

## What the Folk?

### A few takes on what folk music means today

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By Andrew Illif

#### Connecticut Folk Fest

*With Amos Lee, Caravan of Thieves, Jason Spooner Trio, Martyn Joseph, Professors of Bluegrass, Avi & Celia, Pamela Means, Lyndell Montgomery and Chris Pureka. Sept. 11–13. (203) 392-6154. [ctfolk.com](http://ctfolk.com)*

Folk music has endured a certain existential angst since at least Bob Dylan's infamous Newport electrocution of the form in 1965. These days, none but the most senior practitioners describe their music simply as folk — younger musicians always hedge their bets with at least one hyphenated modifier — freak-folk, say, or neo-folk.

In its 17 year history, the Connecticut Folk Festival — which comes to Edgerton Park this weekend — has hosted many established folkies including Richard Thompson, Bruce Cockburn and Steve Earle. But it has also seen a diverse array of the current generation of young, hybrid folk musicians, bringing in elements of country, blues, jazz and many other influences. In the process, the festival has diversified and hyphenated a little itself, expanding its focus to include a Green Expo highlighting environmentally-responsible projects and a bicycle tour of local farms alongside the music, which has been the festival's bread and butter.

We talked with three of the performers who will be gracing the various stages this weekend.

Caravan of Thieves incubated in Bridgeport's Fairfield Theater, the husband and wife duo of Carrie and Fuzz San Giovanni evolving into a quartet that borrows in equal measure from Django Reinhardt's arch and agile guitars and Tom Waits' junkyard percussion. Fuzz and Carrie checked in from the road — after a couple of nights relaxing on the shores of Lake Michigan between shows, the band was getting an oil change somewhere outside Honor, Mich.

*Advocate: How did you end up at a folk festival?*

**Carrie:** We started as an acoustic duo, then a band using swing to spice things up. People get tired of seeing the same music all the time, when something new pops up it's a nice change of pace.

**Fuzz:** We're having a hard time deciding which of these places we fit in more, jazz, folk, or indie. Indie rock people like our music, and there are all these alt- genres: alt-country, alt-folk, where you take elements of something, but you make it new by stretching the boundaries.

We use folk elements in our instrumentation, and in creating a more intimate connection with the audience through the way we behave on stage. We never set out to be a folk band, we wanted to do something genre defying.

**Carrie:** We want to be able to play folk festivals, jazz festivals, indie rock festivals, and then go do dinner theatre to cross a lot of boundaries. You never know if someone's going to show up and say 'Hey, this isn't folk music!' We just show up with our pots and pans, and say 'We're here!'

*Speaking of pots and pans, what's the weirdest instrument in the tour bus at the moment?*

**Carrie:** Some hubcaps. But people always bring stuff to our shows: wheelchairs, garbage cans, anything that clanks and clangs.

*What gets stolen when the Caravan of Thieves comes to town?*

**Carrie:** Only hearts. And fruit. Especially if it's organic kumquats.

Amos Lee, a veteran of both the Newport Folk Festival and his hometown's Philadelphia Folk Festival, is headlining the festival on Saturday night.

*You've played a lot of folk festivals. Is there a common thread?*

**Lee:** I think that the idea of a folk festival is a little more dynamic these days. Folk music is commingled with a lot of genres to create a lot of hybrid things going on. The people going are all music lovers. They want to just go out and listen to some music and to feel good about it.

I think that the concept of community is more confused than it ever has been. I don't know if it's been weakened or strengthened by the electronic presence in people's lives. A lot has changed because a lot of people don't live in their home towns any more. The suburban world has limited human contact. The internet means we can now be as separate as we want to be. Which is the nice thing about these festivals, because it's a place to convene. We all love this music, and we all want to be in the same place at the same time.

I'm not really a folk musician, I'm a bunch of different stuff. I'm influenced by almost every genre of music. Most artists today you can't really quantify their influences, they're influenced by everything they listen to. I grew up listening to a lot of people who would be considered part of the folk world, but again the term folk music is changing because folk are changing. You can't make folk music for people who are not living any more.

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