



## The Record

### Showcasing fine folk

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Friday, April 23, 2004

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STAFF WRITER

The Lentil Soup Boys are getting together again. So is Tony Trischka and Skyline.

From every cabin and hollow, every bayou and mountain pass - not to mention one or two exits of the New Jersey Turnpike - folk musicians are flocking to New Brunswick to help celebrate the 30th anniversary of the New Jersey Folk Festival.

They're even coming from as far yonder as Bergen County, the haunts of "innovative bluegrass" banjo player Trischka.

"It's important to keep this music alive," says Trischka, headliner of this year's festival.

Trischka and his band Skyline were well-known on the folk circuit in the 1980s. Though they broke up in 1990, Trischka is getting back together with his old mates - Danny Weiss on guitar, Barry Mitterhoff on mandolin, and Larry Cohen on bass - for this occasion. They'll be on at 1:25 p.m.

That's one of several reunions that festival founder and director Angus Kress Gillespie has engineered to celebrate three decades of picking, strumming, yodeling, bagpiping, and clog-dancing on the grassy slope of the Eagleton Institute in New Brunswick.

The Lentil Soup Boys, who played that first festival in 1975, are getting together again, too - despite the fact that the members of this "eclectic folk" trio are spread among three states.

**WHAT:** 30th annual  
New Jersey Folk Festival.

**WHEN:** 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.  
Saturday, rain or shine.

**WHERE:** Eagleton  
Institute grounds,  
Douglass Campus,  
Rutgers University, New  
Brunswick. (732) 932-5775;  
[njfolkfest.rutgers.com](http://njfolkfest.rutgers.com).

**HOW MUCH:** Free.

“Our main mission is to showcase New Jersey talent-bearers,” Gillespie says. “These are the people who learned their music or their art in the family, passed it along father to son and mother to daughter, on the front porch or in the living room. This is homemade music.”

Of course, not everyone learns that way. Trischka, for instance, didn’t learn a lick of banjo from his family.

“Who can say why certain music resonates with certain people?” Trischka asks. “I grew up listening to classical, jazz, show music, some folk. Then I heard this bluegrass banjo [on a Kingston Trio record] and suddenly got completely hooked on bluegrass. The next thing you know, I’m taking all-night bus trips to Boston to see Bill Monroe.”

Among other headliners this year: the Lumzy Sisters (gospel), the Kvellers (klezmer), Jim Albertson (British traditional ballads), Rick Palieri (traditional folk songs), and Frank Watson (bagpipes). Ethnic dance troupes will demonstrate steps from Mexico, Lebanon, and India.

**There also will be up-and-comers for whom the festival could be a big break. For instance, folk singer-songwriter Cynthia Summers from Glen Rock. She’ll be on at 3:30 p.m.**

**“This is really an exciting opportunity,” Summers says. “The festival attracts a lot of people who are really interested in this kind of music, who are not as easy to find as you might hope.”**

To be exact, it should attract 10,000 to 15,000 - almost twice as many as when the festival was launched 30 years ago by Gillespie, an American studies professor at Rutgers.

“It’s grown organically, until we’ve attracted very large crowds,” Gillespie says. “The first year, there was only one stage. Now there are four continuous stages of music.” Music is just one of the day’s attractions. There also will be 80 crafts booths featuring such masters as Harry V. Shourds, champion decoy duck carver from South Jersey, and the Briar Rose Woolspinners, who create homemade cloth from their own sheep. There also will be some 20 food booths vending everything from Sno-Cones to steak sandwiches.

It’s the fees from the booth rentals - \$130 for the craft booths, \$600 for the food booths - that enable the free-admission festival to be self-sustaining, Gillespie explains. “Because from the start we’ve really had two sources of revenue, food booths and craft booths, we really haven’t been dependent on state grants or federal grants,” Gillespie says.

Those proceeds have enabled Gillespie and his staff to hire top-name talent over the years: Cherish the Ladies, John Herald, Sonny Rhodes, Elaine Silver, the Bread & Puppet Theater, and many others.

But the smaller performers - the farmer who learned to play mandolin from his grandfather and now plays in public twice a year - are closest to Gillespie's heart. "This is part of our heritage, and it's worth preserving," Gillespie says. "One of the best ways of preserving it is to showcase it - to give the musical tradition-bearer some of the same mechanisms that are afforded to pop culture performers, like proper sound, publicity, and an audience. They can come here, get the accolades of the audience, and come away with the reassurance that what they're doing is worthwhile."

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