



Features

Caravan Of Thieves - Acoustic Swing Purveyors

By Shane Handler

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Judging from some of the vivacious story-telling on **Caravan of Thieves'** debut *Bouquet* and their dramatic live performances, you'd think this project was a pure off-broadway achievement. Instead the acoustic swing quartet led by husband and wife duo **Fuzz and Carrie Sangiovanni** (vocals and acoustic guitars) have carved a niche with their unique blend of gypsy folk/rock and captivating live performances, bringing a new version of the term "live entertainment" to clubs throughout the Northeast.



Fuzz, renowned as the [guitarist](#) for Deep Banana Blackout (DBB still play seldom reunion shows), has transformed his funk licks into fleet fingered acoustic runs that are as narrative as they are energetic. Carrie provides a sense of elegance with her dapper costumes and [melodic](#) vocals, while charismatic violinist Ben Dean and double bass wiz Brian Anderson round out the quartet. By delivering a theatrical live rock/gypsy/swing show, Fuzz and Carrie are more than just musicians, they are front and center "stage entertainers." Best described by the band as an overall "circus of sound," complete with a melodious vocal interplay between the husband and wife team and plenty of props, laughs and surprises, there is hardly a dull ballad amongst a Caravan of Thieves performance. As the quartet is about to kick out on a generous east coast spring tour, *Glide* caught up with both Fuzz and Carrie.

What inspired you to originally being work in a duo setting as Caravan of Thieves? I understand you wanted to move away from rock and go to your acoustic/vocal roots. Were there any other contemporary artists out there doing something similar that motivated you to form Caravan of

Thieves?

Fuzz - Well, Caravan of Thieves is now actually a quartet. But it is true that it started as a result of Carrie and I returning to our acoustic duo from the four piece electric band we had previously. We wanted a simpler sound that would bring our vocal [harmonies](#) and [songwriting](#) to the forefront and felt the rock band was distracting both us and the audience from the thing that originally brought us together to do music. And because it is seeming harder and harder these days to find things that aren't overly processed (music, food, movies or whatever), we felt the need to create a project that would rely on nothing other than our acoustic instruments and our abilities to write, sing, and entertain a room without any assistance, amplification or sound effects.

Nothing too contemporary has really motivated us to do this – it came mostly from a variety of artists from our past, different genres and different art forms besides music. If anything, we are aiming to do something very different stylistically from anything current.



Describe your past experiences with “gypsy jazz?” - Is there a significant recording or artist that had a profound effect on you within this genre?

Fuzz – I was first introduced to Django Reinhardt when I was in college and always enjoyed his playing and the whole gypsy jazz style. I'm partial to the 1930's Hot Club recordings with Stephane Grappelli. I really love the charm and soul in these old recordings but some of the contemporary players like Tchavolo Schmitt and John Jorgenson are also amazing. However, in Caravan of Thieves, we never claim to be gypsy jazz. This only makes up for part of our vision along with some classical influenced rock/pop artists such as Queen and the [Beatles](#) and some colorful writers and characters such as Dr Seuss, Tim Burton and Tom Waits.

Carrie- I can't say exactly when I was first introduced to Gypsy Jazz or even that I knew what it was when it happened. I was exposed to many types of music growing up and really enjoyed most of it. I'd have to say that my knowledge and appreciation for this genre is mostly thanks to Fuzz. When we met, we exchanged many ideas, thoughts

and passions for various artists and styles; this was one that Fuzz really brought to the forefront for me. I instantly connected to the swinging rhythms and loved the way the music made me feel. I also really dug the combination of complex chords and skillful soloing done in a fun and organic setting.

Caravan of Thieves includes Ben Dean (violin) and Brian Anderson (bass). It sounds like your band could include a dozen more musicians creating a whole “caravan” theme and travelling “circus/revue” of musicians. How did you decide to begin with violin and upright bass as the first pieces in your live band? Are there other instruments or actors/props that you see becoming regulars in the Caravan of Thieves?

Fuzz- After we decided to move our acoustic duo in a gypsy swing direction, we knew we would want to expand the sound with other players and instruments indicative of the style. During this time we had met Ben Dean and invited him to sit in with us. After a few times playing as a trio it was clear that his violin would be an essential part of the sound. We also needed a bass and though tuba seemed fun, it was a bit impractical. We knew this great upright bass player so we asked Brian if he would play with us. This became the core of Caravan of Thieves.

We expand on this from time to time, adding accordion and various pieces of junk that we play percussively and we have had guests up to bang on stuff or play fun instruments like the melodica, clarinet or viola with us. When the opportunity allows, we’re sure we would like to expand even further to include more strings, some winds, more junk percussion and even some circus performers and dancers.



Your past [Halloween](#) show appeared like quite the event. What do you remember from that performance and where does it rank in your creative history. It seems that Halloween and Caravan of Thieves go together nicely.

Fuzz- We definitely want to claim Halloween as an annual event for Caravan. It is certainly the most fitting holiday for the band – even more so than Father’s Day or Arbor Day. This past Halloween was quite the event and all in all was probably our biggest and most successful show to date. We went beyond

the usual stage antics and designed a set with extra junk percussion, extra creepy props, dressed up even more bizarre and brought in honorary thief, Bruce Martin (Tom Tom Club) on accordion and [percussive](#) junk. In addition we invited Chris Frantz and Tina Weymouth (Talking Heads and Tom Tom Club) to do some 'spooky' covers of theirs like "Psycho Killer" as well as Michael Jackson's "Thriller".

How much does the visual element play in your live performances? Are the costumes and props easy to come by?

Fuzz- We never go on stage without all dressing up in our most dapper and intriguing attire. It doesn't come easy and we always have to keep an eye out for new items but it makes for a fun pastime on the road to shop the local thrift and antiques stores.

Carrie, what has Fuzz brought out in you as a musician and is there an example in song or on stage that wouldn't have happened if it wasn't for Fuzz?

The first thing that drew me to Fuzz was his positive energy and how it spilled out when he was playing. When we met, whether in conversation or in playing music together, it was an immediate exchange of that same energy between us. We both share such a passion for music and it was extremely easy to do it together. I feel that we really fill in the gaps and complement each other's strengths and weaknesses.

Before I met Fuzz I was [pretty](#) fresh out of college and was an aspiring solo, singer-songwriter. Just me, my guitar and usually a stool. I'd have to say that Fuzz really helped me open up on stage. I can say for sure that I probably wouldn't have seen myself rolling around on stage before we met!



Fuzz, what musical doors has Carrie opened for you?

My move to playing strictly acoustic music has been influenced greatly by collaborating with Carrie, who has always been an acoustic performer. In addition, my ability to sing and harmonize vocals has gotten so much sharper after singing with Carrie as she is quite good at it and has great sense of pitch and blending. We have made it a focal point in most of our songs.

All in all, Caravan of Thieves is very much a product of both of our individual personalities as well as our musical and artistic influences and wouldn't have happened without either Carrie or I.

Caravan of Thieves is rooted in gypsy/swing. Fuzz, a good part of your touring past between Deep Banana Blackout and Tom Tom Club has been in a more groove oriented sound. Has there been a challenge in performing as an artist for shows in which the audience aren't there to party or dance verse The Caravan of Thieves which appears to be more of a story-telling, theatrical vision?

Not at all. That environment is exactly where I need to be right now and is a result of the type of scene we are intentionally cultivating with Caravan. It's very inspiring. If anything, it's becoming more of a challenge for me to perform to audiences who are not there to listen and absorb the nuances of the

show. Don't get me wrong, the show that we've created is mainly centered around fun and interaction with the audience and it's far from some stuffy 'listening' show. At times it could even be just as bombastic and intense (in an acoustic gypsy swing sort of way) as any Deep Banana Blackout or Tom Tom Club show I've done.



Did the songs on *Bouquet* come together over a short or long period of time? *Bouquet* is divided up into acts - What is the overall theme of inspiration of *Bouquet*? When performing live – are all the songs played in succession?

Fuzz- All the songs for *Bouquet* came together over a fairly short period of time - about eight or nine months. The overall theme of the record and Caravan in general is finding elegance, beauty and fun in what is more often perceived as morose or freakish. As far as the live setting, we don't perform the songs in any particular order. As a matter of fact we try to change the set list every night and we have a pretty diverse and unexpected list of cover songs we pull from - completely rearranged for our sound of course.

What direction do you see your next recording headed? Is it going to be more song oriented or part of a bigger concept/theatrical piece?

Fuzz- I think our material will always be song oriented but we are starting to toy with this idea of recurring themes and concepts that will carry over from *Bouquet*. We may also incorporate more of the junkyard percussion on the new record and we have been working with some heavy "primal" swing feels. We do want to construct a concept piece that can tie into a bigger production for the stage but we may have to wait for the third or fourth record as we don't have the man power to pull that off just yet.

Do you feel *Bouquet* properly succeeds in capturing your live element?

Fuzz- In some ways it does as we did not record anything that we wouldn't do live musically and we did our best to capture the sound and energy of a performance in a live setting. It is hard though to fully capture the live show on a CD as it's very visual, interactive and spontaneous at times. We like to think Caravan of Thieves is a band that can both hold its own on record and in the live setting – they are just two very different animals.



How do the two of you work as song-writing/musical partners? Who brings the lyrics and who brings the music to the project? When are you most inspired to pen new music?

Fuzz -It's very collaborative and fun and it most often starts with a concept – the more defined and peculiar the better. We both bring lyrical and musical ideas to the table but it's not till we consult our spirit friend, the "Ghostwriter" (see the song lyrics), that the real magic happens.

There is no specific time that the inspiration hits as it's random, yet often and it usually comes in waves. It's also accompanied by paranormal activity in our apartment.

How would you best describe the Caravan of Thieves sound to anyone asking – “what type of music do you play? What comparisons drive you nuts?

Fuzz - This is a question I think all artists hate to answer but at least in this project I feel like we can have fun with the answer. We have used terms such as “alt gypsy swing” or “Django meets the Beatles at Tim Burton’s house” or “gypsy swinging serenading firebreathing circus freaks”. Take your pick! The only comparison we don't really like is that we are [bluegrass](#) or country. We enjoy those styles but that was never our intention.

Caravan of Thieves’ home base is in the southern Connecticut/New York area. Has it been a welcoming home or a bit of a struggle to find a listening base in that area?

Fuzz- Our home base of southern CT and NYC has been our strongest fan base still and FTC Stage One in Fairfield, CT (the venue we did our two night Halloween run at) is a PAC which is the ideal venue type for us. It was the first venue we ever played at as Caravan of Thieves when we supported Ryan Montbleau Band in 2008 and a year and a half later we are filling two nights there ourselves as a [headliner](#) so it's been pretty welcoming to us.

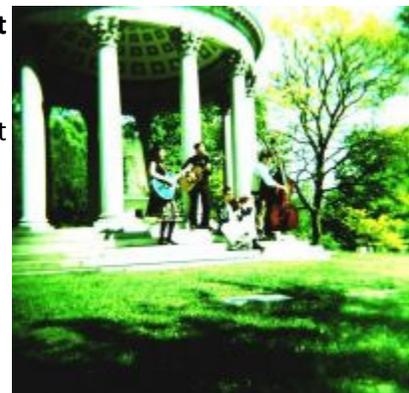
Aside from home, we've had great response in Philly, DC, Boston and Chicago and a few spots in the Midwest and in Virginia. But some of the folk [festival](#) slots we played last summer like Philly Folk, Porcupine Mountain in Michigan and Clearwater in NY were some of our most memorable shows.

Do you feel Caravan of Thieves have had their breakthrough moment yet?

Fuzz -We don't think we've had our breakthrough moment just yet but there are cracks of light breaking through the wall for sure. There certainly has been some really amazing responses like “I was having a rough day but after your show I couldn't get the grin off my face” and we've seen some rapid growth with this project. In many ways this is the most promising and exciting thing any of us has done.

Breakthrough? Maybe when we get to team up with Cirque Du Soleil or the New York Philharmonic for a tour or collaborate with Tim Burton to make a movie...

To find out more about Caravan of Thieves visit their [website](#) or [Facebook page](#). Bouquet is currently available through CD Baby, iTunes (and just about every online site).



Upcoming Tour Dates

March 11	ANN ARBOR, MI	The Ark
March 12	PITTSBURGH, PA	Thunderbird Café
March 13	THOMAS, WV	Purple Fiddle
March 14	EASTON, MD	NightCat
March 25	NORFOLK, CT	Infinity Hall
March 26	CAMBRIDGE, MA	Club Passim
March 27	PAWLING, NY	Towne Crier Café
April 7	FREDERICK, MD	Café Nola
April 8	ARLINGTON, VA	Iota Club & Café
April 9	ASHLAND, VA	Ashland Coffee and Tea
April 10	CHARLOTTESVILLE, VA	The Southern Café and Music Hall
April 11	ROANOKE, VA	Kirk Avenue Music Hall
April 14	MARIETTA, GA	Wild Wing Café
April 16	TAMPA, FL	Skipper's Smokehouse
April 18	ORLANDO, FL	Plaza Theater
April 21	CHARLOTTE, NC	Double Door Inn
April 22	RALEIGH, NC	Lincoln Theater
April 23	ASHEVILLE, NC	The Grey Eagle
April 24	HAMPTON, VA	The Taphouse
May 1	FAIRFIELD, CT	FTC Stage One

Link:

<http://www.glidemagazine.com/articles/55692/caravan-of-thieves-acoustic-swing-purveyors.html>