

The Morning Call

Join Caravan of Thieves for a swinging party



Caravan of Thieves performs Saturday, Aug. 4 at the Jazz Cabaret Stage at... (CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)
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Many bands and solo artists hesitate to debut new material on tour before the new CD is out, preferring to wait until after the release date, when fans have had a chance to hear and get familiar with the new music.

The festive Caravan Of Thieves is not one of those bands. A number of songs on the Connecticut-based group's latest CD, "The Funhouse," was part of its live shows for months before the CD came out April 24.

"We've built a lot of what we do around the live show," says guitarist/singer Fuzz in a phone interview. "We kind of do that [tour] as its own thing anyway, and if we got out and do some dates before the album comes out and then we do some dates after the album comes out, it's all part of the same thing to us. It's getting people interested."

Besides, says Fuzz, who keeps his last name a closely guarded secret, playing material before it's recorded lets the group test out songs and tinker with the arrangements. And the band isn't overly precious about the studio versions of its songs anyway. Where some bands try to create the definitive versions of their songs on CD, Caravan Of Thieves sees its songs more like living, breathing organisms that are allowed to continuously evolve and grow.

"The songs constantly change all the time," Fuzz says. "We change them as we perform them live. We get in the studio and change them again. We go back out and play them live and we change them again."

Caravan of Thieves uses acoustic instruments to create a sound that blends swinging gypsy jazz with highly melodic pop and plenty of sweet boy/girl vocals. There's Fuzz and his wife, Carrie Sangiovanni, on guitars and vocals; Ben Dean on violin, and Brian Anderson on bass. All four members chip in on percussion created with all manner of pots, pans, buckets and other household items.

"The Funhouse" gives a sense of the spirited fun of the band's live show. The CD is based around an amusement park motif — a fitting metaphor for the Caravan Of Thieves' vibe — but it also shows that Fuzz and Sangiovanni have developed into fine songwriters who write seriously memorable instrumental hooks and vocal melodies.

Songs range from the raucous "Eat You," on which the band generates a thunderous rumble that adds a giddy jolt to the sweet melody, to the peppy strut of "I Can't Behave," which is spiced up by its lively violin licks. "Raise the Dead," a highlight of the group's live show, has a melancholic sing-along, and "Sister Went Missing" adds a bit of darkness to the cheery tone of much of the CD.

The music stands up just fine on its own, but in concert Caravan Of Thieves presents an experience for all of the senses. Dressed in turn-of-the-century outfits (as in 1900, not 2000), the foursome rocks, dances, and even acts out certain aspects of its songs.

"When we first started the band, it was definitely all about the music," says Sangiovanni, who was riding alongside Fuzz as they did the interview while on the road in the Northeast. "We had this idea for the style we wanted to do and the influences we kind of wanted to try to mesh together. And we knew we wanted to make it visual as well to help the listeners get a better grasp on the styles we were doing and to pull them into our own little world."

But the show is still at its heart a concert.

"I think some people think we're going to get up there and it's like going to see a Broadway play or something," Fuzz says. "It is, first and foremost, a musical concert and we're up there playing instruments the whole time. So it's like there's only so much of it that can be acted out or choreographed. We don't really choreograph anything. But we move around a lot and we have little things that we play against each other, and certain songs, certain sections of songs, call for more things where we might be speaking. We're certainly more visual and interactive and theatrical than say your typical acoustic band or bluegrass band."

Initially, though, it was just the "Fuzz and Carrie show" as the couple, who got engaged just five months after meeting each other, took to the road to play acoustic duo shows in clubs, in parks, on the street — pretty much anywhere where they could break out the guitars and blend their voices without being a nuisance.

"The nice thing about it was it was just two people and two acoustic guitars and two voices," Fuzz says. "So we felt like we could do it anywhere at any time. It was almost like a street

performance. And when we were thinking about Caravan Of Thieves, it was let's just see if we can continue this idea both musically, conceptually, aesthetically, but have it be a band."

By 2008, a bigger vision was taking shape after Fuzz and Sangiovanni met Dean, and the violinist began sitting in at the duo's gigs. Anderson was added not long afterward and Caravan Of Thieves was born.

Link:

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