



2011  
NERFA  
(Northeast Regional Folk Alliance)  
Conference  
Scrapbook

## TAKING THE HIGH ROAD TO NERFA

Take one supreme fall day, add a set of wheels, top it off with music, and you have the recipe for the beginning of a grand adventure. So it was, on the morning of November 11, 2011 (11-11-11: bodes well, don't you think?), we set off from Manhattan for the Hudson Valley Resort in Kerhonkson, NY, for the 17th Annual Northeast Regional Folk Alliance Conference (affectionately shortened to NERFA).

For us, it's the grandest party of the year; wall-to-wall music, with hospitality in the form of tasty food and drink in almost every guerrilla showcase room.

For the uninitiated, educational seminars are surrounded by musical showcases and informal jamming at all hours.

Formal showcases are held Friday and Saturday from 7:00 to 11:30pm. After that, it's a dizzying array of guerrilla showcases until 4:00am. Jamming continues all night.

Add all of your best friends and the recipe is complete.

**Oh, Ariana!**



For us, the find of the conference was 21-year-old Canadian Ariana Gillis, who combines vocal power and lyrical originality.



In addition to seeing Ariana's Saturday afternoon showcase in the Empire Lounge, we watched her perform again in Mike Kornfeld's AcousticMusicScene.com late-night showcase.



The band member on the left, using the banjo as a percussion instrument, is Ariana's father.



## Community



Catherine Miles, John Fuhr and Dianne Tankle



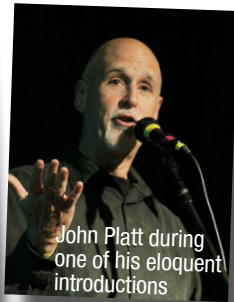
Cliff Eberhardt and Viki Peterman



Jody Gill signed during formal



Suzanne Vega performed after giving her keynote speech.



John Platt during one of his eloquent introductions



The multitabled Fitzgerald family band, Everything Fitz.

## Formal Showcases



We're About 9 was voted a much-deserved return trip to the formal showcase stage.



Layah Jane and Oliver Johnson

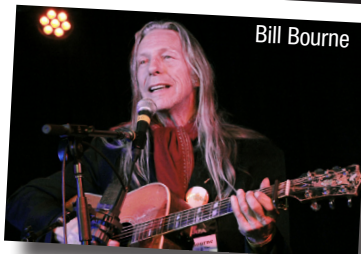


Gathering Time takes a bow.



The Stray Birds

## Quad Showcases



Bill Bourne



Mira Stanley and Chuck E. Costa, AKA "The Sea, The Sea"



Jean Rohe



Carla Ulbrich apparently can't believe what she wrote in her own book.



Bev Grant and Ina May Wool



Honor Finnegan



Paul Sachs



Chasing June



Carolann Solebello



Lois Morton



Jory Nash

# Guerrilla Showcases



Mark A. Berube



NASHVILLE



Frankenpine

# Lobby Jams



Frank Solivan (center), with Tom and Julie Fitzgerald



The last big jam in the lobby at 4am Sunday morning was powerful enough to provoke dancing.

**Ariana Gillis - To Make it Make Sense  
Forget Me Not (2012 release)**

21-year-old Ariana is a roots rocker whose showcases at NERFA were electrifying. The description of her in the NERFA program book read: "High energy folk, bluegrass and pop." No argument here. The studio production on *To Make It Make Sense* leans toward rock/pop, but includes some of the banjo and mandolin that Ariana's father plays in her live shows. Her upcoming album, *Forget Me Not*, shows further growth in her writing skills and a more fine tuned production. Dave Marsh, author and former music critic of Rolling Stone, said "Ariana Gillis is the best new emerging artist anywhere, PERIOD!" We say "Amen."

**Boxcar Lilies**

The Boxcar Lilies are singer/songwriters Jenny Goodspeed, Stephanie Marshall and Katie Clarke. For some, the arrival of three attractive harmonizing women is going to seem like the second coming of Red Molly. However, the husky alto of Jenny Goodspeed, a 2009 Falcon Ridge Emerging Artist (10 on my judge's scorecard that year), lends a different flavor to the overall harmony blend. All three songwriters contribute material and there's only one cover on the CD, but what a great one it is, Neil Young's "Old Man," and what a great job they do with it. If they so choose, there are a lot of other covers out there that folks will pay good money to hear them sing. Rest assured, I'll be listening.

**We're About 9 - Amalgam**

This album combines some previously released material along with some newer songs and some live tracks. I enjoyed the chance to revisit some of my old favorites, like "Albany" and "Born Again," as well as "Live with This," which I had heard them do in concert, but don't see elsewhere in my bank of iTunes storage (possibly misplaced). Nevertheless, it gives me the chance to reacquaint myself with brilliant lines like: **If you ever gambled / If you ever lied / If you ever hurt someone else / for the sake of your own pride / If you have chemicals firing all over your head / telling you not to do what all the other chemicals said / You are living then, you are living then / you are living this human experience...** This is songwriting at its most unique and this is the only place to get it, so you might as well own this album along with all of their others.

**Jean Rohe - Lead Me Home**

Jean lends her light, refined voice to songs sung in English and Portuguese. She combines Brazilian-flavored songs with social consciousness, creating a global mindset. In the sad "What Will We Tell Our Children,"

her silken voice asks, **Suffering on the other side of the sea / am I a citizen, what is my responsibility? / What will we tell our children when they ask what did you do?** We've seen Jean live in concert a number of times, but just begun to listen to her recordings, We're eager to hear a lot more.

**Madison Violet - The Good in Goodbye**

This CD has more studio production than their last CD, *No Fool For Trying*, but it matters little. The album kicks off with the lovely and sad "If I Could Love You," the pedal steel keening its sorrow over the end of a relationship. The second track "Home" adds drums and orchestral violins but thrills with its melody and characteristic harmonies from Brenley MacEachern and Lisa MacIsaac. The title track hews closer to the mandolin-fiddle bluegrass-like feel that we're used to as it ponders **...been searchin' for the good in goodbye**. Whatever the treatment, it's all good. Just don't say goodbye, girls.

**The Stray Birds - Borderland (EP)**

This trio thrilled everyone during their Quad showcase with their harmonies and instrumental wizardry. This short collection of songs has the same ethereal beauty that we saw in concert. Theirs is the sound of an existence buried in the hill country, seeping from the pines. "Ask Me a Personal Question" is a live-in-studio track complete with ambient shuffling sounds and the count-in. It gives an excellent picture of their live act. We've invited them to play at our "Acoustic Live Night" at the Eclectic Cafe in Bay Shore, Long Island, on Saturday, March 10, 2012.

**Ryan Fitzsimmons - Cold Sky**

Ryan Fitzsimmons has a singing style with an engaging, mature pop feel, edgy and full. The production here ranges from roots-rock/pop to acoustic employing banjo and fiddle. One of the more satisfying tracks is "North Central Line." The lyrics mourn the loss of an old railway line and the inexorability of change: **I'm waitin' on the North Central Line / in a station where here's no place for time / on a platform that's slowly rotting away**. Mandolins and fiddles provide a fitting backdrop to this paean to a bygone era.

**Murray McLauchlan - Human Writes**

The feathery baritone of Canada's Murray McLauchlan delivers a heck of a lot of philosophy on this album. It goes down easy, too. It's no wonder, as he's had a lot of practice. This is his 25th album dating back to 1971. "Painting Floors" is typical as he brushes out the lyric: **When you're out of ideas / Can't see the forest for the trees / Lost in the fog / out of dreams... Climb up someplace high just to see / What you can see...** In some places, his life view and understated vocals remind me of the late Bill Morrissey. With Bill gone, it's nice to know there's somewhere else to turn for insightful musical moments.

**The Levins - Barely Contained (EP)**

The husband/wife team of Julia and Ira Levin has a distinctive contemporary style. Julia (piano) and Barry (guitar) display tight harmonies. The title track kicks off the EP and illustrates their grasp of whimsy and imagination: **I once saw a fish in a tall tree / He saw me and he started to grin / the melody reminds me / there's water in air and he started to swim**. They are a personal favorite and we plan on seeing a lot of them. The Levins have also been invited to play at our "Acoustic Live Night" at the Eclectic Cafe in March.

**Bill Bourne & the Free Radio Band - Bluesland**

We came out of NERFA with two great blues recordings and this is one of them. Take a big chunk of John Hiatt and add a dollop of early Dylan and you've got Bill Bourne. His muscular vocals show why this Juno award winner is so highly regarded in his native Canada. This is a rollicking barn-burner of an album and I hope it gets considerable airplay in our area, so he gets more local gigs.

**Suzie Vinnick - Me 'n Mabel**

Here's the second of those two great blues CDs. This Canadian blues singer has a toughness in her voice that lends an authenticity beyond most of her contemporaries. The album is mostly Suzie and her guitar with occasional backup. She tackles standards and makes them her own. Originals like "Save Me For Later" exude sensuality: **Cookin' slow brings out the flavor / Save me for later**. She plays Music on 4 in NYC on February 16th and we plan on being there.

**The Once - Row Upon Row of the People They Know**

This is a beautiful ensemble string band recording with female lead vocals. On this immaculately produced album, the mandolins shimmer and the backup harmonies soar. The mostly traditional-sounding material is broken up by a folky cover of the '70s Queen hit "You're My Best Friend." Definitely a keeper.

**Moors & Macumber (eponymous)**

This CD is less heavily produced than the one above, but has a similar tone. Twin edgy male lead vocals and harmonies float above the stripped-down sound of two guitars and some banjo, mandolin and dobro. They do a nice cover of Steve Earle's "Someday." Very satisfying.

**Twangtown Paramours (eponymous)**

Nicely produced, this is a country-rock album a country rock album with male-female harmonies. Most of the material mines the romantic relationship heartbreak vein that populates country airwaves.

**Frankenpine - The Crooked Mountain**

Frankenpine is an old-timey/bluegrass group with an authentic sound, a significant accomplishment for a group of six 20-somethings. My favorite up-tempo number on this album, "Baltimore," displays their ensemble a cappella harmony chops in the opening bars. For the rest of the song they ride the dickens out of the banjo, fiddle and bass while maintaining a smooth vocal harmony. "Baltimore" is followed by the slower "Cold Water," featuring a solo lead female vocal and a melody that insinuates itself under the listener's skin. A few tracks later, a slow soulful version of Gillian Welch's "John the Revelator" raises goosebumps. Frankenpine is a fun ride and should find a lot of local gigs with this CD.

**Cathy Fink and Marcy Marxer - Rockin' the Uke**

While researching my feature article on Tom Paxton in 2009, I read his eager endorsement of this duo, unfamiliar to me, that he often tours with. Now I see why. Their formal showcase killed and so does this CD. They do things with the ukelele that I haven't heard before. They both have great voices and are virtuoso instrumentalists. There are a bunch of older pop tunes here such as "Blues Stay away from Me," "Bye Bye Blackbird," "Red Red Robin" and "Comes Love." While I might usually become impatient while listening to older fare like this, Fink and Marxer have no trouble holding my attention. I'll be playing their CDs and looking for chances to catch them live in the future.

**Lynn Miles - Fall for Beauty**

Lynn did not appear at NERFA this year but was represented by this 2010 album that I'd missed. Some of the songs here are ones we've heard her do in recent concerts. "Three Chords and the Truth" has an old-time Country/Western feel. In "Goodbye," a duet with Jim Bryson, we hear the consummate expression of heartbreak we're accustomed to hearing from Lynn. **There's a line in the dirt that we already crossed and a chance for salvation that we already lost... Let's say goodbye, baby; we tried, baby...** The tasteful use of reverb and limited production lift this simple expression of regret above the trough of pop treacle that it could have fallen into.

**Amy Black - One Time**

Although her promo notes say she calls Boston her home base, there's a lot of the South in Amy's gritty vocals. Her tales of busted romance, heard over a dobro's slide put us well below the Mason-Dixon Line. When she rocks out, it's with a big dose of rockabilly and that's right in my wheelhouse. We expect that the airwaves/cyberstreams will be carrying a lot of Amy.

**Aireene Espiritu - Goodnight Aireene  
Goodnight (EP)**

This is a pleasing, stripped-down recording, featuring just Aireene's solid alto and her tenor ukulele. There's a low-key gospel flair to "Oh Come, Angel Band," as she sings **Bear me away on snowy wings to my immortal home.**

**Disappear Fear - Get Your Phil**

On this highly effective tribute to Phil Ochs, SONiA and Cindy Frank's harmonies more than do justice to "Power and Glory" and "I Ain't Marching" right now when we can use it. Occupy This Album, maybe? In an inspired match, "I've Had Her" is matched with "Because the Night" by Patti Smith and Bruce Springsteen. On "There But for Fortune," their harmonies, sung over simple piano accompaniment, provide an aural treat. The combination of their voices over piano and guitar on "Is There Anybody Here?" is particularly bracing. The finale is very moving, with an elegaic version of "When I'm Gone," as we ponder the full loss of Phil Ochs' brave stance against the monolith of established power. All in all, this album is an impressive achievement

**Gathering Time - Red Apples and Gold  
(Sampler)**

Their web promo notes claim "Miraculous three-part vocal blend" and I would second that claim. I don't know if any recording could match this group's live rendition of "Suite: Judy Blue Eyes," but this sampler (or their debut CD, *Songs of Hope and Freedom*) will have to suffice until the listener has a chance to hear their smooth-as-silk vocals in concert. Stated influences include "The Byrds, Simon and Garfunkel, Joni Mitchell, The Eagles and many more harmonizing favorites from the golden era of '60s folk-rock..." Specifically, I would add Peter Paul and Mary. At times they seemed to channel P, P & M a bit too much for my taste, but at this point they appear to have come into their own. Case in point: Hilary Foxsong's "If It Would Only Rain" on this sampler. The lyrics tell of a letter from a fallen Confederate soldier to his wife and her inner dialogue in response. **There's nothin' Civil about war when it comes to the battle / Brothers kill brothers, men slaughtered like cattle / They say Jake was brave, he took three Yankees with him / But I think of their wives and I think of their children.** It's timeless, brilliant and heart wrenching. The writing and the song's execution bode extremely well for this group. Look for more on Gathering Time in these pages.

**Linda McRae - For Cryin' Out Loud**

Linda is a honky-tonk angel with a strong voice and she makes the most of it here. *Cryin'* is a roots/country rocker that drips with teardrops over love lost/love gone bad. There's plenty of twang and pedal steel to go around and Linda

breaks into a near-yodel for extra emphasis from time to time. In "Sweet Surrender," she sings **Every time I fall, I learn nothin' at all / I just keep makin' the same mistakes.** Make no mistake, she'll be getting plenty of attention from me. Hang on honey!

**Andrew McKnight - Something Worth  
Standing For**

Andrew McKnight is a crackerjack folk-rocker. Here he corrals a cornucopia of amplified/miked stringed instruments and uses them to dexterously rage against the miasma of hypocrisy that surrounds us. The first track "Times We're Living In," exemplifies the tenor of the entire album as he sings, **Is this what it comes down to, power and preference / executive privilege for or against us / wrapped in the flag, discredit dissenters as they tear down all we hold dear...** His edgy baritone blisters the lazy off our plodding acceptance of the status quo. The tempo slows down toward the end of the album as Andrew ponders the inevitability of change in the landscapes of our childhood. In "Cedars," he sings **This was home when home was a different place.**

**Wool and Grant - pre-release**

Ina May Wool and Bev Grant have struck a rare metal vein with the blend of their voices and their songwriting. In addition to the feistiness they inject into songs about the battle between the sexes, there's the social awareness avenue exemplified by "Get The Frack Outta Here." With lines like, **Natural gas, kiss my natural ass / Get the frack out of here,** I'm glad they're on our side. They've been a team since the beginning of 2011, so it's a little late, but... ladies, consider this an official "Welcome."

**Lois Morton - As I See It**

Lois Morton is a grandmother and a teacher of English as a Second Language (ESL). That's just the beginning. Encouraged a long time ago to write songs by Pete Seeger, she has a knack for slicing through the haze of everyday living to create articulate satirical songs that eviscerate our all-too-human foibles. Cellphone users beware! You've been revealed with: **It doesn't seem to matter, you're assailed with noisy chatter when you only want a quiet, peaceful walk...** and we all bemoan, as Lois does, that your **secondary talk** can't be fined like secondary smoke. "Side Effects" provides an avalanche of medical reaction descriptions. **Oh you may want to be cautious 'cause this pill could make you nauseous / and do not get in a tizzy if it leaves you feeling dizzy / here's a pill could cause amnesia or a fainting bit could seize ya / but don't worry, if you fall you / won't remember it at all...** The pinnacle arrives in a deluge of rhymed names of drugs that are not spellable simply upon hearing them (liner notes absent). For any concert-goer who loves intricate wordplay, Lois is a lodestone discovery. Truly a gem.