

The Village Trip Hosts Launch Event for 2024 Festival

By Natasha Lancaster

On Wednesday, May 22 at 2 pm, dozens of Greenwich Village devotees gathered on a sweltering afternoon at The Bitter End, a mainstay of the area's historically vibrant music scene. While the club does not usually start performances until 6 pm, The Bitter End



LIZ THOMSON AND CLIFF PEARSON AT THE LAUNCH EVENT FOR THE VILLAGE TRIP. In its sixth year, The Village Trip has expanded significantly from its inception in 2018 as a weekend-long affair, to an impressive full two weeks of programming. *Photo by Maria Derr.*

opened its doors early to host the launch event for this year's The Village Trip festival.

The "festival of arts and activism" includes a wide array of happenings from outdoor concerts to lectures, exhibitions, and films focused on the neighborhood. This year, the Village Trip will run from September 14 – 28.

At the launch, The Village Trip offered drinks and food to the community, including pizza catered by the neighborhood classic, Two Boots. After some initial mingling, various musicians performed, giving the audience a sneak peek of what's to come in September. Performances included a few songs sung by Diane Garisto who will honor Laura Nyro as part of the Stoned Soul Picnic: A Tribute to Laura Nyro event, hosted by The Village Trip in the fall. Similarly, Janie Barnett, an Americana singer-songwriter, sang a few wonderful tunes and will be one of the performers at a free concert in Washington Square Park as part of the festival on September 28.

In its sixth year, The Village Trip has expanded significantly from its inception in 2018 as a weekend-long affair to an impressive full two weeks of programming. In fact, last year, the festival boasted 65 diverse events. The festival also continues to host an impressive lineup of individuals who come back year after year to participate, including their Artist Emeritus, David Amram. A musician and long time friend and collaborator of Jack Kerouac, Amram is known as a composer for the New York Philharmonic selected by Leonard Bernstein, and the musical director for Joseph Papp's Shakespeare festival. At the 2024 Village Trip, Amram will do a rendition of "Music for Shakespeare in the Park" with Gail Papp at Joe's Pub.

Perhaps just as fascinating as the festival itself is the woman behind it: Liz Thomson, the Founder and Co-Artistic Director of the grassroots effort. Thomson is a British writer, journalist, and lifelong Greenwich Village enthusiast whose passion for the area started when she was a young girl living in North London. "As a teenager, the music that obsessed me was not the music of my peers. I'd been given a guitar and I learned to play it from an old Joan Baez record in my sister's collection," she said. From there, Thomson connected the dots between different artists that she added to her own collection and the place where they were all hanging out: "In those days, you read the sleeve notes, so I followed the trail, and from Baez to Bob Dylan to Pete Seeger, it was all these people who had been part of the scene in this place called Greenwich Village which seemed—in those days of expensive flights—very exotic. And I thought, 'one day I will go.'" In 2021, Cliff Pearson, a local writer focused on architecture, was looking for a way to enliven the Village post-pandemic and joined the team as Co-artistic Director.

Although the festival was born out of Thomson’s love of music, it celebrates culture and activism in all of its forms. “I realized that it wasn’t just about Dylan and Baez. It was about Eugene O’Neill and the Provincetown Playhouse and Edna St. Vincent Millay and Jack Kerouac. Everyone had been here at some point,” Thomson explained. Accordingly, the festival has had a variety of events that represent the wide range of the area’s history, from “Let Freedom Ring!”, a performance celebrating the 60th anniversary of the March on Washington, to Suzanne Vega singing in Washington Square Park.

Similarly, while The Village Trip honors the history of the neighborhood, Thomson is invested in exploring the current arts scene despite the changing environment of the area. “It’s not just about celebrating a bygone era, though it’s important to remember history. It’s all very much about showing that the Village is still a place where incredible art happens. People still manage to come here and create,” she added.

You can see the exciting creations of musicians, visual artists, performers, and everyone in between at [The Village Trip](#) from September 14 to 28.

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