

After the Bard, a New Place to Go in Stratford

By WILLIAM SHEEDY

UNTIL RECENTLY diversion after the show at Stratford, Ontario, was limited—you could nibble some fine Canadian cheese, have half a pint at the Queen's, or one of the other local establishments.

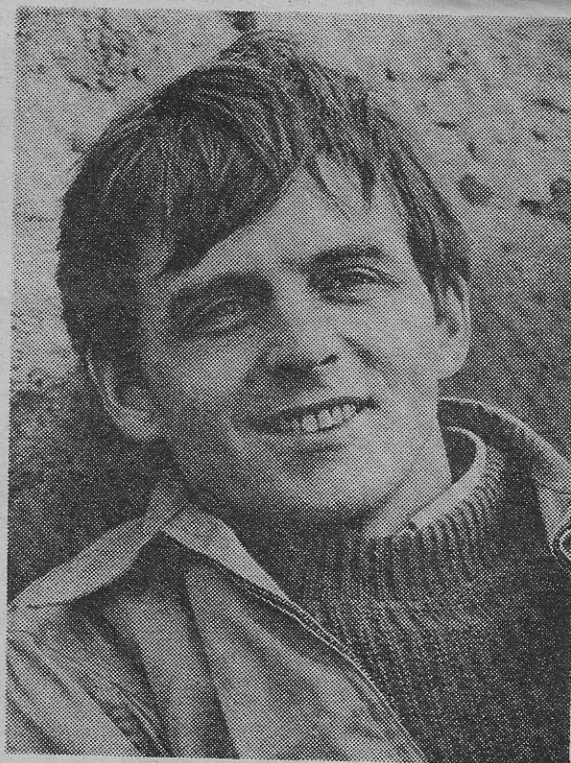
But now a batch of youngsters has set up a professionally operated coffee house — The Black Swan — which features folk singer Chuck Mitchell with two guitars and a variety of songs, and live plays for the Festival overflow.

Unique in the coffee house genre is the management and the content of Mr. Mitchell's lyrics. Admission is one buck, Canadian, for the show which starts 20 or 30 minutes after the final Shakespearean curtain at the Festival Theatre.

This is not only collected professionally, and without equivocation, but if you're a bit late and Mr. Mitchell has started singing before you get through the door the management will ask you to sit on the back bench until he finishes a song, at which point you may move over to your table and chair, one of about 100 (chairs) in the establishment.

There is no microphone to distort the singer's repertoire, which is composed of traditionals, contemporaries (the Flanders-and-Swan ode to the hippopotamus, for example), or super-timely—the "Ballad of the Southern County Sheriff."

Mr. Mitchell, a Detroitier, encourages audience participation, swings a trim, tightly jeaned hip, but keeps his lyrics within the bounds of non-blushing acceptability. Cleaner, in fact, than most of the stuff in "Merrie Wives of Windsor" at the place up the road.



DETROITER Chuck Mitchell is currently featured at Stratford's newly opened Black Swan coffee house.

Mitchell's songs (your dollar entrance fee entitles you to two sets after the Stratford Festival play of the night) are delivered with style and musical competence. The Toronto Star critic, a man not known for leniency toward bad shows, says that "Mitchell is much more than simply a folk singer: He is a singer, an actor, and an intelligent arranger of the variety of musical styles and moods his act is made up of."

As for the surroundings, the management of The Black Swan suggests in an advertising handbill that you may wish to "See Stratford's Only Espresso Machine in Action," adding that "The Black Swan is Fun!"

Oddly enough, the establishment lives up to the handbill. There is, perhaps, a bit of over-exuberance in the menu description of the fabulous cheese plate, but then even the most routine genuine Canadian cheese isn't all bad. The nonalcoholic beverages range from some sort of Purple People Eater to the ever-popular Ovaltine. And the Prices Are Rite.

These youthful Daniels are facing the lion in his own den by offering at 8:30, in full competition with the most competent of Russian and English playwrights at the Festival Theatre, an assortment of full-fledged plays in repertory by the New Vic Players from Ottawa. These will include "Visions of an Unseemly Youth," "Diary of a Madman" and "Confessions of a Necrophile, or Never Laugh When a Hearse Passes By."

Starting next week, Mr. Mitchell will be replaced by an after-the-Stratford-Festival-Show performance of "Hanging On," an original review not seen before by the human eyes of this writer.

If it is up to the snuff of the other items offered by the management — including the muu-muu'd waitresses—it will be worth your attention.