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PRESS RELEASE

First Performer Details Announced for the 2023 NC Folk Fest

Six performers join Ethno USA to be featured September 8-10 in Downtown Greensboro

Greensboro, N.C., May 31, 2023 — The North Carolina Folk Festival announced today the first group of performers who will appear on its stages in downtown Greensboro September 8, 9, and 10, 2023.

A large-scale outdoor event, the NC Folk Fest celebrates the rich diversity of America's roots and heritage, as well as North Carolina's regional traditions. The performers announced today hail from many backgrounds and diverse roots and sounds—from Haitian, Louisiana Creole, and traditional Irish, to Bluegrass, Jewish roots music, and Qawwali / Sufi music from South Asia.

Artists announced today include:

- **Leyla McCalla** (*Haitian and American roots music*)
from New Orleans, Louisiana

Leyla McCalla is a Haitian-American multi-instrumentalist whose cultural and musical roots run deep into her familial country of origin, Haiti. Born in NYC to Haitian emigrants and activists, McCalla often visited her grandmother in Haiti where her fascination with the country, its people, its history, and its culture were nurtured. Leyla's formal musical education focused on the traditions of Western classical music. She earned a degree from NYU in cello performance, and ultimately made her home in New Orleans in 2010 where she initially made her living playing cello in the French Quarter. In New Orleans, McCalla quickly found herself diving into the cultural and historical connections between her new home and its Haitian roots. She picked up the tenor banjo and started researching Haitian folk songs where she found a rich banjo tradition in the music. McCalla's most recent album, "Breaking The Thermometer", is an exploration into her musical roots and connections to Haiti, with inspiration and content drawn from her research into the Radio Haiti archives at Duke University.

The performances by Leyla McCalla are funded in part by a grant from South Arts in partnership with the National Endowment for the Arts and the North Carolina Arts Council.

- **Kevin Doyle's Roscommon Soles** (*Traditional Irish Step Dance & Music*)
from Providence, Rhode Island

Hailing from Providence, Rhode Island, Kevin Doyle is an Irish step dance master who learned his first jigs and reels from his County Roscommon-born mother, Margaret Taylor Doyle. As a youth, Kevin quickly progressed from dancing in the kitchen to studying traditional Irish dance with renowned instructors from Rhode Island and Boston, learning steps traceable to the old dance masters of Ireland. As a teen Doyle successfully competed in East Coast feis (competitions) earning U.S. Irish Dance Champion honors, while also expanding his performance portfolio to include influences from American jazz and tap dance. In 2014, Doyle was recognized by the National Endowment for the Arts as a National Heritage Fellow, the highest honor conferred upon folk artists in the United States in recognition of their lifetime contributions to their traditional craft. Doyle will be accompanied by his band Roscommon Soles with All Ireland Award-winning fiddler Sheila Falls; All Ireland Award-winning uilleann piper Torin Ryan; pianist Donna Long; and flute/whistle player Josh Kane.

- **Riyaaz Qawwali** (*Qawwali / Sufi Music from South Asia*)
from Austin, Texas

Riyaaz Qawwali performs the gripping music style called Qawwali or Sufi Music. The qawwali singers represent the diversity and plurality of South Asia. The ensemble's musicians, who are settled in the United States, hail from India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh and represent multiple religious and spiritual backgrounds. Trained in eastern and western classical music, the members have been professionally performing qawwali for the past 15 years with a mission to expose qawwali to new audiences, while still paying homage to traditional qawwali that has been in existence for over 700 years. Combining their music with poetry from famous South Asian poets of multiple linguistic and religious backgrounds Riyaaz Qawwali creates a universal message of oneness. Riyaaz Qawwali also uses numerous languages - including Urdu, Punjabi, Persian, Gujarati, and Hindi - to represent the linguistic and cultural diversity that exists in South Asia.

- **Damn the Banjos** (*Americana, Blues and roots rock music*)
from Nashville, Tennessee

Damn The Banjos is a group of seasoned Nashville musicians who draw from their traditional and bluegrass roots to perform what they describe as banjo-centered, funk-ed-up, folkified Americana Blues and roots rock music. Tim Carter, a native of Jamestown, NC and beloved musical partner to his brother Danny with whom he toured the world as the Carter Brothers for decades, fronts

the band on banjo, mandolin, guitar, and vocals. Rounding out the band's lineup are Mike McAdam on guitar and vocals; Dann Sherrill on drums and percussion; and Scotty Huff on bass and vocals. The quartet has toured and recorded with some of the biggest names in Nashville, including Alison Brown, Keith Urban, and Keb' Mo'. Their debut album, "Full Speed Ahead," is set to release in 2023 and is packed with energetic instrumentals like the title track, swampy sounds in "Shake My Soul," candid takes on small-town life in "Nowheresville," and groovy observations of quirker people in "Whoa Whoa."

- **Cedric Watson & Bijou Creole** (*Cajun and Traditional Creole Music*)

from Lafayette, Louisiana

Spearheading the emerging generation of Cajun and Creole musicians, Cedric Watson is a fiddler, vocalist, accordionist and songwriter of enormous talent and potential. Cedric Watson & Bijou Creole resurrect the ancient sounds of the French and Spanish contra dance and bourré alongside the spiritual rhythms of the Congo tribes of West Africa, who were sold as slaves in the Caribbean and Louisiana by the French and Spanish. Injecting a healthy dose of his own personality and ingenuity, Cedric has been exciting an ever-broadening audience with his unique take on traditional Creole music, and with his new compositions that expand the genre while still respecting its roots. Moving with ease between fiddle and accordion, and adding his strong blues-inflected vocals, Cedric's albums are a tapestry of pulsing rhythms and Creole poetry, and his live performances are unforgettable, at once progressive and nostalgic.

- **Zoe & Cloyd** (*Klezgrass*)

from Asheville, North Carolina

Springing from rich and complementary traditions of Klezmer and bluegrass, fiddler & vocalist Natalya Zoe Weinstein and multi-instrumentalist & vocalist John Cloyd Miller seamlessly combine original bluegrass, klezmer, old-time and folk with sincerity and zeal. Descending from a lineage of klezmer and jazz musicians, Natalya trained classically in her home state of Massachusetts before discovering old-time and bluegrass and moving south in 2004. John, a twelfth generation North Carolinian and grandson of pioneering bluegrass fiddler, Jim Shumate, is a gifted singer and songwriter, placing 1st in the prestigious Chris Austin Songwriting Contest and the Hazel Dickens Songwriting Contest. Long-time fixtures of the Asheville, NC music scene, the pair were founding members of the lauded roots trio, Red June, later shifting to Zoe & Cloyd after the birth of their daughter in 2015. Their recently released fifth studio album, "Songs of Our Grandfathers," was inspired by the 1995 album by David Grisman and Andy Statman entitled, "Songs of Our Fathers," a beautiful project composed of Jewish and klezmer music. Zoe & Cloyd conceived of their album in a similar vein, albeit with klezmer and bluegrass, as an homage to their grandfathers and their unique musical legacies.

These performers join the following program, already announced, to be featured at the 2023 NC Folk Fest:

- **Ethno USA (international folk music exchange program)**

The North Carolina Folk Festival and JM International (JMI) - a Belgium-based global network of nonprofit organizations that provide opportunities for young people to engage with music - will bring the international folk music exchange program, *Ethno*, to Greensboro during the NC Folk Fest (September 8-10, 2023).

Ethno is one of JMI's 14 international musical exchange programs that convene young musicians in collaborative and educational activities that foster cultural understanding through music. *Ethno* is present in over 40 countries and is JMI's premiere program dedicated to folk, traditional, and world music.

Ethno USA, the only *Ethno* convening scheduled in the United States in 2023, will convene around 40 young musicians from across the globe in Greensboro for a week-long residency. Each *Ethno USA* participant will teach a folk or traditional song from their home country to the other participants in a peer-to-peer, collaborative learning environment through workshops and jam sessions. The residency will culminate in three performances for the public that will showcase original and newly arranged songs created during the residency. Two of the public performances will be featured on stage at the NC Folk Fest in September. [Read the full Ethno USA press release.](#)

To learn more about these artists and their stories, please visit ncfolkfestival.com.

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About the North Carolina Folk Festival: The North Carolina Folk Festival's mission is to honor, celebrate, and share the meaningful ways communities express their creativity and cultural traditions through music, dance, food, crafts and other folk arts to enhance appreciation of diverse traditions and contribute to community vibrancy and inclusivity. Our signature event, the annual North Carolina Folk Festival, is one of the fastest-growing destination events in the Southeast, attracting people from across the U.S. to downtown Greensboro each September. The festival is a FREE admission, three-day event featuring performing groups representing a diverse array of cultural traditions from around the world on multiple stages, including continuous music and dance performances, a makers marketplace, regional and ethnic foods, festival merchandise and more. The 2023 North Carolina Folk Festival will take place in downtown Greensboro September 8 through 10. Additional information is available at www.ncfolkfestival.com.