



Clawhammer workshop at Santa Fe Traditional Music Festival, 2017



Púca



East Mountain Serenaders



Bayou Seco

Jennifer Levin | The New Mexican

GIVE ME THAT OLD-TIME MUSIC

SANTA FE TRADITIONAL MUSIC FESTIVAL

FOR true fans of old-time music, Santa Fe offers something special: the opportunity for a certain brand of purists to have their own place to play. “Very often, traditional music is part of larger folk festivals — which have a lot of singer-songwriters and stuff like that,” Claire Jamieson Zucker said, her tone indicating a weariness that comes with having to put up with such an injustice. In having a festival that is solely devoted to traditional music, she said, “Santa Fe is pretty unusual.”

Zucker is one-half of the Irish — by way of Tucson — duo Púca, who play this weekend at the Santa Fe Traditional Music Festival. The fest runs Friday, Aug. 24, through Sunday, Aug. 26. Whether you fancy old-time Appalachian tunes, bluegrass, blues, Irish music, mariachi, New Mexican polkas, or klezmer, it all fits under the umbrella of the festival, where the “traditional” genre is interpreted as widely as the world of music it encompasses.

“We’re coming because they wanted an Irish contingent, and since we play Irish music, that’s not a problem. But we’re very eclectic in our own musical tastes,” Zucker said.

“In bluegrass, they play a fair number of fiddle tunes, and there are a lot of fiddle tunes that originated in the old-time realm or in the Irish realm. Tunes move back and forth. It’s fun to be a part of that,” said Dave Firestine, the other half of Púca, who play at noon on Saturday. “I take tunes that I know bluegrass people play, and I play them at an old-time session. When you have tolerant people, they’ll play it; they don’t care where it comes from. Other people might be a little stricter.”

Firestine may or may not be referring to Zucker, with whom he’s been playing music for almost two decades. They know each other’s buttons and they push them onstage and off — all in good humor. Both play in other bands as well — in Arizona and the Southwest region, and they tour nationally with their

contradance band, STEAM! Zucker, who is also a clogger, enjoys mixing genres in stage performances — for instance, setting lyrics to an Irish tune she’s slowed down in a way that resembles Appalachian music. But she is something of a stickler for protocol when it comes to playing music with other people in more casual settings. Though they agree that playing music in big jam sessions with friends and strangers is the best part of what they do, Firestine’s loosey-goosey approach to proper procedure can provoke her ire.

“I agree with him fundamentally, but I also think it’s important for people to have places to do their craft in the tradition that they love. I don’t actually think it’s a great thing when someone’s got a really great old-time jam session happening and someone comes in and says, ‘You should play this Irish tune, because it’s just like this old-time tune.’ That’s not why they’re there.

“One thing that you readers might want to know,” she added, “[is whether] they can bring their instruments to the festival and jam with people. In general,

if you have the same instruments as those being played, it’s certainly OK to sit down. But in Irish sessions, if you don’t have a pretty good feel for the tune, it’s best to not play. Whereas, in an old-time jam, it’s really common for someone to sit down with a fiddle in the back row and get tiny bits of the tune and the rhythm, and the next time a little bit more and then a little bit more. The obvious thing is not to mess up the tune, but a little noodling in the background when you’re trying to figure things out is pretty welcome in old-time jams.”

“We don’t encourage tambourines,” Firestine said. “Or spoons,” Zucker chimed in. She explained that the difference in etiquette comes partly from the way Irish musicians learn their music. While it’s not uncommon to learn old-time Appalachian tunes in a group with other people, Irish music is practiced in a more solitary fashion. “When I learn a tune, it’s the same tune that Dave plays, and I’ve heard other people playing it, but I’ve learned it on my own and I kind of bring my own thing to it. When we go into an Irish session, everybody there has learned the tune and each instrument has an idiosyncrasy which makes [each person] play the tune slightly different. When we all play together — when it’s really good — everybody’s idiosyncrasies start to bend to each other, and you get this really sort of intense and communal sound that nobody could make on their own.”

The Traditional Music Festival begins at 7 p.m. Friday night with Santa Fe’s own Mariachi Buenaventura, an all-female mariachi band that has been playing together for many years in restaurants

and at events all over town. The Ladies are followed by Bayou Seco, a Silver City outfit that plays “Southwestern Chilegumbo” — their brand of old-fashioned Southwestern and Cajun music that earned them a 2017 Governor’s Award for Excellence in the Arts. The Adobe Brothers take the stage at 9 p.m. Billed as “a band of identical quadruplets born to different mothers a long time ago,” the Adobe Brothers play international bluegrass from Western swing to Celtic and contradance.

Saturday morning begins with bagpiping by Robert Shlaer at 9:45 a.m. The young musicians of the Academy for Technology and the Classics String Band perform at 10 a.m. The rest of the day features Native American drumming; workshops in such topics as vocal performance, clawhammer banjo, and rhythm guitar; and performances by numerous bands including Lost Souls, FY5, Kitty Jo Creek, Lone Piñon, and Leverett & Wax. The Bill Hearne Trio plays at a dance at 9 p.m. on Saturday. A couple of gospel groups perform on Sunday, preceded by the High Desert Harp Ensemble at 10 a.m.

When asked if she’d be clogging at the festival, Zucker confirmed she would dance in the jam sessions. “As far as onstage —” She hesitated. Firestine jumped in: “Yes, she will.”

Zucker said that when she clogs onstage, she is sure to make her audiences aware that Appalachian clogging is derived from Irish step dancing. Firestine interjected that there is a form of Irish step dancing called sean-nós, “which is a style of dance where the dancer just listens to the music and does what

their feet tell them to do. It’s indistinguishable from clogging.”

Zucker took exception to this: “To Dave, it’s indistinguishable. To Claire, it’s perhaps more distinguishable.” (“Audiences love it,” he said.)

Zucker said that though many fans of traditional music are intimidated by the idea of learning to play an instrument, they are captivated by clogging and immediately want to dance. “I can’t count the number of times where people have come up to me after we’ve done this whole set where I’ve been playing the drums, singing, clogging — and they say ‘Oh, I love your clogging!’ And I’m like, what about all the other crap I did? And then they ask if I can teach them to clog, right then. They think they should be able to learn it in one minute.”

“It really takes 10 minutes,” Firestine said.

Zucker laughed and repeated Firestine’s joke as if it were not the first time she’d heard it. “I always say yes. I tell them, Here’s how you start. I teach them one step, tell them to practice that for a week, and then give me a call.”

details

- ▼ Santa Fe Traditional Music Festival
- ▼ 7 p.m. Friday, Aug. 24; continues Saturday, Aug. 25, and Sunday, Aug. 26
- ▼ Camp Stoney, off Santa Fe County Road 67 (Old Santa Fe Trail)
- ▼ \$50 weekend pass; day and evening pricing and discounts available
- ▼ For tickets, directions to Camp Stoney, and a complete schedule, go to sfradmusic.org.