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National Folk Festival Coming to Nashville

August 03, 2011

By Joe Edwards, Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) - Nashville has no theme park, no beach and no casinos.

But it has music. Lots of it.

The National Folk Festival, which is coming to Nashville Labor Day weekend, caps off several months of major events held here that validate Nashville's self-proclaimed moniker "Music City USA."

The free, 73rd folk festival Sept. 2-4 is to feature more than 250 of the country's finest traditional performers and craftsmen, with simultaneous performances on six stages throughout the Bicentennial Capitol Mall State Park. An estimated 60,000 to 80,000 attendees are expected.

Audiences will be treated to authentic blues, gospel, jazz, cowboy, bluegrass, klezmer, Cajun, rhythm and blues, mariachi, Western swing, zydeco and more. Even polka. Yes, in Nashville, the city famed for fiddles and fringe.

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Performances will celebrate the cultures of Native American, Celtic, Acadian, Middle Eastern, Caribbean, East Asian, Appalachian, Hispanic, Eastern European, African and Pacific Island.

Organizers also promise "a delicious variety of ethnic and regional food specialties."

If Southern food is more appealing, Nashville has plenty of fried chicken, country ham, pork barbecue, collard greens, red-eye gravy, grits and fried green tomatoes. Wash it down with sweet tea.

Gov. Bill Haslam, in announcing the folk festival, said it "preserves and celebrates the roots and variety of American culture we have here in our state."

The festival will take place a few blocks away from the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum (a city shrine) and a dozen or so raucous honky-tonks where hot guitars compete with cold beer for popularity.

If visitors want a taste of American culture, there's a Hard Rock Cafe on the downtown waterfront. And a Hooters.

The festival has been produced since 1934 by the National Council for the Traditional Arts. With such a long run, the festival has transcended country music, Big Band, rock 'n' roll, disco and rap.

A sampling of scheduled acts this year: La Excelencia, doing salsa; Samba Mapangala & Orchestre Virunga, doing East African rumba and soukous; the Massive Monkeys, doing breakdance; Lloyd Arneach, a Cherokee storyteller.

Nashville, which already has 11 million tourists a year, beat out more than 40 other cities to host the event for the next three years. The festival is projected to pump \$10 million into the local economy each year.

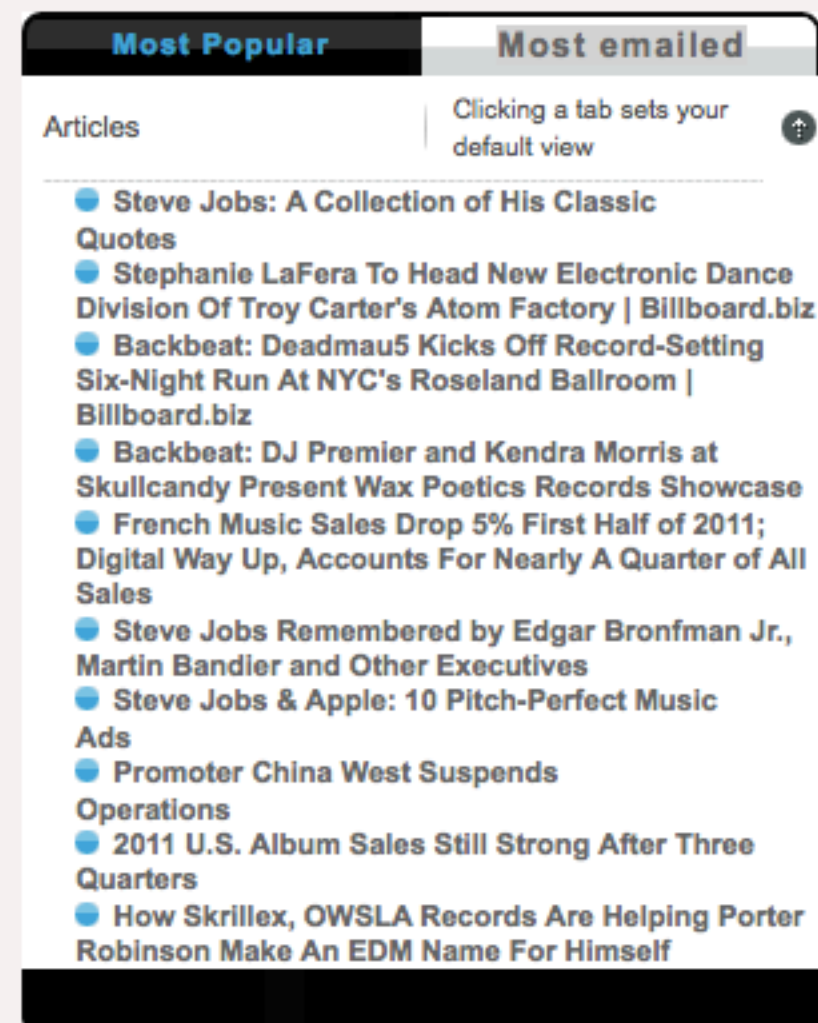
The festival will follow in the impressive cowboy bootsteps of a myriad of recent musical treats.

The four-day CMA Festival in June at the Tennessee Titans' LP Field had daily attendance of 65,000 exuberant fans to see an array of country performers including Taylor Swift, Lady Antebellum, Brad Paisley, Keith Urban and Reba McEntire. That event left approximately \$30 million in direct visitor spending in the city.

The Bonnaroo Music and Arts Festival, held at the same time 60 miles away on a 700-acre field near Manchester, Tenn., sold all 80,000 tickets.

And there's been more.

There are four Grand Ole Opry shows each week, weekly bluegrass performances and the production "Always...Patsy Cline," which wrapped up summer weekend shows July 24.



U2 performed before 45,000 at Nashville's Vanderbilt Stadium July 2. Lady Gaga and Jimmy Buffett also performed in the city recently.

More music is coming soon and it's not just country weepers.

In September alone, Journey with Foreigner and Night Ranger have a show on the books Sept. 13. Swift is to perform two nights, Sept. 16-17.

Last December, Garth Brooks performed nine sold out shows over seven nights in Nashville, raising \$5 million for flood relief in Tennessee.

"Playing music has never felt better or ever felt more right," he said after the shows.

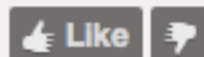
Has there been too much music? Too much of a good thing?

Mayor Karl Dean, ever a Southern gentleman, says no.

"The more we have, the better," he said, adding: "No city in the United States can match our city for the raw talent, creativity and long history of making music."

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