

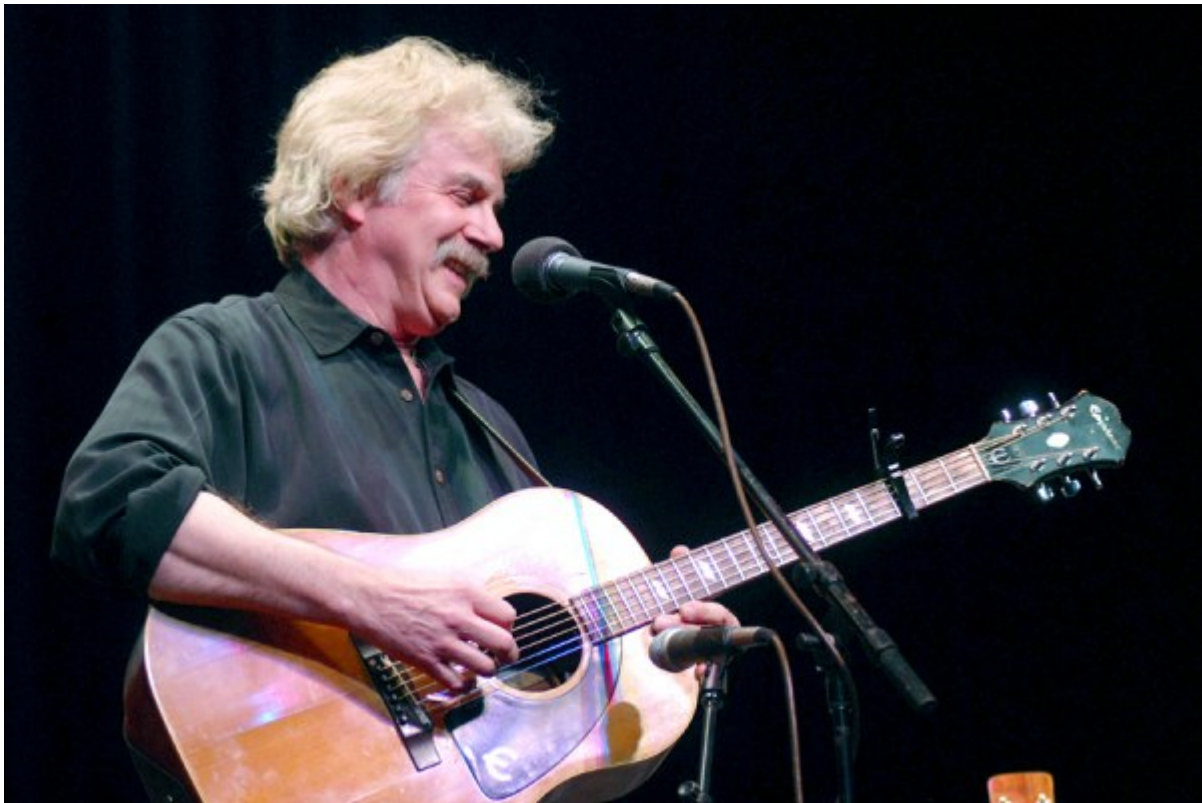
New Bedford Folk Festival combines world-class talent, food, and vendors, in one of New England's most popular annual events, July 7 & 8

By Sean McCarthy.

If you ask anyone who has experienced the New Bedford Folk Festival why they return they will likely give the same reason.

“The magic.”

The New Bedford Folk Festival isn't just a group of individual concerts – a majority of the performances take place in events called “workshops” where artists are paired together for spontaneous jam sessions, creating music based upon pre-established themes. These performances are referred to as “the place where the magic happens,” resulting in unique once-in-a-lifetime performances.



Produced and presented by the Zeiterion Performing Arts Center since 2016, The New Bedford Folk Festival has become a mammoth event. The Zeiterion was approached by the city to keep the festival alive upon the retirement of its founders, Alan and Helene Korolenko, who are now the Artistic Directors, booking all of the entertainment for the event. The festival has become an opportunity to not only discover a new performer but an entirely new genre, an opportunity to enjoy a gourmet food court and beer garden and browse through a six-block marketplace of varied vendors, an opportunity that the Boston Globe has described as one of “New England’s Greatest Celebrations.”

Saturday, July 7, and Sunday, July 8, an 11-block section of historic downtown New Bedford and the Whaling National Historic District will be transformed into a city within a city with the sounds, sights and smells that can only come with summertime.

There are a variety of ticket options. A Premium Pass that costs \$125 includes two full days of exceptional music, a Premium Pass lanyard, a 2018 New Bedford Folk Festival t-

shirt, access to a fully air-conditioned lounge with private restrooms, guaranteed priority seating at all Zeiterion Theatre and Whaling Museum performances, and discounts at several of the food vendors in the Food Court and Beer Garden.

A weekend pass is \$30 and a single day pass is \$22.50. Children under 12 are admitted free. Each day will entertain from 11 a.m. to 9 p.m.



People throughout America look forward to the New Bedford Folk Festival, which, in the past 23 years, has established itself as one of New England's most popular and respected music festivals. It is an opportunity for musicians to showcase their skills in a setting that every player longs for – an appreciative audience in an alluring setting.

So when the streets of downtown New Bedford teem with music fans the New Bedford Folk Festival will again fill its stages with their established recipe – storied world-class performers juxtaposed with fresh new talent keeping visitors enticed with the diverse opportunities available within the folk music world.

Pete Kennedy knows the magic well. He will perform at the festival with his wife Maura for the 15th time.

“The audience expects the unexpected and that prompts the performers to come up with fresh creative ideas that they might not do in a typical show,” he says. “The audience loves to see something that’s only going to happen once, it’s something that makes it different from other festivals – you get a lot of performers who have never played together before. You’re playing with someone you don’t know with no rehearsal but it opens the door for great things to happen that you couldn’t have done yourself. The audience can sense the musician’s excitement.”



“A lot of thought goes into who is going to be matched together, it’s a nice challenge,” says John Gorka, a nationally-renown singer/songwriter who will be playing at the festival for the eighth time. “The workshops always pair people together from different genres that you wouldn’t expect otherwise. It’s something that takes you out of your comfort zone but it always seems to work.”

“The workshops are a chance for musicians to do things they

wouldn't ordinarily do onstage," says Alan Korolenko. "The musicians inspire each other with the unpredictability and uniqueness, it's not very structured so they can have some fun. We'll get about 25 workshops this year with musicians who are flexible and aren't bound to just doing their own songs. Our workshops are central to the festival. They take the theme that I give them and they go with it."

"The interaction factor is much higher in New Bedford than any other playing situation," Kennedy says. "The actual concept of the festival is for the musicians to play together whether they know each other or not, and that makes it completely unique, it all happens right there onstage."

"It's all about the spontaneity."

As always the festival will present homerun performances by artists with international followings including the legendary Tom Rush, Gorka and Cheryl Wheeler.



"I saw Tom Rush at the Zeiterion Theatre a couple of years ago and it was the best hour-long performance I've ever seen in my

life,” says Art Tebbetts, host of the festival’s Main Stage and a 23-year veteran of the event. “It was just him and his guitar and he was brilliant and funny with a great voice. He told stories like it was the first time he’d ever told them. He made you feel like you were part of the process of him discovering this humor for the first time, he’s such a consummate performer.”

When Tebbetts talks about the seasoned songwriters at the festival he highlights the diversity of the performances.

“A good songwriter can hold an audience in the palm of their hand,” he says. “They can control the emotions of their audience, making you go one way or back another way. They’ll take you through all the different parts that go into a good performance – they can make you laugh with one song and break your heart with the next.”

Tebbetts mentions the wide ranging approaches of Gorka and Wheeler.

“John has a great way with an audience, he’s got a gentle demeanor that people love. He’s got a wonderful sense of humor but he also writes great ballads. You can tell that he cares about what he’s doing and works hard at it, and people admire him for that.

“Cheryl Wheeler is funny and witty and speaks her mind about what’s going on in the public discourse. She comes at her music from many different angles and she writes some beautiful songs. She’s fascinating to watch.”



Gorka claims that performers look forward to playing the festival for multiple reasons.

“One of the things that sets it apart from other places is the sense of history,” he says. “It’s unique to have music rooted in history being played in a historical setting. It also attracts people who are really there to listen to the music, they’re knowledgeable music fans. They come from all over the country and it’s nice to know you’re reaching new people. If you’ve played New Bedford before you look forward to returning.”

“We try to have at least a dozen performers or groups that haven’t been to the festival before,” Korolenko says. “We’re looking for something exciting, somebody that can take the stage and grab the attention of the audience.”

“There’s always someone who catches your ear that you’ve never heard before,” Gorka says.

And it’s also important for the festival to present a variety of genres under the folk umbrella. With more than 100 performers on eight stages, the festival will include

traditional, bluegrass, singer/songwriter, Americana, blues, Celtic and more.

Grace Morrisson, a singer/songwriter from Wareham, will be playing the festival for the fifth time.

“This event isn’t a folk concert in the traditional sense,” she says. “The event embraces a wide variety of what the term ‘folk’ means. It’s got everything from traditional to modern, something for everybody. As a performer seeing such a variety of music is a learning experience, and the fans are very engaged in a way you can’t find at most venues.”



The festival will also include non-ticket areas available to the public. The Food Court and Beer Garden will span two blocks on Purchase St. in front of the Zeiterion Theatre, offering a variety of food vendors and a full bar while the sounds of local musicians will be coming from the nearby South Coast Stage.

Food vendors will include the Seafood Hut, Acushnet Creamery,

Dorothy Cox's Candies serving Del's Lemonade, Fancheezical, Timi's Greek and Middle Eastern Food, Wicked Good Kettle Corn, Big T's Jerky, Teddy's Lunchbox and Wursthau III.

Local musicians will include The Jethros, Seamus Galligan, Chuck Williams, Fourteen Strings and others.

Other public offerings include The Family Music and Activities Park at Wings Court, featuring performances in family concerts, music sessions, sing-a-longs and hands-on activities. The festival also includes a major juried arts-and-crafts show featuring more than 80 artisans and craft makers lining the cobblestone streets between the performance tents and venues. They will include jewelers, instrument makers, tie dyers, local honey purveyors, ceramic artists and more, representing a rich culture of handmade wares from the South Coast and beyond.

"The sense of community is awesome," Morrisson says of the event. "I've made a lot of friends over the years, not just musicians but vendors and audience members. The attitude is all about community and helping each other, they lift everybody up. From the top down people are very selfless."