

For Immediate Release

**FOLK ALLIANCE INTERNATIONAL UNVEILS  
OFFICIAL ARTWORK, THEME AND KEYNOTE SPEAKER  
FOR 2017 CONFERENCE**

***FORBIDDEN FOLK* ANNOUNCED AS THEME FOR  
29<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL CONFERENCE**

**ENGLISH SINGER-SONGWRITER AND ACTIVIST BILLY BRAGG  
TO GIVE KEYNOTE ADDRESS**

**EARLY BIRD REGISTRATION OPEN JUNE 1 THROUGH AUGUST 31  
OFFICIAL SHOWCASE APPLICATIONS OPEN JUNE 15 THROUGH  
OCTOBER 3**

**CONFERENCE SLATED FOR FEBRUARY 15-19, 2017 AT THE WESTIN  
CROWN CENTER HOTEL IN KANSAS CITY, MO**

“Before there was Americana, before there was alt-country, there was Folk music.”  
–*No Depression*

“Folk Alliance International becomes a city during its yearly conference.”  
–*The Alternate Root*

Kansas City, MO (May 24, 2016) – In an event held at the National World War I Museum and Memorial, [Folk Alliance International](#) (FAI) today unveiled the official artwork, theme and keynote speaker for the 29<sup>th</sup> annual conference slated for February 15-19, 2017, at the Westin Crown Center Hotel in Kansas City, Missouri. Today’s event included the release of six doves, symbolically sending word of this year’s theme to the five North American regions of the organization and one for the international community.

The theme for the 2017 conference, *Forbidden Folk*, is designed to celebrate activism in art by exploring the past and present role of folk music in civil, labor, pacifist, and environmental movements. Whether in response to unfair working conditions, protesting inequality and injustice, confronting issues of war, standing up for the downtrodden, or addressing topics of concern for society to take note of, folk music is rooted in social commentary and has historically documented the issues of the day.

The official artwork, created by longtime FAI graphic designer Michael Wrycraft, is influenced by the bold and evocative images of the labor movement, and includes the universal clenched fist of resistance, wielding a ukulele.

“Our choice of a ukulele was intentional, an effort to make the image more accessible and modern,” states Executive Director Aengus Finnan. “Placing a user-friendly instrument in the image is a call to action for the average person, not just the professional musician. We all have a part to play, and the songs we write and sing can have meaningful impact.”

With a 30-year career focused on social change and engaging a younger generation in activist causes, English singer-songwriter **Billy Bragg** will provide the keynote address during the conference. His work unabashedly blends elements of folk music, punk rock and protest traditions.

Regarding the collective responsibility of artist and audience Bragg states, “People tell me that they are inspired by my songs, and for that I’m thankful, but I take my inspiration from the only people in this equation who can actually make a difference - the audience.”

Past keynote speakers include Vice President Al Gore, Graham Nash, Rita Coolidge, Commander Chris Hadfield, and Judy Collins.

In keeping with the theme, and in response to feedback from the 2016 post-conference survey, FAI plans to improve on areas of importance to the folk music community. These include efforts to increase international representation and the inclusion of more cultural diversity and visible minorities.

Also of concern to survey respondents and the organization is the need to address the environmental impact of the conference. This has already led to changes in daily office practice, and a planned conference partnership with Bridging the Gap, a regional non-profit that aims to make Kansas City more sustainable by connecting the environment, economy, and community.

**Early bird registration** for the five-day conference known for its community atmosphere, nurturing ethos, and as an industry hotspot for new talent discovery will be on sale June 1 through August 31, 2016, offering discounted prices.

Almost 200 Official Showcases are presented at the conference, selected through a juried process that reviews over 700 applications annually. Showcases range in style under the banner of Folk to include: Appalachian, Bluegrass, Blues, Cajun, Celtic, Roots, Old Time, Traditional, World, Singer-Songwriters, and more.

**Official Showcase Applications** will be open June 15 through October 3, 2016.

Folk Alliance International will continue to produce and provide public access to an International Folk Music Awards gala on the opening night of the conference, a concurrent educational Music Camp, and a one day indoor Kansas City Folk Festival.

Community outreach will be expanded in 2017 to meet growing school interest. A third edition of the Artist In Residence program will be held based on the recent success of past partnerships with the Kansas City Ballet and the WWI Museum and Monument.

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### **About Billy Bragg**

Influenced by Simon & Garfunkel, Bob Dylan and the Clash, Bragg began his musical career in 1977 by forming the punk rock band Riff Raff and later launching a solo career under the name *Spy Vs. Spy* which led to a 1983 release, and included his iconic “A New England,” a Top 10 hit in the UK for Kirsty MacColl later that year.

Following releases under his own name included *Between The Wars*, *Talking with the Taxman About Poetry*, *Workers Playtime*, *Don't Try This At Home* and *The Internationale*, which included the song, “I Dreamed I Saw Phil Ochs Last Night.”

In 1998, a collaboration with the band Wilco and Natalie Merchant celebrating the work of Woody Guthrie produced the first of three *Mermaid Avenue* albums, with the first nominated for a Grammy in the Best Contemporary Folk Album category.

A developing interest in the English national identity informed his 2002 album *England, Half English* and a move closer to English folk music roots with The Imagined Village, who recorded an album of updated versions of traditional English songs.

For the entirety of Bragg's 30-year-plus recording career he has been involved with grassroots political movements. In addition to being published writer, playwright, and actor, Bragg also curates the Leftfield stage at Glastonbury Festival. He has been an opponent of fascism, racism, bigotry, sexism and homophobia and is a supporter of a multi-racial Britain. He has long been a supporter of Labor causes and the struggles of class solidarity, particularly as it related to miners' strikes in the U.K. and the U.S. He is the founder of Jail Guitar Doors, an organization that supplies instruments for prisoners to help address problems in a non-confrontational way.

Bragg is a regular of an annual event commemorating those transported from England to Australia for founding a union in the 1830s, has been an active voice in the Occupy Movement, and participated in Australia's March in March anti-government protests. He called for the EU to intervene in a dispute between YouTube and independent labels, was a vocal supporter of the “civic nationalism” of the Scottish independence campaign, endorsed the Green Party in a recent election, and has promoted tactical voting.

He has just released *Shine A Light*, a collection of classic railroad songs recorded with Joe Henry in waiting rooms and at trackside in train stations from Chicago to Los Angeles. Bragg also has a new book in the works.

### **About Folk Alliance International**

Folk Alliance International is a registered charity based in Kansas City, Missouri. Founded in 1989, with over 3000 members worldwide, FAI is an advocacy, professional development, and networking organization that produces the world's largest gathering of the Folk music community and industry, and is one of the five largest music conferences in North America

FAI serves a growing membership of artists, agents, managers, record companies, publishers, presenters, educators, music support services, manufacturers and community leaders who work in the folk music industry. FAI has five regional affiliates throughout North America that provide smaller conferences and services in their respective markets.

*FAI's mission is to nurture, engage and empower the international Folk music community—traditional and contemporary, amateur and professional – through education, advocacy and performance.*

The annual five-day conference each February features juried Official Showcases of tour and export-ready folk music ranging from Blues, Bluegrass, Celtic, Cajun, Old-Time, Traditional, World, Singer-songwriter, and Spoken Word.

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**For more information about Folk Alliance International and the 2017 Conference, please contact Lellie Capwell at [Lellie@lpc-media.com](mailto:Lellie@lpc-media.com) or [media@folk.org](mailto:media@folk.org) / 818.384.1180**