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American Folk Festival Announces First Performers

2016 marks the 15th year of the annual 3-day folk festival on the Bangor Waterfront

BANGOR, MAINE – The American Folk Festival on the Bangor Waterfront has released the names of the first several artists scheduled to appear at the three-day event in August. Announced cultures include Western Swing, Bluegrass, Portuguese, Salsa, Prince Edward Island, Sri Lanka dance, and Jazz. All seven performers being announced today will be first-time performers at the American Folk Festival.

"This year marks the 15th Festival on the Bangor Waterfront," said Heather McCarthy, Executive Director of the American Folk Festival. "The lineup will be a mix of new performers and some returning favorites from the 15-year history. This community has embraced a festival that has drawn more than 1.5 million people over the last 14 years. We're very excited to present the 15th edition this August."

With 2016 marking the 15th American Folk Festival on the Bangor Waterfront, organizers are not only excited about this year's edition, but are looking back at the festival's beginnings.

"While there were plenty of people looking at the opportunity of the National Folk Festival in 2002 as a chance to show off Eastern Maine and to succeed, I don't think anybody could have foreseen how this festival – and our waterfront – have evolved," said American Folk Festival Board Chair Richard Fournier. "Since 2002, we have seen 290 performing groups representing 152 different cultures, an economic impact of \$238 million, and more than \$1.3 million in bucket brigade donations. Simply amazing."

Fournier noted that the hard work of many has gone into the festival. Fournier specifically noted the "rock-solid" partnership with the City of Bangor that has kept the festival strong.

"To me, this is something that shows where this city is headed," said Bangor City Council Chair Sean Faircloth. "There are key puzzle pieces that happen over the course of history of the last 20 years. This was a lynchpin of what we have seen as far as the renaissance of the city in recent times. It's my honor to be here to follow in a long chain of Mayors and City Councils that have been in support of this."

Fournier also credited the hundreds of volunteers who make the Festival a premiere event year-after-year.

"We are assigned one of the performers for the weekend, and our job is to make sure they get to the stage on time," said Deb Neuman, a longtime volunteer at the American Folk Festival who most recently has been an "artist buddy" at the Festival, and is also current president of the Bangor Region Chamber of Commerce. "We also just make sure they are taken care of and they have what they need. What I love most about it is that I get to see our community through their eyes."

The artists announced this morning are:

[Michael Mwenso & The Shakes featuring Brianna Thomas](#) is a Jazz revue comprised of between 3-5 vocalists and a rotating ensemble including percussionists, pianists, horns and more. Mwenso is just 31-years-old but has been singing and playing piano for more than 20 years. The Shakes were featured in late 2015 on *Jazz Night in America* on NPR and performed at the Kennedy Center's 2015 New Year's Eve Gala.

[Michael Cleveland](#) is considered one of the premier bluegrass fiddlers of his generation. He has been playing fiddle since the age of 4 and made his Grand Ole Opry debut in 1993 as a guest of Alison Krauss. He is a GRAMMY winner and is the International Bluegrass Music Association's 10-time Fiddle Performer of the Year.

[The East Pointers](#) is a trio performing traditional music from Prince Edward Island. The group's debut album, *Secret Victory* contains 10 original tracks written by the group with a sound that could have come from any era in the history of Celtic/folk music. The group was named the Prince Edward Island New Artist of the Year in 2015 and has recently been touring in the UK and Australia.

[Nathalie Pires](#) is a Portuguese performer who has received a number of awards and honors through her talents in traditional fado music. She began singing at the age of thirteen, and has recorded two albums including the most recent, *Fado Alem*, released earlier this month by Sony Music.

[Gerarde Contino y Los Harbaneros](#) was selected by NPR/WNYC as Manhattan's best band of 2015. Contino is a Cuban singer/songwriter who loves to improvise, pull the audience into call & response, and provoke fans into "hip-shaking abandon." In 2015, Gerardo also joined the Max Weinberg Orchestra as the lead-Latin singer for the group. He has toured all over the world and was an invited speaker and performer for TEDMED2014 in the Kennedy Center for the Arts, Washington DC.

[The Western Flyers](#) is a classic western swing trio specializing in Cowboy songs and old-time fiddle tunes. Festival goers can expect a swinging rhythm section, brisk fiddling, and sensitive singing from this relatively new group. Joey McKenzie is the guitarist of the trio who has performed in forty-five US states as well as Canada Europe, Russia and South America. Katie Glassman on fiddle is a two-time National Fiddle Champion and is an integral part of Colorado's thriving roots music scene. Gavin Kelso on bass has a powerful dexterity and a lively musical imagination.

[The National Women's Dance Troupe of Sri Lanka](#) is "part art showcase and part graduation." The dancers in this troupe have trained for anywhere from 10-15 years to perform this tradition, and reach the master level. The troupe comes from Staten Island, NY, which has the largest community of Sri Lankans outside of Sri Lanka.

These artists are just the first of the lineup of artists who will perform at the American Folk Festival on the Bangor Waterfront on August 26th, 27th, and 28th.

The American Folk Festival celebrates the roots, the richness and the variety of American culture through music, dance, traditional crafts, storytelling and food. The Festival is supported entirely by public donations that make it possible to continue to present the Festival in our community.

For more information about the 2016 American Folk Festival on the Bangor Waterfront, please visit www.americanfolkfestival.com or call 207-262-7763.

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Artist sound clips are available at the following links:

Gerardo Contino y Los Habaneros - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gCAwLhcTgts>

Nathalie Pires (after emcee) - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_aIQWxl75ks

The East Pointers - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=17kIDfqmLgk>

Michael Cleveland & Flamekeeper - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zgri3KmoLgA>

The Western Flyers - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RLLVp6QdPA8>

Michael Mwenso & The Shakes - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DpTIj9DJQ1U>

The National Women's Dance Troupe of Sri Lanka - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gHMnbtFxXOo>