

Caravan of Thieves: Bring The Funhouse To You

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Band personalities can be kind of hard to take at times. You spend weeks and months on end pouring your heart out in a studio with those band members and then spend months - in some cases years - on the road crammed into a van with those very same people. All that time with your fellow band members can grate after a while. But imagine if your spouse also happens to be one of those band members.



That's the case for Fuzz and Carrie Sangiovanni, the husband and wife founders of Caravan of Thieves, a beautifully eclectic four-piece that is part gypsy swing and part folk rock band. But the duo - who are joined in the group by violinist Ben Dean and bassist Brian Anderson - have managed to make it work. As a result, they are quickly moving from the music world's best kept secret to becoming everyone's favorite new band. They've already toured the globe with everyone from Nanci Griffith to the Decemberists.

And with a stage show that has to be seen to be explained, Caravan of Thieves is spending most of the rest of the year on the road touring in support of *The Funhouse*, their second album.

Fuzz and Carrie spoke recently about making that album, buying props for their shows and how the couple manages to separate band life from home life.

Innocent Words: So to start, were you in a band first or a couple first?

Fuzz Sangiovanni: Couple first, but just for a little while. Our first gig together as a duo came about three months after we started dating. We did do a little singing and strumming together the first night we met, though.

Carrie Sangiovanni: Yeah, Fuzz had a gig opening for Dickey Betts at the Ridgefield Playhouse in Connecticut. He asked me to join him on it, and we put together a set of music the week of the show and pulled it off! That's when we discovered that there was a real chemistry both on and off the stage. A few months after that we were planning our wedding and our first West Coast tour as a duo.

IW: Seems like family members have a tough time keeping it together in a band [The Kinks, Oasis, Black Crowes, etc.] Do you two have any ground rules to keep things separate?

Carrie: It can be tricky, since we tour a lot, and when we're home we always have work to do for the band, either writing or practicing or the business end. We don't argue much, but when we do, it often has something to do with work. So we both remember that that's all it is and we don't take it personally. I think when you collaborate with someone, especially if you're in a relationship as well, you need to have a thick skin and confidence in your relationship.

Fuzz: Yeah, we always keep solid communication open and resolve issues right away. Been in too many bands and relationships where problems smolder for too long and become much bigger problems than they need to. In addition, we have one important rule: whether we are on the road or home, we try to have at least a few times a month where we do something together that doesn't involve the band and where we won't talk about the band. Science and philosophy are usually more interesting to discuss anyway.

IW: What can you tell me about the songs on *The Funhouse*? How did this writing and recording process compare to *Bouquets*?

Fuzz: Since we started the band, we've been seeking out fantastic stories and concepts to build off of. We have kept with this through both albums, but on *The Funhouse* we are just telling them more vividly and clearly, and we went into writing this batch of songs with antique carnival images in our head. And with a concept of how the modern world provides many distractions designed to influence your overall path in life, buy things you can't afford, tune out, satisfy your every desire, etcetera, and the parallels we could draw to a type of



carnival ride where you strap in, get amused, confused and let off at the end asking, "What just happened?"

Carrie: On both records we intended to capture the live energy and feel of the band. *Funhouse* just has a few more layers and a bigger sound, but still all acoustic. Just more junk and kitchen appliance percussion and wider variety of string instruments (like resonator guitar, banjo, ukulele) played aggressively and recorded at hot levels to add some character and intensity to the record.

IW: You definitely have a sound that's hard to classify. Do either of you have any musical influences that would surprise people?

Fuzz: I know some of my teen angst days of going to thrash and punk shows in Brooklyn and jumping in a mosh pit may come a little unexpected, then going off to college to study orchestral composition and after graduation touring in a funk/soul band for a bunch of years. Guess it's been all over the place for me.

IW: Your stage show is a bit more than just four musicians running through the songs off their album. How would you describe it?

Carrie: The show is first and foremost musical. And we make sure the playing, arrangements and songs are very well rehearsed and thought out. But it is also humorous, visual and interactive.

Fuzz: We've spent the last four years developing ideas and concepts for our show on the stage as we go. Some things work and some don't. So we abandon them. But the things that seem to resonate with our audience most are the interactive moments. This is something Carrie and I first developed from doing outdoors, free form street performances, from trying to grab the people's interest as they pass by, without a stage and production to rely on. And we find when there's less of a barrier between us and the audience; there's a synergy there that's just amazing. In that way it's more or less a street performance brought to the stage.

Carrie: When we started writing songs for Caravan and envisioning what it would be like to perform them live, we knew it would have to be engaging and interactive. We wanted to create an atmosphere for the audience that pulled them into our world for that night, something that would be unique and memorable for all of us. So we ravaged local thrift stores, antique shops, Goodwill and junkyards and hit the road.

IW: What was the hardest thing to get used to going from a duo to a full band?

Carrie: More opinions and having to adapt to new personalities and dynamics.

Fuzz: Definitely, but that could also be the answer to what was the best thing about going from a duo to a full band. We find the band and group dynamic inspiring, sometimes insane, but always exciting.

IW: How has the massive tour been going?

Carrie: The "Enter the *Funhouse*" tour on the whole has gone really well, better than expected. It's the longest we've done so far with many new places for us, and we're starting to see our family of "Freaks" growing and extending from coast to coast.

Fuzz: This spring leg was just for planting seeds, so in that respect we're just getting started. We plan to do another loop through the U.S. in the fall, maybe go back to a few areas we just did this spring and hit some new ones as well. And do more in 2013, I'm sure.

Carrie: For us right now, at this level, it's all about hitting the road and bringing the show to as many places and people that you can.

IW: Then what's next?

Fuzz: We've been starting to work on ideas and concepts for the next album. Can't say yet, but some fun things have developed so far. So maybe we get in the studio before the year is out or by early 2013.

Carrie: In the meantime, we'll continue to scour the national scrap heap for beautiful sounding junk to bang on, and continue to build on our stage show.



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