

Insiders lecture and awards given, but music's at heart of conference

By Bob Mehr

Sunday, February 24, 2008

The 20th annual International Folk Alliance conference wrapped up Saturday night following a four-day run that was the event's most successful to date. The conference -- staged by the locally based Folk Alliance -- has become a major industry gathering for musicians, record companies and industry players in the folk field.

More than 2,000 people registered to watch and take part in an awards ceremony and trade show as well as a mix of showcases and educational panels at the Cook Convention Center and the Downtown Marriott.

Wednesday night's Folk Alliance Awards kicked off the festivities, with an evening of honors recognizing lifetime achievement in the genre. Gongs were handed out to the Staples Singers' vocalist Mavis Staples, and late fiddling great Tommy Jarrell.

The conference's daytime activities were launched Thursday with a keynote address from Janet Reno, former attorney general and producer of the recent folk tribute album *Song of America*. There was also a series of educational symposiums, many of which featured notable Memphians: On Saturday, Ardent Studio's Jeff Powell and local sonic guru Jim Dickinson discussed the changing role of the producer in the modern music business; while Bo-Keys band leader and "Black Snake Moan" composer Scott Bomar talked about creating music for use in film and television.

But the real draw for the event was the opportunity to see nearly 300 acts, often playing multiple times, as part of the event's nightly showcases. The performances offered a chance for labels, talent bookers and producers to glimpse both the past, present and future of folk music. The event has developed into showcase for up-and-coming artists -- like highly touted teen songsmith Anthony da Costa -- as well as established stars like Canadian Ian Tyson.

While the concerts were only for conference badge holders, a number of satellite events were open to the public, including a showcase of Folk Alliance artists at the Center for Southern Folklore on Friday and Saturday nights. A number of other related shows will continue through Tuesday at Midtown's Otherlands and Beale Street's Blues City Cafe.

Early registration for the 2009 Folk Alliance conference -- featuring keynote speaker Roger McGuinn of Byrds fame -- begins July 1.

-- Bob Mehr: 529-2517



© 2009 Scripps Newspaper Group — Online