



Folk Alliance Again an International Celebration of Music

By Katherine Cole
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Nearly 1,700 musicians and music industry persons gathered in Memphis, Tennessee February 18-22 for the 21st Annual International Folk Alliance Convention, an event that celebrates folk music and dance.

The sound of music everywhere is one thing that sets Folk Alliance apart from other conventions. You couldn't take a step without tripping over a guitar picker, fiddler or folk dancer, not to mention all the singer-songwriters, including Amy Speace, who has a forthcoming album, "The Killer In Me."



VOA photo - K. Cole

The International Folk Alliance was founded in 1989 to support the traditional music community. Today, it has more than 3,000 members who come from all walks of life: Performing artists, publishers, promoters, journalists, attorneys; even music fans are among the group's membership. Each year, they travel from all over the world to attend the conference, and participate in daily music performances and industry business seminars.

Peter Cooper, Fayssoux McLean, and Eric Brace showcase their music at 2009 Folk Alliance conference

Executive Director Louis Jay Meyers estimates 20 countries were represented at this years event.

"It's amazing! We've got acts from Spain, from Italy, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, The Netherlands. Six acts from Australia, Mexico, Cuba," he said. "There must be 40 acts from Canada. It's pretty amazing."

And when you think of the state of the economy all around the world, Meyers agrees it's a fairly heavy investment that people are making to come to Memphis for three days.

"It is an investment," he said. "It's an investment in their careers. For the artist, it's an investment in their career. For the agents, managers, labels, it's an investment in their business. For the fans, where are you going to see something this? This combination? To be able to go from a string quartet, to a jug band, to Ian McLagan from The Faces, who is showcasing tonight."

One of the Folk Alliance's missions in the preservation and growth of folk music is promoting and developing new talent. Each year, hundreds of musicians, most of them unknown, are chosen to perform at the event. Among the showcase artists this year is Lucy Wainwright

Roche, from Brooklyn, New York.

The daughter of two well-regarded songwriters and performers, Suzzy Roche and Loudon Wainwright III, Lucy spent several years teaching school before becoming a professional musician. She attended her first Folk Alliance a few years ago as an observer. Lucy says things are a little different when you're a performer.

"When I first walked in, I was quite overwhelmed," she said. "But so far, it's actually been very fun.

Describing a typical day at the Folk Alliance, she said, "I woke up this morning, went to lunch with some friends who are in another band, then I came back and did a showcase in a room upstairs, an 'in the round' with a couple of other people. I sang a couple of songs there. And then I went and watched some other people sing a couple of songs. And then I went and watched some other people sing a few songs. I'll probably go on like that until tonight, when I have [to sing at] another showcase, or two."

While many of the performers at Folk Alliance are relatively unknown, others like Rodney Crowell, Dan Navarro, and Kathy Mattea have been in the business for decades.

So has Steve Poltz. Best known to mainstream music fans as the co-writer with Jewel on her hits, including "You Were Meant for Me," Poltz is a tireless performer who averaged more than three shows each day of Folk Alliance. His goal was to add even more dates to an extended tour schedule that sees him criss-cross the U.S. and Canada before heading off to Australia for more than a month of concerts.



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Steve Poltz

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