

They Stole My Heart

Caravan of Thieves' slick show is rooted in some deep planning

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By Dan Barry

Rockers are conspicuously averse to thinking of themselves as artists. It's kind of weird, actually. You can't even get most of them to admit that they're entertainers. Have you ever noticed that when asked to name a set of influences, most rockers either rattle off a list of people who are almost completely unrelated to their sound, or they say that they're influenced by something vague like "life" or "all the music we hear"? Have you noticed that the few rockers who are willing to talk about art are usually pretentious pricks? Most rockers don't even seem to have given thought to how or even if they can make their band into a viable career. (Steve Albini's early '90s screed "The Problem With Music" — which you should totally read — famously asserted that, after expenses, a typical rock band signed to a typical major label earns about 1/3rd of what they could have made if they spent that time working at a 7-11.) Ask the average rocker any such serious question, and you'll instantly feel like a parent confronting your squirming adolescent about the weed stash you just discovered.

When you hear singer/guitarist Fuzz talk about his band **Caravan of Thieves**, it makes you realize just how low most other bands set the bar for themselves. Words like "aesthetics" and "vision" come up in the conversation — words that are notably absent among their peers. The Bridgeport-based quartet plays swinging acoustic tunes, but their stage show — which involves ridiculous dances and fiery solos — is as whimsical as their music. The tunes are anchored squarely on the vocal harmonies between Fuzz and his co-conspirator (and wife) Carrie. Fuzz notes that the band grew out of their penchant for singing together. The band itself began to take shape when Fuzz began jamming on tunes by gypsy jazz guitarist Django Reinhardt, and found synergy between those songs and the vocal harmonies.

But the Caravan really coalesced around a dark sense of humor and theatrics inspired by an unlikely source: film director Tim Burton. "We started watching movies like *The Nightmare Before Christmas* and *Sweeney Todd*," Fuzz notes, and what came out of the blender was an image of a grim-yet-dapper band singing songs about bugs, snakes, freaks, pirates, and peddlers. It's wonderfully rich stuff: songs like "Billy" feature fun choruses ("Oh my god! You're a bug!"), but the sly reference to Kafka's "Metamorphosis" is there if you can catch it. Likewise, the Thieves incorporate technically demanding passages that are delicious for listeners who appreciate such details, but won't distract listeners who just want to have fun. Their ambition has birthed a captivating monster. The Caravan is out on tour now, but you can catch them on May 23 at the beautiful Infinity Hall in Norfolk — they describe it as their "dream venue."