

1987

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So who is coming to the eighth annual Edmonton Folk Music Festival anyway?

Would you believe Rolling Stone, Village Voice, the Los Angeles Times, the Boston Globe and the Globe and Mail?

That's right. This weekend's superior lineup of folk, country, blues, jazz and ethnic music in Gallagher Park's comfy, natural amphitheatre has tantalized many top North American publications which respect quality musical entertainment.

Of course, no outsider need inform Edmontonians what a gem this celebrated event has become.

Although we're only talking about 3,200 tickets, this year's advance sales in weekend passes are already double last year's.

In anticipation of surpassing 1986's record-breaking crowds, the festival staff has positioned the main stage further downhill, increasing maximum capacity to about 15,000 people (An estimated 9,000 sat on the hill during each of last year's evening shows.)

Mind you, even the rosiest scenario has its share of thorns. Since rain washed away the 1987 profits of the Winnipeg and Calgary folk fests and delivered a fearsome kick to Toronto's already floundering Mariposa, artistic director Holger Petersen's bad-weather mantra is touchingly trusting but hardly foolproof: "People in northern climes can handle a bit of rain."

As well, the last-minute loss of headlining satirist-pianist Randy Newman (suffering from the mononucleosis-like ailment called Epstein-Barr Syndrome) is a regrettable blow. It is counteracted by the addition to the lineup of ex-Band guitarist Rick Danko in about the same way plain yogurt in silver goblets makes up for the burping of a suitably scrumptious torte.

But nonetheless it's a testament to Petersen's tasteful and balanced booking policy in his second year as festival artistic director that the schedule still boasts an array of genuinely intriguing treats and surprises.

That's a perception shared by the musicians as well as the fans, by the way. During a pre-festival interview, country-rock singer-songwriter Rodney Crowell was delighted to discover that old mentor Townes Van Zandt (who penned Pancho and Lefty and scores of other heart-breaking songs) would be on site. His enthusiasm gives rise to happy speculation about the unscheduled magic which Van Zandt and his buddy Guy Clark, as well as Crowell and his wife Rosanne Cash might well create together.

The daily workshop performances which happen at four separate stages and two tents, on the hour between 11 a.m. and 4 p.m. (with a one-hour break at 2 p.m. for Murray McLachlan and Rick Danko's concert), tingle with similarly-exciting potential, on paper at least.

On Saturday, for instance, there's a gathering devoted to the mandolin, featuring the daunting company of Yank Rachell (a blues devotee in his mid-70s who has recorded with Sleepy John Estes and Sonny Boy Williamson, deeply influenced Ry Cooder and written standards for among others, Taj Mahal), Jethro Burns (another virtuoso best known as half of the comedy team Homer and Jethro who guest-starred frequently on the Beverly Hillbillies), our own "Mandolin Kid" Dave Wilkie and Steve Bengtson of The Romanians.

Among Sunday's best bets is the meeting between ex-Pentangle guitarist John Renbourn and and renowned dobro player Jerry Douglas, a gospel jam with Ellen McIlwaine, Big Miller and Diamond Joe White and new song presentations by Ian Tyson, Rodney Crowell, Guy Clark and famed songwriter John D. Loudermilk (who wrote Tobacco Road, Then You Can Tell Me Goodbye, Ahlene and Indian Reservation among hundreds of other standards).

Nor should one ignore the half-hour individual mini-concerts by guitarist John Fahey (who was Leo Kottke's inspiration), Tom Russell (a world-renowned country and western writer who



collaborates with Ian Tyson) and Townes Van Zandt, sprinkled throughout the two days.

As with most folk festivals, discovering new acts, making the connection between a favorite song and its unbranded writer or hearing a once-in-a-lifetime set by musicians who haven't played together in years is half the fun.

There'll be plenty of that going on, what with the likes of Canada's progressive Celtic seafarers Rare Air, terrific Australian songsmith Eric Bogle and Saskatoon's reunited Humphrey and the Dumptrucks making appearances at workshops and main stage shows.

But for many, Friday night's appearance by John Sebastian is the eagerly-anticipated highlight.

Sebastian is the founder of The Lovin' Spoonful and composer of such enduring pop-rock standards as Summer In the City, Do You Believe In Magic? Daydream, Nashville Cats and Younger Girl.

Since leaving the band in 1969, he's released four delicate, blues-influenced solo LPs ("which sold about eight copies each") and written the themes to Welcome Back Kotter and various children's films, including the first Care Bears movie.

Last year, his schedule of 80-100 live performances a year was downgraded some as he was busy enjoying a new son, hosting two TV rock specials called Deja Vu and co-writing a children's book.

Scheduled for publication this fall, J.B.'s Happy Hour is "a story about self esteem."

But although he's just finished a score for the new Care Bears picture, the affable Sebastian isn't stuck on pursuing a career dedicated to little people's entertainment.

His other current projects include collaborating on material with Beach Boy Brian Wilson and fielding offers to be in situation comedies. He's also eager to make more records but says the low budgets most contracts offer hold him back.

"I'm marginally a folk singer — witness Edmonton calling. But it's difficult to make a folk album without it being a letdown to me. You'd be surprised how expensive it is to get that casual, falling off a log sound."

Perhaps wandering around Edmonton's world-class, but sparsely-funded (\$300,000 per year), three-day festival will give him some valuable pointers.

Friday night performance by John Sebastian, above, founder of The Lovin' Spoonful and composer of such enduring pop-rock standards as Summer in the City and Do You Believe in Magic?, will be for many folkies the highlight of the eighth annual Edmonton Folk Music Festival. Also on the list of featured performers is famed songwriter John D. Loudermilk (Tobacco Road, Then You Can Tell Me Goodbye), top right, and country-rock singer-songwriter Rodney Crowell, right, who'll be here and performing with his wife, singer Rosanne Cash.



Main stage and downtown events

<p>Six Winston Churchill Square, 11:45 a.m. - 1:30 p.m.</p> <p>THURSDAY</p> <p>Tom Russell, Spirit of the West, Sneezy Waters</p> <p>FRIDAY</p> <p>The Romanians, Hans Theessink, Christine Lavin</p> <p>Festival site, mainstage</p> <p>FRIDAY, 5:30 p.m.</p> <p>Rare Air Diamond Joe White Terry Galtheite The Romanians Bill Bourne Eric Anderson Roy Block Eric Bogle John Sebastian Ellen McIlwaine</p>	<p>SATURDAY, 2 p.m.</p> <p>Murray McLachlan</p> <p>SATURDAY, 5 p.m.</p> <p>Jethro Burns & the Great Western Orchestra Danny O'Keefe Shari Ulrich Yank Rachell Christine Lavin Humphrey and the Dumptrucks Shuffle Demons Tony Bird The Oyster Band Phil Alvin The Amos Garrett, Doug Sahn, Gene Taylor Band</p> <p>SUNDAY, 2 p.m.:</p> <p>Rick Danko</p>	<p>SUNDAY, 5 p.m.</p> <p>Hurma Music of Clay & Concrete John D. Loudermilk Ian Tyson and Tom Russell John Renbourn Peter Rowan, Mark O'Connor Jerry Douglas Gaye Delorme Quartet Ferron Spirit of the West Rosanne Cash, Rodney Crowell, Guy Clark Finale</p> <p>(Workshop performances at the festival's four stages and two tents run Saturday and Sunday on the hour between 11 a.m. and 4 p.m.)</p>
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