the other from Jewish and white women, to be read on stage that night. Meetings occurred throughout the day, and the two statements were written. When we gathered together again, to share our statements, it emerged that both groups were voicing the same concerns. As Rosa Maria, a Puerto Rican woman said, truth was on our side, and we marched to the stage, with a sense of joy and connectedness.

With some resistance, we were eventually able to gain access to the stage. Three women (Black, Latina and white) voiced our concerns to the audience. Their statements were of pulling us

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together, to dialog about racism; that as women we could make a difference. Within seconds upon completion of our statements, however, Robin Tyler ran onto the stage, charging us with invalidating the work that had been done, and with trying to destroy the festival. She denied charges of racism simply by the fact of being a Jew. Identifying herself as a Jew over and over, she defended herself from personal attack and defended the profits made from the festival, with promise of a videotape of lesbian culture. Her defense of profit, in the context of identifying herself as a Jew was especially painful. Her actions warrant understanding, in that they came from internalized anti-semitism and fear but we must hold her accountable for her racism, her invalidation of others, and her power-tripping.

Her statements threw the

audience into chaos. Some white women yelled for us to go home and stop "ruining their good time." Could they really not see that we had come there for a good time also? That we would have rathered there'd be no racism and classism, so that we too could've enjoyed what we came there to enjoy--true womanispace, for all women?

Many women listened to all that had been said, and were terribly confused. Robin Tyler, invalidating the unity we had accomplished as women of color, Jewish women and white women, caused tremendous pain among all of us who had marched. We left the main concert area, meeting again in a place remote from the chaos. We spoke of our pain of invalidation. Many Jewish women spoke of their fear of being identified with Robin Tyler's statements. We supported each other and reaffirmed our solidarity as Third World,

Jewish and white women. We sang of being family, and ended the night with a cultural festival of our own, a true cultural festival in which differences were shared, supported and celebrated.

Once again, the next day we met. We wore red arm bands to identify ourselves as those who'd participated in the action, in an attempt to share information with many of the women unaware of the issues involved. But the joy in solidarity we had felt during our march was deflated--feminists, once again, succeeded in producing an event which invalidated women of colors' and Jewish womens' concerns and perspectives.

Some women are continuing the struggle begun at the WCWMF. The Pacific Center for Human Growth (P.O. Box 908, Berkeley 94701) is serving as the vehicle for info. exchange, and many women in

the bay area are meeting, discussing and strategizing for next year's festival.

One of the demands that is being brought to Robin Tyler is that next year's festival be planned by a collective, with equal representation of women of color and white women. This, as opposed to the hierarchical structure of this year's festival, with Robin Tyler on top.



† -Credit Lost

If next year's festival cannot make giant strides over this year's event, there can and should be no festival. A boycott is being considered depending on the outcome of negotiations. Meanwhile, each and every one of us must commit to bringing true anti-racism into the feminist community, and must live up to this commitment in our everyday interactions and events.