

Virginia folk

Traditional music, culture star at Richmond festival

By Peter Krause
THE BALTIMORE SUN

Old will be new again this weekend at the annual Richmond Folk Festival.

Now in its third year, the festival casts a contemporary light on traditional folk culture through live music, dance, arts and food. Artists, dancers and more than 30 musicians will be on hand to showcase a heritage that brings communities together through common regions, religions and artistic expression. More than 100,000 attended last year's event.

"We don't focus so much on getting a few big names as much as getting together the best folk artists in the region, if not the world," said Joshua Kohn, programming manager for the National Council for the Traditional Arts, which organizes the festival.

American folk artists from across the country will perform bluegrass, rock, blues, salsa, gospel and more. Many such as internationally known banjo player Ron Short and acoustic blues singer Nat Rasse, hail from the coalfields and mountains of Virginia. Some local musicians, like Dale Jett and Heilo Stranger, carry on their families' heritage of performing folk music in Virginia.

Other performers, such as Louisiana's Bonspir, Catin, Texas Los Texmaniacs and the California-based Peter Rowan Bluegrass Band, will bring the richness of their musical heritage to Virginia.

International folk artists include Norwegian fiddler Benedicte Manseth, Haitian dance duo Boukman Eksperyans and Iranian percussionists Ensemble Shanshadah.

A few of the specialty artists taking the stage are the Northern Neck Chantey Singers, an African-American call-and-response group, and Capoeira Laanda, a Brazilian-style dance and martial arts ensemble.

The folk festival also includes a documentary film series. This year, the focus is on several American cultural communities: Tex-Mex conjunto, Brazilian capoeira, and Virginian watermen and coal miners. Six films will be shown Saturday and one Sunday.

Festivalgoers looking for a break from the concert crowds will have an opportunity to purchase artwork, crafts, jewelry



SKIP HOWLAND PHOTO

The three-day Richmond Folk Festival this weekend features music, dancing, arts and food from different cultures.

environmentally friendly items, handmade soaps and more from the marketplace. The Virginia Folklife Area, curated by the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities and sponsored by Richmond CenterStage, will feature various crafts from the Northern Neck, Middle Peninsula, Tidewater and Eastern Shore regions of Virginia. Traditional boat building, decoy carving, net mending and sail-making will be highlighted.

The Genworth Financial Family Area will include an interactive exotic bird tent, exhibitions of 19th-century games, yo-yo demonstrations, a mock open-air market for children and a hands-on sculpture project. With guidance from local artists, children will have the opportunity to add to a large wooden windmill sculpture throughout the weekend.

If you go

The Richmond Folk Festival is 6 p.m.-10:30 p.m. today, noon-10:30 p.m. Saturday and noon-6 p.m. Sunday. Admission is free, but donations are suggested.

Getting there
Richmond, Va., is about a three-hour drive from the Baltimore area. For lodging and other accommodations, go to the festival's website, richmondfolkfestival.org. The website also has a full list of performers and a downloadable map of the festival grounds. Free parking and shuttles to the festival area are available from Spring Rock


Ethnic food from 30 different eateries will be available at the festival. Expect items including burgers, seafood and onion rings, samosas, jambalaya, gyros and

even alligator.
Green, 7202 Midlothian Turnpike in Richmond, and the Diamond baseball stadium, 3001 North Blvd. in Richmond. Shuttles will leave every 15 minutes and stop at two festival locations downtown. For more information call the shuttle hot line at 804-358-4782.

Parking will also be available in the downtown festival area for \$5.

Information
Call the Richmond Folk Festival Office between 8:30 a.m. and 5 p.m. at 804-798-6466 or go to richmondfolkfestival.org.

"The festival has awesome energy," Kohn said. "The audience knows to be surprised."

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