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National Folk Festival to Hold One-Day Kickoff Event

Get a preview of the nation's longest-running multicultural traditional arts celebration

Jackson, MS — The [National Folk Festival](#) is excited to announce a special program, to be held November 16, 2024. The one-day kickoff event will provide a taste of what's to come at the nation's premier celebration of the artistic traditions of all Americans. It will feature an eclectic and dynamic program, ranging from Cajun to South Asian *Kuchipudi* dance, and from blues to salsa dura.

This FREE event will take place at the “Welcome to Jackson” mural at the intersection of State & Pearl Streets. Seating opens at 3:30 PM, with music from 4:00–7:30 PM.

The prestigious National Folk Festival is the nation's longest-running traditional arts event, a free, three-day, outdoor multicultural celebration of the nation's finest traditional artists. It's producing organization, the non-profit National Council for the Traditional Arts (NCTA), works with a new local host community on a three-year cycle to present the National Folk Festival. Jackson, MS, was selected this spring to host the traveling festival from 2025-2027.

“This preview provides just a glimpse of the breadth of cultures and virtuosic artistry that audiences in Jackson and throughout the state of Mississippi can expect when the National Folk Festival launches downtown next November,” said Blaine Waide, executive director of the NCTA. “We're thrilled to partner on a day of programs with leaders in the city's arts and culture community, which demonstrates the festival's commitment to partnerships and collaborations, something that is fundamental to its success in cities across the country.”

“I'm excited by what the kickoff suggests about the potential impacts that the National Folk Festival will have for families, and our youth in particular,” said Dr. Ebony Lumumba, chair of the National Folk Festival executive committee. “To have these kinds of programs, entirely free, in our downtown will expose all of us, but especially our children, to new cultures, traditions, and ideas. It takes me back to the Jackson where I grew up.”

Prior to the late afternoon and evening program, spend the day exploring several of the sites that enrich Jackson's cultural landscape. Visit the [Medgar & Myrlie Evers Home National Monument](#); free tours start at 9:00 AM. Then from 11:00 AM–3:00 PM, head to the [Mississippi Museum of Art's](#) (MMA) *Of Salt & Spirit: Black Quilters in the American South* exhibition opening, which will feature demonstrations, panel discussions, performances, and more.

Artists featured at MMA include:

- **Annie & the Caldwell Singers** (West Point, Mississippi) – gospel
A true family affair, Annie & the Caldwell Singers deliver the glorious quartet gospel singing of Annie Caldwell along with her husband and five of their children. Their energetic and moving musical testimonies, blending fiery gospel sounds with the slow-burn groove of soul, have made them longtime favorites on the traditional gospel circuit.
- **Chief Shaka Zulu** (New Orleans, Louisiana) – New Orleans Black masking craftsman & stilt dancer
A National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) National Heritage Fellow, Chief Shaka Zulu is a master of Black Masking suit design, a tradition native to New Orleans and its interwoven history of Indigenous and Black culture. Zulu is also a revered drummer and stilt dancer, both rooted in the city's West African traditions.

Artists featured at the National Folk Festival kickoff are:

- **BeauSoleil Trio** (Lafayette, Louisiana) – Cajun
NEA National Heritage Fellow Michael Doucet, David Doucet, and Chad Huval offer up glorious twin fiddle and fiddle-accordion pairings accompanied by acoustic guitar, beloved sounds from the heart of Cajun tradition. The BeauSoleil Trio pays homage to past Cajun masters with delightful stories and beautiful tunes performed with freshness, immediacy, and unmatched virtuosity.
- **Eddie Cotton, Jr.** (Clinton, Mississippi) – soul blues
Bluesman Eddie Cotton, Jr.'s music is rooted in the church. His father was a Pentecostal minister who founded the Christ Chapel Church of God in Christ Church in nearby Clinton, Mississippi. From his start playing in the church at age six, Cotton has become a blues master with an international fan base. His career remains focused on two things: electrifying blues audiences near and far, and his commitment to his home church, where he serves as minister of music.
- **Edwin Perez y Su Orquesta** (New York, New York) – salsa dura
Born in New York, Edwin Perez was raised by his grandparents in Caguas, Puerto Rico. Edwin excelled singing in the church choir his grandfather directed but felt a strong draw to music that spoke to what he calls the "drums in my heart." As an adult, he moved back to New York, where a chance encounter with a Cuban band transformed his private pursuit of music and eventually thrust him to the forefront of New York's Latin music scene.

- **Yamini Kalluri & the Kritya Music Ensemble** (Lansing, Michigan) – Kuchipudi dance
At just 26, Yamini Kalluri is an internationally acclaimed Kuchipudi performer, choreographer, and teacher. Born in the United States, Kalluri grew up in Hyderabad, India, where she began studying this classical dance form at age seven. One of India's nine classical dance forms, Kuchipudi is known for its expressive and theatrical storytelling, emphasis on dexterity and vigor, and a final act danced upon the rim of a brass plate.

Beginning November 7-9, 2025, the National Folk Festival will bring as many as six stages of continuous music and dance, as well as traditional crafts, regional and culturally diverse cuisine, storytelling, parades, and folklife demonstrations to downtown Jackson. The festival is committed to honoring the artistic traditions of all Americans, from those generations old to more contemporary forms of expression. With tens of thousands in attendance each year, the National Folk Festival will become a major new signature arts event for the city.

The National Folk Festival is a partnership of the National Council for the Traditional Arts, the City of Jackson, Visit Jackson, Downtown Jackson Partners, the Greater Jackson Chamber Partnership, the Community Foundation for Mississippi, the Mississippi Arts Commission, the Mississippi Humanities Council, Visit Mississippi, and the National Park Service.

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About the National Folk Festival: Since it was first presented in St. Louis in 1934, the National Folk Festival, the NCTA's flagship event, has celebrated the roots, richness, and variety of American culture. Championed in its early years by Eleanor Roosevelt, it was the first event of national stature to present the artistic traditions of all Americans on equal footing. It was also the first to present to the public musical forms such as the blues, Cajun music, polka, Tex-Mex conjunto, Peking Opera, and many others. Today, the National is an exuberant traveling festival, produced by the NCTA in partnership with communities around the country, from Maine, Maryland, and Massachusetts, to Michigan, Montana, Ohio, and Virginia, that embraces the diverse cultural expressions that define us as a people in the 21st century.

www.nationalfolkfestival.com/

About the National Council for the Traditional Arts: A leading non-profit in the field, the National Council for the Traditional Arts (NCTA) is dedicated to the presentation and documentation of folk and traditional arts in the U.S. Stressing excellence and traditionality, the NCTA strives to expand awareness of the richness of America's multicultural, living heritage through exciting, thoughtfully curated live programs that create dynamic cultural encounters between the nation's finest artists and the public. It works in partnership with communities across America to establish new, sustainable traditional arts events that deliver lasting social, cultural, and economic benefits. Over 7,000 hours of the NCTA's archival audio recordings dating from the 1930s are permanently housed at the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress. The NCTA also champions the interests of folk and traditional artists and organizations in the arena of public policy. ncta-usa.org

About the City of Jackson, MS: Jackson is the capital of the State of Mississippi. Known as the City with Soul, Jackson has a population of 153,701. The city, founded in 1821, sits on the Pearl River and is the anchor for the Jackson metro area. Jackson is home to a number of cultural gems including the Two Mississippi Museums, the Mississippi Museum of Art, and other historic treasures. The city is proudly regarded as the “Blackest city” in America. For more information visit www.jacksonms.gov.