

Voyage 173
Israel-



The Canadian entry in the Folklore Festival, on opening night in Haifa Saturday.

(Oskar Tauber)

5,000 watch grand opening of int'l folklore festival

By YA'ACOV ARDON
Jerusalem Post Reporter

HAIFA. — The first international folklore festival to be held in Israel, this city's main contribution to Israel's 25th anniversary celebrations, opened officially at the big city stadium Saturday night before 5,000 spectators.

The eight national delegations who took part in it, from Tokyo to Salt Lake City, arrived during the past 10 days and appeared in groups in various parts of the country last week; but the premiere — with trumpet flourishes, raising the festival flag and a fireworks display for dessert — was reserved for Haifa. Its Municipal Youth Department has worked hard and long to organize the show, and was rewarded for its labours by the applause and appreciation of the crowd.

The troupes marched, in costume, in alphabetical order (except for the Israelis, who brought up the rear): Belgium, Canada, England, France, Japan, Scotland, the U.S., Yugoslavia and, finally, the Haifa student troupe.

Mayor Yeruham Zeisel welcomed the youngsters briefly and wished them well — and he was expertly translated by Josef Rosen into French and English. Eighty-year-old E. Yamasaki, doyen of Japanese folklore, spoke in Japanese with a vigour that convinced many that folkdancing is one way of preserving health and strength into old age.

Henri Coursaget, the young French president of the International Folklore Festival Organization, told the gathering that it was only a year ago that he talked over the possibility of holding a festival in Israel — while on a Japanese express train — with Mr. Yamasaki and Shmuel Bialik of the Haifa Municipality.

ALLON RESTING

Labour Minister Yosef Almogi stood in for Education and Culture Minister Yigal Allon, who is still resting after a heart attack.

"You represent the peoples of the earth and the universal desire for peace," he told the guests.

But the speeches soon gave way to the folk dancing. The vigour of the Yugoslavs, the tip-toe grace of the Scots dancing to their bagpipes, the Canadians with their "railway dance," the stylized elegance of the Japanese girls, the rustic frolic-

king of the Belgian country dancing (that looked like a Breughel painting come to life, the polished performance of the American university students (that went far beyond the simple folkdances of the older nations) and the stunning performance of their "Indian" acrobat with 58 rings brought a whiff of world travel to the Haifa audience. But the French group, from Nice, won the loudest applause, with their charmingly simple dances and melodies.

Their joyous opening number was led by a little girl who, as it turned out, was not scheduled. The daughter of the band leader and one of the dancers, she had no babysitter and had to be brought along to the performance.

The dancers will stay till the end of the week, performing for audiences up and down the country and for each other.