

Caravan of Thieves at FTC

Acoustic string band marks release of debut disc

By Ray Hogan
Staff Writer

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Guitarist Fuzz Sangiovanni has played in projects with his wife Carrie since they met at the Vermont music club Nectar's in late 2003.

But it took them until last winter to settle on a formula that they felt was the proper vehicle for their style and put their vocal harmonies out front.

Caravan of Thieves is an acoustic string band that features the Sangiovanis on guitars and vocals, violinist Ben Dean and upright bassist Brian Anderson. The group has a pronounced Gypsy swing influence and theatrical elements, which give it an inherent electricity lacking in many "unplugged" projects.

On Saturday, Caravan of Thieves celebrates the release of its first disc, *Bouquet*, with a show at Fairfield Theatre Company.

The band grew out of Fuzz and Carrie's previous group, Rolla, which was vocal- and song-

oriented but had a traditional band configuration.

"We started feeling like many a rock band didn't fit us too well," Fuzz says. "It wasn't quite right for us. The types of venues that we wanted to be doing were where people would sit -- or stand -- and listen, pay attention to the lyrics as we do them and react.

"With loud rock bars there's too many subtleties in our music that got missed. We were able to have a band again but not have a typical rock band. We figured this was something a lot out of the norm but still a great platform to write our songs in."

Fuzz, a former member of the popular funk band Deep Banana Blackout, had been going in a more acoustic direction since meeting Carrie (nee Ernst). The Bridgeport couple immersed themselves in the worlds of Django Reinhardt and Stephen Sondheim after first jamming with Dean and Anderson. A recording of the quartet's second rehearsal served as its demo tape until the release of Bouquet.

"I think it's opened the way for our writing story-oriented songs, with strong and unusual characters and otherworldly concepts that hadn't seeped into our Rolla material," Carrie says.

"For example, one song [the first] 'Ghost Writer' is about a ghost giving us ideas for songs from the other side."

Her husband agrees. "The gypsy lifestyle was so alternative. The things that they might experience could be really far out. A lot of the concepts [on Bouquet] came together by imagining ourselves in lives that were more wild and adventurous. It has a swing inherent to it and melodically lends itself to the dark and mysterious."

Fuzz and Carrie's first gig together was as an acoustic duo opening for Southern rock veteran Dickey Betts at the Ridgefield Playhouse in 2004, the same year Rolla came together. Fuzz says that when the couple began to draw more enthusiasm from duo shows than the main band, they knew it was time for something new.

"Rolla sort of got away from the thing we originally wanted to do, which was acoustic music," Fuzz says. "We would do acoustic duo shows and we liked them better and the audiences liked them better."

"I liked the simplicity of the sound," Carrie says. "We feel our strongest suit in this whole thing is the harmony vocals we've established. An acoustic band is a lot more of a sound that could allow us to feature the vocals -- and use the guitars as rhythm instruments."

Caravan of Thieves will play Fairfield Theatre Company, 70 Sanford St., Saturday at 7:30 p.m. The Ash Creek String Band opens. \$12 and \$17. 259-1036 or visit www.fairfieldtheatre.org.

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