

**A State of Mind: The Falcon Ridge Folk Festival**

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From that humble beginning [in 1988], the festival soon acquired a life of its own. It was not just a physical event, but a state of mind and of spirit that you could go back to again and again whenever needed, whenever the grind of workaday obligations and stresses called for it. Many long time attendees say the physical act of attending each year is a recharging of the creative and spiritual batteries for them. And that Falcon Ridge is much like the mythical kingdom of Brigadoon, a place of light, love and magic that exists for one weekend each year. It appears, it unfolds, happens and then recedes into the mists with the certainty of next July's reappearance.

- Anne Saunders, Artistic Director, Falcon Ridge Folk Festival

## **PREFACE**

If there is such a thing as a “neutral” ethnography, this is most certainly not it. In the spring of 2003, as a young musician and freshman at Harvard University, I was searching for who I was and what I was going to do with my life. Having recently quit playing drumset after ten years of focused practice, I had found an outlet in my songwriting. I explored my ideas on the guitar I’d learned to play just two years earlier, when I was a high school junior in Missoula, Montana.

I went to my first open mic (a musical gathering at which several performers, some amateur, some professional, sign up for a chance to appear on stage to sing one or two songs) at Cambridge’s famed Club Passim on the suggestion of Mieka Pauley, a Harvard College graduate who had launched a successful professional career. One Tuesday night led to another Tuesday night, and what began as tentative exploration became a passion, a family, and ultimately, the central axis of my life. I had found the folk music community.

Just over a year after that, I attended my first Falcon Ridge Folk Festival during the summer of 2004. Living, working, and playing with fellow members of the folk community for four days straight heightened the “family” experience of the year I had already spent frequenting folk clubs and other singer-songwriter events. When I woke up on Monday in my on-campus housing after my return from Falcon Ridge, I felt a bit like Dorothy, just come back from the Land of Oz. Although the physical Falcon Ridge was gone, at least until next year, I sensed my newfound membership in something more permanent, if more elusive. My individual journey in music had become inseparable from the larger community of which it was now a part.

This study of Falcon Ridge then, is the testimony of an interested participant. I write about *my* community, from my own position in the folk web outwards. Those in my immediate circle – the volunteer crew with whom I worked, musicians I work with or know well, presenters who have hired me - appear a bit closer than those I know only as fellow Falcon Ridge attendees. I write from the perspective of someone whose life has been profoundly transformed – for the better – by the event and community that is Falcon Ridge. Naturally, the phenomenon is cast in a positive (though, I hope, not uncritical) light. I also have financial ties to Falcon Ridge: music is something I now pursue as a career, and the many radio hosts, concert presenters, agents, and journalists who attend Falcon Ridge impact the success of my endeavor. Interactions I had in the course of conducting this ethnography would be difficult to completely separate from “doing business.” I should add that my primary means of rendering the world around me is as a songwriter. This cannot help but affect the way in which I observe and report on my surroundings. Because Falcon Ridge unexpectedly moved after the 2005 event, this ethnography has also become somewhat of a commemoration of the 15 years spent at Long Hill Farm.

My project does not create a new social exchange from which to tell a story, as do the monographs of “outside researchers.” Instead, this is a story from within the existing fabric, the testimony of one thread among many that are woven together to create Falcon Ridge. There are many stories like mine to be found among the men and women who gather on a farm in the Berkshires for four days each July. These are the ones I have heard, the ones I tell.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my thesis advisor at Harvard, Professor Kay Kaufman Shelemay, whose scholarship inspired me to explore the field of ethnomusicology, and whose patient guidance shepherded me through two years of work on this project. I would also like to thank my mentors in Folklore and Mythology, Chair Stephen Mitchell and Head Tutor Deborah Foster.

This thesis draws on the collective knowledge and expertise of hundreds of informants throughout the folk music world. I would especially like to thank Falcon Ridge Folk Festival Director Anne Saunders, Neale Eckstein, Jake Jacobson, and Alan Rowoth, all of whom read early drafts of this work and helped me correct my rookie mistakes. I am also very grateful to Neale Eckstein for providing the photos, and to Jake Jacobson for welcoming me into the Circle of Friends Camp.

Many fellow Falcon Ridge community members offered invaluable assistance of a more practical nature. Pete Urbaitis, my volunteer crew chief, showed me the ropes at Performer Liason in 2005, and Rick Kelly and Carole Metsger welcomed me as part of their crew at the Performer Merchandise Tent in 2004. Jake Jacobson gave me a ride and helped me set up my tent in 2005. Jim Gottlieb drove me out to Long Hill Farm from Boston in 2004. I borrowed many fleeces and blankets in the wee hours of the morning, while singing, playing, and listening at various song circles.

Finally, I would like to thank all my teachers, formal and informal, musical and academic, for encouraging me when I didn't "get it" on the first try, and for pushing me to keep searching when I thought I already had the answers.

## INTRODUCTION

When word got out at the 2005 Falcon Ridge Folk Festival (FRFF) that Long Hill Farm, fifteen years the festival's host, was being sold, buttons immediately appeared declaring: "Falcon Ridge is a State of Mind." Though the festival soon found a replacement site just seven miles down the road, the response of the Falcon Ridge community to the land sale revealed a much deeper truth about the folk festival: "folk" music, now as ever, is about community-based creations. Those communities, however, don't need to be geographical or political *physical* "states" that draw on a common history or ethnicity. Falcon Ridge is the creation of those who share the folk music ideal. It is a state of mind.

A traditional folk music scholar would be frustrated in attempting to taxonomize FRFF. It would be ludicrous to label the festival's offerings "folk music of the Berkshires region," although the festival appears in the same location each year, involving several regulars from the area. Primarily a venue for singer-songwriters, FRFF incorporates musical influences from southern blues to reggae to shape note. The strongest common element is undoubtedly American pop music, in the broadest sense of the term. Perhaps a case could be made that what FRFF presents is not a regional folk music but an *American* folk form – the "singer/songwriter genre." But the musicians involved certainly don't stop at the United States border when tracing their artistic roots.

Festival attendees have often struggled with the definition of "folk" – not merely as a matter of semantics, but in what are often very heated, concrete discussions about the way in which such festivals should be programmed: who should be booked and why.

Folk purists generally feel that booking decisions should be based on some set of guidelines related to instrumentation or traceable “roots” of a songwriter’s music. Such purists are continually frustrated in attempting to construct a coherent picture of the “folk” music that is programmed at FRFF. How does one reconcile the music of Bjork-influenced Brown graduate and electric guitar-toting singer/songwriter Erin McKeown with that of New York-based trad string band Crooked Still?<sup>1</sup>

This very dilemma has led many to conclude that FRFF is *not* folk and that, like many contemporary singer/songwriter festivals, it simply hangs onto a moniker that no longer applies. More than one frustrated folkie has griped that several FRFF artists are just pop musicians with acoustic guitars and a few token fiddles.

The error in this conclusion lies, I believe, in the application of the adjective “folk” to a decontextualized notion of the music, rather than to a holistic picture of the music as it is presented at the festival. What unifies the music of FRFF, as well as the community and the operations of the festival (which are much more wide-ranging than what occurs on the mainstage) is the *folk music ideal*, a shared (though debated) set of beliefs that finds its expression both musically and extra-musically in the day-to-day goings-on at FRFF.

### **Realizing The Folk Music Ideal**

First of all, FRFF is not only a state of *mind*. It is truly a *state* of mind. It has its own currency. Falcon Ridge bucks, the only currency accepted by the food vendors, can be saved and used in following years, a constant reminder that Brigadoon is indeed real and will return. It has its own named streets, dedicated to heroes of the community, dead

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<sup>1</sup> In his 2005 Harvard University Ph. D. dissertation, “Hidden Traditions: Conceptualizing Swedish Folk Music in the Twentieth Century,” David Kaminsky discusses a similar definitional challenge faced by members of the Swedish Folk Music community.



and living, just as conventional roadways are named for American Presidents. (Dave Carter Way honors a highly-respected songwriter who died suddenly of a heart attack just days before the 2002 festival.) Like any town, it has its own understood social geography, including named campsites that set up in the same place each year, often with large flags or other identifying markers. The camps on the hill are the place to find music late at night, and the ones on the far left host the most prestigious song circles. The hill is also where you'll find Camp Dar, home base for diehard fans of Dar Williams who frequently travel from as far away as California and Florida. The flats are for campers who want to sleep at night, with the area closest to the stages reserved for volunteers. Run primarily by an astoundingly large army of volunteer staff, FRFF is divided into several command groups, not unlike a government. Performer Merchandise Sales (PMS), Site Crew, Kitchen Crew, and their brethren all have their own famous (or infamous) leaders, crew culture, and in some cases, even their own songs.

Breaking from the state model, however, is the nature of community membership. Very few FRFF attendees are community members by default or cultural inheritance. Though some of the younger festival-goers were introduced to the folk community by their parents, the vast majority of the participants became part of the community through some sort of “conversion” moment like mine.<sup>2</sup> Membership is perceived as an individual choice, often a critical one, and as a result, several attendees have a significant stake in both the folk music ideal and its expression. Whereas many studies of musical communities investigate the music made by a pre-existing community, proceeding according to research questions such as “what are third generation Japanese-Americans

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<sup>2</sup> Described in the Preface

listening to or playing,”<sup>3</sup> this study of FRFF differs in that the community is created and defined by the music. Individually *chosen* membership as a participant in FRFF and the larger folk music scene is what ties its attendees together.

Before distancing FRFF completely from musical communities defined in ethnic or geographic terms by either their participants or those who study them, it must be mentioned that the FRFF community demographics do not mirror those of general American society. Festival-goers are acutely aware of (and generally disappointed in) the lack of racial diversity. As Vance Gilbert, one of the lone African-American performers noted bluntly at his workshop, “Black people don’t listen to folk music. They see an acoustic guitar, and it’s a rope. Seriously people: it’s country music, and it’s something black people don’t have access to.” Despite the multiculturalist hopes of many in the folk music community, the music itself continues to rely largely on traditions perceived (particularly by nonwhites) as white. A secondary concern among folk music enthusiasts is the lack of diversity in age at most singer-songwriter events. Falcon Ridge proves somewhat of an exception in this regard. Though middle-aged attendees still form a strong plurality, several children, young adults and grandparents also attend. As the festival is accessible only by car and publicized through media such as public radio, it is unsurprising that well-educated, middle class attendees form the majority of the paying audience. However, as with age diversity, economic diversity seems to be stronger at Falcon Ridge than at several similar events. As FRFF Artistic Director Anne Saunders said of the volunteer demographic, “we have everything from high school dropouts to MDs and PhD’s.” The income level of the volunteers is somewhat deceptive – although

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<sup>3</sup> Asai, Susan M. 1997. “Sansei Voices in the Community: Japanese American Musicians in California.” *Musics of Multicultural America: A Study of Twelve Musical Communities*. Eds. Kip Lornell and Anne K. Rasmussen. New York: Schirmer Books, 257-86.

many volunteers exchange their labor for free admission because they have little expendable income, few come from real poverty. Typically from middle-class backgrounds, these volunteers are usually starving college students, starving artists, or just hippies working poorly paid nonprofit jobs. The contrast between the heterogeneity valued by the folk music ideal and the homogenous reality evident in the sea of faces at FRFF is a source of great discomfort, frustration, confusion, and humor among the community.

I will describe the festival and its attendees more fully in subsequent chapters. This cursory description, however, should suffice to clarify that the ideals and idealism central to FRFF, while never perfectly realized, are not pipe dreams. As a well-developed “state” into which “citizens” opt in, FRFF is not just summer camp for a bunch of delusional, idealistic folk music enthusiasts (folkies). The festival is an efficiently-run, significant business operation involving thousands of people: 8,000 to 12,000 attendees each day, 4,500 campers, and just shy of 1,000 volunteers. For Anne Saunders, who oversees the FRFF office year-round, the festival is a full-time job. Other FRFF participants are involved with the folk music community to varying degrees during the rest of the year, gathering in coffeehouses and at other festivals, on email list-servs and over radio airwaves, often sustaining the “state of mind” in the midst of more immediate realities of day jobs and “real life.” For these four days, however, the folk music ideal could not be more concrete.

Indeed the real-ness of FRFF is at the crux of its symbolic power. The common goal of those who attend is to make the folk music *ideal* - a vision of shared power and creation, uninhibited personal expression, and general acceptance and love - *real* through

a successful music festival. Given the strong anti-commercial, anti-regimentation components of the familiar sixties folk music ideal, converting this worldview into a viable business plan is no easy feat. However, contemporary “folkies,” no longer part of a nationally-visible social movement, are well-aware that they have a tough job in competing with the mainstream music business for fans. FRFF feels real for four days because it truly does create *real* careers for several of its featured musicians, many of whom spend twelve months a year on the road playing to the folk music audiences who gather at such festivals.

The impossibility, of course, is finding the right way to come to a concrete realization of this folk music ideal upon which everyone can agree. If community members disagree about the ideal itself, they most certainly disagree about the right way to live it out. Many, for example, feel that the prestigious “left side of the hill” campsites hosting invitation-only showcases (where emerging artists can be heard by venue presenters) flout the everybody-join-in, “true” spirit of folk music. Others applaud these showcases for helping jumpstart careers and build national networks, making folk music stronger and more commercially viable. Lively argument over such issues makes FRFF’s identity as an ideological “state of mind” community unquestionably evident. If the folk music ideal wasn’t *the* important factor at the festival, people wouldn’t argue about it so vehemently. To bring the point home, you might hear attendees at a classical festival debating the interpretation of a particular sonata, perhaps decrying a contemporary interpretation. In contrast, die-hard Falcon-Ridge-goers seldom argue very passionately about technical points of the music, but engage in endless discussion about the

community, contributing to a year-round dialogue that spills over onto several email listservs.

Further proof of FRFF's status as an ideological community is the near-oxymoronic status of the mainstage. Listening to the music being played on the mainstage is most certainly not the primary focus of the festival.<sup>4</sup> Particularly when talking to those who are regular attendees or who are involved in the festival beyond just attending, it becomes readily apparent that their festival experience centers around other axes: their camp, their volunteer crew, or their experience playing music late at night after the official performances are over. This is not to say that the programmed music is not an important part of the festival. It is - but not for its own ends. Music on the mainstage is one means among many through which the festival community unites, defines, and expresses itself.

### **What is the Folk Music Ideal, and How is it Expressed Through Falcon Ridge?**

What I term the *folk music ideal* is the belief that individuals should be able to fully realize their own unique expressive potential, that this realization will benefit both the individual and the community, and that the resulting community should be a peaceful place of sharing, acceptance, and non-violence, in which flexibility and understanding eliminate power struggles and distinctions between haves and have-nots. I have met very few individuals involved in contemporary folk music who do not articulate some form of this ideal when describing their reasons for participating in this musical community. Because the folk music ideal is a dialectic and contested concept, it would be difficult to designate any one iteration (including my own) as a definitive statement of

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<sup>4</sup> For a hilarious, if slightly overstated take on this phenomenon, see Angus Gillespie's "Folk Festival and Festival Folk in Twentieth-Century America" in the 1987 volume *Time Out of Time: Essays on the Festival*.

its meaning. Each of the interview excerpts in the appendix could be considered an alternative formulation. My approach to defining the folk music ideal shares much in common with Scott Alarik's approach to defining folk music. After years of trying to formulate a precise definition during his work as a journalist, Alarik wrote in his 2003 book, *Deep Community*, that "Folk music is simply the most useful term I have found to describe the entire genre as it exists today: it is almost universally understood as a description of the kind of music presented in this book, and found on the stages of coffeehouses and folk festivals throughout the world." In short, folk music is what the folk music community understands it to be. So too, the folk music ideal is what the folk music community understands it to be.

The most salient origins of this ideal, particularly in reference to the FRFF community, are the major social movements of the sixties: Civil Rights, Anti-Vietnam War, and, to some extent, the Women's Liberation, Gay Rights, and Environmental Movements that followed. These social movements both fed and were fed by the mid-century folk music revival (Pete Seeger, Joan Baez, Bob Dylan), and helped give birth to the modern folk festival (Woodstock). In highlighting this historical moment, I do not mean to suggest that the sixties brought the first *expression* of the folk music ideal. Such an assertion would erroneously discount such familiar figures as Woody Guthrie and Alan Lomax, among others. However, the sixties marked the first major social movement based on these ideals – and it was this era that brought together the core group of current FRFF attendees.

It is interesting to note that the folk music ideal draws heavily from larger political and social movements, as well as a certain brand of nationalism. (Think of

Guthrie's "This Land is Your Land.") The folk music ideal could easily be thought of as one type of "imaginary," a term often used by anthropologists and political scientists to describe the links that unify nations and societies. As I have noted, while visible markers and overt expressions of shared culture contribute to a sense of community at Falcon Ridge, these would merely be empty symbols without the "state of mind" that informs them. In a sense, Falcon Ridge attendees do "imagine" themselves into community. Many informants felt that this was shaky ground for asserting the realness and validity of what unifies them. Yet this type of community-building process, "the imaginary," has been credited as the basis for the modern nation state.<sup>5</sup>

### **The Strange Bedfellows of Songwriter and Traditional Performer**

Among the defining characteristics of folk music inherited from the revival of the sixties is the combination of traditional songs (and instrumentals) with those composed by contemporary songwriters who perform their own compositions. Along with this often awkward combination come warring camps of enthusiasts, retracing battle lines drawn both before and after Dylan "plugged in" at the Newport Folk Festival in 1965.

In the context of the folk music ideal, both the pairing itself and the resulting debate reflect the community's concern with identity. Singer-songwriter fans emphasize individual identity and individually-defined community identity (i.e. "Here's what being a Texan means to *me*"). Traditionalists often find this approach navel-gazing and look to history and enduring customs to find a more reliable source of community identity.

Both the compositions of singer-songwriters and the repertoire of traditional performers fulfill the folk music ideal as identity music. Where classical and mainstream

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<sup>5</sup> Ivy, Marilyn. 1995. *Discourses of the Vanishing: Modernity, Phantasm, Japan*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 4.

pop music, for example, both ask musicians to train themselves to reach beyond their individuality and aspire to a certain ideal, singer-songwriter and traditional music ask musicians to dig more deeply into themselves, then present an expression of identity. For traditional musicians, this identity is typically based on ethnic or national background. For singer-songwriters, identity is usually based on the basic story of who the individual is and where they are from. The 2004 FRFF program includes such descriptions as “native New Yorker,” “hailing from a small town in Northern Maine,” “born in West London and spent his early years in post war Britain surrounded by a family with wide ranging musical tastes.” Both musical forms reinforce a state of mind that values the expression of unique selves. While FRFF is primarily a singer-songwriter festival, the 2005 line-up included several “roots” artists who perform traditional material as well as their own compositions.

### **Methods**

Ethnographies of one’s own community require a redefinition of research methods from those commonly associated with social science. Research, in this case, does not mark the boundaries between scholar and subject, observer and participant, or even work and play. These boundaries have been collapsed. Research is only one way of casting a set of activities that also fit under other headings, such as “volunteering,” “performing,” “networking,” and “socializing.” An ethnography such as this one is somewhat like a form of Zen – living, but being mindful about it. As I outlined my methods for this thesis, I asked myself the question, “what part of this experience was *research*?” And yet, the more appropriate question seems to be “What part of my experience was *not* research?” An ethnographer is always working.



I attended Falcon Ridge Folk Festival for two years in a row, 2004 and 2005. I did not take a notebook the first year, but I already had this project in mind, and I was certainly more proactive than your average volunteer about initiating conversation with other festival-goers about their experiences. In 2005, I took my notebooks with me everywhere, diligently scribbling field notes about the most mundane matters, and jotting down short interviews. This made me more visible as a “researcher.” In between the 2004 and 2005 festivals, I remained heavily involved in the folk music community of which Falcon Ridge is a part. Many other community members knew I was writing a thesis, and informal interviews often occurred by serendipity (even backstage at my own shows). After a few of these conversations, I devised a simple email questionnaire, which I sent to several festival-goers who seemed interested in the project. I found many of the responses evocative and have included excerpts from several of these interviews in Appendix B.

When writing about a community, it is always tempting to oversimplify social geography and social roles. Many times, I began this work by organizing it according to a single set of groupings: a straightforward breakdown of festival social space by region or role (volunteer, performer, audience member, etc). Such a structure, however, denies the reader a more complex, multi-layered experience of social geography – the experience available to anyone who set foot on the grounds of Long Hill Farm during the fourth weekend in July. It is the unavoidable frustration of the writer that a few minutes’ experience of any ethnographic subject conveys a richness that many hours of research and analysis fail to provide. I hope to at least minimize this frustration. Rather than organizing by categories, I have chosen to write layer by layer, uncovering the

cumulative levels of community that make Falcon Ridge the strong, thickly constituted society that it is.

I begin with the bottom layer – that which is least obvious to the casual, first-time observer, but most crucial to the strength of the community structure as a whole. This foundational layer is defined by two characteristics: it exists largely outside the province of the official festival apparatus and its most active manifestations occur at night, usually very late and into the wee hours of the morning. This layer of festival experience was created just after Falcon Ridge’s initial years, when a campground was added. As the grounds have grown, the tent-based communities have grown with them, solidifying the social structure of the festival.

Layered on top of the campground space and its late night music is the official festival space. The most pervasive and deepest sub-layer of this level is the volunteer community, which incorporates a large portion of festival attendees with varying roles in the folk music world. At the surface level is the portion of the festival easily accessible in a press release: mainstage performances, some of the sidestage performances, commerce (food and craft vendors), and the concert-going experience of paying audience members not connected to the campground or volunteer communities.

The many layers of the Falcon Ridge Folk Festival’s social geography are interdependent, as the majority of festival attendees traverse most, if not all of them in their experience of the festival and its community. So as not to present these levels as isolated sub-communities, I foreground individuals as community members, and utilize my own multi-layered experience to better flesh out the way in which Falcon Ridge is lived.

As I endeavor to present a thickly-constituted, three-dimensional portrayal of social geography, I also want to avoid oversimplifying the social roles of individuals. These roles are as blurred and multi-layered as the social spaces that shape them. Asking a Falcon Ridge attendee what their roles are at the festival (as I did in my interviews), is a very poor way to answer the question. Because an academic interview is an interaction presumed to be governed by the rules of the general culture, most attendees feel compelled to answer this question on the most superficial (economic) level: how did you get your ticket? At this level, there are six principal roles: paying audience member, volunteer, performer, vendor, music professional, production team. Such roles, however, tell only a partial story. Some volunteers are basically paying audience members who pay for their tickets in work instead of cash – they are fans of the music and are donating time so they can afford to see the concerts. Like many paying audience members, these volunteers see themselves more as concert-goers than community members. Other volunteers are, in fact, music professionals – venue owners, radio deejays, and more often than not, singer-songwriters. Very often, the only way to distinguish two music business colleagues as “professional with a comp ticket” or “volunteer” is to look at their badges. This multilayered, blurred, and often confusing definition of roles within the Falcon Ridge community complicates the meaning of seemingly straightforward statements about “music businesspeople” and “volunteers” in the descriptions that follow. To help flesh this out somewhat, I have included excerpts from several interviews in the appendix, each of which paints a fuller picture of an individual’s complex weave through the festival’s social fabric.

I also open each section with overheard remarks from my two years at Falcon Ridge, which help track the inner landscape that accompanies various components of FRFF. These quotes are usually unattributed, either because I did not know who the speaker was or because the phrase was used by more than one person and has been incorporated as part of the shared folklore of the festival. Overheard remarks appear in bold typeface, while my personal observations, excerpted from my fieldnotes, appear in italics.

I begin here with a literature review of previous academic work that has informed my own thoughts, then proceed with a brief history of Falcon Ridge before describing the campground community. From there, I build the social space of the festival from the foundation upwards. Frustrating my attempt at order is the ironic pairing of mainstage and backstage, a single festival space experienced in widely varying depths depending on the network of relationships formed by any particular individual.

While drawing from earlier traditions, both musical and nonmusical, Falcon Ridge has also created several traditions of its own. I acknowledge this in my ethnography with frequent use of the present tense. Most descriptions, however, are of the 2005 event.

## **FOLK MUSIC AND FESTIVALS: A BRIEF LITERATURE REVIEW**

The explosion of interdisciplinary work in the social sciences, the advent of ethnography at home, and the academy's longstanding fascination with folk music have all left the American folk music festival curiously untouched. Very little has been written about the institution; particularly in its contemporary form, which often features singer-songwriters unaffiliated with an "ethnic" tradition. The study of the folk festival lies on the boundary between the study of festivals and the study of folk music, fields which have developed in relatively isolated trajectories, occupying privileged central space in their respective disciplinary canons, and rarely forced to engage with the emerging areas of urban and performance studies.

As Philip Bohlman points out in his 1988 retrospective, *The Study of Folk Music in the Modern World*, scholarship on folk music has been overwhelmingly conservative.<sup>6</sup> Both folklorists and ethnomusicologists have relied heavily on a bounded-culture paradigm that marginalizes original composition, urban setting, and commercial marketplace, all of which are crucial to an understanding of contemporary American folk music. For example, in a 1960 volume entitled *Folk Music in the United States*, Bruno Nettl writes that "folk music usually undergoes some very fundamental changes when it becomes part of an urban or a collegiate musical culture."<sup>7</sup> That cities or universities could have their *own* folk music which could be evaluated on its own terms, rather than as a perversion of an isolation-dependent model, was unthinkable for mid-century scholars of folk music in America. Perhaps largely because ethnomusicology's

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<sup>6</sup> xviii-xix.

<sup>7</sup> 149.

institutional life never eclipsed the area studies model, remnants of the bounded-culture paradigm were still very much a part of folk music study at the time Bohlman was writing, and remain with us today. Almost all ethnographies of folk festivals are written about those events which identify particular “ethnic” or “traditional” genres to be performed, whether the project is billed as multi- or mono-cultural.<sup>8</sup> Even Bohlman succumbs somewhat to this anti-original, anti-modern trend in the field, asserting that “folk music festivals are essentially revivalistic.”<sup>9</sup> In truth, while contemporary folk festivals reject much of *mainstream* modernity, they do not draw exclusively from the past in constructing alternatives. The internet, for example, has been widely embraced by the community that attends the FRFF.

For a scholar of contemporary American folk festivals, folklore scholarship on festivals offers another potential source of relevant theory. Alejandro Falassi’s “time out of time” model, developed as part of a broad survey of festivals in human history,<sup>10</sup> would be instantly understood and embraced by Falcon Ridge participants. Roger Abrahams and Richard Bauman’s refinement of reversal, a classic anthropological concept, also offers theoretical grounding for the ethnographic analysis of the contemporary folk festival. Through analysis of fieldwork conducted at carnival and among mummers, the authors conclude that reversal is not properly conceived of as a series of “discrete and extreme events against an analytic backdrop of unitary moral systems,” but rather as a more permanent and integral social reality.<sup>11</sup> In a more recent article on Luling, Texas’ annual Watermelon Thump, Beverly Stoeltje and Bauman

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<sup>8</sup> This point is most easily verified by simply searching under the term “folk festival” in a social science database or even the word “festival” in a music-related academic database.

<sup>9</sup> 131

<sup>10</sup> Falassi 1987.

<sup>11</sup> Abrahams and Richard Bauman 1978, 207.

conclude that festival events give forces of modernity (not revival or nostalgia) a concreteness and immediacy by framing them as public displays.<sup>12</sup> In my own ethnography, I have used the term “realizing” to refer to the process by which a community based on non-mainstream ideals becomes manifest through the lived experience of the folk festival.

However, models generated by folklore prove insufficient, due to a lack of on-the-ground contact with musical events such as Falcon Ridge. Over the past three or four decades, the field has instead generated extensive theory and criticism related to events such as the Festival of American Folklife, in which several of its scholars have participated as organizers, performers, and advisors.<sup>13</sup> This festival, which focuses on the traditional folk arts of minority groups within the United States, reflects the institutional bounded-culture orientation of folklore studies, and has existed in close dialogue with the field ever since its founding in 1967.<sup>14</sup> Focused on multi-cultural and multi-ethnic “traditional” festivals, which offer clearly defined roles for participant-scholars, folklorists have largely ignored contemporary singer-songwriter festivals, thus leaving gaping theoretical holes related to such issues as composition and commercialism.

Consequently, in this study of a contemporary folk festival, I draw on voices from both ethnomusicology and folklore, as well as the work of other theorists from related

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<sup>12</sup> “Forces of modernity, specifically differentiation and centralization, are played out in complex and revealing ways in these public enactments of community. These forces certainly represent powerful factors in the everyday life of the community, but the festival events give them a concreteness and immediacy that they do not have in daily life by making them into enactments and framing them as public displays.” Stoeltje and Bauman 1989, 170.

<sup>13</sup> Richard Bauman and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett are among those scholars who have written reflexive ethnographies about their participation in the Festival of American Folklife.

<sup>14</sup> “The festival has served as a training ground for many public sector folklorists who have subsequently moved on to other positions around the country, and the FAF format has become a model for like productions in many other locales.” Bauman and Sawin 1991, 291.

social science fields such as anthropology, linguistics, sociology, and performance studies. I also consult music writers and folk world players outside the academy, and through interviews and fieldwork, festival participants themselves. In the arena of folk music scholarship, such roles are particularly hazy. Many “folkies” have gone to universities and written their own ethnographies. An even greater number of these “informants” have read scholarly work on folk music.<sup>15</sup>

For my own “state of mind” model, I draw most heavily on Kay Kaufman Shelemay’s recent work on musical communities, moving away from ethnically and geographically-bounded associations in favor of those linked by descent, dissent, and affinity. As a community of choosing participants who position themselves in opposition to pop music and trace their heritage to the folk revival, Falcon Ridge contains elements of all three Shelemay categories. Among the academic models I found helpful in my study of Falcon Ridge are two from ethnomusicology. Mark Slobin’s tripartite structure of superculture, subculture, and interculture was a useful framework for thinking about the way in which a music culture positions itself within the modern world.<sup>16</sup>

Ethnomusicologist Steven Feld speaks of listeners engaging in “interpretive moves,” both while listening to and talking about a musical language with which they are familiar.<sup>17</sup>

Feld’s work illuminates the way in which musical events and their meaning are constructed by those who have a stake in the community, and are not simply organic expressions of a people, as earlier folk music models suggest. Adelaida Reyes-Schramm,

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<sup>15</sup> Shelemay discusses a similarly blurred scholar/musician distinction in Shelemay, Kay. 2001. “Toward an Ethnomusicology of the Early Music Movement: Thoughts on Bridging Disciplines and Musical Worlds.” *Ethnomusicology* 45 (1): 1-19.

<sup>16</sup> Slobin 1993.

<sup>17</sup> Feld 1984, 8.



one of the first ethnomusicologists to draw on sociolinguistics, makes a similar comparison to language, applying the concept of diversity and choice in an urban speech community to urban musical communities.<sup>18</sup> While thinking through the dimensions of this choice or construction, I was guided by anthropologist Arjun Appadurai's work on ethnoscape, particularly his notion of the ideoscape as one basis around which contemporary cultural groups are formed.<sup>19</sup> Finally, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's work on the festival as an ethnographic object, experienced environmentally, offers insight from the standpoint of material culture and performance studies.<sup>20</sup>

While such an assemblage of ethnomusicology, folklore, linguistics, and sociology creates a strong theoretical base from which to consider an event such as Falcon Ridge, it says very little about similar musical events with which I may compare my own data. Most sources on contemporary folk festivals come from very distant fields or have been written by authorities outside the academy.

One of the most intriguing of these sources was an economics dissertation written by Emily King entitled "Accounting for Culture: A Social Cost Benefit Analysis of the Stan Rogers Folk Festival." While King's disciplinary concerns were far removed from my own, she actually raised several related issues related to why participants value the existence of a festival and their experience of it. I also consulted two works by "folkies" gone academic. Angus K. Gillespie, a folk festival manager who attended several festivals in the early 1980s as an observer, published his analysis as an article entitled

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<sup>18</sup> "Like the speakers in an urban speech community, they have access to diverse musical resources and are conversant with multiple sets of sociomusical rules." Reyes-Schramm 1982, 10.

<sup>19</sup> Appadurai 1991.

<sup>20</sup> "All the senses are engaged. The experience tends to be environmental, as episodes of the drama are enacted in various locations." Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1991, 417.

“Folk Festival and Festival Folk in Twentieth-Century America,” grouping festival attendees into three humorous archetypal categories of “family,” “folknik,” and “outlaw,” and asserting that none of these characters attended festivals to listen to the music.<sup>21</sup>

Sheldon Posen, a singer and organizer who joined the ranks of folklore through a master’s program at Memorial University of Newfoundland, analyzed the Mariposa Folk Festival, concluding that what made the music “folk” was its context, not its content.<sup>22</sup>

Posen’s concern with defining “folk” music is a prominent one within the folk music community, as reflected both by my own fieldwork and by Scott Alarik’s 2003 collection of articles, *Deep Community*. Alarik, a journalist and folk musician who writes for the *Boston Globe* and the folk music magazine *Sing Out*, is widely acknowledged by those who attend Falcon Ridge as the nation’s premier folk music critic, an important bearer of community knowledge and critique. *Deep Community*, a collection of short pieces previously published in periodicals, confronts the problem of defining “folk” music, and like Posen’s article, anchors the term in community rather than content.<sup>23</sup>

The contemporary festival which bears the most resemblance to Falcon Ridge is Kerrville, a three week-long songwriter’s event held in Texas hill country at the end of each May and into June. The autobiography of its founder, Rod Kennedy, entitled *Music*

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<sup>21</sup> “Up to this point we have sketched three archetypal festival goers, and we have argued that each is in some fundamental way inattentive. The family is interested in buying things. The folknik wants to make music himself. The outlaw wants to be noticed. No one seems to be paying attention.” Gillespie 1987, 160.

<sup>22</sup> “What I was doing was ‘authentic’ not because I sang traditional songs unaccompanied or affected an English accent, but rather because I was doing these things in accordance with my group’s belief that those things made me authentic.” Posen 1993, 136.

<sup>23</sup> “Folk music is simply the most useful term I have found to define the entire genre as it exists today; it is almost universally understood as a description of the kind of music presented in this book, and found on the stages of coffeehouses and folk festivals throughout the world.” [Folk music is the music folk fans listen to]. Alarik 2003, 3.

*from the Heart*, depicts the administration and experience of a contemporary folk festival in descriptive detail.

Finally, the folk revival, the historic movement to which many Falcon Ridge's participants trace their roots, has generated an extensive written history. Benjamin Filene's *Romancing the Folk*, Robert Cantwell's *When We Were Good*, and the collectively-authored *Baby Let Me Follow Down: the Cambridge Folk Years*, spearheaded by Eric Von Schmidt and Jim Rooney provided a context for the memories and constructed descent lineages of festival participants.

## **A TRADITION BORN: FALCON RIDGE HISTORY**

Falcon Ridge began in 1988, at a time when MTV and lavishly produced pop hits had long since banished the folk music of the sixties and seventies from the mainstream media. The end of the eighties, however, saw a flurry of activity at open mics in both Boston and New York City, as a young crop of singer-songwriters who would soon gain national attention honed their craft. One summer, on the Massachusetts/New York border, a builder started a small festival that would cater to this new breed of folk musicians.

“It was a lovely 2 day event created by Howard Randall,” Falcon Ridge artistic director Anne Saunders recalls in her online history of the festival.<sup>24</sup> “A few years earlier he experienced bluegrass music for the first time. Almost immediately, without stopping to ponder the possibilities or consequences he created his first festival, the Winterhawk Bluegrass festival. On the heels of those first years, an avid interest in all types of acoustic music, most especially singer/songwriters, took root. Falcon Ridge was born in 1988.”

Saunders and others soon joined forces with Randall, and what began as a two-day concert at the Catamount ski area quickly became a full-blown festival. In 1992, Falcon Ridge’s second year at Long Hill Farm, the festival’s offerings included three stages, children’s programming, dancing, an emerging artist showcase, and camping. The fast growth of the festival reflected a nationwide rediscovery of the singer-songwriter: Tracy Chapman, not long removed from her days as a street performer in Harvard Square, won 1988’s Grammy Award for Best New Artist. Mark Cohn won in

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<sup>24</sup> <http://www.falconridgefolk.com>

the same category in 1991. Folk music and the music business came face to face for the first time in decades, and festivals such as Falcon Ridge were at the crossroads, helping to catapult such artists as Ani DiFranco, Alison Krauss, and Shawn Colvin to mainstream success.

While this encounter most definitely changed the face of pop music, it also forced folk music to redefine itself. Having persisted in fairly isolated status since the folk revival (when festivals such as Newport and Woodstock gathered large audiences and mainstream, if countercultural, attention), the folk music community found itself confronted by a new generation, forced to clarify its values and identity. While many of the questions raised by the folk crossover of the early nineties are still being debated, what has developed at Long Hill Farm is perhaps one of the most robust, fully established manifestations of what this new folk music really is.

**CHAPTER 1:**  
**THE HILL AND THE FLATS: CAMPING AND AFTER HOURS MUSIC**

*It is 1:17 a.m. on Thursday, and I wake up cold as a result of poor camping preparation. I walk up the hill to try to locate a fire and find all the music tents quiet except the Front Porch, where a few people sit in chairs in a circle. There is a fire burning just outside the tent, so I station myself next to it. I get there just as one of the circle-sitters finishes a song, and notice that there are also a few people on the periphery – this “audience” meets the song’s finish with polite applause. The next performer, Ollie, begins strumming on a very cheap guitar (which he proudly broadcasts as a \$10 purchase), then delivers an original number based on the premise that a woman cannot make a date as a result of having been abducted by aliens. With each verse, Ollie expands further and further into the ridiculous, eliciting the hysterical laughter of the sleep-deprived. After he finishes, one of the circle-sitters declares, “I’m going to join the pussies,” to which his neighbor replies, “I’ll sleep when I’m dead.” The stubbornly wakeful camper relates a story about a friend of his. “She woke up at 6:00 a.m. every morning,” he said. “I asked her about it once, and she said, ‘I’m going to spend enough time underground.’ She died the next summer.” “That’s cool,” an alternative-looking young woman says. I am still clinging close to the fire, not yet warm enough to face the walk down the hill to my tent. Ollie gives me two wool blankets, then tells me his volunteer crew assignment – the equivalent of an address here at Falcon Ridge. “You can keep them all weekend,” he said. “Just return them to me before you leave on Sunday.” Most campers are asleep now, but as I walk down the hill, I notice a drum circle still going.*

**“That was the only time I ever feared for my life. There was so much lightning and thunderstorms all night long. People were sliding down the hill on tarps like a waterslide, and of course the music kept going on. I went back next year and they were selling T-shirts with little lightning bolts on them that said “I survived.”**

**The Hill**

Common to many festival or ritual experiences across all cultures is an element of completely restructuring time, abandoning quotidian temporal markers in favor of different markers – or no markers at all. Alejandro Falassi refers to this phenomenon in the title of his oft-cited volume on festivals, *Time Out of Time*. From my own life experience growing up in Montana, I am reminded of the practice of vision quests among many Native American Nations, in which young men leave the comforts of everyday life

(including food, water, and sleep) and go alone into uninhabited country to realize spiritual truth.

Late night music on the hill at Falcon Ridge is not nearly as spartan a proposition as a vision quest, yet the unpredictability of camping, the culture of sleep deprivation, and the single-minded pursuit of music and musical communion create a similarly spiritual, otherworldly frame. If there is a moment when you are most aware that you are at Falcon Ridge and NOT in the real world, it is 4:00 a.m. on the hill.

“The hill” is not an officially designated piece of the Falcon Ridge geography. As Jake Jacobson (concert presenter at Franklin’s Circle of Friends Coffeehouse and twelve-year Falcon Ridge attendee) remembers, only a few tents were even staked there during the festival’s initial years at Long Hill Farm. But the festival grew, and more campers began creeping up from “the flats” adjacent to the stages onto the terrain uphill.

What put the hill on the map (literally – it now appears on the map in the festival program), however, weren’t individual tents, but canopies that accommodated entire communities of campers, hosting song circles and cookouts, and functioning as gathering places for watching the mainstage music and socializing.

### **The Big Orange Tarp**

**“The first time I heard his new CD, I had to listen to it five times in a row. I’m telling you, at least three of those songs are hits.”**

One of the first such mega-tents to sponsor late-night music was the Big Orange Tarp (or, as regulars call it, the BOT), which appears every year in the same spot on the left side of the hill. Founded in the early nineties by Alan Rowoth, who also initiated folkmusic.org and the folk music list, the first e-newsletter for the folk music community, the BOT began as a means of showcasing emerging talent at several singer-songwriter

events: Falcon Ridge, the Rocky Mountain Folk Festival, and the Folk Alliance Conferences.<sup>25</sup>

Over a decade after its inception, the BOT remains a central feature of the late night music scene on the hill. In both 2004 and 2005, music at the BOT ran Thursday through Sunday, beginning each night after the mainstage (between midnight and one o'clock) and continuing until four in the morning on Friday and Saturday. Alan Rowoth and Scott Moore (a house concert presenter and central figure in the DC-based organization Focus Music) presided over the circle of chairs gathered beneath the namesake orange tarp, moving from the prestigious invitation-only showcases "early" in the night to the open circle just a couple hours before sunrise.

Friday and Saturday nights at about one o'clock were the most crowded moments at the BOT 2005, with onlookers backed up in concentric circles moving out from the chairs and stretching beyond the shelter of the tarp. Most of the ten or so "first round" performers were already tuned up and seated in their chairs by the time the mainstage performances finished, having been invited by Alan when they arrived at the festival - or perhaps even earlier by email.

Traditionally reserved for artists performing as part of the Friday afternoon emerging artist showcase on the mainstage, the coveted first round slots provide a good opportunity for rising stars to get heard. With only a lantern casting light over the performance, it is difficult to see any faces other than those of the musicians, but those playing can only assume that several people lurking in the darkness book venues, host

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<sup>25</sup> I have included Rowoth's description of the BOT and its history in the interviews section of the Appendix.



radio shows, or perhaps even have connections with booking agencies or independent labels like Signature Sounds or Waterbug.

Scott Moore was clearly aware of this dynamic when he announced each performer at the BOT 2005, giving a quick biographical plug that included recent career highlights. The floor belonged to each artist for one song at a time, progressing around the circle until each first rounder had played twice. After playing their second song, each first round performer disappeared back into the darkness to pack up their guitar and move on to another song circle (or perhaps go to bed), and a ready and waiting second rounder, alerted by Alan or Scott, quietly took his or her place.

The second round, while not as exclusive as the first, was still a coveted position. The circle was populated this time with one or two more mainstage showcase performers as well as “friends of the BOT,” with whom Scott and Alan were familiar. The crowd had thinned out a bit, but the format was the same, and those present continued to treat the occasion with the seriousness of a performance: audience members spoke to one another only in low whispers and some performers were visibly nervous. When the second rounders left their places, however, their chairs were not immediately filled, and there was a sense of slow exodus. By the time Alan announced the open third round and called on any performers who were still awake, most of the presenters and BOT “audience” had left, and the coveted showcase became more of a campfire song swap.

The third round is usually a mix of good friends who stay up to share increasingly moving or hilarious songs, dogged wannabe first and second rounders hoping to get an “in,” and performers who never expect, or hope, to move from the campfire to the stage. The songs definitely get a little more “out there,” as exhaustion sets in and the delirium of

sleep deprivation (affecting most) becomes difficult to distinguish from the delirium of excessive alcohol consumption (affecting a few). Those still awake for this round are generally very proud of it and wear their ability to stay up as a badge of honor. Comments such as “I’ll sleep when I’m dead,” and “going to bed already?” are frequent and animated, as well as a few well-developed philosophical statements on the importance of living life to the fullest and refusing to succumb to soul-deadening middle-class normalcy.

### **Music at the BOT**

**“This is one I won’t do on the mainstage.”**

The Music at the BOT underscores the nature of Falcon Ridge as an ideologically-based musical community, rather than a community defined by shared repertoire, genre, or group participation. Most songs performed at the showcase are presented by their writers, who accompany themselves on guitar. (One or two banjos or mandolins make an appearance, and some performers have even been known to haul a keyboard up the hill.) Many, if not all, audience members are hearing the song for the first time, and if anyone joins in, it is another respected professional performer whose impromptu harmonizing is considered an asset and a compliment.

First and second rounders aim to present themselves in the best possible light, playing their strongest songs and showcasing their performance ability. Most understand that another important element of positive reception in this community relies on conveying a portion of one’s identity, convincing the audience that songs come from an authentic and unique place. Bringing in unusual musical influences or otherwise creating contrast is a terrific way for a performer to validate themselves in the eyes of the

community, provided the music is clearly connected to the person making it. Thus, performing oneself as a community member has more to do with foregrounding the shared values of the folk music ideal than with highlighting musical similarities between oneself and others in the community. The introduction to a song can often be as important, or more important, than the song itself.

Mike Morris, a showcase performer attending his first FRFF, was one of the first round performers at the BOT on Thursday night. He began by openly telling the circle that he had had difficulty connecting with his military father. “Maybe I should go to one of his retired officer’s meetings and he should come to Falcon Ridge,” Morris joked in introducing the song “Fat America,” a critique of commercial culture and media-driven violence. Though Mike was relatively unknown at the BOT, he gained immediate acceptance by introducing his song in a way that demonstrated his personal connection to both his music and to the festival community.

By the middle of the night on Saturday, the tension of first impressions had clearly diffused. Showcase performer Kellie Lynn Knott presented a new song co-written with five campmates, plopping down a paper plate with lyrics before breaking into “F\*\*king at Falcon Ridge up on the Hill.” Lines such as “We don’t know their names, but we caught it all on film” and “Maybe it’s late tonight, but are you on the pill?” drew knowing laughter from those present, who signaled their awareness of the festival “hookup” scene, and applauded Knott for her blunt, humorous, hyperbolic portrayal. When another showcase performer followed Knott with an instrumental, BOT regular and famed folk envelope-pusher Eric Schwartz asked “Can we imagine it’s about

f\*\*king?” “Yes, I encourage it,” the soft spoken player-of-sensitive-guitar-instrumentals replied. “It’s called ‘Oregon,’ so you’ll have to imagine you’re in Oregon.”

A few moments later, Schwartz regaled the crowd with one of his best-known songs (released as a music video online), “Keep Your Jesus Off My Penis,” (a critique of “moral” legislation by President Bush and the Christian Right) to which many sang along. A few of the BOT listeners, particularly showcase performers who were attending the festival for the first time, had not heard the song before, though, and Schwartz drew particularly enthusiastic applause for the line “Who the f\*\*k are you to turn your views into my laws?” “This is a song that is a lot more fun with a sign language interpreter,” Schwartz cracked.

### **Other Showcases: The Front Porch and The Budgiedome**

*Midnight Friday. Alan Rowoth and Scott Moore at the BOT have squeezed me in for a pre-first-round song. My producer Russell Wolff joins me on acoustic guitar and harmony vocals, and we perform one of my originals for the crowd assembled to hear first-round showcasers. When we are finished, the initial round begins immediately, and we struggle to quietly pack up our guitars and make a graceful exit to the Budgiedome, where Russell is scheduled for an early set. When we get there, we immediately go from silence to socializing: everyone knows him there. Several are diehard “Früheads” who know Russell as a former opener for the now defunct Moxy Früvous. When his set begins, he references these regulars from the stage, mostly not by name, but by an identifying feature. “Bald Chick” is proud of her strikingly unique appearance. We play seven songs together – a highly impromptu set with snatches of pop covers and silly songs from Russell’s old albums that he seldom plays anymore. I try to keep up with the harmony vocals. Though the tone seems light, Russell gives a very serious thank you to the Falcon Ridge community for being a place he can come back to, where he can talk to people after having gone through rough times. “Most of you know the story of how I almost died from a throat infection,” he says. “I’ll spare you the gory details right now.”*

For many emerging singer-songwriters who come to FRFF to advance their careers, the BOT is *the* destination on the hill. However, as an invitation-only showcase (for the first two rounds), it has its detractors, most of whom feel it is too exclusive, too

serious, or simply not “the only game in town.” Some of these critics commented to me that the BOT had become increasingly exclusive and business-like since its more campfire-like inception, and complained, “This is a festival – not [the] Folk Alliance [Conference].” Neale Eckstein, house concert presenter and regular BOT attendee, counters this assertion that the circle is elitist. “An invitation to play at the BOT carries some weight. The mixture of well-established and rising stars are what draws the large audience, and they expect a level of quality. Performers want to play in Alan's circle because they are assured of a respectful listening audience, a good number of whom are in a position to give bookings or radio play. Many of the performers Laurie (Laba) and I have booked for our series are people I first heard at the BOT. I also know Alan is trying to make the trip worthwhile for Emerging Artist Showcase performers who've traveled here to perform only two songs on the mainstage. The BOT gives them valuable additional exposure.”

For those looking for slightly looser, invitation-based showcases, the BOT's neighbor to the right, the Front Porch, runs simultaneously, featuring a slightly larger oval of chairs, a bit more convivial atmosphere (you could hear a guitar drop, but not a pin), and a more easily accessible performance space. Unlike the BOT, the Front Porch was not initiated with the specific purpose of showcasing music. In fact, co-founder Renette Hackett told me, the Porch's beginning was more serendipity than intention – an accidental meeting of the Hackett and Szlachta families at the 1988 Philadelphia Folk Festival. Over time, the group of people comprising what is now the Front Porch expanded beyond these two families, but the group wasn't given the moniker The Front Porch until 1996, and wasn't part of Falcon Ridge until 1998. Though many Front Porch

regulars are non-musicians or amateur players, singer-songwriter Lisabeth Weber, her bass player Maggie Marshall, and Maggie's husband Jimmy have been very active attendees since the mid-nineties, and help to facilitate late night music at the Porch. The music here runs even longer than the BOT – those up late enough to hear it are often treated to a victory yell by Front Porch “survivors” who witness the sunrise. Late Saturday night at the 2005 festival, Weber led a Front Porch tradition: a group performance of Simon and Garfunkel's “The Boxer,” during which a pair of concert crash cymbals made a very loud appearance in the chorus. Sunday morning at 6:20, a piper played Amazing Grace on the hill, and a large crowd at the Front Porch cheered, never having gone to sleep.

A significant portion of Weber's writing is political (as are the buttons she makes and sells in the Performer Merchandise Sales Tent), and both political and humorous songwriters abound at the Front Porch. Politically liberal songs are well-received at virtually every performance space on the festival grounds, from the mainstage to the chair outside the staff toilet, though certain environments expect more musicality than others. While these leftist songs certainly have a leg up at the BOT, they are so well-received at the Front Porch that their writers can get away with hastily-penned compositions and admittedly poor musicianship if necessary, as long as they drive the point home. I have never heard a Republican-sympathetic song performed on the festival grounds.

One of the most popular Front Porch performers is Chris Chandler, a performance poet with a flair for the bizarre, a facility with literary and political reference, and a physically dramatic style. Chandler, whose festival itinerary includes a fifteen-minute mainstage slot, was a hit at the BOT as well. He brought his band, keyboard player

David Roe and trumpet player Frankie Hernandez, along with him on the late night campfire circuit. The trio drew both uproarious applause and laughter with such convictions as “the antichrist is responsible for non-alcoholic beer,” and “the fruit loops bird is a homosexual” (a poke at the paranoia of the right-wing morality police). Chandler’s performances broke from the usual sound texture of the campfires. He performed his lead vocals mostly as spoken word, with Roe and Hernandez riffing and singing in the background. Occasionally, the group brought in snippets of other songs as references, as they did in one wildly popular piece that included several well-known peace songs from the folk revival era.

On the other side of the BOT, at the far left side of the hill, stands the Budgiedome, one of the largest canopies, and a hybrid fan-camp/showcase tent. Unlike the BOT and the Front Porch, the Budgiedome is set up in typical concert fashion with rows of chairs facing a stage area (a well-lighted rectangle of grass). Instead of running song circles, the Budgiedome features six to eight song sets by a handful of artists each night, often bringing in acts that are well known among folk fans. The Budgiedome’s founders, Steve and Lori Martin, first set up at FRFF 1999 as Camp Früvous, a gathering place for diehard supporters of Toronto-based folk/rock band Moxy Früvous. The Budgiedome made its debut the following year, after “a few test runs in our back yard.” Russell Wolff, a frequent opening act for Moxy Früvous, invited performers Christina Abbott, Christopher Williams, Kevin So, Butch Ross, and Adam Brodsky for the inaugural weekend. (Among followers of the national folk scene, Williams and So are now familiar names, while Abbott, Brodsky, and Ross are well-known regional performers.)

Though Gordon Nash has replaced Wolff as the booking coordinator, Wolff still performs each year, and the Budgiedome continues to draw considerable talent. Moxy Früvous has been “on hiatus” since February of 2001, but their fans seem no less eager to gather at FRFF. The crowd at the Budgiedome still consists primarily of proud “Früheads.” Not surprisingly, given the nature of the former band’s material, cleverly humorous or slightly oddball performers get the best response at the Budgiedome, which has a much more alternative, even anti-establishment, feel than does the BOT. While flowing, natural fabrics abound at the Front Porch, and outdoor or casual wear is the norm at the BOT, the younger Budgiedome crowd is more likely to sport a few piercings, studs, and shaved heads. (The unforgiving nighttime chill of the Berkshires, however, proves to be the great equalizer, as the fashion statements of all three camps are buried under wool blankets and winter jackets.)

### **Beyond the Left Side of the Hill**

**“I forgot about all those other circles. I’ve gotten so into the BOT, I miss everything else. They’re probably more fun.”**

The BOT, The Front Porch, and the Budgiedome are far from the only showcases at FRFF. BOT host Alan Rowoth summed up the plethora of late night music in a parenthetical editorial on the Folk Music list in July of 2001:

Every year there's more music around the campgrounds at Falcon Ridge. Terry [Kitchen] and Joe [Giacioio]'s event is also the one thing I know about that's always happening down in the flats [The Night Owl Song Swap – see the following section on The Flats], which is key if you can't muster the energy to climb the hill. There's also LOTs of music up near the BOT. At the BOT we go all night long and start each Friday and Saturday night with a little artist showcase featuring some of the performers from the new artist showcase on Friday afternoon with a sprinkling of main stage performer drop ins, folktrainers, and other surprise guests. The first couple rounds of that are sure to be some of the hottest performers at the festival. We also make sure that everyone who wants to



gets to play, but we keep the circle small and run people in and out of it so that I don't freeze a couple of dozen performers in my area, but instead give them all the opportunity to get around to the other camps and play.

The camp directly next to ours on the ridge (towards the tree) also has some fabulous stuff going on and they do a lot of ensemble jamming. The other direction around our cul de sac takes you to the Burlington VT camping group and they always have good music there too. There's a lot of stuff close by our area. Camp Dar is just down the hill from us and they often have music. further up along the ridge road are several other music camps including The Baltimore Songwriters Group, Camp Hoboken, and Jack Hardy's camp. There's so much good music around, about the only mistake you could make would be to go to bed early.<sup>26</sup>

Another notable camp, now in existence for half a decade, is Tribes Hill, which identifies itself on its website as: “a nonprofit organization uniting musicians of the lower Hudson Valley region and their patrons in support of a music community that aspires to common goals and beliefs. It is a conceptual gathering place for people of all races, politics, and faiths coming together to explore and celebrate the human experience through song.” A favorite of several established performers as well as established artists, Tribes Hill, like the Front Porch, is known as a less competitive alternative to the BOT.

### **Further Beyond the Left Side of the Hill**

**“Oh no. Don’t grow up.”**

Even the BOT, the Front Porch, the Budgiedome, Tribes Hill, and the expanse of showcases mentioned by Alan Rowoth take up only a fraction of the “long hill” the farm is named after. There are many other non-showcase sites where FRFF attendees share music far into the wee hours. Walking towards the right side of the hill after the mainstage has finished, one can see several small canopies in action. At first, they are mostly small song circles – friendly gatherings of songwriters or amateur musicians. As one moves further left, the crowd gets progressively younger, and drum circles begin to

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<sup>26</sup> <<http://grassyhill.org/pipermail/folkmusic/2001-July/001377.html>>. 24 July, 2001.

appear. By the time one reaches the far right, gatherings seem mostly social, with only sporadic music punctuating the conversation. Many of these are held in large tents, in the open air, or alongside cars parked next to the road.

In addition to late night music, the hill also plays host to several ardent fan gatherings, the best established of which is undoubtedly Camp Dar. Setting up every year halfway up the left side of the hill, Dar Williams fans from all over the country form a physically-manifest version of the famed Dar-list. This email list, like Alan Rowoth's folk music list, was one of the first virtual communities to gather a large online fan base around the contemporary singer-songwriter genre. Other fan camps include the George Fox Pavilion (home base for fans of The Nields and the Kennedys), Camp 9 (for fans of We're about 9), and Happytown, the Buddhist prayer flag-bedecked canopy erected by fans of Tracy Grammer and her late partner Dave Carter.

### **Late Nights on the Hill**

*1:00 a.m. Saturday night/Sunday morning. I am napping in Laini Sporbert's tent up near the BOT, until my manager Neale Eckstein wakes me up for one last chance at the late-night music scene. "It's showtime," he says, a little ironically. I am somewhat dazed, but Neale manages to get me and my guitar over to the Front Porch. When we show up, there are quite a few musicians in the circle, but not many people watching yet. There is still a lot of noise and talking, tuning, in between songs. Lisabeth Weber's emcee style bears greater resemblance to introductions at a casual barbeque than to those at a showcase. "Hey everybody, this is Claudia," she belts out. "She's a Falcon Ridge virgin."*

#### **"I'll sleep when I'm dead."**

If I were to follow my own formatting conventions, the heading "Late Nights on the Hill" should indicate a physical locale at FRFF. Indeed, it is a space, but not a space sanctioned in any official way by the festival organizers. Yet for many, late nights on the hill are the ritual center of FRFF, the source of its strong sense of community, the

element that most clearly establishes the annual event as “time out of time.” Throughout the year, participants in this late-night music scene (which reconvenes at regional and national Folk Alliance Conferences as well as a few other festivals such as Kerrville and Rocky Mountain) recall one-of-a-kind moments when they first heard a song performed or were moved to tears by a sentiment of love, loss, or longing shared among members of the circle. As Chris Chandler said when beginning one of his performances, “I’ve been doing fifteen or twenty years of this ... I see us gathered here, and I say ‘where would I rather be?’”

It is late at night on the hill when dreams – the dreams of those for whom FRFF is most meaningful – take center stage. For aspiring musicians, this is a shot at “making it.” Voices exhausted by the late hour, fingers barely able to move over the necks of their guitars in the frigid air, they wait several minutes, often hours, to pour their hearts into one five-minute song. For presenters and other listeners, this is a chance to discover a truly inspiring artist for the first time, spend time with old friends (both musicians and fellow listeners), and believe for a moment that life is about seeking out beauty, that there is more to living than just the routine of work and household chores.

Late night music is a source of both individual pride and community spirit among those who participate as either musicians or audience members, stemming from the shared experience of staying up late, enduring fatigue, cold temperatures, and hunger in order to experience music together. Those still awake at three in the morning (particularly the amazingly well-represented middle-aged contingent) rejoice in not being spiritually dead, not having lost their sense of adventure and enthusiasm for life. One gets the sense that the rest of the world is missing out, that folkies might be crazy, but at

least they haven't completely succumbed to a McDonalds/minivan/Nintendo nation. Those who stay awake are proud to be "sucking the marrow out of life," and reiterate time and again that *this* is what is worth living for. "I figure I can sleep at work," one of the regular BOT listeners commented.

"It's grueling, but you know, we're here now, and you've got to be as present as you can for it," Alan Rowoth told me on Friday. He had stayed awake until four in the morning the night before, breaking down the song circle set-up after the music was done. "I'm not as young as I used to be," Rowoth said. "Setting up really takes it out of me."

The element of sacrifice evident in Rowoth's comments generates not only pride, but also a strong sense of community. Shared hardship forces people to become closer, and everyday boundaries collapse to allow spiritual communion. This is particularly true for the small group that actually camps in the area surrounding the BOT. "Now it's such a community up here," concert presenter Laini Sporbert told me, "that I would come even if there wasn't music."

Ironically (from the scholarly standpoint, though not so much from the standpoint of community members), one of the strongest centers of community is also one of the least regionally grounded. The Budgiedome hosts are from suburban Philadelphia, and they also pitch their canopy at Susquehanna Music and Arts Festival. Alan lives in nearby Syracuse, but Front Porch mainstay Lisabeth Weber is based in New Hope, Pennsylvania, and the performers featured at both showcases hail from all over the country, as do many of the presenters and other interested audience members who come to listen. The Big Orange Tarp appears not only at FRFF, but also at the Rocky Mountain Folk Festival in Colorado, and the annual Folk Alliance conference, which is

hosted by different cities each year. Tribes Hill also makes the rounds of several festivals.

For many of the people who participate in late night music on the hill, FRFF is a family reunion of sorts, one of the few times when their “state of mind” community, spread throughout the US and Canada, gathers in one place.

### **The Flats**

**“This is it. We’re home.”**

At the foot of the hill and to the right of the festival stages are the flats: volunteer camping and general camping for those who want easy access to the stages and (relative) peace and quiet for sleeping at night. The area closest to the stage is reserved for volunteers, while general campers (paying festival attendees) have a bit longer hike from their campsites to the programmed entertainment. Filling up quickly beginning Wednesday, the flats are fully populated by Friday night, with tents, campers, and cars lined up next to one another in neatly arranged rows between roads. Characterized predominantly by vehicles parked next to tents and a few small, private, social canopies, the flats also have a few named canopies, such as The Last Chance Cafe. I camped with a small group of volunteers from the Circle of Friends Coffeehouse in Franklin, MA, and we hung a banner on a small canopy that featured the coffeehouse name and logo. On the flats, however, named locations are primarily social destinations, not showcases, since late-night music after the mainstage is prohibited in the “quiet camping” area.

The flats are not completely devoid of the song circles and fan camps that characterize the hill, however. Northeast-based singer-songwriters Terry Kitchen and Joe Giacoio host the Night Owl Song Swap, which unlike the BOT, Front Porch, and

Budgiedome, is listed in the official festival program and marked on the map of the festival grounds.<sup>27</sup> As the program proclaims, “The Night Owl Song Swap takes place by the horse barn Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights from midnight ‘til whenever. All are invited to come share a song, story, poem or just listen.” Kitchen, who has been hosting the event for thirteen years, describes the circle as “friendly” and “low key” in a 2001 post to the Folk Music list, differentiating it from the more exclusive, higher-stakes setting at top-of-the hill showcases. Both the Night Owl Song Swap and the Night Owl Hoot, the two after-hours events officially sanctioned by the festival, predate even the Big Orange Tarp. As Festival Director Anne Saunders explained, these official events were actually intended to encourage the spread of unofficial late night music. “We started these as a way of seeding the campgrounds,” she told me. “It seems like it worked and we don't even need to keep our fest organized ones but we do, sort of grandfathered in.”

The flats are also home to Camp Edhead (alternatively known as the Pirates Patch or Lower Camp Früvous), founded by fans of Eddie From Ohio, a folk band that has appeared at FRFF for seven consecutive years. A few other small named campsites identify themselves with flags and banners. Nonetheless, the flats function primarily as a bastion of relative sanity, basking as much in their normality as the late night uphill song circles do in their abnormality. Many of the campers on the flats take pride in making their camps “home,” adding various trappings of suburbia: lawn chairs, picnic tables, grills, pink flamingos, gnomes. (I even watched one man mow his “lawn.”)

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<sup>27</sup> The map also includes “BOT Circle,” the road circling the late night music area on the hill, but not the BOT itself.

Many FRFF attendees, myself included, camp in the flats, but hang out on the hill at night for as long as possible. Even within the “time out of time” festival experience, we are able to manage our level of “out-ness,” taking in our dose of heightened ritual timespace, then coming back down to the flats to sleep, eat, rest, and engage in behaviors that are more recognizable as normal life. “I camped on the hill a couple of years, up near the BOT,” Jake Jacobson from Circle of Friends told me. “Sleeping on the hill is no fun. I’d rather camp in the quiet area and then wander around at night.”

With the majority of the late-night music scene congregating on the hill, the music heard in the flats is primarily broadcast through radios: as people return to their camps during the day, some play CDs and others broadcast the “Falcon Ridge Radio” – a Low Power FM signal that allows those on the flats to listen to the mainstage sets.

## **CHAPTER 2: THE MIDWAY: VOLUNTEERS, VENDORS, AND SIDESTAGES**

*It is 9:15 a.m. on Thursday, my first day “on the job” as a member of the Performer Liason Crew. My fellow crew members, most of whom know each other from the Philadelphia Folk Festival, have done this many times before and are signing up for shifts on a spreadsheet. Unsure of the protocol, I ask crew chief Pete Urbatis how many shifts I should sign up for. “Just so long as all the boxes are filled,” he replies. “We’re very casual here.” Performer Cadence Carroll walks in and asks “Am I too early?” quickly discerning that we don’t seem to have any supplies out, let alone any fully prepared performer access badges. “No coffee, no check-in,” Pete replies, jokingly, then says “no, we don’t have anything.” Check-in, which is technically at nine or ten (stories differ), won’t actually start until twelve thirty, when we finally begin cutting badges and hastily inserting them into their plastic casing. The reason? “My printer is having a conniption fit,” Artistic Director Anne Saunders declares.*

**“I just assume everybody here knows everybody.” – Reba Heyman**

The central vein of the official festival space is the midway, a wide dirt road that accommodates several lanes of foot traffic as well as the golf carts used by volunteer crews engaged in everything from escorting performers to delivering ice. This thoroughfare runs from the Mainstage and Volunteer Food Tent on the left, past the food and craft vendors, to the Kids Tent (Family Stage), and Workshop Stage, stopping just before the Dance Tent on the far right. The center of activity for paying festival attendees, the midway is also home base for volunteers. Most volunteer crew assignments place volunteers in T-shirt sales, Performer Merchandise Sales (PMS), Security, Information, Grounds, or the Kitchen, all of which are located along the midway. All volunteers stampede the Volunteer Food Tent three times a day for free staff meals.

Walking down the midway at the height of the festival, it’s easy to spot the markers of community membership. Falcon Ridge Staff T-shirts are ubiquitous, and many of their wearers carry tote bags from various festivals, folk clubs, Folk Alliance



conferences, and organic food co-ops. Liberal or anti-Bush buttons and T-shirts are a common sight as well. More than one person sports a button made by festival performer Lisabeth Weber that proclaims “Feeling Blue? Think 2008.” When cars drive through to camp at the beginning of the festival, they carry familiar markers as well. We drove in right after a van with a kayak on top, a bike rack on the back, and a bumper sticker from Boston’s WUMB, the nation’s only 24-hour folk music station.

Also easy to spot are the markers that distinguish community members from one another. Though every volunteer wears a staff T-shirt, they are not all the same. Longtime crew members often wear T-shirts from past years, which function as a status symbol among the volunteer community.<sup>28</sup> On Wednesday night of FRFF 2005, I was chatting about this with the “Godparents of folk,” Vic and Reba Heyman (two sprightly senior citizen folk music patrons from the Washington, DC area who have been to every FRFF) and their friend Brenda, a massage therapist who regularly volunteers. “I think I’ve got the whole collection in my tent,” Brenda said, “I didn’t pack any other shirts. I’m always on duty, and I’m not wearing one shirt for four days straight.” “That’s good,” Reba said. “It shows you’re not a newbie.” Backstage access, in the form of a lanyard worn around the neck, also functions as a visible marker.

### **Volunteering**

**“It’s great to be involved in all the behind-the-scenes stuff.”**

At the beginning of the day, the Midway belongs mostly to volunteers, some of whom have early shifts, and others of whom simply want to get a good spot in line for the staff showers or the food tent, which begins serving breakfast at eight o’clock. On Friday

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<sup>28</sup> Again, Gillespie 1987 documents this phenomenon through humorous overstatement.

morning at seven, there was already a line at the staff showers and someone began singing “how many years ...” a la Bob Dylan’s “Blowin’ in the Wind,” eliciting a few groggy laughs.

Two other staff members were having a serious business discussion about T-shirt sales. “They sold like \$5,000 worth of merchandise just yesterday,” one of the staff members exclaimed. “The tie dyes are gone, the women’s tanks are gone – every year we tell them, I don’t know why. I mean, they don’t consult with us.” “They’re probably worried about laying out inventory that won’t be sold,” the other volunteer proposed.

Many of the staff members at FRFF have a great deal of experience, and accompanying expertise (or perceived expertise). Clashes of opinion are not uncommon, and volunteers like those outside the staff shower certainly turn a critical eye to the proceedings. This is another manifestation of the folk music ideal and its encouragement of uninhibited individual expression. Most volunteers take pride in their contributions and are unafraid to voice opinions about how things should be done, even if their views conflict with those of their crew chiefs. I talked to several volunteers who had done similar jobs at other festivals, and most embraced their “veteran” status and the comparative perspective they were able to offer. Most of these volunteers with experience at multiple festival praised FRFF for its laid back attitude, community feel, and focus on the music and “social issues” rather than making money off party crowds. “I’ll never volunteer at Philly [Philadelphia Folk Festival] again,” one volunteer told me. “They’re f\*\*king rude. After twenty-five years of volunteering there, they told me I could sleep in the parking lot.”

Some of the regular Falcon Ridge staff members have become well-known community icons. “Have you heard about the Ice Man?” Performer Liason crew chief Pete Urbaitis asked me on Friday. “He was this man who used to run the ice concession and drove through the campground with a megaphone going “ice” in a low voice, usually at seven a.m. after a late night.” Though Ice Man was present at FRFF 2005 only in community memory, Lost and Found Guy (Ben Zeman) - who pinned lost items to his T-shirt and wore them everywhere he went - was there for his seventh year, joined on the volunteer crew by his wife and mother.

Other volunteers are familiar because of their year-round roles in the folk community. Several are involved in some way with a folk venue: booking shows, promoting them, or running sound. Others host radio programs. Quite a few are musicians. At a festival like FRFF, where emerging songwriters try to get noticed and build their careers, volunteers with influence don’t necessarily want to advertise that fact. “I try to keep a low profile here,” one promoter/volunteer told me. “It’s better here than at Folk Alliance. There it’s on your badge (the label “venue”) like a target.”

### **The Volunteer Open Mic**

**“This is an ugly song: three chords of pain and bitterness. I’ve just got five minutes, so I’ll give you the abridged version.”**

While the festival begins on Friday for most of the paying attendees, many volunteers arrive Wednesday to set up camp before their Thursday shifts. For the past three years, Vic and Reba Heyman have hosted the volunteer open mic Wednesday night at the Volunteer Food Tent, complete with a sound system and an audience that can easily top one hundred. The level of professionalism varies widely. In 2004, I saw Waterbug recording artist Jonathan Byrd (a full-time touring musician) perform at this

event. In 2005, one of the performers forgot all the words to her song and nearly had a nervous breakdown on stage. Another act featured two instrumentalists who “sat in” with one another and never quite got in sync. Some of the audience seemed uncomfortably aware of the warring time feels, while a fair number of others were blissfully oblivious, hooting and hollering at the end of the performance. Though singer-songwriters with guitars dominated, as they do at all FRFF events, the 2005 open mic also featured a few poets.

The most popular acts were those that specifically referenced FRFF. Several audience members sang along with a song performed and written by a member of the kitchen crew famous for addressing the audience as “my fellow workers” each year. “When it rains at Falcon Ridge, the food tent is full,” My Fellow Worker sang in a husky voice. “When it snows at Falcon Ridge, you have stayed too long.” Another well-known performer was Dave Brennan, the son of Long Hill Farm owner Robert Brennan. “This may be the last Falcon Ridge here,” he said, with visible regret. “You’ve been a great crowd, and on behalf of myself and my family, we’ve really enjoyed having you here.” The original song Brennan performed, “Born on the Land of Long Hill Farm,” recorded his heartfelt attachment to both the farm and the festival. “Peace, Love, Friendship and Freedom upon the land, everyone stand hand in hand and share the Peace, Love, Friendship and Freedom born upon this land, born upon the land of Long Hill Farm,” Brennan sang.<sup>29</sup>

### **Thursday Music Business Workshops**

*I am about to perform in front of the largest group of people who will hear me all weekend, and I am almost certain to look like an idiot. I am one of six to seven*

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<sup>29</sup> I have included the complete text of Dave Brennan’s “Born Upon the Land of Long Hill Farm” in the appendix.

*hundred people at Vance Gilbert's Performance Skills Critique at the Family Stage tent, and I have volunteered myself as an example. There are no casual fans here: they won't arrive until tomorrow. This audience is mostly made up of volunteers, many of whom are promoters, and some of whom just want a good laugh. I am hoping to convince the promoters that I am the sort of unshakeable, confident performer they would want to hire. I won't have to work hard to satisfy the people who are there to laugh. Vance will undoubtedly make several good-natured jokes at my expense.*

**“Ever wondered why people don't dance to folk music? Good luck finding the beat. You go to see a singer-songwriter and they are always playing in Eastern Standard Emotional Time. Tap your foot people, give us a “one” to land on.” – Vance Gilbert**

Thursday's events, though more formal than the volunteer open mic, also cater to an inner circle of folkies, mostly volunteers. A relatively recent addition to the FRFF schedule, the Thursday programming consists of two stages of music business workshops during the day and dancing throughout the afternoon and evening in the dance tent. In 2005, the mainstage performances didn't begin until six thirty Thursday night. “I guess they figure only the crazy people are here this early, so they put the business stuff on Thursday,” Jake Jacobson surmised. The workshops, with titles ranging from “Touring with Kids” to “Guitar Care Primer” to “The Artist/Venue Relationship,” were lighthearted, well-attended affairs, featuring panels drawn from the line-up of FRFF musicians and festival VIPs. At the Guitar Care Primer, veteran guitarists and panelists Pete Kennedy and Eric Lowen swapped road horror stories. “You really have to understand the technical end,” Kennedy told the audience, “particularly in the folk world, where you've got the sound guy who's usually a park ranger walking around with one of those poles with a nail on it.”

By far the most popular Thursday event was Vance Gilbert's Performance Skills Critique, held late in the afternoon at the family stage. The audience of six to seven

hundred extended far beyond the parameters of the tent to watch Gilbert grill a brave crop of young singer-songwriters who volunteered as guinea pigs. Gilbert began with a comedic, self-deprecating presentation of performance do's and don'ts (mostly don'ts), exploiting racial and sexual humor – and stock folk music jokes - until the audience was rolling with uncontrollable laughter. At this point, he invited interested performers to come up to the front and be critiqued. Despite the certainty of humiliation, would-be guinea pigs far exceeded the number Gilbert could accommodate. After selecting his victims, Gilbert asked each performer to start their song, then demanded they freeze in the midst of the performance. With his charge immobilized mid-strum, Gilbert proceeded to point out their faults (or, if they were particularly lucky, their strengths) to the audience, continuing in the unabashedly humorous vein of his introductory presentation. Those participants who chose to perform slow ballads were hard-pressed to resume their performance without bursting into laughter.

### **Why Volunteer?**

*It is Wednesday, a little before five o'clock. The festival won't begin until tomorrow, but volunteers are already arriving, setting up camp, and asking when and where to sign up for the volunteer open mic. I am at the volunteer tent, where open mic hosts Vic and Reba Heyman are searching for a pad of paper and talking with friends. Reba apologizes for not introducing two members of the conversation: "I just figure everybody here knows everybody else," she explains. I sit down with my guitar and start playing, running through the instrumental parts to a few of my songs to gauge whether my friends and fellow volunteers were sincere when they asked to me to sing for them. Conversation drops to a dull roar, so I begin singing an original, "9/8 Central." The crowd in the tent, mostly concert presenters and other music facilitators of one sort or another, is relatively familiar with this tune as a staple of my show. A narrative piece heavy on lyrics, "9/8 Central" talks about my experience growing up in Montana, feeling insignificant when TV advertisements failed to give show times for my time zone. I recorded it on the CD that I have just gotten back from the duplicators, and I have brought several copies with me to give to DJs and concert presenters. As I am playing, a few new faces walk into the tent, so I engage them by launching into the traditional "Follow the Drinking Gourd" and encouraging*

*them to sing along. Two college students take me up on it, then borrow my guitar to play a song by songwriter Josh Ritter, well-known among the crowd that attends Falcon Ridge. Sensing a jam, others move in – one joins us with a hand drum, and another man with a badly-tuned guitar tries to pick up the chord changes. As the musical session become more diffuse, I pack it up so I can finish setting up camp before the open mic begins.*

**“This is Falcon Ridge. We don’t talk about our day jobs.”**

Volunteer applications become available every spring, and the crews soon fill up: experienced festival-goers know to get their forms in early. Most volunteers arrive Wednesday night and leave either Sunday night or Monday morning, but many arrive as much as a week early to help set up. Why do so many people want to volunteer? The free festival wristband, camping, and food are certainly a factor, and for volunteers who are also performers, a chance to be seen and heard is equally important. I found, however, that most volunteers had a much larger stake in their roles at FRFF.

Because the folk world is largely non-profit, volunteer run, and essentially ignored by the commercial music business, the majority of those who sustain it also have other jobs. As a result, many folk music presenters and patrons who volunteer at FRFF have developed dual identities around their “day job” and their after-hours work in folk music. In the communities among which they live for most of the year, their day job identity is the more legitimate one. Many FRFF volunteers are known primarily as taxpaying, family-raising, professional suburbanites. For most of these people, however, the identity built around their after-hours work is a more authentic, satisfying expression of self. Throughout their day-to-day lives, they struggle to maintain this identity as a state of mind, reconvening with other like-minded people when making booking phone calls or setting up for monthly or weekly shows. However this day job/night job hierarchy is reversed at FRFF, as individuals are primarily recognized for the work they

do in the folk world. Many volunteers who consider each other friends do not even know each other's day job selves. To shed light on this issue, I decided to ask a few people what they did for a living. I didn't get very far before being instructed, "This is Falcon Ridge. We don't talk about our day jobs."

Similarly inverted at FRFF is the majority/minority dynamic with respect to politics and value systems. Liberals feeling marginalized by Republican control of national politics take full advantage of the opportunity to vent among one another; and environmentalists, supporters of gay rights, and vegetarians enjoy a much more normative status than they do during the rest of the year. When I walked through the line at the almost exclusively vegetarian food tent, the server felt the need to point out the anomalous meat sausages, warning me, "these are real." In the wider world, of course, veggie substitute sausages would be pointed out as the exception. But at FRFF, tofu dogs and veggie burgers are the default.

For some FRFF volunteers, the folk world's significance goes beyond community. Jeff Miller, a well-known concert presenter from Burlington, Vermont, explained that Falcon Ridge and the folk world had become the family he and several of his friends never had. "This is Thanksgiving for me," Miller said. "We don't have biological families. I spend my holidays alone, but coming to Falcon Ridge every year, we're seeing our chosen families, our healthier alternative."

Another longtime Falcon Ridge volunteer celebrated his twenty-third anniversary of sobriety at the annual twelve step meetings held at eight a.m. in the dance tent.



## Vendors and Performer Merchandise Sales

**“We can only process your checks as fast as this one printer goes – but you’re welcome to come sit in the RV.” – Carole Metsger, Performer Merchandise Sales**

The FRFF vendors comprise yet another community within a community. Many of the food and craft vendors travel the same festival circuit throughout the summer and have known each other for years. Some of them never see the stages. In fact, they may not even be interested in the music. Others have stronger connections to the music being presented: four radio stations, two record labels, and folk music magazine *Sing Out!* All have booths, and many performers and volunteers stop by to chat.

Outpost in the Burbs, a coffeehouse concert series operated out of a church in New Jersey, goes so far as to host live music at their FRFF vendor booth. Posters advertising a Friday noon performance by Red Molly, a trio of women songwriters with an old-country repertoire and string band instrumentation, were visible both at the booth and around the festival site. A sizeable crowd gathered to hear the group, despite the fact that they were unamplified and competing with the official “emerging artists showcase” on the mainstage. Red Molly, booked as an opening act at the Outpost in the Burbs, had no official gig at the festival, but came to Long Hill Farm (like many other artists) to perform at such “rogue” venues as this booth and the late night BOT showcase.

Outpost in the Burbs was not the only booth where music was being played. Gary Martin, a house concert presenter from South of Boston helped out at the tent for Waterbug Records, a small label specializing in traditional and political folk. “I was sitting around playing a little accordion,” he told me. “We’re right across from the dance stage, so I was playing stuff with the same beat. I don’t think I ever succeeded in getting

the right key.” While Martin brought his own accordion, some of the booths actually sold musical instruments. Granata Guitars attracted several experienced guitar players who enjoy talking about such topics as action and fretboard length. McNally Instruments had a slightly different tack, encouraging passers-by of all ages and abilities to try their hand on the strumstick, “a hand made musical instrument” with three strings. “Squeeze one string and play all three,” one of the McNally crew instructed the midway crowd.

The Performer Merchandise Sales Tent suggests an interesting blend of commercialism and the folk music ideal. While one can’t help noticing that even emerging artists have very professional displays (complete with stickers, glossy photos, t-shirts, and CD listening stations), the sign by the door to discourage shoplifters clearly separates the PMS tent from a Hastings or Tower Records. “Shoplifting – Don’t Do It,” the sign proclaims, offering the following three reasons: “Deprives the artists of hard-earned income, creates big headaches for the volunteer staff, does unspeakably nasty things to your karma.” The sign makes clear that what’s on sale here is not really hard-and-fast merchandise or commodity. Those who shop at the PMS tent are fully aware that they are supporting a culture – and the musical careers around which it is built. Many think of their purchases as part exchange for goods, part donation to a good cause.

### **The Workshop Stage**

**“She wasn’t a big star, but she touched a lot of people.”**

The Workshop Stage is a sonic borderland, with the mainstage to the right and the dance tent down the hill to the left. On Saturday afternoon, at the very right side of the workshop stage audience, one can hear, simultaneously, Lowen and Navarro’s tear-jerking ballad “If I Was the Rain,” coming from the workshop stage, and Paul and

Storm's country-song parody, "Six Guys, Ten Teeth, and One Brain Between Us," being performed on mainstage. This sonic mix is punctuated by periodic shouts from the enthusiastic crowd down the hill at the dance tent.

Workshops are one of the classic folk festival traditions, gathering several performers together for an in-the-round performance on one stage (usually organized around a theme) to encourage collaboration, storytelling, and a greater sense of intimacy among the performers and the audience. At FRFF, workshop performers sit on chairs across the front of the stage, each performing one song before handing the floor over to their neighbor. Much like late-night song circles at the BOT, performers chime in with one another on harmony parts or guitar leads.

Saturday's "It Just Takes Two" workshop, featuring five duos, epitomized this culture of workshops, with Pete Kennedy adding banter and introductions between acts. "The workshop stage is kind of magical," Kennedy said at the outset of the hour. "Weird, unexpected things always happen, good or bad." Before proceeding to the music, Kennedy tossed out a surefire political joke to energize the 12:15 audience: "So have any of you read J.K. Rowling's new book, 'Dick Cheney and the Half-Wit Prince?'"

Kennedy's close relationship with both his fellow musicians and his audience was evident. Introducing Lowen and Navarro, Kennedy exclaimed, "we not only get to play with so many of our favorite musicians, but also our favorite people." When he introduced a Kennedy's song from the duo's new CD, he told the crowd, "It doesn't come out until August, but we've got a box or two here at Falcon Ridge. It's our big gig of the year and we love you guys."

Later in the day, the Workshop Stage hosted “My Back Pages,” with two young roots bands: Crooked Still and Gandalf Murphy and the Slambovian Circus of Dreams. Both groups embraced the unexpected, spontaneous nature of the workshop as Gandalf taught the audience to yodel and Crooked Still’s cellist, Rushad Eggleston, broke into an impromptu performance of “My Favorite Things,” coaxing vocalist and bandleader Aoife O’Donovan to sing along.

Sunday morning’s workshop, Remembering Rachel, was a much more sobering occasion, paying tribute to well-loved singer-songwriter Rachel Bissex, who died of breast cancer in early 2005. The FRFF event, involving over twenty artists on stage, followed similar events at the Kerrville Folk Festival and Folk Alliance Conference, in which performers who had known Rachel covered her songs. FRFF, however, was also the CD Release Party for a two-CD “Remembering Rachel” recording, featuring many famous national folk performers as well as several of Bissex’s best friends.

The large Sunday morning crowd, which had begun assembling long before the ten o’clock start time, was a powerful testament to Bissex’s omnipresent role in the folk community. “This is probably the first time we’ve had this many musicians upright at ten a.m.,” the emcee joked. Tears flowed as the late songwriter’s compositions were performed, and many in the audience sang along. The tribute finished with Bissex’s original, “In White Light,” featuring lead vocals by Eric Schwartz and a trumpet part by Rachel’s husband. “Thank you, Rachel, for bringing us all together,” Schwartz said at the end of the performance, before thanking Tom Prasada-Rao and Cary Cooper, singer-songwriters and principal organizers and producers of the recording project. “Love yourselves and each other for the rest of the day,” Vance Gilbert added.

## **The Dance Tent**

**“The goal today is to dance before I’m so tired I forget which foot is my left and which is my right.”**

While the strains of energetic polkas and contra dances reach the ears of those attending the workshop stage, the sprawling rectangular dance tent, tucked into the rightmost edge of the festival site, is undeniably a universe of its own.

Addressing the Saturday morning production trailer crowd that had already begun discussing the affects of the Friday night downpour, festival right-hand-man Bob Weiser exclaimed, “The dance tent was totally oblivious: they dropped the flags and they danced right through the storm.”

While the music at Falcon Ridge has spawned a thriving community, the dance component of the festival draws upon an already-existing group of New England contra dancers who flock to the open air, 8,500 square foot floor. Falcon Ridge hires many of the region’s top callers and dance bands, making it one of the premier contra dance events of the summer. Though many festival attendees commented that the music and dance elements of Falcon Ridge were like “two separate festivals,” occasional crossover was programmed by festival organizers. Each year, two or three of the dance bands reach a wider audience by playing on the mainstage as well as for the dancers, and many volunteers and music enthusiasts visit the dance tent for at least a couple numbers. Non-contra forms of dance, such as Cajun, Zydeco, Swing, and Polka make cameo appearances, and family dances and beginners sessions cater to novices. Most sessions at the dance tent, however, are contras (occasionally squares) and those present are familiar with both the steps and each other.

“The dance community is surprisingly small,” Falcon Ridge dancer Jon Greene wrote me in an email. “There are many, many people I recognize at Falcon Ridge from other dances. As the festival wears on, the level of connection grows between those of us who dance a lot. It leaves a warm afterglow (as well as a monumental let down) in the days and weeks following the festival. But we all somehow get back to our non-liminal lives.”<sup>30</sup>

Greene’s comments call attention to an overlap between dance and music enthusiasts at Falcon Ridge that runs much deeper than a brief introduction to one another’s art forms. Though the contra dancers and the late night music participants at Falcon Ridge share little common musical vocabulary, they are united by a surprisingly similar core experience and reason for participating. Like the song circles, the dance tent runs into the wee hours (stopping at two a.m. Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights), and is frequently packed right up until the last song. The constancy of the dancing adds to the element of time restructuring – many people show up in the afternoon and barely leave, dancing straight through not only storms, but mealtimes, sunsets, and moonrises. Just as festival attendees who know each other through music seem to have two selves, dance is an alternate, “liminal” identity, through which dancers construct entirely different social networks than those within which they live their “non-liminal” lives. Like the BOT, the

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<sup>30</sup> As I mentioned in the introduction, ethnography in the folk music community often involves encounters with fellow scholars in the field, including dancers who use terms like liminality. “My daughter, Anna, wrote an anthropology thesis a couple of years ago in which she applied and broadened Turner’s concepts of liminality and *communitas* to a therapeutic community here in western MA,” Jon explained, referencing Victor Turner’s 1969 work, *The Ritual Process* (Chicago: Aldine Pub. Co.). Liminality, originally formulated as one stage in a rite of passage, refers to a state of ambiguous, fluid identity, during which an individual is particularly open to change. Greene’s application of the term to Falcon Ridge struck me as highly appropriate.

dance tent fosters a shared, physically challenging, ritualized, extra-ordinary experience that breaks down the boundaries of the “real world” and brings dancers closer together.

“There is something wonderful, really transporting, about dancing in an open air tent late at night to live music with people who have largely shed, at least for the moment, their "natural" inhibitions, self-consciousness, and judgmental tendencies,” Jon Greene wrote.

Both Greene and other dancers emphasized the same values I have identified as components of the folk music ideal. Many felt that dance, as an inherently participatory, social activity, was particularly efficacious in creating actual change in the way people relate to one another: honoring diverse identity, encouraging expressiveness, and fostering friendship among people of all sorts. An advertisement for “Gender-Role-Free Dancing with the Lavender Country & Folk Dancers” that appeared in the FRFF 2005 program clearly identified this construction of social space as a primary mission.

In some communities, gender-free dancing has been a way for gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, transgender, straight friends and allies to come together in a safe, nurturing environment to enjoy dancing, socializing, and building a community of unique friendships. For others, it is a way of addressing gender-imbalance issues and to ensure that everyone who wants to dance, can dance.

At Falcon Ridge, male/female pairs were the norm, though I saw several women dancing with women and parents dancing with children. During the Saturday afternoon “Cool Contras and Squares” session, all the dancers were part of the contra formation, performing uniform steps and executing a “ladies whirl” en masse to enthusiastic shouts. Earlier in the afternoon, when Polka band Brave Combo offered up an eclectic set punctuated by such familiar tunes as “Wonderful World,” individual dance styles covered a much wider spectrum. Some couples engaged in swaying slow dance, while others

moved in a more energetic fashion, inspired to varying degrees by Polka. Children and free form solo dancers joined in as well.



### **CHAPTER 3: MAINSTAGE AND BACKSTAGE**

*6:45 p.m. on Thursday. I walk up to the BOT with my guitar to watch the mainstage and hang out with friends. We are mostly socializing: it is too far away to really see, and you can't hear the lyrics being sung by the performers. Most of us have seen the groups that are performing at some point within the last year. Being here before the showcase begins helps me relax and also allows me to get to know some of the people for whom I will be performing. Jake Jacobson from Circle of Friends Coffeehouse is one of the few actually watching the mainstage intently: he is interested in booking one of the bands, but wants to see their live performance first. I retreat to a friend's tent to take a nap. I won't be performing until after midnight, and I'll need to be ready to last until three, maybe four a.m.*

**“Who says you can't play a mellow song in the middle of the day on a big stage for people who have never seen you before?” – Dave Crossland**

Mainstage and Backstage represent both ends of the insider/outsider spectrum at FRFF. The hill directly in front of mainstage is where you'll find those attendees who come specifically to see one performer, who identify as “concert-goers” rather than community members, who have never heard of Camp-Dar or the BOT or the PMS crew. (This year, several attendees have come specifically to see Ani DiFranco, and constitute a community of their own.) Backstage is, by definition, the most exclusive space at the festival, a community within a community, defined by “access” worn around one's neck on a lanyard.

#### **Music on the Mainstage**

**“Sometimes Ani is too much in your face, but I'm glad that she is and she has a lot of important stuff to say. So many singers are just too laid back. I like a message.”**

Although the music on the mainstage begins midday (eleven on Saturday and Sunday; noon on Friday), the mainstage community begins forming around six or six thirty a.m., when audience members start lining up to claim territory with blankets after

the gates open at seven. While the “land rush” is competitive, audience members are very considerate of one another, and many complete strangers introduce themselves and become friends. Rather than spelling out “rules,” the announcer onstage Sunday afternoon simply encouraged the audience to “love thy neighbor” and to “refrain from doing anything that would curb the enjoyment of your neighbor.” “Can I get an amen?” she asked. Following an enthusiastic response, she replied, “yeah, you’re a folk crowd.”

Mainstage music kicks off at noon on Friday with the emerging artist showcase: two-song performances by twenty-four different artists selected by a panel of judges from some 400 hopefuls who mailed in CDs and bios. Just having the chance to perform on the FRFF mainstage is a boon for their careers, but they also vie for a slot as one of four “Falcon Ridge Favorites,” selected by the audience to reappear at next year’s festival and as part of a Falcon Ridge Preview tour that makes the rounds of various folk venues during the weeks before the festival.

Though the selection of emerging artists is always the subject of discussion, it proved a particularly hot topic in 2005, when several well-established acts appeared in the showcase. “We were doing this song fifteen years ago,” Vance Gilbert remarked jovially when his pal Jim Infantino performed “Stress,” a folk hit released by Infantino in the early nineties, during the final showcase of the afternoon. While some found the abundance of established artists in the showcase merely interesting or amusing, others were upset, particularly lesser-known applicants who felt they stood no chance when forced to compete with full-time touring professionals. Even one of the artists who *was* chosen thought the afternoon’s line-up was evidence that change was necessary. “Maybe the talent level of people who have been out there awhile and really shouldn’t be on a

stage for the new and unheard will say something to the leadership,” he remarked.

“Maybe they need a new stage: the ‘couldn’t get booked’ showcase.”

The most hilariously defined “emerging” artists were Freebo and Photoglo, the veteran bass player who once played with Bonnie Raitt, and his partner, a highly respected Nashville songwriter who was one of judges for the Kerrville Folk Festival songwriting contest earlier in the summer. “Well, this is great,” Freebo exclaimed from the stage. “Two guys over fifty, emerging artists. It’s never too late!” Adding to the irony, Freebo and Photoglo chose to begin their performance with “Fishin’ in the Dark,” a Photoglo-penned tune that once hit number one on the Billboard Country Chart.

The ten-minute showcases on the large outdoor mainstage heighten the challenge of conveying individual identity and personal connection – key elements for a folk crowd – so performers who are already known have a leg up. Diane Ziegler (who, like Infantino and Gilbert, built her career in the fertile Boston open mic scene of the late eighties/early nineties) hit the nail right on the head by taking the stage in a sun dress with her kids in tow to get set up and tuned, then performing her song “Momma’s Boy.” She got the most applause, however, when introducing her second number, “Heaven’s Only Daughter.”

“This one is inspired by my experience growing up in the Catholic Church,” Ziegler told the audience. “My siblings and I are all in various stages of recovery. I’m frustrated that there aren’t more women spiritual leaders in this country.” Following uproarious cheers, Ziegler explained that her song was about Mary. Infantino also elicited enthusiastic applause with ad-libbed lyrics referencing the festival, familiar sing-along parts, and a veiled reference to a popular internet-only “filmstrip” critical of the

Bush administration. Cleverly inserted in the middle of another song, Infantino sang the lyrics “You’re in Athol (referencing a small town in Massachusetts), to the tune of the lyrics “You’re an A\*\*hole” (from the song of his that was used in the filmstrip).

Shouting and laughter made it clear that many of those in the crowd got the reference.

The showcase was also the first appearance of the weekend for the mainstage’s most frequent performers: the festival’s six American Sign Language interpreters. As the festival program explains, “Access to the music has always been a priority at FRFF and our onstage ASL interpreters are the most beautifully expressive part of that effort.” Two of the signers at FRFF 2005, Jody Gill and Dave McCloskey, were returning for their fifteenth years, while two others, Nancy Kaplan and Molly Wilson, celebrated their twelfth and eleventh Falcon Ridge anniversaries. The quick changeovers and varying styles of the showcases present as much of a challenge for the signers as they do for the artists and sound technicians: Infantino’s blindingly-fast “Stress” drew much of its dramatic appeal from the efforts of the ASL interpreter, who milked the hilarity of the speed in his attempt to keep up. Another interpreter described a different kind of challenge she faced when signing for unfamiliar performers. “I warn performers that signing’s a lot more graphic,” she told me, “so if I’m gonna go all out, you’re going to see what you’re saying. So if you want to tone it down a little ...”

The dynamics of the rest of the weekend’s mainstage performances remained much the same, though the performers were more consistently familiar to the audience and remained onstage for fifty-minute sets. The majority of performers were nationally touring acts, particularly familiar on the New England singer-songwriter circuit, and repeat performers at FRFF. Identity-based and political songs were well-represented

among the crowd favorites. Two young bands who got their breaks at previous Falcon Ridge festivals, string foursome Crooked Still, and Baltimore-based trio We're About Nine, were crowd pleasers on Saturday. Revival-era folk "star" Jesse Colin Young drew several festival-goers to the mainstage on Saturday morning. Young's performance of "Get Together" proved particularly meaningful for many of the attendees, several of whom remembered Young performing the song with Jackson Browne, Steven Stills, and Graham Nash at the 1979 No Nukes concert. Backstage at FRFF 2005, one woman teared up. "There have been more bomb attempts in London – I found an NPR station," she said. Her friend replied, "We're at Falcon Ridge, we're not supposed to know about the real world." "I was thinking about that and listening to Jesse Colin Young sing "Get Together" and I lost it," the first woman said.

### **Tradition or Favoritism?**

**"It just wouldn't be Falcon Ridge without The Nields."**

Both at the festival and in interviews, several people mentioned that FRFF booked the same rotation of acts every two or three years, noting that this consistency may have stemmed from the festival's relationships with particular performers and agents. "It used to be Bill-Fest," said one journalist who felt that performer Bill Morrissey, who helped Falcon Ridge get started in its early years, had used insider status to get many of his favorite performers booked. "They just booked the Fleming roster every time out," another FRFF attendee griped, referring to one of the largest agencies representing folk music performers. Not all FRFF attendees were upset about the consistency, however: "I never even look at the line-up," several people told me. "I come every year." Other Falcon Ridge-goers felt that remarks about favoritism were overstatements fueled by

jealousy and sour grapes. “I think the people who are saying those things are probably associated with performers who can’t get booked here,” one presenter and Falcon Ridge defender told me. Festival Director Anne Saunders bluntly noted that most of the regular performers are not only beloved community members but top money-makers.

Yeah, I know about the controversy of having them every year. But they are OUR children, they grew up as artists with each passing FRFF. Their history and ours are intimately and forever intertwined, so they will always play the fest. On a more biz/economic point, the Niels are among the top 5 in merch sales every year, EVERY YEAR for over 10 years running, hard to argue with that fact of life. EFO [Eddie From Ohio], the Niels, Moxy Fruvous, Greg Brown, The Kennedys, our own, spawned from this community, it's their music, tees, whatever stuff that goes home with fest goes in huge quantities every year.

Sunday afternoon featured two of the most regular FRFF shows, sister act The Niels (who have appeared at nearly every festival), and The Kennedys, a married duo who celebrated their tenth Falcon Ridge Anniversary in 2005. Both acts were extremely well-received by the mainstage crowd, many of whom left after the performance (and before Ani DiFranco’s set) to beat the traffic. Before the Kennedys performed the song “Half a Million Miles,” written about their career and marriage, Pete Kennedy thanked the crowd. “We played here the first year we were married,” he said. “We got married and the first thing we did was write a song, then we took a road trip – and probably only the people here don’t think that’s weird.”

While the tried and true performers had plenty of stage time, I also saw several acts that deviated from the perceived Falcon Ridge mold. Los Angeles-based duo Lowen & Navarro, returning for their second year, and Texan singer-songwriter Jimmy LaFave brought with them the markedly different musical cultures of their own home-bases. Performance poet Chris Chandler, who appeared at 4:05 on Saturday for a fifteen-minute set, was most certainly a departure from the musical norm. Gandalf Murphy and the

Slambovian Circus of Dreams, a young, progressive trad band that played just before Ani DiFranco, emphasized their electric guitar, covered Queen's Bohemian Rhapsody, and introduced one song with "this is a tip of the hat to those early folk pioneers, The Who."

### **The Song Swap and the Gospel Wake-up Call**

**"This is a socially conscious festival. People are more adept politically, more environmentally conscious, more mellow. I just came from another festival with a younger crowd, heavy drugs and drinking. I don't mean to stereotype, but you know, the twenty or thirty somethings who walk through your campsite. People here are interested in the scene, the camaraderie, talking intelligently."**

Among the most popular sets on the mainstage were two FRFF traditions: the Friday Night Summer's Eve Song Swap and the Sunday morning Gospel Wake Up Call. Friday night's event, featuring Chris Smither, Susan Werner, Tracy Grammer, and Vance Gilbert (and Jimmy LaFave, who was added at the last minute because his afternoon set was cut short due to the rain) was a perfect example of Falcon Ridge's bread and butter. All four songwriters are "folk famous," particularly in New England, but virtually unknown to the wider music world (though Werner and Grammer are making headway in the cabaret and country scenes, respectively). Werner's "My Strange Nation," expressing patriotism despite disagreement with the current administration, garnered an extremely enthusiastic response, as did Gilbert and Grammer's covers of the songs written by Grammer's late partner Dave Carter.

Sunday's Gospel Wake-up Call was packed, largely by those who had just attended (or participated in) the Rachel Bissett tribute on the workshop stage. "This morning's service is not for any religion," the emcee announced. "It's for the spirit." Proving the point, Lowen and Navarro performed Mentor Williams' hit, "Drift Away."

(“Give me the beat boys and free my soul, I want to get lost in your rock and roll and drift away.”) “When in doubt, turn off your mind. Your own consciousness shines,” the announcer said when the song was finished. “When we feel the beat of rock and roll, we know this .... There is only one religion: it’s compassion. Experience an eternity in the here and now.” As Lowen and Navarro, the Kennedys, Eddie from Ohio, and special guests Chris and Meredith Thompson continued to performed, two large white doves (powered by two people on stilts) spontaneously appeared, crossing in front of the stage, moving up the hill and across the audience. As the doves circulated throughout the audience, Dan Navarro reprised Jesse Colin Young’s “Get Together,” breaking into an a cappella section and encouraging the audience to clap. Near the end of the performance, the Thompson twins were invited to sing their version of Amazing Grace. “This hill is my favorite house of worship. We celebrate the sound of music and sisterly love,” Chris Thompson said. When the Thompsons finished, the announcer applauded the spontaneous doves of peace, then introduced the Gospel Wake Up Call’s traditional closing number, “I’m On My Way.”

Having been prepared by several of my interviewees for “Ani madness,” I was surprised to find DiFranco’s Sunday evening set a rather sedate affair. The hill was packed, but no more so than it had been for popular folk performers such as Dar Williams, and most of the crowd was sitting down just as they had been all weekend. Young, alternatively-dressed Ani fans (some with dreadlocks) were visible, but neither dominant nor particularly rowdy. When Ani yelled out “I love this country; we need a change in this country,” to huge cheers, it was not so much threateningly revolutionary as it was reminiscent of Susan Werner’s similar sentiment two nights before.



Following DiFranco's set, the festival finished with a group performance of Pat Humphries' "Never Turning Back," FRFF's "Closing Song" for over a decade. "It was performed by its author that first time as our final song," FRFF Artistic Director Anne Saunders explained. "It was such a perfect ending. More verses specific to FRFF have been added over the years and we sing it every year at close."

### **Backstage**

*I'm starting to get a little tired after being on my feet all day, but I'm not sure if I should sit down. First of all, I only have backstage access because of my volunteer crew status, and I'm not on duty. No one is checking, and I know enough people that it's probably OK, but I feel bad taking up a chair. Also, the minute I sit down, I'm liable to get caught there. It might be obvious if I stand up in the middle of a performance, and there's always the possibility that I would do so right in front of the artist's agent or manager.*

**"This kind of life is up and down all the time and you just do it because you love it. The power of stories is the thing that drives my life." – Rik Palieri**

Two very different and separate crowds watch the mainstage performances : the paying audience on the hill, and the backstage crowd that moves between a small seating area to the right side of the stage and the backstage tent, where food, couches, and business opportunities sustain a lively social atmosphere from mid-afternoon to midnight.

The paying crowd mostly remains stationary on their blankets. A few congregate in the small dance pit on the right side of the stage, expressing their communion with the music in styles ranging from Irish step dance to hippie creative movement. The majority seem content to sit and watch and listen.

The backstage crowd, however, remains constantly active, engaging musically and analytically with the performances on stage, networking with one another, and socializing. This community-within-a-community is the most clearly defined at the festival: either you've got a pass or you don't. All the official festival performers have

backstage passes, including the emerging artists. Volunteers working on the Performer Liason or Backstage crews have these passes as well, as do all the members of the production team, and members of the press. Other VIPs include well-known patrons, presenters, and agents, as well as a few deejays. Access isn't determined by any hard and fast rule, but by a subjective evaluation of one's contribution to – and membership in – the community. As one VIP put it, “only the *real* agents who represent *real* people are backstage.” One of these *real* agents is Mary Granata, whose artist roster includes 2005 FRFF performers Lowen and Navarro and Jesse Colin Young. Her husband, Peter Granata, has been selling his handmade guitars in the vendor area for ten years, and the couple has been coming to the festival for thirteen. While chatting with a member of the Performer Liason Crew, Mary mentioned that vendor parking was always full, but that she and her husband had been given a pass to park closer to the festival grounds. “You *should* be connected,” the crew member said. “You’ve been here long enough.”

Meaningful access, however, requires more than a backstage pass. Navigating the social (and business) situation backstage can be daunting if you don't have an “in” and several acquaintances. Many of the emerging artists never appeared backstage other than to perform their own two-song set. While they all had access in a technical sense, artists who were lesser known in New England could easily have found the backstage social scene a difficult one to penetrate.

Despite its exclusivity, the backstage community contains numerous self-identified misfits and maintains a healthy meta-commentary. Certain performers who attend FRFF, including some who appear on the mainstage and some who go just for the campfires, find the festival and its definition of folk overly conservative. These

performers want to connect with the festival's sizeable audience but wish they could bypass the festival leadership, the showcase process, and the entire value-laden institution that presides over booking decisions. Accused by many folkies of using folk as a stepping stone, these boundary walkers usually accuse their critics of valuing politics over good music. "There's no point to a f\*\*king ballad," one performer exclaimed backstage during a particularly slow song. "It's a waste of my life." This performer later told me that he actually liked most of the music made by one of the members of the group onstage, but felt he had made a poor, politically-motivated decision in joining the other members to perform the material they were presenting at FRFF.

Gene Lewin of the band Groovelily expressed his frustrations in a slightly more restrained manner. When I caught up with him backstage, he was contemplating how much of his drumset he should schlep up the hill for the band's performance at the Budgiedome. Aware that a full drumset would not be appropriate, he was unwilling to downsize to a hand drum, as many other drummers performing with folk groups do. "I've done the djembe thing at so many of these things," he said. "It's SO not what I do. It's like (jazz drummer) Tony Williams said: 'drums are meant to be loud.'" I overheard another performer exclaim, half-joking, but half-serious, "get me away from all these tie-dye wearing, grey haired folkies."

Not all the middle-aged folkies are particularly tame, however. Also backstage was Jayne Toohey, a photographer and longtime follower of the folk scene best known for her work with Full Frontal Folk and her Naked Folk Calendar, which debuted in 2005. Discussion of which performers had already agreed to appear in the 2006 edition provided some of the hottest gossip backstage. "I'll buy it just for Modern Man," one

volunteer said, referring to a comedic duo of middle-aged men who Jayne mentions as one of the features of *Naked Folk* 2006.

Though most backstage regulars aren't quite this provocative, those who are most "in" are often those who treat the situation with the most levity. After all, no one is getting rich in the folk world, and very few are getting famous. For all the hype sensed by a new performer at the BOT, Falcon Ridge is several light years removed from the big time. This was particularly evident backstage on Thursday when mainstage performer Dan Navarro told his agent, Mary Granata, that he had brought his son with him to the festival and that they were both camping. "Our friends have a shower," Mary told him. "Woohoo!" Dan responded, as if he'd just been offered champagne and a limousine escort. Minutes later, Grassy Hill Entertainment director Tom Neff feigned self-importance when he came to pick up his badge. "I need whatever I need for the new world order. I need my bling bling," Neff jokingly demanded of the volunteers.

Ultimately, both performers and presenters are involved because they love the music and the community. Most are actually making significant *sacrifices* of time, money, and sanity to do so. "There's no money in it," former presenter and current folk deejay Bob Weiser told me. "You gotta be crazy to do what I was doing: seventy to eighty shows a year." Because the primary motivation for involvement is not money, Weiser told me, there tends to be a higher percentage of "nice" people in folk music than in other corners of the music business.

This was certainly evident in the interactions among performers, VIPs, and volunteers. When The Nields came to pick up their badges, Performer Liason Crew Chief Pete Urbaitis gave them each a big kiss on the cheek, and the sisters proceeded to

greet each crew member by name, including the daughter of one staffer. Even the biggest star of the event, Ani DiFranco, did not receive excessive star treatment. Though decoy “LFS Touring” badges had been prepared for her and her crew to discourage stalkers, Ani security ended up being very low-key. “They’re still letting all the same people backstage even though she’s there,” one volunteer told me Sunday afternoon. “They’ll probably close it up later, but, you know, we’re not used to too many prima donnas.”

### **Back-backstage: Production**

**“Having been out in the real world for as long as I was, it’s great to be able to just handle things as they come up.” – Pete Urbaitis**

You know you’re not at a commercially-sponsored music festival when a young woman walks out of the production trailer wearing an orange wrap skirt and butterfly wings and carrying a cash box. The high priority placed on individuality and diversity among promulgators of the folk music ideal extends from the FRFF midway to the heart of its business operations, where quirkiness is routinely tolerated at the expense of efficiency. The level of stress and activity that permeates the FRFF production office is similar to that at any other festival. However, individual eccentricities, at least those of the core community members, seem to escape the forces of streamlining. At twelve-thirty on Thursday, for example, backstage access passes that were supposed to be printed and ready to go by ten were still unfinished, and an increasing number of performers, agents, and members of the press were being turned away. Meanwhile, festival Artistic Director Anne Saunders worked furiously to solve the technical difficulties, emerging from the trailer periodically to report to the Performer Liason crew. “Remember how we took notes last year on ‘things that could be better next year,’” one of the crew members remarked with the jovial, knowing smile of a longtime folkie who

knows that things often run late or imperfectly in this world. “This could have been one of them.” Saunders was equally good natured, jokingly exclaiming “f\*\*k the performers,” when an agent she had known for many years asked her when badges would be ready. Saunders explained that her printer was “having a fit” and that badges would be ready as soon as possible.

Friday morning, one of the members of the Performer Liason crew showed up for work in her pajamas and declared that she was comfortable and planned to wear them all day. She was vigorously applauded. A few minutes later, another crew member exclaimed, “hey, we have a security mandolin!” pointing to a security staff member who had just taken his mandolin out of its case, continuing to man his post while playing.

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Falcon Ridge has grown considerably since its beginnings in 1988. As Anne Saunders and Howard Randall stood outside the production trailer Sunday afternoon, talking to one another, a core group of crew members collectively reflected on the seventeen years past, witnessing for a moment the festival’s infancy, the place from which it all started. “Is this bittersweet for you?” someone asked Howard, referring to the fact that this Falcon Ridge may likely be the last one at Long Hill. I didn’t hear his answer, and I didn’t know him well enough to ask the same question, so I asked instead “what are you up to?” He told me that he’d been fixing a trailer – axles and bent parts. “I never had a schedule,” Howard said. “I just figure it out as I go along.”

Saunders later reminisced on the resiliency of the festival and the strength of the community that was built through the arduous process of developing the event.

We went to four stages in 1994, a very transitional year. We added a dance stage, made Family much larger with tented audience space. That was also the very first

Friday evening song swap with The Story, Patty Larkin and Greg Brown. They went only 3 rounds before the most spectacular and dangerous severe thunderstorm we ever had swallowed the hill. My little backstage trailer had a short circuit and/or was struck by lightning, never knew exactly but I could not get out of it until we turned off the juice, whole trailer was live. We turned off everything it was so bad.

Dancers in the new dance tent dropped the sides of tent and kept right on, totally oblivious. Everyone else ran for cover and we went on to take care of each other in the common tented areas and campgrounds all night long. I was actually crying at one point when the swap absolutely had to stop and several patrons came up to me to say they would be back in the morning, that the song swap was an amazing thing. Many said they felt they got their moneys worth and then some just in those 3 rounds. "Keep it up just that way," they said. "We'll be back."

In a way it was the sorest test of "deep community", a turning point that made us unbelievably strong for years to come, still does. The first coming together of the community under duress. We made the special tees that said "94 survivor" with a lightning bolt, big raindrops and our logo, falcon with umbrella, the next year. Dave Carter's passing was much harder, no physical danger, no massive physical discomfort but way harder.

Saunders' recollection of past hardships in the festival's history served more than just personal nostalgia. As the Falcon Ridge community prepared to move locations, several long-time attendees invoked the 1994 thunderstorm. They remembered their "94 Survivor" tee shirts determined to turn yet another unexpected difficulty into a community affirming experience. Before it even happened, the 2006 move became a part of the Falcon Ridge story, its significance immortalized on a couple dozen homemade buttons: "Falcon Ridge is a State of Mind."

## CONCLUSION

The Falcon Ridge Folk Festival is a musical event and a commercial venture. The annual four-day production of concerts, workshops, dances, vendor booths, and related activities have been created on a physical site in the Berkshires. However, the *event* of Falcon Ridge is merely the tip of a much larger iceberg: the *musical community* of Falcon Ridge. This year-round “state of mind” community, held together by a debated set of concerns that I collectively term the *folk music ideal*, creates the value-added, social framework within which the Falcon Ridge event and its music are communicated and understood, defined and redefined. Thus, the festival becomes a vehicle by which this musical community and its ideals are realized. Much like the folk musics of nations or ethnic groups, the performance of music at Falcon Ridge<sup>31</sup> is a ritual medium through which group identity is continually explored, challenged, and affirmed.

Like many musical communities, Falcon Ridge contains several overlapping layers of participation, ranging from membership in a quasi-society to more casual music consumption. Official festival events provide a common ground for all attendees, while unofficial, late night music and camping foster deeper levels of community. Individuals often navigate between these two layers, constructing complex identities that function as fully-formed alternatives to their “day jobs.”

The music at Falcon Ridge Folk Festival resists the attempts of community members who feel compelled to define it as “folk.” Though acoustic guitars appear in nearly every performance, instrumentation varies widely, as do musical styles and

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<sup>31</sup> In this context, I am not setting performance apart as an activity separate from volunteering or vending. Rather, I use the phrase “performance of music,” very broadly, as something akin to Christopher Small’s “musicking,” in which each person involved in the act of producing a musical event must be considered a participant.



influences. Musicians perform themselves as community members by linking their music to their identity, either as singer-songwriters or traditional performers, and by associating themselves with the folk music ideal. Some musicians make this link in very blatant ways, with political lyrics or outright condemnation of commercialism proclaimed over the microphone. Other performers embrace the spirit of the folk music ideal in more subtle ways, by inviting the audience to sing along or by camping on the grounds.

My own experience as a community member and ethnographer is really not so unique. “Ethnographer” does not actually exist as a stand-alone community role. To conduct anything other than armchair ethnography, one must take on other roles. As a matter of fact, ethnographers have been doing this for centuries, long before reflexivity became fashionable in the academy. Much like particle physics, ethnography requires an embrace of the simultaneous positions of participant and researcher. In the humanities, our own fully constituted human selves are our best investigative tool.

## EPILOGUE: FALCON RIDGE'S FUTURE

On October 19, 2005, I got an email from Dave Brennan, who told me the sale of Long Hill Farm had closed just two days ago. "The good news is, it will stay a farm," Brennan wrote. "The party that bought it is liberal Democrat and a member of the Green Party and likes to do organic farming. The bad news is that Falcon Ridge will no longer be here. The festival will still be in the area as it has moved about 7 miles north of here so at least it has not gone far."

Also that month, the Moxy Fruvous website<sup>32</sup> posted the following announcement:

Over the past week and a half "we" (a small crew of volunteers and a couple of Bub's hired help) have moved all of the Falcon Ridge Folk Festival equipment and property up to a farm that is about 6 or 7 miles from the Brennan farm. Since Howard (Bub) Randall the promoter for FRFF hasn't announced the name of the new farm where we will be holding FRFF 2006, I can't release that info either. I can tell you that the farm is a GREAT location with much more "usable" property than we had at the Brennan farm.

There is a gentle slopping hill at which the main stage will be located at the bottom. There will be plenty of open field camping areas and there will be an added feature of some camping being located in a wooded area for those who choose that kind of setting. All of the existing stages will be located around the fields so we will have appropriate spacing. Oh, there are a few smaller fields which will allow us to better separate "quiet" camping for those who want to jam all night - like that group that used to be up on the ridge.

The dates for FRFF 2006 are: July 20, 21, 22 and 23, 2006. So now you have the date and can start to plan throughout the cold winter months how fantastic it will be - being the first volunteers to set up on the NEW site for FRFF.

With a strong financial outlook and thousands of committed regulars, Falcon Ridge will no doubt continue for many years, much as it has for the past decade and a half. Even so, the move from Long Hill Farm heightened the sense of community self-

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<sup>32</sup> <http://www.fruhead.com>. Though the band is "on hiatus," their website remains an active forum for their community of fans, known to one another as Früheads.

definition and expression at Falcon Ridge 2005. This ethnography became part of a movement to commemorate the past fifteen years of the festival and to find a collective identity that would help guide the festival's re-establishment at the new site.

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### **Online Resources for Further Research**

Falcon Ridge Folk Festival. <<http://www.falconridgefolk.com>>

Nields Nook. <<http://www.nieldsnook.org/gfp.html>>

Tribes Hill. <<http://www.tribeshill.com>>

The Budgiedome. <<http://www.budgiedome.org>>

FRFF-list. <<http://cos.polyamory.org/frfflist.html>>

Fruhead.com. <<http://www.fruhead.com>>



## **Appendix B: Excerpts from Interviews with Falcon Ridge Attendees**

### **Scott Alarik**

Folk music critic, *Boston Globe* and *Sing Out*, author, musician  
11/22/04

*How long have you been going to Falcon Ridge?*

I went once in the early or mid '90s, then for the last two years.

*What is/are your role(s) there?*

I was a performer the first time, workshop participant the second, and emcee the third.

*Run through what you usually do while you're there - morning, afternoon, nighttime - do you get there early?*

Mostly I just hang around and visit with people. It's not a festival that keeps participants very busy, I've found, which enhances the social vibe of the event for fans. A lot of performers mingle with fans during the day. One of the things that impresses me about Falcon Ridge is that it's evolved into an event many different people use for many different things - and they all work.

*What is the "heart" of the festival? The performances? The volunteer community? The campground (any one particular part)?*

The overall community it's created. Falcon Ridge has been criticized for bringing the same performers back every year, but they were consciously trying to create an annual community by building loyal relationships with artists - and the fans they attract each year. I think that's really begun to pay off the last few years, and they're drawing record crowds. At a certain point, an event that becomes a real scene - a place folks attend regularly - reaches a critical mass, in which its very popularity becomes the reason its popular. Everybody goes there because everybody's going there. Falcon Ridge, more than any other regional festival, I think, has succeeded in creating that. Lowell is similar, in that people go because of the event, rather than a particular year's roster, and the similarity of musical personality from year to year is the big reason. Both paradigms, I am happy to say, stand the pop star system on its head.

*What function do you think this festival serves in the folk community?*

It is regarded as an essential place for young songwriters to hang out, sing at the campfires, become known in the community. That, I think, does two things: one good, one bad. The good thing is that it creates the correct impression that this is a community music, and that becoming an integral part of that community is a crucial ingredient in having a successful life in folk music. The bad thing is that it creates the impression among some that there is a step-ladder to success, and that singing around the campfires,



meeting this star or that presenter, is moving new artists up that ladder. But as Utah Phillips says, "There are no career moves in folk music." There are only audiences, and an artist's ability to interest them and to retain that interest. As much as Falcon Ridge can create the illusion of that step-ladder, however, I think it also dispels it by displaying the whole folk scene in one communal, cacophonous place, as it truly exists.

Falcon Ridge is also an important gathering of the Northeast folk dance community. I'm not as concerned about how segregated that is from the music festival as some others are. Folk dancers have always, by choice, been a rather separate enclave within the larger folk world. It's how they like to see themselves, probably how they always will.

*How has it changed?*

I don't think it has changed as much as the people coming to it have changed, and been changed, by what Anne and Howard have been trying to do. It's almost as if the folk community has evolved to the point that it innately gets what Falcon Ridge is all about now. But at the same time, the event has gotten in a very solid groove, and developed a very secure identity. It knows exactly what it is, how things work, and how to present things. I have been terrifically impressed the last couple of years by how well everything runs. There is such an absence of glitches, either technically or environmentally. Everybody comes, hangs, and gets out of it what they want.

It has also avoided becoming insular or overly cliqueish. Given what an ingrown community they have worked to create, I'm very impressed at how welcoming the event is, how easy it is for new people to get their sea legs and feel right at home. Falcon Ridge's success says wonderful things about the people who created and continue to support it - and about what kind of music form Folk is today.

**Jamie Barth**

Fan, Pirate's Patch community member, Club Passim Board Member  
11/21/2004

*How long have you been going to Falcon Ridge ?*

I've been to Hillsdale's version of Brigadoon on and off for about 8 years - a few years on, followed by a year off.

For the first many years of my FR experience, I stayed in a Hillsdale B&B, as I felt camping really wasn't for me. As a result, I didn't really stay there late, usually leaving after the last main stage event. Then, last year (2003), I decided at the last minute to go (on Monday, before it started on Thursday). I journeyed out that Saturday AM, hung around catching various acts and walking the midway (and working hard to karmically draw the angel who had offered to share her tent space with me as I had no idea where Camp EdHead was). That finally worked around supper time.

As a result, I ended up late late late that night sitting on the side of the hill with Neale [Eckstein], Justin Roth, and Steph Corby - watching Arlo from a far distance, then (for the first time) visiting the BOT as well as the Budgiedome. It gave me a real sense of what so many had been talking about.

The next day, the EFO community was out in force - cooking brunch for the full EFO camp, just prior to the gospel wake-up call (which had been initiated and continues to be hosted/led by EFO).

This year, my friend again offered to share her porch front tent - I had had a great time, hanging with the Edheads and being part of that community. I had enjoyed the camping experience much more than I expected, so decided to fully throw myself into it.

My camping enthusiasm underwent a serious test though, when the sky opened in mid-afternoon and went on for several hours - resulting in a soaked sleeping bag and many other wet garments!

The best part, though, was the sense of community that was truly surfaced by the rain. This year, Camp Edhead (aka "The Pirate's Patch") came complete with a 25'x10' shelter. When the rain started, I found myself here, with about a dozen others. We waited out the 3-hour rain by first singing EFO songs, morphing then into 80s power ballads - all a capella.

*What is the "heart" of the festival? The performances? The volunteer community? The campground (any one particular part)?*

I think this is different for everyone. I'm not connected to the FR volunteer community, so don't count that in the mix. However, it's the performances that draw me each year - along with the chance to sit on the hill and look at the landscape while feasting, listening and/or dancing. I look forward to hearing new voices, people I didn't know before. It's happened several times - mainly with Moxy Früvous and Great Big Sea, but also with Sam Pacetti and Jimmy LaFave.

But, clearly, my more recent connection to the Pirate's Patch has been special. It's great to be part of that community.

*What function do you think this festival serves in the folk community?*

It's wonderful to spend a long weekend away from a city environment, with people who share an interest like this music. I see it as a place to bring a wide range of people together to expose them to new voices - and to give those voices a place to be widely heard.

*How has it changed?*

My sense is that I see a lot of the same faces (performer-wise) year after year. So, I suppose that's how it's stayed the same. I'm not sure that it has changed - at least as much as it has the potential to. I suppose it's become a lot tighter - and better run as a business. At the same time, that's led to it feeling somewhat more regimented. I suppose that has to happen as it draws more and more people.

**Jonathan Byrd**

Volunteer, performer at unofficial, late night showcases and song circles  
11/17/2004

*How long have you been going to Falcon Ridge?*

Two years

*What is/are your role(s) there?*

First year, attendee, second year volunteer stage crew

I am committed to playing music with other people, sharing songs, and participating in a musical community. That's what I'm there for. So, if I'm not working or sleeping, I'm playing and listening.

*What is the "heart" of the festival? The performances? The volunteer community? The campground (any one particular part)?*

I have never watched a main stage act, except from behind the stage while I'm working-oh, and I caught a song from Richie Havens. Walter Parks was badass. Playing music with an intimate community is far more important to me than seeing whoever's "big." Volunteering helps me, because I'm new to the festival, to build an instant community. The campground is where I find the most rewarding stuff, mostly at Tribes Hill or Jack Hardy's camp (under the pirate flag on the hill). Both Rick Rock, of Tribes Hill, and Jack Hardy inspire their communities to play music all day and all night. They are hospitable and encouraging to nearly everyone.

**Robert Corwin**

Photographer, Big Orange Tarp helper  
11/26/2004

At Falcon Ridge, I wear all these different hats. Wherever I go, I keep bumping into myself. I'm there exhibiting and selling. I'm there as an official FRFF photographer: for Anne, for publicity, and for the website; and I'm also there to take pictures for myself: for my archives, for my collection. Some of the pictures end up in SingOut! and other magazines, on CD artwork, or quite often I'll get performer pictures to people that want to use them for publicity; and some folks will ask me beforehand to take pictures for a specific purpose— once in awhile I'll even do a photo shoot there! But most often I shoot

first, not having any idea what I'm shooting for, and it's sometime later that the photo surprises me by taking on a life of it's own. And sometimes I help out at the BOT. It used to be that the BOT was – we started an organization, folkmusic.org, that became an official organization with a board and everything that oversaw the folk music discussion list, and also funded the BOT. I was on the board, but that kind of got dissolved as a formal nonprofit. But sometimes I help out or MC at the BOT. And I usually spend my nights there to have a good time, to listen to music, and occasionally drag a musician in who I think deserves to be heard. For me, it's a big family reunion. I often feel like a hermit when I'm home. I don't even know who to call to see a movie here in Philadelphia – my focus is away from home so much. My family is at Folk Alliance and at the festivals. It's a very important social thing. It's also a networking event. I'm hired to do photo shoots with people I meet at Falcon Ridge. Already this year I've done a couple.

My favorite part of a music festival is the workshops. And, for me, Falcon Ridge is definitely more of a workshop festival – I hardly ever go to the mainstage during the day – I'd much rather be at a workshop. Plus, I've seen most of the people do their mainstage sets elsewhere. So the mainstage is not as interesting. On the workshop stage, more musicians are playing together in unusual configurations, and more spontaneous things can, and usually do, happen.

**Mark Erelli**

Performer, former volunteer

11/21/04

*How long have you been going to Falcon Ridge?*

I first went in 1996, the summer after I graduated college. I went as a member of the Record Sales tent volunteer crew.

*What is/are your role(s) there?*

I was a volunteer in the Record Sales tent for 96-98, then I was able to play the festival once in 2001 and again in 2004 on the mainstage.

*What is the "heart" of the festival? The performances? The volunteer community? The campground (any one particular part)?*

My feeling is that the heart of the festival is the notion or idea that community matters, that it's vital to our quality of life. To that end, folk music is used as a vehicle for bringing the whole community together in one place for a common purpose. The performers, the volunteers, the campground folks. I think we all inspire each other in this big positive feedback loop, so it's hard to single out any of these factors. I do believe it's the notion of community that makes folk music unique. It is music that brings people together, it always has, and hopefully always will.

**Jim Gottlieb**

Fan

11/23/04

*Run through what you usually do while you're there - morning, afternoon, nighttime - do you get there early?*

I always get there on the afternoon when they open the gates. I like having plenty of time to set up my tent and get into the spirit of the place rather than just show up when the music is already underway. It also helps to get to know people to be there when everyone is helping each other set up. There is also a first night tradition at Camp Dar (where I have always camped) to go to the Diner for dinner. After that, I'm on the farm the whole time. I have never left the farm during the festival.

On Friday, I will always try to see as many of the "emerging artists" as possible. One reason I come is to discover new people, and this is a good way to do this.

*What is the "heart" of the festival? The performances? The volunteer community? The campground (any one particular part)?*

Many volunteers would say it's the volunteer community. But since I've never volunteered (because this is my one chance every year to see so many of my favorite singers and I don't want to be stuck volunteering somewhere and miss any performances), I'd have to say the midway is the "heart". It's where everyone, fans and performers alike, are on equal footing

**Victor Heyman**

Presenter, patron, "godparent of folk"

11/17/2004

*How long have you been going to Falcon Ridge?*

We have attended every FRFF which began in 1988.

*What is/are your role(s) there*

We were on the showcase selection committee for several years. For the past 3 years we have MC'd the staff open mic.

*Run through what you usually do while you're there - morning, afternoon, nighttime - do you get there early?*

We usually arrive on the site the afternoon before the festival begins, greeting friends and getting the lay of the land. We get dinner in Hillsdale and return to the site in time to get requests to perform in the open mic. The show lasts from 8pm until 11pm, after which we go to our motel. For the first 15 years we stayed in the same B&B near by but the

owners have retired and we now stay in a motel in Hillsdale. We usually go to the site around 11am in time to see the workshops from the beginning. We switch between the workshops and main stage depending on whether we are familiar with the artists and the type of music presented. We always listen intently to the Emerging Artists showcase performers, many of whom we know from Kerrville or Susquehanna festivals. On the other hand, we rarely stay late at night for the In-The-Round because the temperatures tend to drop into the 40's and the same performers play again on subsequent days.

*What is the "heart" of the festival? The performances? The volunteer community? The campground (any one particular part)?*

For us the heart of the festival is the workshops and main stage performances. We stay backstage and visit with the performers and staff. We are not campers but for those who are, the campgrounds are a crucial part of the festival experience, especially the Big Orange Tarp or BOT which marks the Folkmusic.Org camping area on the big hill. An extremely important part of the festival is the Dance Tent. The dancers are a loyal set of activists who have virtually no contact with the rest of the festival but provide a significant source of revenue.

*What function do you think this festival serves in the folk community?*

FRFF is a major singer/songwriter festival. It devotes a whole afternoon to providing space to emerging artists, draws its main stage performers from the top drawer of acoustic performers, provides camping facilities which enable campers to produce music after spending the day consuming it. All of this is done on a relatively spacious farm that doesn't put everyone cheek by jowl (as opposed to the Philly Folk Festival, for example.) The festival also provides excellent American Sign Language signers who add to the enjoyment of both deaf and hearing audiences--these people are funny as well as proficient.

**Scott and Paula Moore**

Presenters, Big Orange Tarp helpers

11/17/04

We love Falcon Ridge and have encouraged a number of friends to go. Each of two kids are planning to take a friend in '05.

*How long have you been going to Falcon Ridge?*

About 5 years

*What is/are your role(s) there*

Fans, with an eye to finding performers we like for possible bookings; Scott served on a workshop panel one year.

*Run through what you usually do while you're there - morning, afternoon, nighttime - do you get there early?*

We get there Wednesday afternoon, set up camp at the top of the hill, near the Big Orange Tarp (BOT). We are involved in fixing community meals for breakfast and dinner. Lunch usually from vendors. Up early to take a tarp to the main stage and workshop stage. Go to some of the workshop stage events, some of the main stage. Always block out room for new folk, Vance's workshop. Nap some during some of the late-night main stage sets so we can be fresh for the after-hours music at the BOT (generally till about 3 a.m.). We also go to the quarry about 5 miles away [to swim], usually as part of a car pool, and shop at the store in town.

*What is the "heart" of the festival? The performances? The volunteer community? The campground (any one particular part)?*

For us, it's the camping community, for us the BOT.

*What function do you think this festival serves in the folk community?*

Showcases a lot of great music, both established and upcoming acts. Brings people together. Teaches some people things they use (setting up house concerts, better performance skills, etc.)

*How has it changed?*

I don't think it has. For us, we have changed some. Now we tend to spend more time talking with friends and a little less listening to music.

**Gordon Nash**

Budgiedome host

11/18/2004

*What function do you think this festival serves in the folk community?*

It serves the same function as major holidays have in the general culture. It is a time to celebrate and spend time with people you love.

We [The Budgiedome] don't coordinate with Anne at all. I'm not sure that I have ever spoken to her. The whole thing just grew spontaneously. We built the Budgiedome for ourselves and musicians started showing up. It is all unofficial.

I don't volunteer but Steve [Martin] does. He works on the set-up which allows him to get to FRFF early and set up the dome. He is the only one that gets comped.

Continuity is part of the appeal. We go up there and act like hippies for four days then return to our real lives.

*What is "real life" for you?*

In real life I teach math at New York Institute of Technology. I think my students figure I'm a hippie. I put musicians I like in my word problems. If it takes Maura 6 hours to paint a room and it takes Pete 4, how long would it take for them to paint the room together?

**Alan Rowoth**

Founder, The Big Orange Tarp

2/16/2006

*I am going to send you a copy of a nearly-finished draft of my Falcon Ridge thesis. I say quite a bit about the BOT [Big Orange Tarp], so I'd love for you to read it over and see what you think. If there are points you want to respond to or inaccuracies you would like to correct, Please let me know.*

Regarding the BOT stuff, it's essentially all correct. One minor correction is that the illumination under the BOT is an orange shrouded compact fluorescent light that I've made several of. I tried Christmas tree lights and liked them better, but the car inverter wouldn't hold them up all night long. You can leave it lantern in your text as it makes no functional difference. I have experimented with gas lanterns, but moved away from them because of the noise they generate.

I needed the inverter anyway, as it also powers the keyboard. (As well as the CPAP machine that I use when I sleep, even when camping around the country) I've brought my own keyboard for at least 6 years now except for one year where I ran out of packing time. It's usually replaced by a better unit that one of the artists has brought anyway, but I try to always have one, for the occasional keyboardist...) I used to bring a bass amp, but no one as capable at sitting in on bass as say Freebo or [Eric] Schwartz ever came to sit in, so I eventually stopped bringing it. I do occasionally augment the circle with "house band" players like Arthur Lee (guitar), Christopher Williams (percussion), Gina Forsyth (fiddle) or Bill Kahler (soprano sax), primarily under the Colorado BOT.

I work hard to try to get away from strictly WHIGWAG (White Guy/Girl With a Guitar) performers, trying to cycle keyboards and other alternative instruments into the rounds as often as possible. I also try to achieve a good mix of ages, genders, styles, etc when programming the rounds, so as not to unconsciously send a message of exclusion. Sometimes my mix choices are a bit more limited than I would like them to be. Also I have come to expect that one or two performers each night will actually become no shows, for whatever reason, so I always have alternates or ringers penciled in to fill the chair if someone doesn't show up. There is sort of a BOT "inner circle" of Swiss Army Knife players that are always willing to help out. These include Christopher Williams, Don Con, Steve Seskin, Justin Roth, Danya River, Eric Schwartz, Amy Speace, Brian Joseph, Kort and Beth McCumber, Michael Bowers, Christopher Smith, Dan Pelletier, George Wurzbach, and Juliet Wyers. Bill Nash is, by far, the most frequent performer under the BOT.



I don't remember what year the BOT first arrived at the festival. I think it is predated only by the Nightowl Song Swap as live late night music at the festival. I do remember that the first year, I intended to attend the festival was the year that it was canceled. So the year after that was my first Falcon Ridge, whatever year that was...

I started doing campground music first in Colorado at the Folks Fest. The original "BOT" wasn't even orange. it was just your basic blue tarp. I decided I needed a bigger structure, and the tarp I got was coincidentally orange. I loved that it was unique and so easy to spot, so we decided to name it and play it up. Hence, the Big Orange Tarp branding. That BOT was 16x20'. When I had to expand to the 20x30 version, I paid a serious premium for orange and the metal superstructure that now holds it up. The Tarp I custom ordered was supposed to be convertible for either 20x20 or 20x30, but the tarp maker messed up and didn't add the features he had promised, so I just left it. The plan actually is to have several structures stored around the country that we can use. The Original BOT is still in use in Colorado, stored at Steve Clark's house, but it's on it's last legs and will be replaced this year or next with another new one. If I ever expand it again, I may change the moniker to HOT (Huge Orange Tarp).

We have been at four different locations in the campground settling on the last location for about the last 6 years, just to make it easier for folks to find us. I hope to scout the new festival location prior to the actual festival and help Anne [Saunders, Festival Director] visualize the entire late night scene there in a way that might allow me to get our new location right the very first time after we move.

As much as possible, I try to get all the artists who play under the BOT to sign the tarp, though it's all but impossible with the dew at Falcon Ridge unless they return the next day. I do have BOT shirts that chronicle some of the artists that have played there. I'm overdue for an updated shirt as well, maybe this year. The last one paid about half the cost of the new structure for Falcon Ridge with the remaining \$500 or so coming out of my pocket. I also love the BOT guestbook, which is open for comments, criticism, and artwork to anyone hanging out under the tarp.

I was inspired by the incredible song circle presence at the Kerrville Folk Festival and have decided to try and generate similar scenes at other folk festivals, to provide exposure opportunities for other artists. My plan is and was always to grow a larger campground scene, with the BOT only providing inspiration and proof of concept to other campers. We have done quite a bit of outreach to our live music neighbors on the BOT Circle to make them feel welcome and to encourage them to do their own thing and give each camp it's unique flavor. I also try to minimize the time we hold performers under the tarp as much as possible so they can do a couple of other performances in the campground on the same night.

In addition to Falcon Ridge I also do the BOT every year at the Rocky Mountain Folks Festival (and the Planet Bluegrass Song School, though it's strictly open circle throughout song school) I also did the BOT multiple times at Napa Valley (in California) and Winterhawk before those festivals evaporated. I had intended to add the BOT to Bruce Rouse's camp at Kerrville [Folk Festival], at his insistence, since I'm not sure that Kerrville needs one more song circle. My feeling was that I could use my nationwide folk scene networking to provide opportunities to great performers enjoying their first visit to Kerrville. That may or may not still happen. I've contemplated other folk festivals as well. I couldn't find a spot to do it at Newport, since there is no organized camping scene.

I almost went to Philly twice, but it sounds like their campground is stuffed to the gills, with no space for my 20x30' tarp and its associated infrastructure of camping, cooking, and kid stuff. There's been talk about doing it at SMAF, New Song, and Country Roads. Anything is up for grabs if I can afford it. Strawberry would be a contender only if I could clone myself, as it conflicts with Kerrville each year. We have also used the BOT for outdoor events in the Baltimore area and contemplated expanding that use. And, even though I'm too lazy to actually try to simulate a BOT in a hotel room. I continue to brand some of my industry showcases with the BOT name.

When I morphed folkmusic.org into an actual nonprofit, it was with the intention of proliferating BOTs and BOT branded events as well as greatly expanding outreach to young performers and young audiences, but the board's vision of what folkmusic.org might be was so varied that I found it dissipating my energies rather than enhancing my ability to create opportunities for performers, so I went back to being essentially a one man show with helpers rather than coconspirators.

In the first several years, I tried a wide variety of formats for performances under the tarp. Single song signups, scheduled playtimes, 3 song sets, big circles, etc. The imperfect format I have come to love best is what I call the "Modified Camp Nashville 6 chair /w pops," inspired by the very small (but not specifically 6 chair) circles at Camp Nashville in Kerrville. I book (usually) 6 acts for the first round and run them two songs each. Before the first round starts, I usually do two or three "teaser" songs with BOT "ringers" (usually great performers not in the showcase who have traveled to the festival and camped with us) to get the crowd in and settled. Then throughout the night I may "Pop" in mainstagers, other showcase artists, and some favorites of mine (like Jack Hardy, Eric Schwartz, or Chris Chandler) who I know will kick butt even though I have little "excuse" to slide them in other than loving them. I try not to Pop an artist more than once or twice in a round because it makes them long. The Pops were actually inspired by the "Pilgrim Chair" at the Mike Williams Pickin Parties that started in Nashville and are now held in NYC. Sometimes I pad the opening of the open circles with Ringers as well.

I also try to slide performers in and out of the rounds in a staged without a noticeable changeover because it holds the crowd better. We used to do a Chinese fire drill at the end of each round and we always lost more crowd in the confusion. Plus folks get to see a bit of what's coming up before they mentally check out. Second Round is sometimes as good as first, especially in Colorado where the nights usually stay warm later. Falcon Ridge we have gone as deep as 4 scheduled rounds before we went open circle, but in the last three years, I never book past second round. I'm not sure if I will again as the crowd seems to sort of expect it to "end" at that point now. Whatever happens I stay up and personally listen (usually to at least two songs) to each and every person who comes by to play, if they are willing to stay up that late. I have discovered a couple of BOT "regulars" in that way. I use the same format during the Rocky Mountain Folks Festival, but it's easier because there are only 12 finalists there. At Falcon Ridge, I am consistently still listening to performers as the sun begins to rise on Saturday and Sunday morning but usually not much past that. Rocky Mountain usually breaks up by 4am or earlier. At Falcon Ridge, we do open circle on Wednesday night and on Thursday usually start with one invited ringer round before we go open circle. These are also good nights for me to audition unknown players. Ordinarily Showcasers don't stay up late the

night before their 10 minutes of mainstage fame, though Mike Morris and others sometimes surprise me.

The BOT circles were formatted as juried showcases for two main reasons, First to provide a VERY compelling and listener friendly experience much stronger than your average open mike, so that audiences would build and come back, night after night. Secondly, I want them to be useful as a booking tool and I work hard to get presenters out to listen. Once I counted 12 bookers under the BOT at one time and there were likely more that I didn't recognize. I decided to focus on showcasers because the criteria are tough enough that all are deserving. I only seek out and invite the ones that I really like, but I have never turned down any showcaser who approached me and wanted to perform at a showcase under the tarp. (they didn't always get the slot they wanted, but that's unavoidable) Frankly, it also made it a bit easier to let down some of the "almost ready" folks who really wanted to play the tarp but weren't quite up to the level of the other players. I try to always pop in mainstagers who show up, partially because it's so great to get a song or two out of Cliff Eberhardt, Ellis Paul, Vance Gilbert, or Carolyn Aiken but also because I want people to have the feeling that anything can happen at anytime at the tarp, despite the seemingly rigid format.

I *try* to always use an Emcee and a stage manager. The Emcee is usually a presenter or DJ. My favorite Emcee over the years is Radio Bob McWilliams of Lawrence KS, who always has nice, succinct but pithy anecdotes about the performers. He knows the latest album title and other biographical stuff. Other perennial favorites include Scott Moore, Robert Corwin, and Steve or Kristin Clark. I've tried a number of people and it works best with someone who can say 35 words or less on the performers without telling song length stories as introductions. But I do prefer intros with some information beyond the performer name in them.

The best stage managers I ever had were Karen Cameron, Krista Reymann, and Carl Pelton, but Robert Corwin and a bunch of other folks have also effectively helped me out with it. I need someone who can recognize the performers by sight when they show up to pop or get a seat assignment for the second round. It's no mean feat up there in the dark. Especially when a lot of the performers from outside the northeast region are virtually unknown except to me. The stage manager is actually the most important member of the team as they need to roam around and expedite everything while the performance is in progress. They also let me know when folks are lurking too far in the darkness to be seen (or in the blind spot directly behind me that I try not to crane my neck to, for fear of looking bored). A lot of performers still haven't figured out that the best place for me to see them is directly across the circle.

The Tarp has a very loyal following and they all know me, so I try to pay strict attention to all the performances because people notice when I don't and I feel it sends a message that devalues the performance. I used to try and skip out now and then to hear a performance at the Budgie Dome or another hilltop venue, but when I leave, people follow me... (and I hate that) so I don't even get up to go to the bathroom any more. I plant my ass in the chair and try not to take it out for about 6 hours. Generally the Emcee is just there to do the introductions and I take that opportunity to convey my instructions to the stage manager on who to queue for pops and who to slide into what chair when (and so forth) When I have to Emcee myself, which happens maybe 15% of the time, I

have to create other opportunities to communicate with the stage manager. On the occasions when my stage manager has bailed, it gets really tricky.

I do book a lot in advance of the festival, but always leave room for some serendipity and I take full responsibility for all the booking choices, though I rely a lot on input from folks like Scott Moore, Steve Panzer, Neale Eckstein and the Clarks when building the rounds, occasionally calling on them to negotiate the invites as well.

A secondary mission of the BOT is to encourage young audiences and I try to get as many kids as possible to camp with us. This isn't always easy to generate though we have had as many as 20 kids in our camping group on certain weekends. We have hosted daytime events for kids featuring Annie Wenz, Christopher Smith, Jay Mankita and other performers. At one time or another, all of my nieces and nephews have attended the festival, though none have chosen to come back every single year. We also try to encourage young folks to perform and I've popped more than one 10 year old into the circle to play a song if they were so bold. The crowd has always been receptive and charitable.

I also try to generate a homey atmosphere throughout the fest and we do lots of shared meals and swimming expeditions. Carl and Jennifer Pelton, Mike and Sylvia Allinger, Scott and Paula Moore, Folk Sally [Johnson], Beth [Longoria] and Laini [Sporbert] all contribute heavily to that part of the experience (which I am, frankly, useless, at) At Rocky Mountain, BOT stalwarts include Christopher Smith and his family, Bill Nash (who has recorded hundreds of hours of performances under the tarp, which we constantly fantasize about putting to some historic charitable use), Justin Roth, and many of the other Song Schoolers who have hung with us over the years. My dream is that someone will carry on the Tarp tradition when I am no longer able to, maybe a lot of someones with various tarps at various festivals around the country. I am too much of a control freak to have delegated that responsibility yet, though there was one BOT night some years back hosted by Bill Nash on the Sunday after folks fest that I missed.

Have I raised any other questions for you? If nothing else, this may be the first time that I've ever really written this out in the form of a record. Maybe future BOT proprietors will come into possession of it and learn something about their roots.

Perhaps it's a bit grandiose of me but I feel this is a time of some historic importance in the folk continuum. I'm always encouraging anyone who chronicles this period photographically, academically, or in any other way that it may be revisited by future generations. It's my fervent hope that, even if they never see any other use, Bill Nash's Big Orange Tarp recordings will wind up in the Library of Congress or a similar repository to be accessed like the Lomax Collection has been. I'd like to think that much of this music could be timeless, if we can provide access to it in the future. Perhaps some of today's underappreciated writers will find a new life in a future listenership.

**Shelly Sholley**

Volunteer, coordinator of the Pirate's Patch Camp

2/22/2005

*How long have you been going to Falcon Ridge?*

I have been going to Falcon Ridge since 2000.

*What is/are your role(s) there?*

My first year, I was a paying ticket buyer. From 2001 to the present, I have volunteered. the first year because I was unemployed and had to in order to pay my way into the festival plus to benefit from the volunteer tent meals, the last 2 years I kept volunteering because I like the feeling that I am 'giving back' to the folk community and helping make the festival a great experience for all.

*Run through what you usually do while you're there - morning, afternoon, nighttime - do you get there early?*

Ok, my first 2 years of volunteering, I was on the security crew and picked alternating shifts depending on my concert watching needs, so some days I would have to get up EARLY to get to a 6am-9am shift. Last year, I volunteered on the site crew kitchen. This means I was cooking for/serving all of the site crew setting up the fest {tents, fences, etc. We report the Saturday BEFORE the fest and work saturday thru wednesday, so when the rest of the volunteers/campers arrive for early entrance on Wednesday, our work is done and basically for the -actual- festival, our work is through and all we do is enjoy.

Another thing that I do, not FOR the festival is that I am the organizer/coordinator for 'the pirates patch'; the Eddie From Ohio fan camping area. This means that friends and fellow fans contact me to save them space in the camp and since I go up early, I save space for them. Last year we had total of 20 tents PLUS our dining flies, not to mention cars, so it's kind of a big job, but I love it. Also, since I am close friends with the band members, I arranged for the band to come to a party at our camp last year, so that was lots of fun for everyone and I think a great way for the fans to get to meet the band up close and personal.

*What is the "heart" of the festival? The performances? The volunteer community? The campground (any one particular part)?*

For me, it's a mixture of the performances and the people. The volunteer community is great and I REALLY loved being a part of the early crew 'family' last year; so much so that I will -always- volunteer for that from now on.

Another thing is that I have 'adopted family' members that I only really get to see every now and then and some only there each year.

Also, I do merchandise sales for many of the performers throughout the year, so in that respect as well, it's a way to get to see -them- all in one place as well.

I think that the lower volunteer camping is the best because you are close enough to the fest area and also if you want to go up the hill for any song circles and stuff up there, you can do that, but still have the peace and quiet when you want to sleep.

*What function do you think this festival serves in the folk community?*

I think it is an important part of the folk community because it's a great festival and also the camaraderie between the performers there just seems different than at other fests I have gone to.

*How has it changed?*

Hrm.....I don't know how to answer that. I think the way that the performers and fans came together at the festival in 2002 when Dave Carter passed away. Not only the tribute set that the performers did, but the way the attendees all bonded together when the whole community was grieving, I thought it was an amazing event.

**Meredith Toler**

Fan

11/22/04

*How long have you been going to Falcon Ridge?*

I went one time, in 2003. ... I found out about the festival I believe when I was looking for somewhere to catch Eddie from Ohio and then learned more about the festival from the festival website.

*What function do you think this festival serves in the folk community?*

For me personally, folk festivals serve to introduce me to performers I don't know of yet, are an opportunity to celebrate life and just be and hang out. It's also a fun event to plan, look forward to and do with a friend. I love that I can share folk music performances with family and friends. We share CDs and introduce each other to different performers. I'm usually drawn to see someone in particular at a festival and develop some new favorites while I'm there. Folk music is best when it's heard live in person! Outdoor festivals in general and particularly in the summer are a celebration of music, nature, community and life – all together. I don't know that much about the folk community but I suspect this festival is a tradition with a lot of people and a way to connect with old and new friends. I met a woman who had been attending for years with her family. (I do not know how to get in touch with her, unfortunately.) It also felt like a celebration of that region - the NY Berkshires/E. NY/W. MA. Folk music has played a pretty big role in my life the last couple of years and has been a way that I've become closer with family and friends and even met some new friends through the common interest.

## **Appendix C: Map of Falcon Ridge Grounds and Key to Acronyms and Abbreviations**

### **KEY TO ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

ASL	American Sign Language
BOT	Big Orange Tarp, late night music camp
EFO	Eddie From Ohio, folk band that regularly performs at Falcon Ridge
Folk Alliance	Annual music conference attended by many Falcon Ridge community members
FRFF	Falcon Ridge Folk Festival
PMS Tent	Performer Merchandise Sales Tent
Round	One rotation around a song circle
Showcase	Late night music format in which a camp host presents pre-selected musicians. Also refers to the Emerging Artist Showcase, a Friday mainstage performance during which 24 selected artists each perform two songs.
Staff	Volunteers

Map on following page reprinted from 2004 Falcon Ridge Folk Festival Program





**Appendix D: Photographs from Falcon Ridge 2005**

Courtesy of Neale Eckstein

Additional photos contributed by Dan Navarro