

ARTISTS



AL SIMMONS

There's no rest for the wacky — which is why, after more than five decades of madcap music, comedy and off-the-wall inventions, Al Simmons is still cooking up new ways to make fans of all ages go "Wow!" Now making his 14th Folk Fest appearance since 1979, Manitoba's own Simmons is one of the most beloved stars of Canada's family entertainment circuit. He's a master of mischief, a creative genius who blends kooky costumes, preposterous props and gleeful sing-a-longs into a uniquely uproarious performance. His message? That there's magic in just being silly, no matter how old you are. That joyful sense of play captivates kids and keeps their parents in stitches. It's also made him a favourite at festival stages all over the world, earned him a slew of television appearances and a pile of awards — even a hot dog named after him at a restaurant in his hometown of Anola.



ALLISON RUSSELL

When Allison Russell stepped into the solo spotlight in 2021, her unleashed voice stunned the roots world. It had been a long time coming. Since

rising to fame in the mid-2000s with Vancouver folk outfit Po' Girl, and later with collective Our Native Daughters, Russell had been renowned as a riveting vocalist and deft banjo player. But with the release of her stunning solo debut, *Outside Child*, the Montreal songwriter announced herself as one of the era's most revolutionary performers. With her passionate voice and fearless storytelling, Russell commands the stage, weaving Americana, gospel and soul into an incendiary sonic experience. On the heels of *Outside Child's* cathartic expression of survivor's joy, her 2023 album, *The Returner*, arrived as a body-shaking declaration of Black liberation. Those albums garnered a total seven Grammy nominations, including a win for "Eve Was Black." Backed by an ensemble of Black, queer and historically marginalized musicians, Russell uses the power of music to uplift, and spread a message of beloved community.



ANI DIFRANCO

For all of the critical acclaim Ani DiFranco has received, all the stardom, all the awards, she remains as she began over 36 years ago: a captivating performer, a fiercely independent feminist icon and a defiant folk rocker with an activist soul. Since breaking into global consciousness in the 1990s under the banner of her DIY Righteous Babe label, DiFranco has blazed trails through genre and industry, cutting through the noise with her fearless poetry and a certain

punk sensibility. Whether through her songs or on social stages, she has stood for gender and reproductive rights, and against racism; for the planet, and against power; for people, and against prisons. Perhaps the world needs that voice now, more than ever. Now making her seventh Folk Fest appearance, DiFranco is back with her new 23rd album, *Unprecedented Sh!t* — a collection of new and unreleased older tunes that speak for themselves, just like the iconic singer herself.



ASHWIN BATISH

As a youth in the 1960s, Ashwin Batish had a front-row seat to one of pop music's most transformative moments. It came when his father, iconic Bollywood musician S.D. Batish, was invited to play sitar on The Beatles' album *Help*. The younger Batish loved the band, just as he loved learning the North Indian sitar tradition from his dad — and soon, he was inventing his own fusion, electrifying the instrument and bending its strings into breathtaking new directions. Now 74 years old, Batish is a sitar and tabla master, a renowned educator and one of world beat's greatest treasures. In his hands, the sitar is ageless. It speaks with a voice that is both ancient and modern, equally fluent in all the musical languages of the world. It rocks, it rolls, it dances calypso, it even slides to the hot vibes of funk. His pioneering career has produced

many hits, including “Bombay Boogie,” “Casbah Shuffle” and “Raga Rock,” and forever broadened the horizons of Indian music.



AYTAHN ROSS

Aytahn Ross turns everyday moments into laugh-out-loud adventures with his one-of-a-kind blend of circus skills and comedy charm. He’s performed for over a million people in 13 countries, wowed crowds at Just for Laughs, and even caught the attention of Monty Python’s John Cleese (who said “Hello”—but still!). His journey began right here at Winnipeg Folk Fest in 1985, when he first learned to juggle, and he’s been delighting audiences ever since. Known for his aversion to clown makeup and tights (his words: “You’re welcome”), Ross has carved out a career that’s as hilarious as it is impressive. When he’s not performing, you might find him at his off-grid cabin dreaming of rescuing animals. Keep an eye out for his pop-up performances and be sure to hit up one of his circus workshops to learn some tricks of your own!



BASIA BULAT

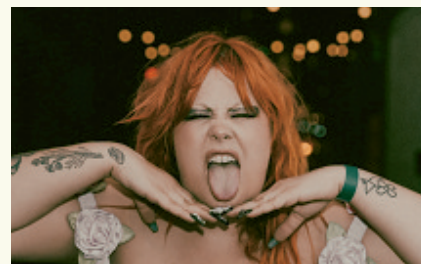
There’s an otherworldly magic to Basia Bulat’s music, though she need cast no spells. The enchantment is all in how her ethereal voice sparkles over her autoharp and guitar, giving life to an effortless melange of R&B, folk and soul. For over 18 years, that graceful combination has held Canadian roots fans rapt: a three-time

Polaris Prize finalist, the Montreal songwriter’s tunes have been adapted for symphonies and earned five Juno nominations. As her life has changed, so has her music. Bulat’s new album, *Basia’s Palace*, came out of a time of transition. A new home, a new baby, a pause; space, in the silence of late nights, to hear her own thoughts. And so, her *Palace* is a paradise that comes alive in the wee hours of the night, as her voice floats on a dreamlike river of synths and strings. An heirloom for her daughters, and all those who reach for both joy and softness in a time of new beginnings.



BEATS ANTIQUE

The pulse of a drum. The shake of a hip. This is how Beats Antique coaxes you to follow them down the rabbit hole, and as you’ll discover, their journey goes deep. It’s music. It’s art. It’s cabaret. It’s a world unto itself, where undulating Middle Eastern melodies tangle around breakbeat brass, downtempo dubstep and cosmic electronic beats. Since 2007, the Oakland-based trio of composer and belly-dancer Zoe Jakes, multi-instrumentalist David Satori and drummer Sidecar Tommy has seduced audiences with its immersive performances. Their shows are a shadow carnival for the senses, a transcendent full-body experience that weaves costume and dance with mesmerizing crescendos of fusion world beat. That vibe has fuelled a dozen albums, attracted a loyal following of self-proclaimed Beats Freaks, and drawn an eclectic array of collaborators, including Les Claypool and the Preservation Hall Jazz Band.



BEGONIA

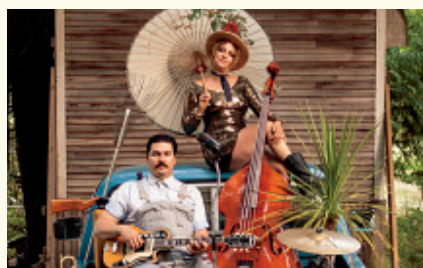
What is the magic that makes Begonia? Soulful songs that raise goosebumps. A beguiling stage presence. A voice that can move mountains — or at least, it would, if our city had any to move. Since 2017, Winnipeg chanteuse Alexa Dirks has been astonishing audiences across the world with her exquisite pop songcraft and jaw-dropping live shows. Hailed as one of Canada’s most extraordinary singers, she got her start with vocal roots phenoms Chic Gamine before striking out on her own. As Begonia, she’s released four acclaimed recordings — including her 2024 EP, *Open Swim* — racked up multiple hit songs on Canadian radio, two Juno nods and two Polaris Prize nominations. Her lush arrangements draw listeners into her world, where empowering lyrics rise and fall on melodic waves of emotion. But her voice is always the star of the show: rich, expressive, holding audiences rapt whether she holds it to a tremulous whisper, or unleashes its full power to soar.



BLACKIE AND THE RODEO KINGS

As individual musicians, they’re Canadian icons. United as Blackie and the Rodeo Kings, they’re downright unstoppable. For nearly 30 years, the roots-rock supergroup of Tom Wilson (Junkhouse), Colin Linden and Stephen Fearing has ripped up

concert stages with their formidable vocals, driving rhythms and sizzling guitar jams. They first came together in 1996, for what was supposed to be a one-off gig to salute late, great Canadian folk hero Willie P. Bennett. Their explosive chemistry left crowds wanting more — and soon, they coalesced into an enduring band that Fearing calls “a strange and wonderful beast.” In that time, they’ve collaborated with everyone from Bruce Cockburn to Emmylou Harris, and kept pushing the boundaries of their blues-heavy country-rock fusion. Their most recent 11th studio album, *O Glory*, is what Linden calls the band’s most “spiritual and political” statement to date, and a thrilling testament to the veteran musicians’ everlasting search for excellence.



BLUE MOON MARQUEE

Blue Moon Marquee’s musical world is a wild sort of place. It’s a lantern-lit stage where jump blues struts with Romani jazz, and sultry voices croon Indigenous soul. It’s a smoky backroom bar where Howlin’ Wolf tangos with Django, Earnest Tubbs shoots firecrackers with Cab Calloway and Memphis Minnie throws dice with Screamin’ Jay Hawkins. You get the picture: this pair can do it all. Since 2012, the Alberta-raised duo of A.W. Cardinal (vocals, guitar) and Jasmine Collete (vocals, upright bass, drums) has polished a reputation as one of Canada’s most spellbinding blues bands. Unbound by genre or era, their smouldering jams mark them as timeless artists, with a fusion-minded vision that could only have come from this time. Produced by blues legend Duke Robillard, their breakout fifth album, *Scream, Holler & Howl*, swept the Maple Blues awards and took home the Juno for 2024 Blues Album

of the Year; their red-hot follow-up, *New Orleans Sessions*, rocketed to similar acclaim.



BRUCE COCKBURN

Few artists have shaped Canadian music quite like Bruce Cockburn. A legendary songwriter, virtuosic guitarist, and lifelong activist, Cockburn has spent over five decades penning poetic, powerful songs that reckon with the state of the world and the spirit. From timeless classics like *Wondering Where the Lions Are* and *Lovers in a Dangerous Time* to his latest album *O Sun O Moon*, the Order of Canada recipient and 13-time Juno winner continues to create with unflinching honesty and deep humanity. His music blends folk, jazz, blues and global rhythms, but it’s his lyrical fire — anchored in justice, faith and compassion — that’s made him essential listening across generations. Cockburn shows no signs of slowing down, proving that age may weather the body, but it only sharpens the soul.



CAMPER VAN BEETHOVEN

In the summer of 1985, a student band from California with a curious name and an even quirkier sound released their first independent album, *Telephone Free Landslide Victory*. Featuring the single “Take The Skinheads Bowling,” the album — and the band — confounded all definitions. Wildly irreverent, deeply eccentric, they frolicked in a surrealist sonic landscape where jangly ska rhythms

tripped out with sunny West Coast folk, punk rock dirt and spaghetti Western vibes. That sound gripped 1980s youth, inspired an entire college rock movement and launched Camper Van Beethoven into the annals of alt-rock history. In the ensuing decades, the band became cult icons, disbanded, periodically reunited and went on to other things, including frontman David Lowery’s star turn with Cracker. Now, to celebrate the 40th anniversary of their trailblazing debut, the band’s original six members are back with their first live performances in five years: a lot older, a little wiser, but still the same genre-blending iconoclasts of avant-garde rock.



CATHY FINK & MARCY MARXER WITH CHAO

At nearly every bluegrass and folk festival they’ve played in their four-decade careers, acclaimed Americana masters Cathy Fink and Marcy Marxer have been the ones most likely to get the jam started. So when Marxer met Chao Tian in 2015, of course the first thing she did was invite the Beijing-born musician to play. A master of the yangqin hammer dulcimer, Tian had never been to a jam. At first, it wasn’t clear how their traditions would mesh: could back-porch banjo really frolic with classical Chinese composition? As it turned out, the answer is a resounding yes. Together, the trio revel in finding common ground in surprising places. Through their virtuosic techniques and sweet vocal harmonies, down-home Appalachian toe-tappers dance with Chinese lullabies, contemporary folk and good-natured storytelling. Now with a new self-titled album, their union is a vibrant example of how sharing music can be a powerful form of diplomacy.



CHRISTOPHER PAUL STELLING

Sometimes, Christopher Paul Stelling has said, he's grateful his road-tested roots haven't (yet) found commercial success. To be sure, the Atlanta-based songwriter has had brushes with the big time: in 2016, his impassioned voice and virtuosic finger-picking caught the ear of blues-rock icon Ben Harper, who enlisted him as an opening act and produced his 2020 album, *Best of Luck*. To play on those big stages was "revelatory," Stelling has said. Yet he thrives best when he can build his community from the grassroots. A longtime indie road warrior, Stelling's incendiary blend of astonishing riffs, razor-sharp lyrics and sandpapered vocals have earned him a loyal network of fans across the world. They even crowdfunded his new double release, *Forgotten But Not Gone & Few and Far Between*, a 20-song collection that was born out of heartbreak, searches for the promise of better days and finds the redemptive power of creation.



CRISTINA VANE

Whether on the map or in her music, Cristina Vane has never been one to stay long in one place. Born in the foothills of the Italian Alps, raised hopping between European countries, the gifted multi-instrumentalist started writing rock songs as a teen. Yet when she discovered slide guitar, it changed her musical direction forever. After graduating from Princeton, Vane

moved to Los Angeles, where she busked on boardwalks and, inspired by icons such as Blind Willie Johnson, mastered slide blues, bluegrass fingerstyle and clawhammer banjo. Soon, Vane hit the road, touring for months before settling in Nashville, where her 2021 debut, *Nowhere Sounds Lovely*, was born. That record earned raves from *Rolling Stone*, which compared her bluesy riffs and bewitching voice to a young Bonnie Raitt or PJ Harvey. "I'm essentially a rock kid who is obsessed with old music," Vane once said — and all those influences now frolic together on her brand-new third album, *Hear My Call*.



D'ORJAY & THE LOVELY LUVIES FAM

This ain't your granddaddy's country, though it grows from the same root, all those classic honky-tonk tunes that D'orjay grew up listening to as a kid in rural Alberta. Yet since stepping into the national spotlight in 2020, the astounding vocalist has shown they're a new kind of outlaw — which also happens to be the title of that year's breakout debut album. Known as The Singing Shaman, the delightful D'orjay — who is a trained shamanic healer — stands as the captivating leader of a new prairie rock revival. It's a style where honky-tonk rhythms melt into anthemic blues and soulful folk-rock, all of it coloured with a distinctly Black queer perspective. Backed by their band, The Lovely Luvies Fam, D'orjay's sublime voice is a thing of wonder. It can spread out as comforting as a warm blanket, or belt with enough strength to rattle the sky, bringing to life songs that speak of our power for self-healing.



DAVID ESSIG

Look, David Essig isn't one to toot his own horn. Sure, he's a deft Delta-style slide blues guitarist, singer, songwriter and author. But he's not looking to be famous, and doesn't go for awards — in fact, he once said the only award he's ever won was at a local fair, for growing the largest kohlrabi. So, we'll have to be the ones to sing his praises. For over 54 years, Essig has been a beloved figure on Canada's grassroots folk scene, the kind of old-school player that makes you come for the riffs, but stay for the stories. He's criss-crossed the country countless times, captivating audiences with his narrative lyrics and sure-fingered picking. When people ask what kind of music he plays, he just tells 'em "authentic." After 23 albums, two books and 13 Folk Fest appearances, he's still in awe of his fortune to be a working Canadian artist — and Canadian roots fans are still in awe of him.



DENGUE FEVER

A Cambodian-born singer, who rose to fame in her home country on a popular talent search show. Five inventive American musicians, who became captivated by Cambodian psych-rock. When they came together as Dengue Fever, they created a fusion that united all of their worlds. Since 2001, the Los Angeles sextet has transfixed fans with their profound curiosity for sounds that cross genres

and oceans. Led by Chhom Nimol's crystalline voice, the group imbues retro Cambodian pop with surf-rock vibes, Afro-beat rhythms and an improvisational flair. For a time, after glowing success earlier in their career, the band took a break from the spotlight. But in 2023 — 20 years after their self-titled debut, and eight since their previous record — Dengue Fever re-emerged with *Ting Mong*, their most immersive album yet. Named after a Cambodian effigy of protection, the album finds the band leaning into warm melodies and mellow, soul-searching grooves — music to bring comfort in uncertain times.



DOMINIQUE ADAMS

Wherever there's darkness, there's a place for light to shine through; wherever there's light, there's a chance for shadows to fall, too. This is the balance at the heart of Dominique Adams' music. In recent years, the rising Winnipeg singer-songwriter has been hard at work, learning from collaborations with other local artists, quietly refining her thoughtful approach to alt-folk. Now, she's ready to step into the spotlight with her debut full-length album, *To Keep*. Coming four years after her self-titled EP, the brand-new record reveals an artist who has grown confident in her own voice. There's a deeply-ingrained, hard-won optimism in Adams' tunes. These are songs that hold shadows with tenderness, bravely confronting the pain of living with loss and loneliness. Her voice, like Joni Mitchell before her, seems to be spun of pure gold, capable of weaving dark and light tones into intricate melodies.



DOUGIE POOLE

When the 2020 pandemic brought Dougie Poole's touring schedule to a halt, he — like everyone else — found himself stuck at home, with little to do but play guitar and work as a freelance computer programmer. Well, that's lucky for us. Because the songs he began writing then grew into his third alt-country album, 2023's *The Rainbow Wheel of Death* — and few records have captured a time of pause any better. As a songwriter, Poole blurs the lines between genre and generation. He'd cut his musical teeth in Brooklyn's indie underground, immersed in a diverse scene, equally influenced by alt-pop artists such as Animal Collective and classic country stars such as Dwight Yoakam. So his tunes follow suit, blending lo-fi 1970s country with pop synths and a golden baritone voice that would be right at home in any era. These are country croons about digital heartbreak, vaping on the job and drifting millennials — timeless concerns wrapped up in modern dilemmas.



DUANE ANDREWS AND THE HOT CLUB OF CONCEPTION BAY

What do legendary jazz guitarist Django Reinhardt and the rousing traditional folk tunes of Newfoundland have in common? It's an easy question, because there's really only one answer: Duane Andrews. With a trained ear, an adventurous spirit and a passion for music that transcends

genre, the Juno-winning composer and guitarist has perfected one of the jazz world's most unique — and refreshing — fusions. Through his fleet fingers, Reinhardt swing standards dance alongside classic East Coast toe-tappers, their infectious rhythms seamlessly connecting cultures, eras and musical languages. It's a mix few would have predicted — but over the course of more than 20 years and a dozen albums, Andrews has astounded audiences across the world with his virtuosic talent and vision. When he's backed by the swingin' fiddle, guitar and drums of the Hot Club of Conception Bay, the result is even more irresistible. By the way, you can also catch him kicking up a family-friendly party with The Swinging Belles.



EMILY WURRAMARA

From the women who came before her, her mother and grandmother and great-grandmother, Emily Wurramara learned many things. She learned to be proud of her Warnindhilyagwa people of northern Australia, and their culture; she learned her ancestral language, Anindilyakwa; and above all, she learned to love herself. Now, as a singer, a spellbinding performer and a passionate advocate for the environment and youth mental health, Wurramara is sharing those lessons with the world. Hailed as one of Australia's most influential Indigenous artists, the award-winning songwriter crafts dreamy roots songs designed to uplift and heal. Singing in both English and Anindilyakwa, Wurramara draws on ancient lullabies and soulful blues to explore themes of self-acceptance, resilience and love. She recently made history when her 2024 sophomore album, *Nara*, was proclaimed the Australian Recording

Industry Association's Best Adult Contemporary Album of the year — making her the first Indigenous woman to win the category.



FOLK BITCH TRIO

What's in a name? In this case, it's not that serious. You see, when Gracie Sinclair (she/her), Jeanie Pilkington (she/her) and Heide Peverelle (they/them) dubbed themselves the Folk Bitch Trio, they didn't have any big plan for their band. They were just three friends from Melbourne who loved to sing together, and started rolling with a name that suited their off-the-cuff personalities. They couldn't have imagined then how their lives were about to change. Because there's a magic in their confessional alt-folk, a spell that's weaved through their honeyed harmonies, sensitive arrangements and quiet dedication to singing about stark truths on singles such as "God's A Different Sword." Now, these three friends have found themselves on an adventure that's earned them showcases at SXSW, rave reviews in *Rolling Stone*, and opening slots for the likes of Rufus Wainwright and Aussie stars King Gizzard & the Lizard Wizard.



FRED PENNER

"When we're all here together," Fred Penner sings, the day "just keeps on getting better." That's true, and it's why we couldn't imagine having a 50th party without him. So let's welcome back to our stages

one of our most beloved Folk Fest friends, and a star who truly needs no introduction. For over 40 years, Manitoba's own Fred Penner has captivated families with his joyful sing-alongs and lyrics that light up young imaginations. Through his 12 award-winning albums, countless concerts and acclaimed 1985-97 CBC TV show, he taught us that sandwiches are beautiful, that the cat always comes back and that just being yourself is special. He's a gentle giant, a legend of children's entertainment and a Canadian icon. "Never underestimate your ability to make a difference in the life of a child," he once said — and few know better how sharing something as simple as a song can inspire whole generations.



GILLIAN WELCH & DAVID RAWLINGS

In the early 1990s, Gillian Welch was a young folk singer studying songwriting at Boston's Berklee College of Music; David Rawlings was also there, majoring in guitar. One day, they both turned up at an audition for the college's only country band — and that chance meeting forever changed the face of American folk. Today, Welch and Rawlings are renowned as pillars of the Americana revival, and one of the most influential acts of their generation. They've been hailed as modern masters of American folk, and protectors of time-honoured country and bluegrass traditions. Among a wealth of projects and collaborations, they've partnered on nine albums, won three Grammy Awards — including for their latest release, *Woodland* — and been nominated for an Oscar. Their musical chemistry, both deeply intuitive and honed by over three decades of experience, sweetens their deft fretwork, intertwined harmonies and

expansive knowledge of old-time musical forms. They are legends both already made, and still in the making; still exploring new depths and textures of timeless folk.



GUSTAVO AND GREEN FOOLS THEATRE

Prepare to be amazed. Prepare to be astounded. Prepare to see feats of daredevilry the world has never seen — err, at least, to see someone attempt them. For over 35 years, Calgary's non-profit Green Fools Theatre Society has brought the magic of children's theatre to street parties, festivals and workshops all over the world. Led by fearless stuntman Gustavo the Impossibleist — whose zany plans never seem to work the way he intended — the troupe uses a range of artistic forms to delight and excite young imaginations. In addition to Gustavo's high-energy, interactive shows, the Fools will also animate our site with cavorting life-sized puppets and stilt-walkers in wondrous costumes. Through all of these iterations, the Fools are on a mission to build a welcoming community where everyone can play and explore their creativity. They believe we can change the world for the better, one kid at a time.



HURRAY FOR THE RIFF RAFF

When Alynda Segarra was just 17, they hopped on a freight train and began criss-crossing the United

States, running away from everything — and everyone — they knew. It was a journey that helped shape them into who they are today: a curator of stories, a fearlessly authentic artist and one of Americana's most sublime songwriters. As the singular musical voice behind Hurray for the Riff Raff, Segarra's distinctive brand of folk-rock has earned the acclaim of audiences and critics since 2007. With their warm alto voice, fluidly insightful lyrics and gently driving guitar, they open a window onto the raw and real human experiences of the world. Now, on their 2024 eighth studio album, *The Past Is Still Alive*, Segarra is looking back to the pivotal moments and people of their life — like that teenage train journey — and reflecting on all the hardships they witnessed and bravery they gained on the way.



JAKE VADELAND & THE STURGEON RIVER BOYS

He's an unapologetically retro man, with an old soul. He's showcased in Nashville, done a world tour, been nominated for a Juno and earned a whack of regional music awards. What's more astonishing? He did much of this before he was even old enough to get into a bar south of the border. Since 2022, Saskatchewan phenom Jake Vaadeland has been heating up stages with his gleefully nostalgic take on an old-time country party. Backed by his rollicking band, The Sturgeon River Boys, the self-taught banjo- and guitar-picker dishes out a foot-stomping barrage of classic bluegrass and 1950s rockabilly. He even has the look to match: his slicked-back hair, oversized suits and between-song patter call back to the winking charisma of bygone stars. In 2024, at just 21 years old, he became

the youngest-ever artist to be certified "Road Gold" by selling over 25,000 tickets to Canadian concerts in just 12 months.



JASON ISBELL AND THE 400 UNIT

For Jason Isbell, the long road to stardom didn't come easy. There were struggles, all of them public: he hit the booze, hit rock bottom and earned a hard-won sobriety. Through it all, he never let go of the relentless authenticity of his voice — and now, the whole roots world is listening. Since striking gold with his 2013 breakthrough release, *Southeastern*, Isbell has been hailed as America's unapologetically-political king of lo-fi roots-rock. He's a six-time Grammy winner and even a movie star, with a role in Scorsese's epic *Killers of the Flower Moon*. His honesty is the key: as both performer and songwriter, Isbell wears his heart on his sleeve. His lyrics simmer with raw sincerity, transformed by his world-weary voice into anthems of love, loss and everything in between. Recently, Isbell stripped down to the bare bones for his first fully solo acoustic album, *Foxes In The Snow*. But with us, he'll be backed by his rocking five-piece band, The 400 Unit, whose smouldering chemistry has long stoked the fire of Isbell's live shows.



JEFFREY MARTIN

Jeffrey Martin has never been one to smile in pictures, though he is a happy guy. It's just that he's more of the reflective type, searching for solitude wherever he can find. It's in those quiet spaces that he finds time to think, and write, and make sharp observations about the rough-hewn gem of human life — insights that imbue his music with a wisdom beyond his time. Since 2009, the Portland-based songwriter has been hailed as one of the finest voices in American folk, a rare artist whose nuanced poetry and starkly simple songs aim straight for the soul. He recorded his new album, *Thank God We Left The Garden*, in a tiny shack he built in his backyard, holding his breath as trucks rumbled down a nearby road. The result unfolds as his live performances do, mesmerizing in its honesty, just a man with a guitar, a rich vocal and a deeply empathetic view on the world.



JOLIE LAIDE

After carving out a critically-acclaimed niche through the 90s and early 2000s, Los Angeles singer-songwriter Nina Nastasia seemingly vanished from the public eye. But in 2020, when tragedy rocked her life, she set out to explore the aftermath of a complicated grief — and found the perfect collaborator in veteran Calgary guitarist Jeff MacLeod (The Cape May, Florida BC). The two had

met by chance almost 20 years ago, at legendary producer Steve Albini's studio. Now, as Jolie Laide, they take listeners on an indie-rock journey that's intimate, starkly cinematic and deeply rooted in place. Their 2023 self-titled debut sees classic California ballads rub up against desert dirges, like a road trip down the Pacific Coast directed by David Lynch. Darkness is pierced by brief bursts of light; songs trail off rather than close with a bang. In French, the duo's name evokes something that is beautiful in its ugliness; Nastasia's haunting lyrics capture that duality the same.



KEVIN MORBY

In a way, Kevin Morby likes to think of his catalogue as a river, always flowing. The water may feel different in places — faster or slower, cooler or warmer — and yet, the river remains the same. So it is with the folk-rock troubadour's records: each possesses its own unique persona, yet unmistakably belongs to the same musical world. There are few quite like his, that's for sure. Over the course of seven acclaimed solo albums, the Kansas City songwriter has burnished a reputation as one of America's most singular performers. Like Bob Dylan before him, Morby's incisive lyrics and artful melodic hooks cut through the noise, building a cohesive yet ever-evolving musical vision. His 2022 album, *This Is A Photograph* — and its 2023 companion release, *More Photographs (A Continuum)* — finds him at his best, delivering an Americana elegy to the meaning of family, a visceral blues- and gospeling paean to life and death.



LA CHIVA GANTIVA

Fifteen years ago, a few Colombian musicians gathered to jam in Brussels, cooking up sizzling rhythms that made them feel a little closer to home. That's how La Chiva Gantiva started, but since then, their vision has grown. Today, led by exuberant frontman Rafael Espinel, the band also includes members from Belgium, Chile and Vietnam; the resulting sound is a cultural soundclash that straddles both sides of the Atlantic and beyond. This is party music for a world without borders. A jam where an Afro-Caribbean heart is funk'd up by hip-hop, rock and punk, and delivered with an explosive live energy that's ignited some of the biggest festival stages in the world. Eclectic, electric and irrepressibly wild, La Chiva Gantiva are marking their 15th anniversary with a new album, a continent-hopping tour and a resolve to keep connecting artists and genres from every corner of the world.



LA LOM

In the heart of Los Angeles, not so long ago, there was a house band that played in the lobby of the legendary Roosevelt Hotel. Their job was to provide background music for tourists and passersby off the street, serving up instrumental re-imaginings of classic soul hits for three hours a day, five days a week. Yet soon, Zac Sokolow (guitar), Jake Faulkner (bass) and Nicholas Baker (percussion) began expanding their sonic fabric,

pulling in all the threads that make up the vibrant tapestry of their city's music scene. That's how the Los Angeles League of Musicians — or LA LOM — was born: as a love letter to the diversity of Angeleno music. Through their hands, surf rock dances with Mexican boleros; sauntering cumbia sonidera meets the guitar-driven twang of Peruvian chicha and Bakersfield country. Now, with the release of their self-titled debut album, the trio is cementing their journey out of the background, and onto centre stage.



LAKE STREET DIVE

There's a lot to be angry about in the world, Lake Street Dive drummer Mike Calabrese recently said, but we can't live only in anger. Sometimes, we need joy to sustain us — and so, Lake Street Dive is here to light that ecstatic fire, and just get us moving. For over 20 years, the quintet has been pushing the possibilities of pop music. Led by the captivating torchlight voice of singer Rachael Price, their sound is a bold cross-pollination of genres, blending soul, funk, jazz and R&B with saucy flashes of Latin American pop and even a little psych-rock. Now, their eighth full-length album, *Good Together*, is the ultimate expression of that musical polyglotism. Nominated for a 2025 Grammy for Best Traditional Pop Vocal Album, the record is a sonic declaration of joyful rebellion, thick with lush grooves, buoyant vibes, and rhythms designed to lift our spirits and get our hips swinging.



LEONARD SUMNER

In this era of unsettling history and healing wounds of the past, Leonard Sumner's music is medicine. Since his 2013 debut, *Rez Poetry*, to his latest EP *Travelling Light*, the Anishinaabe songwriter from Little Saskatchewan First Nation has been hailed as one of the most important voices of roots music in Canada. It's all in how he brings worlds together. Sumner's style stands rooted at the confluence of narratives and cultures, where blues meets hip-hop and poetry flows over the heartbeat of ancestral drums. With his gravelly voice and lyrics that walk the line between fortitude and fragility, Sumner sings to waken the consciousness of audiences who may have been unaware of their slumber. With every vibration of his guitar strings, he rattles the dust off truths that have been buried far too long — truths about past and present, struggle and hope, and how we find the strength to keep walking on.



LES MAMANS DU CONGO X RROBIN

In her heart, mind and soul, Gladys Samba — otherwise known as Mama Glad — holds the Bantu lullabies of the Congo, melodies into which generations of African women have breathed their hopes, their sorrows and their resilience. As lead vocalist with Brazzaville women's collective Les Mamans du Congo, she sang

that spirit for all who would listen — and when the Mamans teamed up with French hip-hop producer Rrobin, the hybrid project set them on a path to even broader horizons. There's a seductive alchemy in the collaboration, which has expanded to include two full-length albums, including 2023's *Ya Mizolé*. To Rrobin's bewitching beats, the five Mamans dance with joyous abandon, adding percussive rhythms played out on plates, baskets and recycled materials. In the Lari language, they sing about social change and the daily lives of Congolese people, calling out for a new era of empowerment and emancipation for African women.



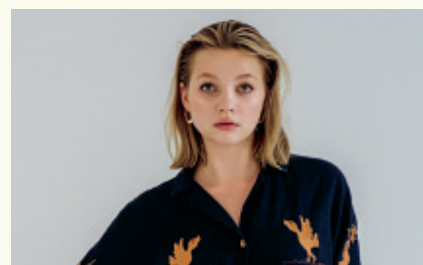
LEYLA MCCALLA

Some stories are painful. Some are joyful. Some can even change the world — and Leyla McCalla believes that to catalyze social transformation, all of these stories need to be told. A virtuoso multi-instrumentalist and soulful singer, McCalla draws on centuries of history and modern music to craft songs that bridge the personal and the universal. Born in New York to a family of Haitian emigrants and activists, she mastered the cello, banjo and guitar; for a time, she honed her craft on the streets of New Orleans' French Quarter, before joining Grammy-winning Black string band Carolina Chocolate Drops. As a solo artist — including on her new fifth studio album, *Sun Without the Heat* — McCalla weaves all of these diverse parts of her story together. Fusing musical vibes from Afrobeat, Brazilian tropicalismo, American folk-blues and her own Haitian heritage, along with lyrical inspiration from Afrofuturist thinkers, McCalla's songs explore the hope, grief and power we can find, as we strive toward justice.



LOS BITCHOS

In the beginning, Turkish-Australian guitarist Serra Petale had a vision: she wanted her band to sound like “Van Halen and the Cocteau Twins, but from Turkey.” It sounds wild, but the genre-bending gals of Los Bitchos deliver all that, and so much more. Featuring the talents of Petale, Uruguayan synth dynamo Agustina Ruiz, Swedish bassist Josefine Jonsson and British drummer Nic Crawshaw, the instrumental quartet rocketed to fame thanks to their contagious take on global pop-rock. They'd met as friends in London's underground music scene, running into each other at parties, tripping out on tequila and cumbia vibes. Together, they pulled in a little of all the sounds they loved: Latin rhythms, Turkish psych rock, the dirty distortion of '80s hair metal and the bright exuberance of disco. Their breakout 2022 album, *Let The Festivities Begin!*, launched them to Glastonbury and Coachella; now, with their sparkling sophomore record, *Talkie Talkie*, they're leading fans on a technicolor dance floor explosion.



MARYNA KRUT

Well before the world's gaze became fixed on Ukraine, Maryna Krut was a rising star in her country. A master of the bandura, the traditional Ukrainian lute, the Kyiv resident had competed on regional versions of talent-search shows *The Voice* and *The X-Factor*, enchanting audiences with her angelic

voice and ethereal string melodies. Then Russia invaded Ukraine, and suddenly, Krut's role in her country's future changed. Now, she stands as a witness to the horrors of war, and an ambassador of Ukraine's unbroken musical spirit. From her temporary home in Western Ukraine, Krut travels east, to the front lines, where she comforts weary soldiers with the heavenly sounds of their ancestral traditions; and she travels west, to the rest of Europe and beyond, bringing the story of Ukrainian culture to the world. Wherever she goes, her presence is a testament not only to the beauty of Ukraine's music, but also the resilience of its people.



MATT GORDON & LEONARD PODOLAK

Ireland's Matt Gordon is a fiddler and singer, whose fleet-footed clogging and thigh-slapping hambone has taken stages by storm since the 1980s. Leonard Podolak is a virtuosic master of the clawhammer banjo, who for decades has whipped up some of Manitoba's wildest roots parties with his band, The Duhks. Put those talents together, and they can promise you this much: we're all gonna have a real good time. Longtime friends and musical collaborators, Gordon and Podolak deliver an exhilarating trip through old-time Appalachian music. Their performances seamlessly blend intricate instrumental lines with heartfelt singing and dazzling dance. They've teamed up on a few records over the years, including 2020's big-band extravaganza *Power Wagon: Live At Shanley's*. But the best way to experience this duo's toe-tapping, hand-clapping chemistry is to see them live.



MAVIS STAPLES

It's not every year that we get to host a living legend on their birthday weekend — so what a thrill that Mavis Staples chose to be here with us. For over 75 years, Staples — who turns 86 years young on July 10 — has been one of the defining voices of her generation. She's an R&B titan, a civil rights icon and a Rock'n'Roll Hall of Fame inductee as the last surviving member of her storied family soul band, The Staple Singers. History has turned to the sound of her voice. She marched with Martin Luther King Jr., performed at John F. Kennedy's inauguration and serenaded the first Black American president, Barack Obama. Above all, she's a creative force whose songs of joy and freedom left an indelible mark on the cultural consciousness of a nation, and a world. This is her first appearance at Birds Hill Park, and we couldn't be more honoured to welcome her.



MELBOURNE SKA ORCHESTRA

In 2003, a crowd of musicians converged on a club near Melbourne. They were on a mission: to set the record for the most horn players playing the ska-skank at the same time. Tickets sold out. The sound was enormous. The musicians had so much fun, they forgot to check if they'd set the record — but they still started something that made waves 'round the world. Led by inimitable frontman Nicky Bomba

(Bomba, Bustamento, John Butler Trio), the Melbourne Ska Orchestra is a big band, with even bigger energy. Featuring a line-up that has, at times, swelled to as many as 34 members, the group's explosive live shows have kept fans dancing 'til they drop, including on massive stages at Glastonbury and the Montreal Jazz Festival. Now, over 22 years after that world-record attempt and still going strong, the Orchestra is bringing their brassy, sassy ska party to Folk Fest for the very first time.



MIA KELLY

Oh, it's always special to watch the next generation of musicians spread their wings at our festival, and soar. Just two years ago, Quebec chanteuse Mia Kelly came to Folk Fest as one of the rising stars of our Young Performers Program. She was already turning heads in the Canadian folk scene, thanks to her soulful voice and enthralling blend of folk, rock and blues; her 2022 debut album, *Garden Through The War*, went on to earn her plaudits as Young Performer of the Year and Emerging Artist of the Year at the 2024 Canadian Folk Music Awards. Now, with her new sophomore album, *To Be Clear*, Kelly is establishing herself as one of the country's most captivating up-and-coming performers. Her songs, shared in both French and English, channel raw and vulnerable emotions, capturing real human stories with a sensitive and poetic lyricism.



MR MARK

Armed with a truckload of instruments and an even bigger dose of enthusiasm, Mr Mark (a.k.a. Mark Cameron) has been making kids giggle, wiggle, and sing along since 2002. A master of musical mayhem, he's brought his wildly fun, one-man show to festivals across the country — from Lunenburg to Iqaluit — and has even teamed up with the Winnipeg and Regina Symphony Orchestras for playful productions that turn classical music into full-blown fun. Whether he's belting out a tune about macaroni and cheese or leading a full-audience dance party, Mr Mark always delivers the kind of joyful, high-energy performance that keeps families coming back for more.



NOELINE HOFMANN

Noeline Hofmann grew up in a small town in Southern Alberta, surrounded by big sky, tall grasses and prairie people. The beauty of all those things left an indelible impression. She's never felt closer to God, she's said, than she does in the plains — and so her music stands as a testament to its soul. From bittersweet ballads to gritty barn-burners, Hofmann's golden voice brings the people and places of Western Canada to vivid life. Her songs tell tales of heartbreak, honky-tonks and rodeo junkies, captured through the wistful precision of her lyrics. Wildrose country, she calls it — and it's made her a rising star. In 2024, her first year as a full-time musician, she cracked the Billboard Top

100 with her single, "Purple Gas," a duet with country star Zach Bryan; unveiled her debut EP of the same name; inked a record deal; and even took the stage at the Grand Ole Opry.



OMBIIGIZI

When Daniel Monkman and Adam Sturgeon first met in 2018, they thought they had a lot in common. They were both Anishinaabe alt-rock musicians, and frontmen of their own projects: Sturgeon with Status/ Non Status, Monkman with Zoon. Yet they had a lot of differences too — and as Ombiigizi, they're fusing their individual sonic architectures and finding common ground. Pronounced om-BEE-ga-ZAY — it means "this is noisy" in Anishinaabemowin — the project sees the duo exploring their cultural histories through atmospheric washes of sound: plaintive moccasin-gaze melodies, futuristic keyboards, driven and distorted guitars. On songs such as "Cherry Coke," a tribute to Monkman's residential-school survivor father, lyrics imbued with family storytelling reveal difficult truths. That combo caught the ear of Broken Social Scene's Kevin Drew, who produced their Polaris Prize-shortlisted 2022 debut, *Sewn Back Together*, and their 2024 sophomore album, *Shame*.



PEACH PIT

If their wild ride toward indie-rock stardom ended tomorrow, the four guys of Peach Pit would still be friends. That is, after all, how they began: just

a bunch of buddies from Vancouver who wanted nothing more than to play music together. As frontman Neil Smith, guitarist Chris Vanderkooy, bassist Peter Wilton and drummer Mikey Pascuzzi honed their dreamy alt-pop sound, that easy chemistry would make them a global sensation. Since making their debut in 2016, the quartet's melancholic melodies, introspective lyrics and mesmerizing live shows have caught fire with fans, propelling them to sold-out headlining tours, buzz-worthy appearances at Lollapalooza, Bonnaroo and Osheaga, and three hit albums of wistful guitar-driven pop. Now, with their fourth full-length record, *Magpie*, Peach Pit is taking their evolution further, infusing their signature style with kaleidoscopic soundscapes and raw emotional depth — while still holding onto the sparkling joy of being four friends, doing what they love.



PETER PAUL VAN CAMP

Poet, humourist and performer Peter Paul Van Camp was scarcely out of knee pants when he busked at the very first Winnipeg Folk Festival in 1974, and had only just learned to tie his own shoes when he first appeared on the Main Stage the following year. His fluting tones were to become a fixture for a generation of festivalgoers, making 20 past appearances in total (but who's counting?). Now here he is again in our midst, a full-grown fellow in his 73rd summer with a lifetime of poetical performance as his calling card. You can say what you like about his verse-mongering — and many people have — but Mr. Van Camp has for decades delivered the goods wherever poetry is welcomed... and elsewhere, too. Clearly, he enjoys his work, despite its perilous nature. If the itinerant rhymester can make one claim, it's this: he will not only steal your heart, but return it, cleaned and pressed.



PETUNIA & THE VIPERS

How do we begin to describe the modern musical enigma that is Petunia? Imagine if David Lynch and Nick Cave had a hillbilly baby that yodelled. Imagine if Tom Waits met Elvis for a jam at Woody Guthrie's place. Or maybe, you can't really describe the phenomenon that is Petunia — you just gotta see him play. For nearly 30 years, the Vancouver crooner — otherwise known as Vern Lockhart — has criss-crossed the world, beguiling audiences with his melting pot of American music history. Whether solo or with his band, The Vipers, Petunia mixes up a bit of everything that's toe-tapping and creaky. There's some ragtime in there, and Western swing, and a dash of blues. There's a whole lot of vintage country, and even a pop of punk in the attitude. Now, this time-travellin' wanderer and his band are continuing that sonic exploration with their brassy and long-anticipated new album, *Callin' Me Back*.



ROBYN HITCHCOCK

If there was one year that most changed Robyn Hitchcock's life, it was 1967. It was the year he turned 14, and found himself catapulted from bright boarding-school pupil into the trippy world of Dylan, Sgt. Pepper-era Beatles and mind-expanding hippie folk. Nearly six decades later, Hitchcock is still gleefully living in that world. One of England's most deliciously eccentric songwriters, he's a psychedelic folk-rock troubadour

who's filled over 20 solo albums with thoughtful songcraft and his trademark astringent wit. Hitchcock's songs, he's said, are like paintings you can listen to: vivid, surrealist poetry twines with genre-breaking melodies. On the strength of those songs, and his near-constant touring, Hitchcock has built a devout cult following across the world, and earned a reputation as one of the founding fathers of British alt-folk. Recently, he retraced some of those early steps in his wistfully funny memoir, *1967: How I Got There And Why I Never Left*.



ROMI MAYES

Romi Mayes has taken some hard knocks in her life, but she's never faded away. For more than 25 years, Manitoba's first lady of blues-rock has been a lynchpin of the Canadian roots scene. She earned that position the old-fashioned way, through her gritty, passionately emotive music. With her sizzling guitars and full-throated rasp, the Juno-nominated performer howls and purrs through razor-edged lyrics, rocking out wherever she can find a stage. She's long been one of the hardest-working musicians on the circuit, keeping a busy slate of gigs and mentoring up-and-coming artists to get a foothold on the trails she blazed. Now, after a nine-year hiatus from the studio, Mayes has put her scintillating sound back on record with her long-awaited seventh album, *Small Victories* — a return that leaves no doubt, no matter the ups and downs, Mayes is here to stay.



ROSE CITY BAND

As a young man, Ripley Johnson found himself transfixed by old vinyl records. He'd spin Neil Young and Grateful Dead classics for hours, marvelling at the crackle of the needle and their yellowing covers. Each record, he thought, was a tactile experience, a piece of art with a story. As Johnson came into his own as a musician — he's the man behind psych-rock outfits Wooden Shjips and Moon Duo — that early vinyl collection would make a lasting mark on his own sound. With Rose City Band, Johnson and his cohorts Barry Walker on pedal steel, keyboardist Paul Hasenberg and drummer John Jeffrey craft tunes that belong to the era of great records. Sun-kissed rock rolls along with nostalgic rhythms, breezy Cascadia vibes and graceful neo-psychedelic melodies. All of their albums, including their brand-new fifth release *Sol y Sombra*, are available on private vinyl press, continuing the tradition of making music as precious to touch, as it is to hear.



RUBY WATERS

When Ruby Waters dubbed her first full-length album *What's The Point*, she didn't have only one interpretation in mind. It could be the trigger to an existential crisis. It could also be a reminder to chill out, not sweat the small stuff and enjoy the wild ride of life — or, for that matter, her music. Raised in small-town Ontario, now

living in B.C., the indie-rock chanteuse got her start busking in Toronto, where her whiskey-soaked voice fit right in with the bustle of the street. Soon, it became clear her addictive melodies and disarmingly candid charisma were destined for greater things. Now, Waters is a rising star, a Juno-nominated phenom whose soulful alt-pop tunes capture the vibes of boozy late nights, and all that they bring: love. Lust. Existential malaise. Everything that's raw and real and unvarnished. So what's the point? Maybe it's just to say what you wanna say — or sing.



SAND

Sand measures time. Time measures music. And music is the measure of humankind — so in its very name, Winnipeg's own SAND reflects the breadth of creation. The same can be said of their music. Formed as a side project in 2000, SAND began as something of a local supergroup, fusing the diverse talents of guitarist Dave Quanbury, storyteller and visual artist Mary Louise Chown, and percussionist Phoebe Man. Inspired by a sand mandala built by Tibetan monks, the trio began creating their own ephemeral collage through melody and rhythm. With eclectic instrumentation that includes guitar, hammered dulcimer, Irish flute and ocarina, SAND weaves elements of Chinese folk songs, English country dances and Japanese taiko drumming to tell stories through music. They've appeared at Folk Fest twice before, most recently in 2011; now, they're thrilled to reunite to help celebrate our 50th edition.



SLOW SPIRIT

In 2013, after graduating from Brandon University's jazz studies program, singer-bassist Natalie Bohrn and guitarist-saxophonist Eric Roberts might have headed for the glittering cities of the American coasts, where session players are in more demand. Instead, they turned towards each other, and to their indie-rock roots. Four years later, Slow Spirit's debut album, *Unnatured*, captured the local scene, earning acclaim as one of *Uniter's* top local records of 2017. Since then, the band's line-up has shifted through the seasons, but the heart of Bohrn and Roberts' soul-searching songwriting has remained. Together, the duo see themselves as explorers of sound. They're like divers, swimming in the deep end of songs, where indie rock floats through currents of folk and jazz. Through their three full-length albums, including 2024's *That's The Gods Talking*, fearless instrumentation and rich vocals caress an acoustic core, carrying listeners through the existential desires of this ever-changing life.



SON ROMPE PERA

As kids growing up on the outskirts of Mexico City, brothers Jesus and Allan Gama learned to play the marimba from their musician father. They'd accompany him when he gigged at parties, playing classic Mexican folk. But when a teenaged rebellious phase hit, they put the marimba away and started thrashing out in punk bands — and

now, that musical journey has come full-circle. Since forming Son Rompe Pera in 2017, the Gama brothers and their bandmates have set the cumbia world ablaze as the marimba's most hard-rocking rebels. Their music — such as on their 2023 sophomore album, *Chimborazo* — pushes the marimba to the limit, fixing its chiming tones amidst frenzied outbursts of electric guitar and percussion, punked-up vocals and a street-sense that comes straight from their barrio. It's a revolutionary take on Mexican, Peruvian and Colombian rhythms, and their wild live shows drive that home — so expect to dance 'til you drop, because there's no other band like this in the world.



SOUSOU & MAHER CISSOKO

It was music that brought Sousou and Maher Cissoko together, and through music, they brought together their worlds. In the beginning, she was a singer from the southernmost tip of Sweden; he was a griot, a storyteller-musician from Senegal, and a master of the 21-stringed kora lute. When Sousou's love of that instrument brought her to West Africa, her path crossed with Maher's — and soon, they decided to unite their voices, their traditions and their lives. Together, the husband-and-wife duo weave a musical spell that carries a message of unity. The magical sound of the kora twines with their soulful voices, uplifting songs sung in five different languages and radiant melodies that spread like a sunrise, glowing with joy. Whether touring the world or welcoming visitors at Jaliya Camp, their creative and educational space on the Senegalese coast, the pair's expansive love for West African traditions, and each other, bridges cultures and evokes a unifying spirit of home.



SUMMER BEAR & FRIENDS

The pulse of the drum. The sure steps of moccasin-clad feet. These are the rhythms and movements that have danced over Treaty One land since time immemorial, carrying the stories of their people in every beat. Now, Summer Bear & Friends is here for the fifth time at Folk Fest, to share what those dances mean. Founded over 25 years ago by Elders Barbara and Clarence Nepinak, Summer Bear & Friends features some of Manitoba's finest Indigenous dancers. Wearing beautiful handmade regalia, the performers whirl through intricate steps originating in the Anishinaabe, Cree, Assiniboine and Sioux cultures, taking time to educate audiences on the history of each style. From the breathtaking shapes dancers create in the hoop dance, to the healing chimes of the women's jingle dress dance, they infuse every performance with a spirit of welcome, inviting all to cherish the traditions that call these lands home.



SUPALUNG

When Sam Brookes and Pete Josef sat down to record their first duo album, they had a simple rule. If a tune didn't spark a smile, pulse with emotion or fill their eyes with euphoric tears, then they scrapped it and started over again. Basically, the longtime musicians from Bristol wanted their new joint project to sound like pure joy — and as Supalung, they've done

it. Formed from the union of solo artist Brookes and multi-instrumentalist Josef, named in homage to the late, great English rock singer Terry "Superlungs" Reid, Supalung is poised to chart a new course through the diverse textures of indie rock. Deeply melodic, a little experimental, their songs find Brookes' tender lead vocal floating over spine-tingling keyboards and guitars that crash like waves on the shore. Carried by these sounds, their 2024 debut record, *I'm Alive*, arrives as a love letter to all the pair's influences, and the emotional depth of music itself.



THE BLACK SEA STATION

Long ago, there were the klezmerim, itinerant musicians who roamed the back streets of Eastern Europe, playing at parties for meals and a few coins. The sound they honed then was a visceral exploration of life's joy, and its loss; they could whip audiences into a frenzy of dancing, or bring them to tears with the mournful wail of a clarinet. Today, Winnipeg's own The Black Sea Station is carrying on this tradition. Featuring Daniel Koulack (bass), Victor Schultz (violin) and Myron Schultz (clarinet) — co-founders of seminal local klezmer act Finjan — along with Moldovan accordion wizard Nikolai Prisacar and multi-instrumentalist Ben Mink, the quintet transports listeners to a time and place long past. Through a mix of original songs rooted in history, and traditional tunes spun up with modern zest, they whirl through the exuberant klezmer sounds of their Eastern European heritage, tending the old ways with deep love and respect.



THE BUDOS BAND

For 20 years, reviewers have searched for words sufficient to describe The Budos Band. One website calls them "doom-rock Afro-soul big band with a '70s touch." Another reviewer likened them to the sonic equivalent of Quentin Tarantino choosing music for a James Bond flick. They call themselves psychedelic instrumental music with an Afro-soul heart and a little '60s sweetness on top. No matter what you call 'em, these Staten Island legends are hypnotic. Since forming in 2005, the nine-piece band's thunderous sound has known no bounds, taking any and all inspirations when they come. Supercharged assaults of syncopated percussion are jumped up with energized guitar licks and blasts of vigorous brass. They've poured that driving mix into a slew of world tours and a pile of wildly eclectic records, including their otherworldly Western-tinged 2023 EP, *Frontier's Edge*. Nevermind what to call 'em — you don't need words to get carried away by these rhythms, and just dance.



THE CAT EMPIRE

The only thing constant in life, as they say, is change — well, that and The Cat Empire burning up the stage. For over 25 years, the Australian funk outfit has brought the house down at some of the globe's biggest parties, astounding fans with its magnetic explosion of big sound and eye-popping visuals. Now, after

a major line-up change in 2022, the band is looking ahead to a fresh new era — but that relentless energy remains. With two original members, keyboardist Ollie McGill and vocalist-percussionist Felix Riebl, continuing its founding legacy, the reimagined quintet retains The Cat Empire's core DNA while taking a big stretch into more diverse influences. Their brand-new 10th studio album, *Bird In Paradise*, pairs sizzling flamenco and Afro-Cuban rhythms with the outback grit of Aussie rock. Add McGill's jazz chops in the mix, Riebl has said, and you have a sound only The Cat Empire can create.



THE DUHKS

For our 50th edition, Folk Fest fans are in for a special treat: a rare sighting of Manitoba roots music's most remarkable birds. When The Duhks arrived on the Canadian folk scene in 2002, it didn't take long before they had legions of fans flocking to dance. Led by banjo wizard Leonard Podolak — son of beloved Folk Fest founder, the late Mitch Podolak — the freewheeling quintet kicked up a party infused by Celtic folk, Appalachian barn-burners, Creole zydeco and a dose of percolating Latin American rhythms. They released five acclaimed studio albums, got nominated for a Grammy and set stages afire all over the world. Eventually, as band members turned their focus to other things, The Duhks took a hiatus. But in 2022, after six years away, the original line-up reunited to celebrate their 20th anniversary. Since then, they've appeared at a handful of special events — and now, their rollicking roots will fly into Folk Fest once again.



THE LEE BOYS

The Lee Boys grew up in the Miami church where their father was a pastor, and the rafters shook every Sunday with the soul-rattling gospel tradition known as sacred steel. It's a style born in America's Black churches, where spiritual hymns became infused with hard-driving doses of rhythm and blues. The result is an ecstatic, electrifying sort of praise — and today, The Lee Boys are among its finest purveyors. For over 25 years and four albums, the family band of brothers Alvin Lee (guitar), Derrick Lee (vocals) and Keith Lee (vocals), along with nephews Roosevelt Collier (pedal steel), Alvin Corey Jr. (bass) and Earl Walker (drums), has brought sacred steel out of the pews, and onto some of the biggest festival stages in the world. This is music to feel in your bones — and if it moves you, feel free to get up and dance, shout, sing along, and above all, have fun.



THE LONE BELLOW

When a serious accident left his wife temporarily paralyzed, Zach Williams learned to play guitar and started pouring his fears, his hopes and his love into song. After she recovered, the couple moved to Brooklyn, where Williams began gigging, met fellow transplanted Southerners Brian Elmquist and Kanene Donehey Pipkin, and The Lone Bellow was born. Since releasing their exquisite self-titled debut in 2013, the trio's warmth and chemistry has cast an indelible

roots spell on stages across North America, and beyond. Over the course of five albums, including 2022's *Love Songs for Losers*, the band reveals a range that spans from arena-ready folk-rock anthems to the gorgeous Americana ballads they call "little redneck symphonies." Through it all, their finespun songs revel in hard truths and unexpected beauty, lifting transcendent choruses with luscious three-part harmonies, and the little sprinkles of levity we all need to keep on keepin' on.



THE PAPER KITES

Few bands can create moments that stand the test of time, moments that slip into audiences' hearts and linger in their minds. Few bands, in other words, are like The Paper Kites. More than 15 years, six albums and a billion online streams into their career, the Australian folk-rockers have built a fervent community of fans through the lush arrangements and understated beauty of their tunes. Led by the dreamy voice of songwriter Sam Bentley, the quintet's blues-inflected melodies are lifted by swells of keyboard and guitar, and punctuated by sizzling riffs of lap steel. One of the few Australian bands ever certified platinum in the United States — thanks to their 2010 hit single, "Bloom" — The Paper Kites have perfected the art of making music that can fill a room: their 2023 sixth album, *At The Roadhouse*, was recorded during a month-long residency at a small-town bar, where the rich intimacy of their sound left audiences spellbound.



THE SWINGING BELLES

As primary school teachers, Laura Winter and Erin Power know how music can inspire kids' wondrous creativity. As musicians, they know that nothing gets a crowd on its feet like an ol' fashioned boogie. So when they put their talents together as The Swinging Belles, you can bet on a swinging good time for the whole family! For over a decade, the Newfoundland trio of Winter and Power, along with guitarist Duane Andrews, has been charming audiences of all ages with its timeless take on a jazzy dance party. The goal, they've said, is to make music that delights their littlest fans, while still entertaining parents — and so, their live shows are packed with gleeful sing-alongs, interactive storytelling and other fun surprises. That joyful mix has earned them two Juno Awards (2016, 2024) for Children's Album of the Year, and a place in our hearts as previous Folk Fest family favourites.



THE ZAWOSE QUEENS

There's a spirit in The Zawose Queens' music. There's a fire. There are the vibrations of their Wagogo ancestors, speaking through traditional instruments: soaring chizeze fiddle, buzzing ilimba thumb piano and ngoma drums that chatter and thunder. Above all, there are the voices of Pendo Zawose and her daughter Leah, twining in rapturous polyphonic melody, rising to the sky.

Pendo's late father, Hukwe Zawose, was a Tanzanian music icon, who rose to global attention through his work with Peter Gabriel. Now, with the release of their debut album, *Maisha*, his descendants are continuing his mission. It's the first time the women of the family have stepped into the spotlight as lead performers, writing their own songs in their native Kigogo language, exploring groundbreaking fusions between ancient melodies, modern electronic beats, and a boundless pride in the environment and traditions of their homeland, and its people.



TWO CROWS FOR COMFORT

When Cory Sulyma and Erin Corbin first joined musical forces, they didn't dream of flying too far from home. They'd play an open mic here and there, or a small show or two. Yet soon, it became clear they had something special in their cozy take on heartwarming -- and heartbreaking — folk. Now, as Two Crows for Comfort, the Manitoban duo have spread their wings and made a new home on the road. Living full-time in an 18-foot camper van with their dog, Elliot, in tow, these wandering troubadours criss-cross the continent, weaving a warm Americana blanket of exquisite lyrics, soaring lead vocals and smooth harmonies wherever they go. Their poignant storytelling and easy, off-the-cuff banter is equally at home at intimate house parties as on the stages of some of North America's top roots festivals, and has earned glowing reviews for their three albums and two-time recognition (2019, 2021) as the Manitoba Country Music Awards' Roots Duo or Group of the Year.



VÍÍK

Underneath the cool, minimalist aesthetic of Nordic folk, there lurks a more primal heart. As a singer and composer, Norway's Elisabeth Vik set out to uncover that essence, dismantling the music of her heritage and putting it back together in ways that resonated with globally-minded generations. And when she found the right collaborators in Danish bassist Jakob Kragesand, violinist Annelene Toft Christensen, multi-instrumentalist Espen Wensaas and percussionist Håkon Berre, the band Víík crackled to life, bright like a firework. Since 2019, the incendiary quintet has pushed traditional Nordic folk to a sharp modern edge. Through their hypnotizing performances, deft instrumentals are made wild with untamed expression; Vik's fearless soprano dances lightly over haunting arrangements, or unleashes into a throat-shredding howl of raw emotion. Now, with their 2024 debut album, *SAGT (What's Been Said)*, Víík are poised to stun audiences across the world, as the virtuosic rebels of Scandinavian folk.



VIV AND RILEY

Vivian Leva and Riley Calcagno were just teens when they met at a music camp, the summer after their high-school graduation. Prodigious musicians already, she was there teaching vocals; he was there teaching fiddle. That first night, they jammed until the wee hours of the morning, revelling in a shared love of old-time

Appalachian classics. But as they and their union grew up, their sound matured with them — and now, Viv and Riley are looking towards future horizons. Today, the North Carolina-based couple still play the traditional stuff with their award-winning stringband, The Onlies. But as a duo, they build on that backbone of old-soul roots and country, refreshing it with modern perspectives and melodies. Their music, such as on their acclaimed 2023 album *Imaginary People*, finds plucky summertime jams shimmering with bittersweet nostalgia and tightly-wound harmonies. Sweetly sad and a little sardonic, their songs search for the little sparkles of beauty that keep us going. Old roots, young energy.



WACKYDOODLE DANCE PARTY

If you're searching for beats to delight little feet, look no further: WackyDoodle Dance Party is here to keep parents and kids alike on their toes. You may already know Winnipeg's DJ Co-Op and K Chedda as the mixmasters behind some of Manitoba's most legendary grown-up dance parties: him at Grippin' Grain and Nothin' Butt 90s, her with spins at Festival Du Voyageur and our very own Folk Fest. Now, with over 25 years of DJ experience between them, the husband-and-wife duo draws inspiration from their own two kids to entertain the whole family. With a seamless mix of hip-hop, pop, Motown, funk and soul, and a vivacious interactive crowd show, the WackyDoodle crew dish out a non-stop extravaganza of positive vibes. No matter how young — or just young at heart — you are, come join the coolest fam on the block for a jam that's energetic, engaging and seriously fun!



WAXAHATCHEE

Katie Crutchfield was born in Alabama, grew up near Waxahatchee Creek, skipped town and struck out on her own. That was over a decade ago, and at the time, she had no way to know how far that road would go. She just knew she was ready to work — and as Waxahatchee, Crutchfield has ridden that tireless ethic to skyrocketing international fame. Over the course of six sublime records — including her latest, *Tigers Blood*, which was Grammy-nominated for Best Americana Album — Crutchfield's sound has evolved from low-fi folk, to earthy indie-rock, to lush alt-country. But her voice has always been the same: honest and close, poetic with a lyrical southern lilt. Her potent songwriting holds nothing back, taking a piercing gaze on love, addiction, recovery and self-discovery. Most of her lyrics explore shades of sadness — "It's tricky to write songs about being happy," she's said — but like a stream, her graceful melodies flow onwards into hope.



WILLI CARLISLE

Lately, an essential question has haunted Willi Carlisle's mind: how do we save love from hate, in a time of intense divides? Through his raucous live performances, we may find an answer. Born and raised in the Midwestern plains, but moved to Arkansas to become a folksinger, Carlisle draws on folk history to explore modern dilemmas. Through his raw

voice, Dust Bowl ballads rub shoulders with sardonic barnburners and heart-wrenching queer waltzes. His third album, *Critterland*, cements his growing reputation as a poet for the people. Through piercing yet unpretentious lyrics, Carlisle delves into the most uncomfortable parts of the human condition: loss, generational trauma, addiction. Yet underneath these themes, there's one that rises above: love. These are songs about love of all kinds, and between all genders. Love that hurts, love that heals, love that unites across the ways that we suffer. So how do we save that kind of love? Sing along, and let's find out together.



YE VAGABONDS

When Brían and Diarmuid MacGloinn first started busking around their southeast Ireland hometown, they felt like the "weirdos of Carlow," they've said, because they strummed folk. At the time, most local musicians dished out rock 'n' roll covers. But the brothers had grown up steeped in their parents' favourite folk music, joining family sing-alongs, speaking Irish at home — and soon, they'd find themselves among the vanguard of a new wave of Irish folk. In many ways, the brothers' windswept melodies and spritely strings are of the kind that have long resonated over Ireland's emerald hills, but Ye Vagabonds are not a traditional band. They're more like explorers, lovingly uncovering and reinventing sounds from both sides of the Atlantic. Through their silken vocal harmonies, the brothers polish up beloved folk classics and lesser-known gems, nestling them alongside their own original compositions. For that, they were acclaimed as the best group in Ireland at the 2019 RTÉ Folk Awards.



ZACKERY

There can be no doubt from where Zackery Wiebe's roots grow. Consider his recent breakout single, "Roslyn (Live from the Silo)" — a Bon Iver cover which, as one might guess from the title, was recorded in a Manitoba grain silo. For that tune, Amazon beamed his face on a Toronto billboard; but the singer-songwriter's voice was made to echo over the Prairies. Raised on a grain farm near Morden, Wiebe grew up singing hymns in the church choir and writing songs as he travelled the world. When he started posting some of those on TikTok, his wistful voice and intimate indie-folk melodies started to go viral — now, he has over 150,000 fans from all over the world. Today, Wiebe is one of Manitoba's most promising rising talents. He's the kind of artist who broke his arm, wrote a song about it and turned even that into a soul-searching experience; a poet whose charisma needs only a stage and a guitar to shine.



ZRADA

It's amazing how words can mean different things in different places. For example, in Ukraine, *zrada* means betrayal, or treason. Yet on the stages of Manitoba, Zrada means just one thing: party time. (Or, if you prefer, *chas dlya vechirky*.) Since 2006, Winnipeg's Zrada have earned a reputation as the local rabble-rousers of Ukrainian psychedelic folk. Through a madcap fusion of guitars, drums, accordion, fiddle and brass, the seven-piece band charts out a kaleidoscopic journey through the dark heart of their ancestral soundscapes. It's a wild sound, bursting with energy, where joy meets melancholy and hardship is rocked by resilience. Their lyrics are all in Ukrainian, but don't worry: you needn't know a word to understand that when Zrada whips up the jams, it's time to catch the beat, get on your feet and *tantsyuvaty* — err, we mean dance.

YOUNG PERFORMERS PROGRAM

Every year, the Winnipeg Folk Festival shines a spotlight on the next generation of music through its Young Performers Program, an inspiring showcase of emerging artists from across Canada, the U.S. and abroad. This program not only nurtures and develops the next generation of talent in folk and related genres, but also gives them a powerful platform to grow their craft.

Hosting multi-talented youth musicians aged 14 to 24, the program offers two immersive days of workshops and mentorship with Festival artists and industry professionals, culminating in a live performance on one of our stages on the third day.

Since its launch in 2000, the Young Performers Program has been a launchpad for countless emerging artists, many of whom have gone on to light up major stages across the country and around the world.

MENTORS AND MENTEES

MENTOR: Basia Bulat

Ben Notes
Winnipeg, MB - Singer-Songwriter

Colin Bracewell
Minneapolis, MN - Pop/R&B/Rock

Freya Milliken
Port Williams, NS - Indie/Folk

Morgan Jean
Winnipeg, MB - Singer-Songwriter/R&B

Piner
Kingston, ON - Indie/Folk/Rock

Siobhan Bodrug
Toronto, ON - Indie/Pop/Soul

MENTOR:
Jaxon Haldane

Arlo
Winnipeg, MB - Singer-Songwriter

Dane Pedersen
Cape Breton, NS - Folk/Singer-Songwriter

Jackson Klippenstein
Kenora, ON - Indie/Folk/Rock

York Street Thought Process
St Mary's, ON - Folk/Singer-Songwriter

Lily Vanderhooft
Winnipeg, MB - Pop/Folk

Rachel Nichole
Edmonton, AB - Indie/Folk/Singer-Songwriter

MENTORS:
Duane Andrews and Erin Power

FINICK
Minneapolis, MN - Indie/Folk/Rock

Kydney
Beausejour, MB - Indie/Folk/Pop

Wheelhorse
Winnipeg, MB - Blues/Rock

Yellow House on Moss
Victoria, BC - Fiddle Folk

MENTOR:
Leyla McCalla

Abrielle
Winnipeg, MB - Folk/Indie

Lexie
Kenora, ON - Pop/Indie/Folk

McMillan
Montreal, QC - Folk/Singer-Songwriter

Nick Reimer Hamm
Winnipeg, MB - Folk

Tamoto
Winnipeg, MB - American Primitive/Old Time/Banjo

Xander Boulard
Winnipeg, MB - Indie Folk/Singer-Songwriter

MENTOR:
Sam Brookes

Adam Yarish
Winnipeg, MB - Indie Folk

Karina Joy
Winnipeg, MB - Dream Folk

Parker Beesley
Winnipeg, MB - Folk/Singer-Songwriter

Sam Fournier
Winnipeg, MB - Folk/Singer-Songwriter

Sam Ripat
Montreal, QC - Singer/Songwriter

Tayler Grace
Edmonton, AB - Indie Folk

