2021 POST-CONFERENCE REPORT

FOLK UNLOCKED
VIRTUAL CONFERENCE
FEB 22-26 2021

.folk
ALLIANCE INTERNATIONAL
The Folk Unlocked Virtual Conference was a new experience for all of us, one where we learned to adapt to a world that has been forced to move all social interactions into the digital sphere. The folk community has always been resilient, but this year more than ever has truly shown the strength and commitment that we all have to continue sustaining the genre and building an industry that supports all who wish to join it.

While we weren’t able to gather in person like we’re used to, we were able to preserve many of our traditions using technology, while simultaneously creating a more accessible and inclusive event. Moving the conference online forced us to reimagine our usual programming, and thanks to valuable feedback from the community, we were able to bring our new vision to life.

Folk Unlocked may not have felt like the traditional event we have built over the last 30+ years, but it held its own and in many ways came to be a standout year despite all of the challenges. We’re extremely grateful for the support of this community and hope to continue to provide a platform for connection, discovery, and inspiration for years to come.
OUR GOALS

In envisioning what a virtual event would look like for our community, we had many goals in mind. We wanted to create an inclusive event, build spaces for community connection, provide unique programming that delivered timely and relevant content, and meet our revised budget projections after sustaining a sizable hit from canceling our in-person conference. We’re proud to say that we not only met but exceeded those goals with the Folk Unlocked Virtual Conference.

COMMUNITY BUILDING

In addition to the 26 daily panel sessions, we built in a variety of offerings serving different areas of our community. The Affinity Groups, Peer Sessions, Connecting Artists: Mentorship Meetings, Bramble Lobby Socials, Going Up: Virtual Elevator Rides, and the Remembrance Room provided opportunities to build individual community connections during the conference.

UNIQUE PROGRAMMING & RELEVANT CONTENT

With all of our community reeling from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, we knew we needed to provide relevant and timely content that addressed the most pressing issues in the industry. Sessions like “Leveraging the Livestream, Looking Forward”, “Changing the Tune: Pandemic Resilience and Organizational Recovery”, and “Audio Production In-Person and Remote” helped provide clarity on how to stay afloat through uncertainty.

DECREASED REVENUE, INCREASED ACCESS

In 2020 we knew our organization would sustain a considerable loss of income from the cancellation of our in-person conference. Nevertheless, we resolved to continue providing much-needed online resources to our community. We also made the decision to open our conference up to anyone who wanted to attend by creating a pay-what-you're-able registration model. Our registration goals were conservative, but through outreach and community partnerships, we were able to exceed our projections. This allowed us to surpass our income goals while still offering an accessible event at a price point as low as $0 for those who needed it.
KEYNOTE INTERVIEWS

This year’s conference featured two keynote events. Dr. Bettina Love’s live-only interview by Brandi-Waller Pace felt like a window into a conversation between two friends about activism, Black culture, and a call to the community to engage in active allyship.

Margaret Atwood was interviewed by Anaïs Mitchell, and together they reflected on the role of music as a rooted art form, a healing process, and a connective thread for our community: past, present, and future. You can view the full recording of Margaret Atwood’s keynote on our YouTube channel.

WATCH ATWOOD KEYNOTE
FAI’s strategic plan prioritizes diversity, equity, inclusion, access, and international growth. Presented here are the responses to questions in the post-conference survey regarding FAI’s progress toward meeting related goals.

### Conference Stats

- **Keynotes:** 2
- **Peer Sessions:** 10
- **Affinity Groups:** 13
- **Countries:** 35
- **Panels:** 26
- **Artist Mentorship Meetings:** 268
- **One-on-One Meetings:** 818
- **Attendees:** 3,094
- **Total Views:** 673,000

### Conference Attendee Breakdown

- 46% Artists
- 29% Industry
- 11% Affiliates
- 9% Presenter
- 5% Unidentified

### Presenter Breakdown

- 40% Festival
- 24% Concert Series
- 18% Venue
- 15% House Concert
- 2% Theatre
- <1% Camp

### Panelists

- 30% BIPOC
- 45% Disability
- 7% LGBTQ2IA+
- 13% Female

### Peer Sessions

- 28% BIPOC
- 10% Disability
- 0% LGBTQ2IA+
- 7% Female

### Affinity Groups

- 37% BIPOC
- 40% Disability
- 7% LGBTQ2IA+
- 20% Female

### Awards Show

- 36% BIPOC
- 55% Disability
- n/a LGBTQ2IA+
- 15% Female

### Exhibit Hall

- 58 Exhibitors
- 11,294 Booth Visits

### Spotlight Showcases

- 37 Spotlight Showcase Hosts
- 199 Spotlight Showcase Performances

### Unlocked Showcases

- 64 Unlocked Showcase Presenter Rooms
- 1,307 Unlocked Showcase Performances

### Survey Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>% of 503 survey respondents who felt satisfied or very satisfied</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Range of Ages</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range of Career Levels</td>
<td>77%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gender Balance</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range of Folk Genres</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marginalized/BIPOC Presence</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Diversity</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Representation</td>
<td>73%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Range of Ages

Range of Career Levels

Gender Balance

Range of Folk Genres

Marginalized/BIPOC Presence

Cultural Diversity

International Representation
SPOTLIGHT SHOWCASES

In place of Official Showcases that typically happen at our in-person conference, FAI presented Spotlight Showcases. These one-hour pre-recorded live performances were produced by our music industry partners from around the globe and featured artists from their regions or countries. We felt the energy of the performances and witnessed the enthusiasm of the audience through the highly engaged live chat feature of the conference platform.

UNLOCKED SHOWCASES

An essential part of every FAI conference is the after-hours Private Showcase scene, a festive, community-built offering of hundreds of mini-concerts presented simultaneously. FAI recreated (albeit virtually) this inspiring model, providing a meeting place to reconnect, discover new music, and build community among folk musicians, industry, and fans alike through the magic of Unlocked Showcases.
**Peer Sessions**

Ten Peer Sessions, designed to foster conversations within specific industry cohorts, were convened this year: Agents, Arts Councils and Music Offices, Emerging Music Industry and Artists, Festivals, Folk Radio Promoters, House Concerts, Managers, Media and Publicity, Radio, and Venues. New attendance records were set across all meetings, with over 800 folks participating. The resonance of these gatherings will result in regularly scheduled Peer Session Weeks and has led to the establishment of several online groups.

**Remembrance Room**

In a year of great loss in the folk community, the Remembrance Room provided space to grieve and celebrate those who we have lost. Attendees shared anecdotes and videos, creating a virtual space to mourn lost members of the community including Gene Shay, Anne Feeney, John Prine, past FAI Board member Angelo Joaquin Jr., and countless others sorely missed.

**Wisdom of the Elders**

The Wisdom of the Elders panel returned this year, this time featuring Bill Staines, Pura Fé, and Vance Gilbert, and hosted by Ian Zolitor of WXPN. The session gave insight into how each of the elders built a career out of a community, how they prioritize physical and mental health while on the road, and who inspires them. It was absolutely a can’t-miss conversation!
GLOBAL MUSIC MATCH

Global Music Match forged connections between 96 international artists, with the goal of raising their profile in international music markets through collaborations. These artists returned to celebrate this newfound community with the inaugural Global Music Marathon, the culminating event of the year-long pilot program. This six-hour premiere concert was perfectly presented as the closing celebration of FAI’s debut digital event.

FOLK DJS UNLOCKED

During this action-packed hour-long session, hosted by the inimitable and hilarious Christine Lavin, nearly 40 artists were randomly selected in real-time to give a one-minute live pitch to the 200 folks who attended. After Folk Unlocked, the folk DJs were emailed a list of all of the artists along with their submitted information. It was a fun and lively event, and FAI plans to present an extended version later this year.

BRAMBLE

To recreate the social atmosphere that leads to special, and often impromptu, connections made during the in-person conference, we partnered with Bramble to bring a unique virtual experience to attendees during Folk Unlocked. Our virtual gathering venues, featuring multiple rooms in each world, allowed folks to join as they please and navigate their avatar through the virtual space, meeting new people and catching up with old friends.

ELEVATOR RIDES

Anyone who has attended FAI’s in-person conference knows that riding the elevators can lead to unexpected bouts of laughter, insight on great sessions, and chance encounters between strangers just waiting to become fast folk friends. To create this connection virtually, attendees were placed in a randomly sorted “elevator ride” (also known as a Zoom room) with about six others for another opportunity to build community connection.
AFFINITY GROUPS

This year’s Affinity Groups served many different communities: First Timers, LGBTQ2IA+ Folks, Folks Coping with Loss, Folks Living with Cancer or Chronic Illness, BIPOC, Folks in Recovery, Folks 55+, Women, Folks with Disability, Change Makers and Activists, Francophones, and Hispanohablantes. The success and high participation of these groups will result in the convening of virtual Affinity Group sessions year-round.

COMMITMENT TO DEI PROGRAMMING

FAI values diversity, equity, inclusion, and access, striving to ensure gender parity in all its programming, celebrating multiple languages and cultures, and actively inviting and welcoming participation from marginalized, disenfranchised, and underrepresented communities.

Diligence, community engagement, outreach, and commitment to centering new voices led to the most diverse FAI program participant roster in our history, while simultaneously addressing FAI's commitment to a national 10/20/30 Racial Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion pledge.
Thank You Volunteers

Folk Unlocked wouldn’t have been possible without the help from many dedicated volunteers, including those who participated in the pre-conference brainstorming sessions. They provided support by hosting Zoom rooms, adding closed captioning to videos, reviewing video content, verifying and organizing Unlocked Showcase data, and countless other tasks.

Claire Armbruster
Kyshona Armstrong
Helen Austin
Jason Baker
Rachel Barreca
Gene Bowlen
Hannah Bright
Michelle Demers Shaevitz
Claire Diamond
Eric Elliott
Quique Escamilla
Ethan Gabbard
Joey Gates
Susie Giang
Brigid Greene
Elaine Hayden
Jenny Inzerillo
Jamie Katz Court
Brianna Lane
Kristina Latino
Christine Lavin
Len Lawhon
Erin Mae Lewis
Lilli Lewis

Jeff Lowe
Rodger McBride
Art Menius
David Messer
Dan Navarro
Shelley Nordstrom
Eoin Ó Catháin
Rob Oakie
Katie Ortman
Neil Pearson
Ann Powers
Dave Rabinowitz
Shakura S’Aida
Saralou Schmidt
Patricia Sibley
Raghad Tmumen
Phil Ward
Mike Warren
Doug Williams
Telisha Williams
Ann Zimmerman

Thank You Staff and Board

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Executive Director

Jennifer Roe
Director of Operations

Alex Mallett
Director of Development

Michelle Conceison
Programming Manager

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Communications Manager

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Caroline Randall Williams

Carolina Rojas Posada

Lisa Schwartz

Matt Sever

Ashley Shabankareh

Gerald Torres
THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS & FUNDERS
Founded in 1989, Folk Alliance International (FAI) is a National Arts Service Organization based in Kansas City, Missouri, USA.

FAI defines folk broadly as “the music of the people” (reflective of any community they are from), and programs a diverse array of sub-genres including, but not limited to Appalachian, Americana, Blues, Bluegrass, Celtic, Cajun, Global Roots, Hip-Hop, Old-Time, Singer-Songwriter, Spoken Word, Traditional, Zydeco, and various fusions.

We are a registered 501(c)3 organization with the EIN 56-1698333.

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**ABOUT FOLK ALLIANCE INTERNATIONAL**

The purpose of making this land acknowledgment in post-colonial society is to show respect for Indigenous peoples and their traditional territories, to recognize their unique culture and enduring relationship to the land, and to raise awareness about histories that have often been replaced, suppressed, or forgotten.

We acknowledge that we were joined at Folk Unlocked by folks from around the globe, using technology not accessible to all. We recognize the importance, complexity, and difficulty of land acknowledgments when organizing, creating, and collaborating online. We invite you to join in acknowledging our shared responsibility, and for each of us to consider our roles in reconciliation, decolonization, and active allyship.

**LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

Folk Alliance International’s office is located on the ancestral Indigenous land of the Osage, Kansa, Kaw, Kickapoo, and Očhéthi Šakówiwin nations, also known as Kansas City. We honor with gratitude their elders: past, present, and future.