



2023 Village Trip composers (l-r) Aleksandra Vrebalov, Carman Moore and Joseph Keckler

The Village Trip, a Beautiful, Musical Ride with the ASCAP Family

By Jim Steinblatt • September 13, 2023

A “Festival of Arts & Activism” celebrates the rich cultural legacy of Greenwich Village while opening doors for new music; ASCAP Foundation Charles Kingsford Fund World Premieres to Be Featured

The 2023 edition of The Village Trip: A Festival of Arts & Activism runs 17 days during September in the world’s only village that doesn’t need to be identified by name – New York City’s Greenwich Village. A place that conjures up smoky clubs hosting folk singers, jazz virtuosos and snarling punk rockers, Greenwich Village was also the home turf for a burgeoning

wave of poetry, new directions in journalism and the graphic arts, as well as a hotbed of civil rights efforts. “Hijinks and high ideals,” says Village Trip Founder and Joint Artistic Director Liz Thomson about the Festival and the neighborhood it celebrates.

Thomson, a British author and journalist, spoke to ASCAP from the Washington Square Hotel, “of Joan Baez’s ‘Diamonds and Rust’ fame, but also the place where Allen Ginsberg and the Rolling Stones and Chuck Berry and Ernest Hemingway and Dylan Thomas and all the jazz people had stayed.” Also on the call was Village Trip Joint Artistic Director Cliff Pearson, an architect and educator. The two, who share a sense of wonder at all that has taken place in Greenwich Village since the 19th Century, also believe firmly in its artistic present and future. According to Pearson, “The important thing about The Village Trip is that it's not just about history. It's not just about the Beats and the 1960s and the hippies. We want it to be very much about creating new art today, new music today. And we want to make the connection that Greenwich Village has to remain a creative place.” However, he adds darkly, “there's a real danger, with real estate prices being so high and billionaires building giant houses or renovating three or four townhouses and combining them into one apartment for themselves, that creative people won't be able to afford to live in Greenwich Village.”

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–Cliff Pearson, The Village Trip Joint Artistic Director

The Village Trip schedule finds events celebrating the long and storied history of Greenwich Village sitting comfortably alongside new artistic endeavors by a host of rising young creators. The blossoming of the Village folk scene of the late 1950s and early 60s was brought back vividly at the Bitter End with “Greenwich Village and Me,” a talk by Terri Thal (author of a memoir of that name and former manager and wife of the late Dave Van Ronk) with performances by Tom Paxton and Happy Traum. The Public

Theater features *Wonderful Town*, a 70th anniversary celebration of that classic musical (music by Leonard Bernstein and lyrics by Betty Comden & Adolph Green) featuring the maestro's daughter, Jamie Bernstein and Village resident Janis Siegel (of Manhattan Transfer fame).



(l-r) Actress Nancy Walker with *Wonderful Town* composer Leonard Bernstein and songwriters Adolph Green and Betty Comden

Among the many New Music presentations at The Village Trip is a highly anticipated concert taking place at Salmagundi NYC, "Simic Colors." Featured world premieres will include composer Aleksandra Vrebalov's "Simic Songs." Commissioned by The ASCAP Foundation Charles Kingsford Fund, her new song cycle is based upon poems by the late Pulitzer Prize winner, US Poet Laureate and ASCAP member, Charles Simic. Alongside Joseph Keckler (baritone) the other performers for Vrebalov's work will include Djordje Nesic (keyboard), Ljubinka Kulisic (accordion), Changhyun Cha (trumpet) and Greg Chudzik (bass). Joseph Keckler will not only be featured in the Vrebalov world premiere as baritone, but will perform his own original works relating to Greenwich Village. Soprano Sharon Harms, together with Oren Fader (guitar) and William Anderson (mandolin) are the performers in the upcoming world premiere of Carman Moore's "A Village Triptych," a co-commission by The ASCAP Foundation Charles Kingsford Fund and the Roger Shapiro Fund for New Music. Also included in Simic's honor will be a world premiere of "Simic Colors" from composer Gene Pritsker.

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–Liz Thomson, The Village Trip Founder and Joint Artistic Director

The Village Trip umbrella also covers activities relating to hip-hop, punk rock, comedy, LGBTQ+ rights, architecture and Jewish and Ukrainian culture. And, as this summer marks the 60th anniversary of The March on Washington, Village Trip programming highlights Cooper Union's Great Hall – a location that hosted historic speeches by Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass and where the NAACP was officially formed. On September 21, “Let Freedom Ring! Music and Voices of the March for Civil Rights, Then and Now” will fill The Great Hall with song, dance and words that confront discrimination, inequality, and oppression.

The Village Trip has grown from a three-day event into a 17-day festival that touches on virtually every aspect of creativity, community and activism in Greenwich Village. As Liz Thomson says, “The Village is a kind of crucible in which much of 20th century culture was hammered out. Everything comes together here. And it's amazing when you read through an obituary of an artist or a musician, almost always somewhere, if they're American, they've honed a chunk of their craft in Greenwich Village.” Fittingly, there is now a sprawling annual Arts & Activism Festival to celebrate and magnify that legacy.

The Village Trip runs through September 24th. [Click here](#) for schedule and more info.

**Aleksandra Vrebalov photo by Zeljko Mandic. Joseph Keckler photo by Michael Sharkey.*