

# Acoustic Live!

IN NEW YORK CITY

A MONTHLY LISTINGS GUIDE WITH A COVER FEATURE ARTICLE IN EACH ISSUE  
COVERING THE NEW YORK METROPOLITAN TRI-STATE AREA

2013  
NERFA  
Scrapbook

## The View from the Top



The picture above is of the view outside the window of our hotel room.

It was especially enjoyable since we couldn't pay too close attention to the spectacular views on the way to the conference.

We're always exhausted from prepping for the Northeast Regional Folk Alliance (NERFA) Conference weekend, but blissful as we drive the twisting road up the mountain to Kerhonksen.

Usually, the only time we see this area is on the way to and from the NERFA Conference.

Now that retirement has been thrust upon me, I'm making a commitment to take a trip up there when I'm rested and ready to take photos.

We came away from the conference with well over 2,000 pictures (a lot of editing for sure).

Scenery aside, when it comes to photography, musicians are our favorite subject, and NERFA dishes up a huge smorgasbord.

—Richard Cuccaro



This professorial gentleman, a sartorial throwback, is the brilliant Joe Craven. I had been too busy to preview the listed quad showcase artists on the NERFA website and was thrilled to see his name in the program book. **Foakee**, his collaboration with Sam Bevan, an adventurous cross of jazz and folk, is a recent discovery, but has quickly become one of our favorite albums.



We didn't catch their name, but this group was the first we saw setting up in the lobby on Friday after we arrived. The jams are a big part of NERFA magic.





Musician Greg Klyma with presenters Coco and Bruce Wilde (First Acoustics series, Brooklyn, NY)



Presenters Barbara Shiller (CT Folk) and Amy Blake (The Place, NJ)



Presenters Michael Kornfeld and Karen Finkenberg (Huntington Folk Music Society)



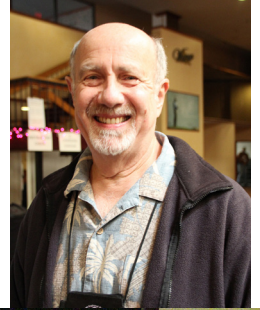
L-R: Agent Michelle Fortier, musicians Loretta Hagen (with Luca, her dog) and Meg Braun

## Community



Above, musician Mark Allen Berube breaks out a sly grin at the welcoming cocktail party, and at right, snuggles with his wife, musician Carolann Solebello

Photographer Jake Jacobsen has taken so many pictures of me that I couldn't resist asking him to pose for one of mine.

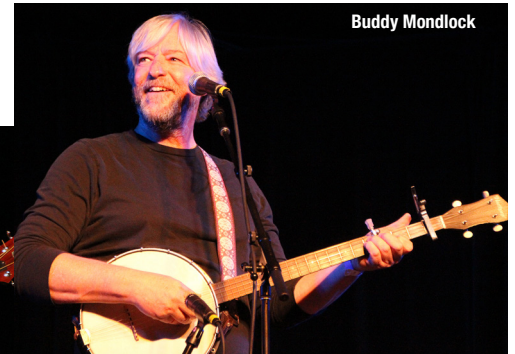


The Boxcar Lilies

## Formal Showcases



Natalia Zukerman



Buddy Mondlock



Brooks Williams

## Quad Showcases



Robby Hecht got some help with his quad set. That's BettySoo far left and Amy Speace, third from left.



# Guerrilla Showcases

Acoustic Live

- Presents
- Friday
- 11:30 Suzie Brown
  - 11:45 Natalia Zukerman
  - 12:00 Hanna & Maggie
  - 12:15 Rebecca Pronsky
  - 12:30 Brooks Williams
  - 12:45 Woolf & Grant
  - 1:00 Beth DeSombre
  - 1:15 Heather Pierson
  - 1:30 Spuyten Duyvil
  - 1:45 Jory Nash
  - 2:00 Carrie Ferguson
  - 2:15 Sarah Cribben-Merrill
  - 2:30 Phil Henry
  - 2:45 Aaron Nathans
  - 3:00 Mark Allen Berube
  - 3:15 Heather Styka
  - 3:30 Sharon Goldman
  - 3:45 Ben Rabb
- Saturday
- 11:30 Darryl Purpose
  - 11:45 Jeremiah Birnbaum
  - 12:00 Bobtown
  - 12:15 The Levins

Amanda Percy



Suzie Brown



Melissa Greener



Miles to Dayton



Musical Chairs

Hosted by THE BRAD YOPKER DUO

Fred Stesney and Katherine Etzel (Bobtown)



Katherine Etzel



Dave Ostrowski and Stephanie Marshall (The Boxcar Lilies)



Ina May Wool and Carolann Solebello



Beth Kaufman (Spuyten Duyvil)



Bernice Lewis and Jeremy Birnbaum



Jeremy Birnbaum and Mark Miller (Spuyten Duyvil)



## The Last Jam

There was a lot of exuberance in the hotel lobby at 4am Sunday for the last jam of the conference. We found it hard to tear our lens away from the flax-haired Katherine Etzel of Bobtown, but managed to capture many other blissful grins from the last-gasp communal bash.



## Scott Wolfson and the Other Heroes - *Life On Fire*

Scott Wolfson aspires to a fusion of style and musical audacity. The assembled group of musicians in the Other Heroes commits to this goal. *Life On Fire* showcases the ability of Scott and company to create an album with a diverse sound and strong lyrics throughout. The lead-off track "You Can't Break Me Again," is a buoyant honky-tonk romp. Its sly declaration, **I was born broken**, reinforces the song's title. The third track, "Memory Of A Fall," is reminiscent of Tim Hardin's classic "Reason to Believe." Scott sings softly, **If I seem to lose my way / Do you just leave me? / Do you think you'd stay?** Piano and cello add to the song's gravity. "1972" borrows stylistically from that era -- a synthesizer chortles giddily -- to create a nostalgic, sometimes comedic look backward: **Laughing at the joke, as your lungs filled up with smoke** starts a progression as the song's protagonist attempts to grow through the decade. "Brooklyn Mermaids" is a soft lament for a twice-lost love: **So don't love mermaids from Brooklyn / 'cause they're gonna be who they must be...** "Stray Dogs" joins the rave-up category, reaching the conclusion that "Everybody learns that even stray dogs find a home." *Life on Fire* rocks effortlessly and joyously and ruminates softly when it has to. We're expecting a lot of airplay for this album.

## Suzie Brown - *Almost There*

We just discovered Suzie Brown last year and we're happy to see a new release from her. We mentioned in last December's review column that her voice reminds one of Patty Griffin. Its combination of softness and edginess prompts a descriptive catch phrase to cross my mind: "velvet knife." This is almost completely an unvarnished paean to love with a capital "L." The title track, co-written with her slide guitarist Scott Sax, kicks off the album and it's just plain beautiful. A slight shift into a minor chord in the "almost there" refrain produces an ache of longing for something good to come. Suzie puts that velvet knife to good use in "Own Little Show," a mash note to the man she loves, telling him that **The price of admission / is just a little kissin'**. In other hands this would be a bit too syrupy, but she carries it off. Another co-write with Scott, "Receipt for Love," is a great little finger-popping number that automatically gets the listener's toes tapping. Showing smart respect for rock history, she covers "I'm Gonna Be a Wheel Someday," an old Fats Domino signature song. The velvet in her throat is a perfect match for this nugget from the legendary '50s "Fatman." There's a sorrow in "Fallen Down" that seems to point to the gun violence in America as it laments **blood stained ground / This time we've really fallen down**. The particularly evocative slow ballad

"Don't Know if I Dare" is brilliant. Suzie balances newfound love with fear of loss with **I think you're gonna leave me alone / I keep feeling like I'm home**. We've been waiting for a year to make a connection and have finally made arrangements to feature Suzie in our June 2014 issue. We can't wait to learn more about this exceptionally talented performer!

## Robby Hecht - *Last of the Long Days / Late Last Night*

I've admired Robby Hecht's music for a long time, but didn't actually see him until this past NERFA conference. As a former struggling singer/songwriter wannabe, I listen to Robby's albums with their great songs spooling off one after another, and I can't help but wonder: "How does he do it?" One key element seems to be his ability to create melodies, tempos and lyrics that fit his voice, an instrument of reedy perfection. "Real Someday," from *Last of the Long Days*, explores some of life's existential questions: **Hey old friend, would you come back home / I'm still here and I'm all alone / I know that you would find your way / Come back now it's all OK / and I swear we'll make it real someday**. It has a repetitive refrain toward the end, **I'm gonna be somebody**, that repeats about eight times. I've gotten aggravated with other singers who've done the same thing, but Robby's sound and his varying modulation makes it thoroughly enjoyable.

His cover of Townes Van Zant's "If I Needed You," a duet with Jill Andrews, formerly of The Everybodyfields, is exquisitely done. The title track from *Late Last Night*, is a resigned, sad goodbye: **Days will come when I'll miss you so / and I'll pray to God to have you back home / but I will not move, I'll just watch you fly away ... Spread your wings, ain't no one gonna make you stay**.

A searing anti-war indictment, "Along the Way" examines the mind of a soldier on his last day alive: **Only heaven knows where I'm goin' today / trying' to be so strong and brave / I killed a soldier for the greater good / I crossed the lines and shot him where he stood / I killed a man because they said I should / Another came and shot me in return / Screamin' at me how I was going to burn / That's the last thing that I ever learned / along the way**.

A Nashville writer, many of Robby's cache of songs on these two albums sound like they could be or have been hits for some of the major label names. One in particular, "Losing You" has more hooks than a tackle box: **I don't want to start, no / talkin' 'bout my heart, no / Pull the pieces apart, no / No more ... I don't want to tear myself in two / I'm already losin' you**. We've already reached agreement with Robby on an *Acoustic Live* feature for March 2014, coinciding with a new CD release, so there's more material coming on this song craftsman.

## The Echo Hunters - *Fortuna Beach*

This veteran six-piece Canadian folk/rock band has 20 years experience writing and playing together and they know their way around a recording studio. *Fortuna Beach* has a layered sound that slides down the ear canal like quicksilver. On the lead-off track, "The Dark Room," overlapping slide licks with heavy reverb float on top of the vocal, strummed guitar, drums and bass. We like it. Their harmonies have been compared to CSNY. The hymn-like "Come to Me" has an especially rich sound. It starts off slowly as the lead singer gently intones: **Well, you don't know what you came for / You can't recall the plan / As you lay beside this riverbed, your face down in the sand / waiting for the word to rise up within you / you're looking for a sign to take you by storm / well, I'm not sure that's how it goes / I hope these words will take hold / when you don't know where you belong / will you come to me?** The use of cello in combination with a 12-string guitar results in a sublime piece of music. "If I Had" is a light song of devotion — **If I had something to prove, I'd prove it to you** — that showcases the band's CSNY-like harmonies. We'll be giving this album repeat listenings.

## Moors & McCumber - *Against the Grain*

This is the third album from the harmonizing multi-instrumentalist duo of James Moors and Kort McCumber. The two present a mix of folk, blues, Celtic and bluegrass. At a recent gig, they said how many instruments they play between them, but I can't recall the number. Glancing at their online bio credits, it looks to be around 20. "Love and War" is a wise choice for the lead-off track. It establishes their ability to smartly dissect societal issues as well as the well-stocked personal trove. Fiddle, cello, guitar and mandolin weave around their tight harmonies as they sing: **Everything is rosy when you have the right of way / Some will claim they're holy as they try to take your rights away / There are no hard fast rules when it comes to love and war / So you'd best know what you're after and what you're in it for**.

"It's Different Now" takes advantage of the sonority of a sighing cello as the two sing about not being able to recapture a love: **It was a bright white snow fallen down / to cover tracks that we laid down / the night before ... Why wait for this thing to come undone / mistakes were made ...** bouzouki and banjo heighten the sorrow of this beautifully sung piece.

The title track, using mostly just guitar and harmony, is a cry of quiet defiance of a tiller of land against encroachment by modern advances: **You can't take away the land / that I've built up with my own two hands / I'll take the land, I'll make a stand / against the grain again**. Moors & McCumber blend harmony and strings with precision and grace.



## Laura Marie - The Season

If my interpretation of her online photographs is accurate, this is a little woman with a very big voice. A Texas belter and folk rocker, Laura Marie pushes her voice easily over drums and electric guitar. She pulled me in immediately with catchy melodies, a husky alto and passionate lyrics. In "Dark Horse," she sings: **Maybe you're a lost cause / or maybe you're a dark horse just like me.** Even a contemplative song like "Hard Rain" can't hide the power in her vocal as she glides over a Dobro's keening wail. A somewhat abstract pondering, perhaps about an approaching emotional storm, she sings: **Sometimes waiting, sometimes not / now not to sleep, but to breathe / lying alone in the heart of what's cold and dark / searching for peace ... So don't start, baby. Don't start now / It's too late to sparrow away / Come in from the porch and lock all the doors / There's nothing to do now but pray.**

On the familiar sounding, but nevertheless lovely anthemic ballad "If You Don't Feel A Thing" Laura's voice soars: **Don't say you never ever know / The right from the wrong, the things that belong / from the things that we try to find long after / It's gone, it's gone.**

I know I'm going to enjoy using this album to drown out the drone of egocentric cellphone users on the buses and subways of New York City. Big sound or small, loud or soft ... it's just beautiful. You got me, Laura.

## Lou Dominguez - We the People

This album has a simple, homespun feel. The singing is no-frills, straightforward storytelling by a Jersey boy of Cuban heritage. Lou Dominguez's parents fled the Castro regime in the 1950s. They seem to have imparted a passion for what democracy is supposed to mean. While I was slow to warm to its low-key approach, I couldn't resist "Citizens United." This guy's been reading my mail. **There's a party on the hill, you and me we ain't invited / Citizens United / The lobbies and the super PACs are all super excited / Citizens United / They argued corporations and people are the same / Five judges rushed it through in the thick of night, rigged the game / Now money equals speech but my speech can't buy a thing / We had them on the ropes, they bought the referee and ring / Charles and David Koch are delighted / Citizens United.** As far as I'm concerned, that encapsulates the situation as good as anything I've said or read. Lou also tackles our inability to deal with our gun crisis, our imperfect justice system, veterans returning from war with post traumatic stress disorder, crazy Facebook rules and a few other current topics. His approach is simple and earnest. It can seem like preaching at times, but I find myself agreeing with him anyway. A lot of food for thought here.

## Heather Pierson - The Hard Work of Living

My first contact with Heather Pierson was her walk-on during a Brad Cole showcase at our booth at Falcon Ridge Folk Festival this summer. She played a melodica, the small wind instrument that works with a keyboard. I pegged her as a keyboardist who probably sang pop/folk/rock. Well... not quite ... not even close. She played guitar on two of three songs in her Acoustic Live guerrilla showcase (melodica on the third) and showed herself to be quite a good singer with a flair for gospel. *The Hard Work of Living* enlarges upon that observation and adds one more: she's a damn fine writer. Her songs are folkier than I expected — there's an embrace of roots — but it seems logical, coming from someone who grew up in Maine and now lives in New Hampshire. "Speak Wisely" is a blues number that sharply observes: **Well, who am I to complain / And just add to all the noise? / 'cause people will be people / And they'll use their tools like they're toys / But silence is golden and all you talk is trash / It's gonna come back around and knock you on your ass / So speak wisely or not at all.** "Let It Roll Off Your Back" is one of those gospel rave-ups that makes me wish it didn't have to end. **If people can't see things your way / Let it roll off your back / Or if you can't understand what people do / Let it roll off your back ...** The homilies in the song are basic — **Sometime you have to smile** — but the drumbeat power of repetition and the power in Heather's voice give me a thrill. We're looking forward to seeing a lot more of her.

## Spuyten Duyvil - Temptation

I find myself using the term rave-up probably more than I should. If I had to shut it down except for one musical act, this would be the one. Mark Miller has assembled one of the most kick-ass ensembles we'll get to see in the Northeast. The album leads off with a cover of "I'll Fly Away," the most recorded gospel song of all time. There's a worthy addition to the best versions. I might be sitting around having a cup of coffee at 10a.m., but if the speakers are pumping out track three, Spuyten Duyvil's version of Abbie Gardner's "Honey On My Grave," well... It's five o'clock somewhere and time for a beer ... or three. I'll probably take a Captain Lawrence IPA. Beth Kaufman handles most of the lead vocals and her voice is an exquisite bell-like clarion call. Mark's gruff and gritty vocals are a perfect counterpoint. He takes the lead vocal on the title track. I especially love that first line: **Watchin' you walk / like watchin' the last train leavin' the station tonight.** The band really runs on all cylinders on this one. Blues harp, lap steel, fiddle, drums... sheer perfection. The last track, "Everything I Am," features the silky voice of Mark and Beth's daughter, Dena Miller. There's promise here of a generational carryover on this terrific third album from Spuyten Duyvil.

## Cricket Tell The Weather - Sample EP

This is perhaps the hottest new bluegrass band in the Northeast. They were chosen as one of the 25 emerging artists to showcase at the 2013 Falcon Ridge Folk Festival. Mark Miller of Spuyten Duyvil asked them, on the spot, to join the bands playing at his pig roast festival at Urban H2O in Yonkers, N.Y., one week after Falcon Ridge. The band is working on their debut nine-song album scheduled for a December 2013 release. For anyone who doesn't have a copy of the sample, there are six songs available for listening on their website, [crickettellttheweather.com](http://crickettellttheweather.com), under the tab "music." The one song on the sample that isn't on the website is "Embers from Afar" (judging by the refrain — there are no titles on the sample). It really cooks and we're eager for the album release to make it available to everyone. Fiddler Andrea Asprelli handles much of the lead vocal work and her voice is smooth and sweet. She sings the first track on the sample, "Remington." **On a day in 1816, he said, that rifle's mighty fine / but I can make one better than you, better than you can buy.** The lead line mirrors an online quote that "Eliphalet Remington II believed he could build a better gun than he could buy." While the song lyrics don't exactly match the online *Wikipedia* account of how Remington Arms developed, it's a great song and well played (however, since it got an award from the city of Bridgeport, Conn., where Remington Arms had a factory, their research might just have eclipsed mine). All four songs are a harbinger of great things to come for these five fine musicians.

## Amanda Percy - Royal Street

Amanda Percy's set in our Saturday guerrilla showcase at NERFA was so powerful that I said she was "a female version of Steve Earle." It was partially the Texas connection and the gravity of her performance but I'll stand by that statement. She might lean a little harder on the romance than Earle, but there's a hardscrabble grittiness to her that's irresistible. Her song "The Story Of My Heart" might just be illustrative of that: **The story of my heart / Is so much more than a photo in a locket / Shot of whiskey / Pool stick chalk / Eight ball in the corner pocket ... I ain't where I oughta be, baby / Take me anywhere.** A song of leaving, "Unbind," with its shimmering sadness, shows some of that grit: **In a truck of bad luck antique furniture / she'll cross her heart and pray for a kind future / Ramblin' right on past that hill top grave / she'll say a little prayer, blow a kiss, and wave / Goodbye to her love, so young, so brave / Sad memories, like ivy vines / they don't easily unbind.**

If Amanda takes a break from Austin to visit New York City, we'll do our best to give her a warm welcome.