

Gypsy swinging, fire-breathing circus freaks



Caravan of Thieves, one of the freshest, funniest bands around, plays the Arts Block Friday

Caravan of Thieves has described its sound this way: “If Django Reinhardt, the cast of Stomp, and The Beatles had a party at Tim Burton’s house, Caravan of Thieves would be the band they hired.”

They have also called themselves “Gypsy swinging, serenading, fire-breathing circus freaks,” so I think you get the idea that this quartet out of Connecticut is not your run-of-the-mill mainstream rock band. On the contrary — it is off-kilter, enthusiastic and thoroughly delightful.

At the core of the band is the husband and wife songwriting/ guitar playing duo of Fuzz and Carrie Sangiovanni, who are joined by fiery violinist Ben Dean and equally frantic bassist Brian Anderson.

The band’s music is rooted in gypsy jazz and acoustic swing, but also includes traces of rock, punk and straight-ahead jazz. Add to that mix Beatles-esque harmonies, pounding rhythms and a heavy dose of theatrics, and you have one of the freshest and funniest bands around.

Caravan of Thieves will perform at the Arts Block in Greenfield on Friday, June 3, at 8 p.m. Singersongwriter Heather Maloney, accompanied by guitarist Joe Boyle, will open.

The Sangiovanni’s started the band about three years ago. Prior to that, Carrie had been working as a singer-songwriter on her own while Fuzz had played with a variety of bands — most notably the jam band Deep Banana Blackout and Tom Tom Club. The pair started performing as a duo and later formed the indie rock band Rolla before deciding that they wanted to form an all-acoustic band. The couple was drawn to the idea of playing music that didn’t require technology, but they knew that they didn’t want to be a bluegrass or old-timey band.

“Fuzz had been listening to some Django and we got to wondering, what if our sound had a swinging kind of feel to it?” said Carrie. “We never wanted to just play gypsy jazz or be a tribute to Django, but we thought maybe we could use that as a foundation, keeping our songwriting and harmonies. We tried it and it worked.”

“It took awhile to put the thing together,” added Fuzz. “We wanted a little bit of a modern spin on the music, plus for it to be fun and animated. Over time, it grew into that.”

He said that working with Dean, who he describes as having a more classical and gypsy style of playing fiddle, and later finding bassist Anderson, a player who approaches the bass as if he is playing rock ’n’ roll, helped make it all come together.

But from the start, Fuzz and Carrie wanted to create an interactive experience for the audience that would be

fun and unique. So with that in mind, they crafted a show with a strong theatrical edge added to the music, one that included stories, characters and a heavy dose of humor.

“When we were first thinking Caravan of Thieves, it wasn’t just that gypsy jazz was the influence, we had lot of ideas, like creating this ghost story that would give spookiness to it,” Fuzz said. “And we also knew that we wanted a certain look.”

“And I love the animation of Tim Burton. That is also big influence on this,” said Carrie.

When the band played at the Iron Horse Music Hall in April, the band members were dressed like characters out of a theatrical production. The men sported ties and Fuzz donned a Chico Marx styled hat while Carrie wore boots, fishnet stockings and a frilly skirt. The show was non-stop energy as the band banged on hubcaps and plastic buckets, drawing the crowd into various sing-alongs and slipping some fun cover tunes into the set, including takes on Michael Jackson’s “Thriller” and Queen’s “Bohemian Rhapsody.”

“Some of the covers come from specific shows like ‘Thriller’ and ‘Psycho Killer’ was originally part of a Halloween Show,” Carrie said.

“Yeah, the covers come from different places,” added Fuzz.

“Some from influences on this band, such as The Beatles, Queen, and Dr. Seuss. They have to have an interesting edge to them — be cool thematically and lyrically.”

When Caravan of Thieves first started out, being a band that didn’t fit into a certain niche brought with it some challenges in terms of securing gigs. But over time, it has established a solid following of “Freaks” (the band’s term for its fans, taken from one of the band’s songs). The band tours constantly and will be playing many festivals throughout the summer. It released the studio album “Bouquet” in 2009 and followed up with the live recording “Mischief Night” last year. The band is presently completing work on a new studio album that will be released sometime this summer.

“We knew right from the very beginning that some people would really like it and there would be some people that would hate it,” Fuzz said. “I would rather walk that line rather than be right in the middle. I think our show should cause a big reaction — one way or the other.”

“I think that in the long run it will prove itself, but it will take some time,” said Fuzz. “This isn’t a flash in the pan kind of thing.

Our goal is to build a loyal fan base that is really into what we do.”

“It’s really encouraging to see people returning to shows,” said Carrie. “It’s all part of this freaky family that we are trying to cultivate.”

Advance tickets are \$10 and available at www.theartsblock.com. Tickets are \$12 at the door.

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