

Caravan of Thieves puts a theatrical spin on gypsy jazz

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Caravan of Thieves, from left, Ben Dean, Fuzz Sangiovanni, Carrie

It didn't take long for Fuzz and Carrie Sangiovanni to realize that their band, Caravan of Thieves, needed to be a visual as well as an aural experience.

The band, which will perform Friday night in Lancaster Square as part of Music Friday, grew out of an acoustic duo featuring the Sangiovanis playing guitars and singing.

Influenced by the guitarist Django Reinhardt, their music started moving toward the kind of jazz music he pioneered in the 1930s.

"We started writing stuff," Carrie says during an interview from their home in Fairfield, Conn., "that had a little more of a swing, a little bit more of that feel. We were feeling like we were going in this direction and listening to gypsy jazz and stuff like that. We were like, 'Yeah, we really dig how there's no drums but it's still really rhythmic and fun and driving.' "

The couple recruited Ben Dean to play violin and Brian Anderson to play upright bass, and Caravan of Thieves was formed.

That was about 2 1/2 years ago. After just two rehearsals, the band recorded a four-song EP and started playing out.

"It wasn't until we started to perform as a unit -- the four of us -- that we started realizing that this music really lends itself to this whole elaborate stage show -- music and theatrical elements and things like that," Fuzz says.

Carrie adds, "We knew going in we wanted to be something different. We were like, 'OK, we've got to dress up, we've got to set the themes, we've got to set the tone.' We knew we wanted it to be something colorful and fun. The actual stuff we do in the show has kind of evolved naturally."

During its live show, the band -- whose original songs tend toward the darker side of things and can be a touch twisted -- like to interact with the audience and involve them in the show.

The band has toured extensively, opening shows for a diverse group of artists, including Dan Hicks, Tony Trischka, Ryan Montbleau Band and Enter the Haggis.

It will tour this fall with Tom Tom Club, which is led by bassist Tina Weymouth and drummer Chris Frantz, both of whom were members of Talking Heads. Fuzz also plays electric guitar in Tom Tom Club, and the band's accordion player, Bruce Martin, sometimes plays in Caravan of Thieves.

Caravan of Thieves last month released a live CD, "Mischief Night," that captures its stage show. The album includes cover versions of Queen's "Bohemian Rhapsody," Talking Heads' "Psycho Killer" and a Beatles medley of "Girl" and "Being for the Benefit of Mr. Kite."

The band also released an excellent studio album of all-original songs called "Bouquet" in 2008.

"I feel like we spend a lot of time on the material and the lyrics and the content and the arrangements," Fuzz says. "So it's one of these things that I think our songs stand up on their own so they don't have to be perceived live to be appreciated."

However, he and Carrie agree that Caravan of Thieves should be experienced live to be fully appreciated.

"A lot of people have said to us at shows that they heard the music on the CD and liked it," Carrie says, "but then they saw the show and totally got it. Then it all clicked and it really made sense."

Caravan of Thieves

Hoots and Hellmouth

Lancaster City Choir

Music Friday Music Fest, 5:30 p.m. Free.

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