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Four-Cornered in Colorado, Festive Caravan of Thieves Steals the Show

When it comes to summer music festivals in Colorado, most visitors think of bluegrass in Telluride, folk in Lyons and the all-encompassing Mile High Music Festival just east of Denver.

Is somebody in Pagosa Springs trying to keep the [Four Corners Folk Festival](#) a secret?



This hidden gem tucked into the southwest corner of the state, about 50 miles east of Durango, has to be one of the most gorgeous high-elevation settings in the country. Like the [overhyped Telluride Film Festival](#), its competition for the entertainment dollar that's about a three-hour scenic drive to the northwest, the Four Corners Folk Festival is usually held over the first weekend in September heading into Labor Day. And while it takes several hours behind the wheel (about six from Denver) and some treacherous turns before arriving, the majestic beauty you discover along the way makes it well worthwhile. Even if you can only make it for the grand finale on Sunday.

Of the mountain music festival more than 7,000 feet above sea level, 19-year-old [Sarah Jarosz](#), a New Emerging Artist nominee at the recent [Americana Music Awards](#), said, "There's no place I'd rather be than here." Added gifted singer-songwriter Aoife O'Donovan of newgrass (with a classical twist) up-and-comers [Crooked Still](#) as the festival celebrated its 15th anniversary, "I really don't think this weekend could be any better." (Jarosz, right, performing with O'Donovan.)

Then there's the wife-and-husband members of scene-stealing group [Caravan of Thieves](#), singer-guitarist Carrie Sangiovanni and the band's ringleader who goes only by the name of "Fuzz." They were ebullient in their praise days after their first appearance at the festival run by event director Dan Appenzeller and executive director Crista Munro.

When asked to describe the overall experience, Fuzz and Carrie said in a joint e-mail interview, "To be honest, it was one of our favorite festival shows as the site was gorgeous, the staff was very accommodating and sharp and the patrons were some of the most appreciative and hip folks we've played to."

No wonder the town located within the San Juan Forest attracts world-renowned musicians for three days (and nights) of virtual nonstop entertainment. Under the white tent on top of Reservoir Hill, about 1,200 concertgoers and campers unite to enthusiastically acknowledge an eclectic mix of artists that takes the word "folk" out of the Four Corners Festival and raises it to breathtakingly -- and sometimes unexpectedly -- higher ground.

Such was the case with Caravan of Thieves, a rowdy bunch of unpredictable party animals based in Connecticut that plays anything but just plain folk.

Although I was seeing them perform for the first time, I was familiar with most of the artists on Sunday's bill, including: Jarosz (with accompanying whiz kids [Alex Hargreaves](#), 18, fiddle, and [Nathaniel Smith](#), 16, cello); Celtic group [Solás](#), with a touching performance by fiddler [Winifred Horan](#); and the night's headlining act, bluegrass king [Sam Bush](#) (with a crown, right, to prove it) and his solid four-piece backing band. I was particularly looking forward to enjoying Crooked Still after [interviewing O'Donovan for a May piece](#) about *Some Strange Country*, their album that No Depression's Kim Ruehl said "[is easily one of the best records of 2010.](#)"

However, I must admit I had no previous knowledge of Caravan of Thieves, those wild and crazy guys (and gal) who turned out to be the most pleasant surprise of the day.

This zany group brings a touch of vaudeville, over-the-top theatricality, performance art and an all-but-the-kitchen sink collection of percussion utensils (and a hubcap) to their brand of gypsy swing music. Think Three Stooges with a sexy sidekick and musical skills.



Fuzz, who grew up in Queens and Long Island but says his real name and age are "deep and very, very dark secrets," offers a slapstick delivery and flamenco-style strumming. Sangiovanni, originally from Westchester, N.Y., is the alluring heart and soul of this gang of four. Handsome Brian Anderson (double bass) and string-bean Benjamin Dean (fiddle), who both hail from Connecticut, contribute mightily to their madcap shenanigans. (Dean, left, and Anderson, right, are shown with Sangiovanni.)

With fetching lace stockings and gloves, along with an acoustic blue guitar, Sangiovanni is the focal point, but there's so much more to see. The group in perpetual motion slides through their set of broad comedy with ease. They offer up their own compositions from their self-released [Bouquet](#) while daringly taking on such covers as the Talking Heads' "Psycho Killer" and Queen's "Bohemian Rhapsody," earning a standing ovation in the process.



Covering Talking Heads shouldn't be that mind-boggling because Fuzz, right, has performed for seven years in [Tom Tom Club](#), the funky freestyle outfit created by Chris Frantz and Tina Weymouth. That husband-wife/drummer-bass pairing provided the strong shoulders for the Heads' avant-garde ensemble that became an international sensation under the experimental wizardry of David Byrne.

When they were a duo, Fuzz and Carrie also did a night of Talking Heads music with [String Cheese Incident's](#) Kyle Hollingsworth and [The Motet](#) for a special Halloween show in Denver in 2008.

Of Frantz and Weymouth, Fuzz and Carrie said:

They are wonderful people and true artists and music appreciators. They really like what we are doing with Caravan of Thieves and have had us open a couple years ago when we first started it. And yes, they also fully endorse our version of 'Psycho Killer' and have come out to play it with us on our annual Halloween show. Of course, they played garbage can, pots and various junk instead of their real instruments. Very good sports.

Asked if Caravan of Thieves was intimidated at the thought of playing a somewhat traditional folk festival in Colorado, the charming couple said:

Not at all. We've done quite a few before and folk audiences seem to really get what we do. Plus folk fests have broadened quite a bit these days to include much more than folk and we believe the folk audiences to be some of the most sophisticated listeners out there.

Besides, they made it a point to interact with the fans before and after their set, partaking in Friday night's late show at Ross Aragon Community Center just below Reservoir Hill and in the workshop tent at noon Sunday. They also encountered "magical experiences" in the campgrounds and around nightly campfires, playing for patrons who paid as much as \$325 to hang out on the hill all three days. And they even performed a private concert for a man who was too ill to make it to Sunday's mid-afternoon set.

Along with quirky songs from Bouquet ("Ghostwriter," "Rattlesnake," "Bar Isole," "Freaks" and "Billy," a tale about a guy who's a bug) their memorable show under the tent also included a "montage" about the weather that was downright uproarious, bringing new meaning to "You Are My Sunshine" and "Singing in the Rain."



Proving to be kid-friendly, too, Sangiovanni, left, and the rest of the band asked children of all ages to join them onstage for their usual set closer called "Raise the Dead," co-written by the personable pair who compose much of the band's original material.

Despite the gruesome title, the song's actually an uplifting -- rousing, even -- singalong. With bursts of hand clapping and foot stomping, the number, according to Fuzz, is about "bringing all the wonderful and amazing people that are special in your life back" and "we're gonna have a party for these folks."

It can be found only in an "abbreviated form" as a hidden track on their recent live release, [Mischief Night](#), but Fuzz and Carrie said, "We plan to record the whole song in a studio this fall and it will be on a new album we will release early next year."

Asked if they knew about [Phantom Planet](#)'s song of the same name, Fuzz and Carrie said:

Not until now... Just when you thought you thought of something first! But after giving it a listen or two, the two songs seem very different, so it's hard to compare. Their song is more indie rock/pop and seems to be a bit darker and heavier, where we see ours as a celebration of life... or death... or something like that.

Whatever it's celebrating, Caravan of Thieves always seem to be the life of the party. In fact, as the remaining stragglers were filtering out the gates to board the buses heading down the mountain, Fuzz and Sangiovanni were still hanging tough. In their minds, the party wasn't over until *they* said it was over, as evidenced by their comment to no one in particular:

"Let's see if Sam Bush likes to take whiskey shots."

Extras

See Michael Bialas' slideshow from [Day 3 of the Four Corners Folk Festival](#) in Pagosa Springs, Colorado on September 5, 2010:

Link:

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/michael-bialas/concert-review-caravan-of_b_715781.html

<http://www.nodepression.com/profiles/blogs/party-on-gypsies-tramps-and-a>