

Musikfest '85? It's Already In the Works

By MATTHEW KARAS
Globe-Times Staff Writer

Jeff Parks was speaking softly, with not so much a grin as a radiant glow dominating his expression. "We're planning Musikfest '85," he said.

And why not? Day One of Musikfest '84, the nine-day festival that is supposed to make Bethlehem a summer tourist attraction, was doing just that. Jeff Gordon, media relations director of the festival, after talking to individual site supervisors, estimated the opening day crowd to be 15,000.

"That's beyond our expectations," said Parks, president of Musikfest.

Tourists were bustling along the sidewalks of Main Street, and constantly filling the seats at the four downtown spots where performances were happening almost continually.

It was warm and sunny — Parks could not have ordered better weather. Upwards of 1,500 people were spending the afternoon under the tent at Festplatz, on the Christmas City Fairgrounds, waiting for the Stadtkapelle Berching of West Germany to appear. A street magician was passing the hat on the Main Street side of the Bethlehem Plaza Mall, and painters were doing quickie portraits in the middle of the mall, while the Volksplatz



(Globe-Times Photo by Pam Lott)

BRUSHING UP — George Mengelson of Bethlehem paints a colorful Musikfest picture Saturday on one section of a white wall outside the old Bass

store on Main Street. A new section of will be painted each day.

stage featured a trio of performers, including Jan Lewan's neo-Engelbert Humperdinck act, on the New Street end.

People had come from places like Baltimore and Philadelphia to take it in.

"We just made the circuit (of all the performance locations), and we'll do it again," said Ken Widman, who said he drove two hours to get to Bethlehem from New Jersey.

Widman and his wife, Irene, had

read about Musikfest in a newspaper — they don't remember which one — and sent away for information on the festival. What they got back was a packet of information along with postcards from around

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Musikfest '84 Organizer Says Musikfest '85's in the Works

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the Lehigh Valley.

Anna Maraini of Philadelphia, wearing a green "Oktoberfest" hat and dancing to the polka music of Jolly Joe and the Bavarians, who said she frequented German festivals as often as possible, said Musikfest had "started out great."

Free-Lancers

"It seems to be going flawlessly so far," Parks said at 7 p.m., backstage at Kunstplatz, where Don McLean was to perform in 50 minutes.

The director said there had been no major technical problems, no crowd problems and no parking problems. "It's the quality of people here," he said — "they're waiting patiently, they're not throwing beer cans, they're not throwing firecrackers."

Among the people at opening day was a small group of travel writers, mostly magazine free-lancers, who were invited by the Northampton County Tourism Council for a familiarization tour of the Bethlehem area. The future growth of Musikfest may hinge largely on how they and other writers portray the event and the city, if they choose to portray them at all.

As visitors on a familiarization tour, the writers aren't here to report on the festival, per se; rather, they're here to see if it's an attraction that merits a story. Their guides are concentrating as much on the county as a whole as they are on the festival.

On Friday, the writers ate at the Holiday Inn-East and then attended the Viennese Ball at the Hotel Bethlehem, where they spent Friday and Saturday nights. Saturday morning, they were taken to the Weller Center for Health Education in Wilson and for a boat ride on

the Lehigh Canal. After lunch at the Moravian Cook Shop, they were given free time to roam around Musikfest.

Thumbs Up

Two of those writers, interviewed Saturday afternoon, gave thumbs-up signs to Bethlehem. Yes, Bethlehem could be a place to go on a summer vacation, they said.

Jane Tulik Jones, a regular contributor to *Modern Maturity*, the 8.8 million-circulation magazine of the American Association of Retired Persons, and Constance Stapleton, who writes for *Bon Appetit* and *Country Magazine*, among others, sounded in many ways like each other's echo. They gave Bethlehem points for "friendliness," food and for the ability of local businessmen to join in support of Musikfest.

"There's a sense of community," said Ms. Jones, a resident of Riverton, N.J. "I'm very impressed that everyone seems to be behind this thing. That's obvious everywhere."

Ms. Stapleton, who lives outside Washington D.C., and who confessed to being "a great fan of Bethlehem," pointed to "the friendliness and openness of the people. Strangers that you see on the street, everyone, people that you don't know, just talk to you as if they did know you."

Both women agreed that the food at the Holiday Inn-East was much better than average Holiday Inn fare; that the Weller Center was "rather spectacular" (Ms. Jones' words); that the Hotel Bethlehem was "homey, yet very efficient" (Ms. Stapleton's), and that the festival is a viable tourist attraction, in large part because of its ethnic heritage, that should continue annually.

But, Ms. Jones qualified, "I don't think Bethlehem is ever going to get away from being the Christmas City. That always will be their best tourist attraction."

Ms. Jones and her photographer-husband, Don, were both impressed by the look of the city. "A lot of mill towns have a drab look to them, but this is anything but drab," Ms. Jones said.

"Everything seems to be in apple-pie order," she said. "People must have said, 'If our door needs a new coat of paint, then let's do it now.'"

Tradition Important

Ms. Stapleton, after spending time at the crowded Festplatz tent, said, "They just seemed to be having such a wonderful time."

The festival would make a good vacation for "anyone that loves music," she said. "Tradition is something that's so special about Bethlehem, and that's probably the most important part of a music festival like this."

Although downtown Bethlehem appeared to have been made into a tourist trap almost overnight, Ms. Stapleton said she got a "natural feeling" from what she saw. "It's not put on; it's innate. It's obvious people enjoy living here, and want to share it with everybody else," she said.

She offered one suggestion, however, for future Musikfests: "They should have more ways for people meet other people."

"A lot of people like to travel alone," said Ms. Stapleton, who was unaccompanied on the familiarization tour. She said the Viennese Ball that kicked off the festival Friday night at the Hotel Bethlehem attracted too much of a "couples" crowd.