FAI’s 29th annual conference saw the largest number of attendees in its history with hotel rooms, advertising and the Exhibit Hall selling out. 2017 also marked a distinct increase in international attendees and diversity of programming. Expansion of mentorship, peer sessions, and new industry-specific receptions resulted in more business conducted, while enhanced production values strengthened showcases and panel events. The following report highlights a summary of conference events, data, and post-conference survey feedback.

Conference Theme
This year’s theme, Forbidden Folk, was intentionally selected to celebrate activism in art by exploring the past and present role of folk music in civil, labor, pacifist, and environmental movements.

The official artwork was inspired by the bold and evocative images of the labor movement and included the universal clenched fist of resistance wielding a populist ukulele.

Woven into the fabric of this year’s event, the Forbidden Folk theme informed panel selections and artistic programming choices including:

- Indigenous Gathering hosted by a local elder to welcome Indigenous artists from the Americas, Australia, and Norway.
- Standing Up for Racial Justice training promoting accountability through collective action.
- Contemporary Protest panel with moderator Nic Dawes of Human Rights Watch and panelists Billy Bragg, SONiA disappear fear, Ramy Essam, and Eliza Gilkyson.
- The launch of two new annual awards to honor the socially conscious roots of folk music.
- A special presentation by Ani DiFranco who spoke of the importance of staying politically engaged by voting, saying, “Believe in democracy just enough to show up and make it real.”

In addition, FAI commissioned two Artist in Residence projects, each related to the human side of justice, with Blues artist Rita Chiarelli, Latin Fusion band Making Movies, and veteran police officer and poet Octavio “Chato” Villalobos collaborating on both sides of prison walls.

Cementing the prevailing tone of the conference, Billy Bragg in his keynote address said, “Activism is the antidote to cynicism,” and asked a new generation of folk artists to be visible by taking their messages to places where it will challenge the status quo.

“An essential gathering for the roots music community that exceeds the dreams we had in 1989. Great people, strong workshops, powerful message, and tons of diverse music from traditional string bands to First Nations hip hop.”

-- Art Menius, FAI Board President, 1990
27 COUNTRIES REPRESENTED

Armenia, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Denmark, Egypt, Estonia, France, Germany, Guatemala, Honduras, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Russia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, United States, Uzbekistan, Venezuela, Yemen

“Inspirational, fulfilling, and thrilling to experience. I was very impressed with the level of consciousness, responsibility, and creativity of the people I met and experienced. We made many great discoveries for future booking.”

-- William Michael, BlissFest

23% INCREASE IN ATTENDEES from 2016

406 PRESENTERS

2,694 ATTENDEES

ATTENDEE DATA
The International Folk Music Awards Show had standing room only attendance and is partially responsible for a larger delegate presence (nearly 600 more!) earlier in the week than in previous years.

The all-FolkStar event featured a performance by Kris Kristofferson and presentations from Paula Cole, Megan Mullally, and Eliza Gilkyson.

The evening included a tribute to Louis Jay Meyers and the announcement that our Music Camp will henceforth be named after him.

**International Folk Music Awards and Recipients**

- Lifetime Achievement Awards: David Amram, Malvina Reynolds, Helen Creighton
- Spirit of Folk Awards: Barbara Dane, Chloe Goodyear, Michelle Conceison, Ramy Essam, Si Kahn, SONiA
- Member-voted Best of 2016 Awards:
  - Album of the Year: Sarah Jarosz for *Undercurrent*, Michael Kiwanuka & Inflo for “Black Man in a White World”
  - Artist of the Year: Parker Millsap
- Folk DJ Hall of Fame inductees: Oscar Brand, Howard & Roz Larman, Mike Regenstreif, Rich Warren, Gene Shay
- The People’s Voice Award: Bruce Cockburn
- Clearwater Award: The Clearwater Festival
To address the environmental impact of the organization, events, and programs, FAI launched the Green Folk program in 2016. Implementing a variety of strategic actions to significantly reduce the footprint of the five-day conference, FAI successfully diverted 5.9 tons of waste from the landfill to recycling and compost stations.

Actions taken include:

- Trained volunteers monitored recycling stations to encourage responsible waste disposal. The “Green Team” was comprised of a Crew Chief who managed 80 volunteers who worked 342 hours.
- 4-stream monitored recycling stations and compost bins for biodegradable waste throughout the conference on Lobby, Ballroom, and Private Showcase floors.
- Elimination of disposable cups.
- Implementation of a BYOWB (bring your own water bottle) campaign.
- Sustainable wood hotel room key cards.
- 100% Recycled paper and soy ink use for FAI’s 2,500 copies of the 150-page program and pocket guide.
- Digital Ads replaced posters and flyers on the Lobby & Ballroom floors in an effort to reduce waste.

These efforts were supported by our partners Bridging the Gap, Mid-America Regional Council Solid Waste Management District, and the Westin Crown Center Hotel.

**THANK YOU VOLUNTEERS!**

A huge thank you to the 233 volunteers that donated 4,190 hours of time, enabling the conference to run smoothly. Our volunteers commit their valuable time, skills, and heart to make FAI an amazing experience for all.

“Folk Alliance creates a fast-paced networking opportunity for new artists that is unparalleled. Our artists are going non-stop for the full duration of the conference and always come away leaps and bounds ahead with experience, connections and an overall sense of the magic of the Folk Alliance community.”

-- Cathleen McMahon, Mission Management

“IT can be difficult to marry art and commerce, community and industry, but Folk Alliance does an impressive job of providing that space. FAI helps artists make a viable living.”

-- Graydon James, The Young Novelists
A post-conference survey was sent to all conference delegates and received 759 responses. FAI prioritizes inclusion, diversity, and international expansion in our Strategic Plan which articulates a set of measurable goals. We asked survey respondents to report how they felt programming this year satisfied these goals and how important a priority they should be in programming the 2018 conference.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Response</th>
<th>2017 Report Card</th>
<th>2018 Priority</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender balance</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range of genres within folk</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range of career levels</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range of ages</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International representation</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural diversity (language, musical content)</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visible minority representation (regardless of music style)</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“Folk Alliance is the most important business conference I attend every year. It offers a significant opportunity to meet and hear new talent. The trade show is the best of any convention and the activity is very electric.”

-- Clay Pasternack, CPI Distribution, Gotta Groove Records

Our sincerest thanks to all who took part in creating a space where so many people could connect, reflect, and leave feeling inspired. To anyone we missed, we hope to see you next year at #FAI30 to celebrate 30 years of community and song!