

DEAR DIARY

I recently decided to attend one of those weeks that promise total immersion in traditional music for those courageous enough to seek same. Instead of getting involved with one of the established venues like Elkins or Swannanoa, however, I opted for a slightly cheaper version closer to home. Its first year was also its last, for reasons that will become obvious as you read the following excerpts from my diary. (In order to avoid any legal complications, I will refer to it as "Trad Week".)

Dawn

Arrive at campus aboard only public transportation available at 4:00 AM, wondering amidst yawns why the Trad Week organizers have chosen such an ungodly hour for registration. Cab driver seems proud of once being mistaken for a serial killer, and tells me more times than necessary that he can eat "any goddam steak in Texas" with his one good tooth. Further doubts raised after I enter the compound and am handed a gas mask. I try to explain to the big noisy man that my name isn't Maggot, but he doesn't seem interested. Am I in the right place? At least they don't take away my fiddle. I am comforted by the sight of other participants stumbling around. I hear no music but am too tired to care. I am pushed into a dark room and collapse fully clothed on what looks like a bunk-bed. I use the gas-mask for a pillow and fall asleep instantly.

6:00 AM

After two hours sleep - in the uncertain course of which I discover that my bunkmate is a piano accordion player with flatulence - we are awakened rather rudely by a Huge Ugly Person beating on a garbage can. The noise would be bad enough, but we discover that the garbage can is labelled "breakfast". It smells pre-digested. The Huge Ugly Person calls our names off a clipboard; when we respond, it throws a spoon at us. When we all have spoons, it yells "bon appetit", laughs rudely, and disappears.

7:00 AM

Three of my fellow inmates have been rushed to what we presume is the infirmary with unbearable stomach cramps. Those of us remaining are advised by yet another unfriendly Trad Week staffer that registration will shortly be taking place somewhere across campus. No directions are

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offered. It's already 92 degrees and there's no air conditioning, and one of the flute players has hung his sweaty socks out to dry on the only fan in the barracks. Mimsy and Wendy, the two bodhrán players from some place in Ohio, get into a terrible fistfight over a bar of soap. Somebody else tries to do a few push-ups and gets screamed at by the Californian banjo player as an "anal retentive fascist pig". Two out of the three unisex toilets don't seem to be working. Maybe taking out my fiddle to play a few tunes isn't such a great idea after all...

11:00 AM

Hard to believe that there are so many people in attendance, and that the sub-humans registering us are so incapable as to leave us milling around smartly in the 100+ heat outside the Registration Building. We stand like lost souls awaiting entry documents to Hell, surrounded by our instruments and baggage (when we ask if we can leave everything in the barracks, the Huge Ugly Person chuckles and says "Yeah, good idea!", but we can already tell it's not being sincere). You can hear strings breaking and seams splitting as the instruments slowly bake inside their cases. A few of the older registrants have fainted and are lying uncared-for on the garbage-strewn "lawn" outside the Registration Building. One of the Trad Week staff arrives eventually in a pickup truck, jumps out and starts pouring water out of a fire bucket onto the unconscious forms. When they fail to revive quickly enough, he kicks them, gently at first, then more forcefully until they start to show signs of life. Then another bucket of dirty water and he's gone. Later I check the Trad Week brochure and am amazed to read "First-class medical attention provided on campus in the event of an emergency." I start to laugh, and I guess I get hysterical because the next thing I know, Mimsy is slapping me repeatedly across the face...

11:45 AM

We are advised by an Trad Week officer using a bullhorn that the registration process will continue after lunch. He points with his riding crop - it never occurs to us to ask why he needs one - to a low cinder-block building about a half-mile away and informs us that it is the "chow hall". We have a total of 30 minutes to get there (carrying instruments and luggage, of course), eat, and get back on line to register. Mimsy, who we

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understand has spent several years in a convent before discovering the delights of the bodhrán, yells out an obscenity and makes a rude finger gesture in the direction of the officer. He gives a friendly wave in return. When we reassemble after lunch, Mimsy is not there. We never see her again. Rumors run rampant.

12:00 PM

Lunch cannot be described. The food is so bad even the flies stay away - a pity, since their protein content would be welcome. The soup is toxic waste recycled by a not-particularly-gifted seventh-grade science class. There are slabs of pinkish material laced with inedible gristle, giving the mouth feel of Spam and rubber bands. White grainy material on the side looks like rice but seems to be moving. Round greenish things could be brussel sprouts or golf balls or bizarre body parts from a large iguana. There a pitchers of liquid on the table the color of the stuff that drips relentlessly from somewhere under your cousin's 1983 Yugo. Cutlery and dishes have apparently been dry-cleaned for the past twenty years. The paper napkins have been used before, many times. The servers are apparently hired on the basis of [1] rudeness [2] unfamiliarity with English [3] severity of their lung disorders, which apparently they have been encouraged to share with us.

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Well, I think that will give you an idea of what awaited all of us. If we had known that Day 1 was the high point of the Trad Week experience, 99% of us would have gone over the hill, deposit or not. But you don't pass up lightly on an opportunity like this.