

The theatrical folk rock of Bridgeport's Caravan of Thieves

Caravan of Thieves plays the International Arts & Ideas Festival in New Haven on June 23



Caravan of Thieves (MICHAEL WEINTROB PHOTO / June 19, 2012)

By Sean Corbett

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Caravan of Thieves

June 23, 7 p.m., free, International Arts & Ideas Festival (opening for Carolina Chocolate Drops), New Haven Green, Elm Street Stage, New Haven, artidea.org

Almost exactly four years ago, when joining the Caravan of Thieves for their first mobile rehearsal around the streets of Bridgeport, there was already a glimpse of their coming success. Every time they stopped to play in the cemetery or the street, a crowd gathered. At first it'd be the novelty — you don't often see fancy old-time vaudeville hosts taking their guitars and double bass for a walk — but then they'd settle in and take a listen, in awe of the Flamenco and jazz grooves, the complex string arrangements and warm harmonies.

That day it was Bridgeport, but these days they're picking up fans all over the country, from frequent stops in Boulder or New Orleans, Asheville or Tampa.

"It's been fun seeing the whole thing kind of unravel," says Fuzz Sangiovanni, guitarist, singer and co-creator of the Caravan of Thieves. He and his songwriting, singing and life partner Carrie sound like they're just observing something they've set free. But that's not entirely the case. Together with violinist Ben Dean and bassist Brian Anderson, the highly theatrical Caravan of Thieves have performed their John Lennon and Django Reinhardt-inspired gypsy jazz/rock on old steam boats, in multi-week residences at small theaters, in grimy bars, upscale banquet halls and cabaret theaters and at late-night and daytime stages at massive summer festivals.

"Recently we've been on this path of trying to bring our act to the next level, really trying to push on this," says Carrie. "We were feeling like the music was getting better and we wanted to, not let that... we wanted to do something with it."

Recording *The Funhouse* at Tarquin Studios in Bridgeport was that next level, and even though producer Peter Katis' state-of-the-art recording studio was right across the street, it was still a long way away, financially. Lucky for the Thieves, their legions of followers are always hungry for twisted little gypsy tunes. They opened a Kickstarter.com campaign, came up with some clever perks, and quickly raised more than \$10,000.

"Making a fan-supported record was crucial for the whole thing," says Fuzz. "I think it took our fans to another level. Even if they didn't kick in money, they realized they could really be a part of what we're doing, that it's not just us. It's like we've become a little more unified as a family."

After picking up some extra guitars from friend and rocker Christopher Robin, they were ready for Tarquin. "We wanted to capture our live energy in the studio, so we played together in the same room," says Carrie. "Fuzz and I sang on microphones facing each other. It wasn't so isolated and sterile."

The result is lush, celebratory and refreshing in this world of too-many folk rock bands. They made the album without the use of any electronic instruments and added percussive items like stepladders, keg buckets and pans to the already spicy lineup of guitars, bass, banjo, ukulele, viola and resonator guitar. The sharp, thick and clean sound on *The Funhouse* is a shining example of how it's supposed to be done.

On more than a few of their smartly composed songs about love, death, ghosts and general mischief — like "Haunt Me," or "Candy" and "Raise the Dead," with their playful lyrics and dark subject matter — they strike a balance between darkness and happiness with a silly, creepy air of mystery. All the while, it's pretty family-friendly. With a big assist from genuine, old school word-of-mouth, Fuzz and Carrie are busier than ever with the Caravan of Thieves and say they're usually only back home for a month before they push off again.

"There's not a lot of time for reflection," she says, "we're always thinking about the next thing."

Link:

<http://www.ct.com/entertainment/music/shows/nm-nh26-mucaravan-20120621,0,4749719.story>