

When spring arrives in downtown Norfolk, The Perry Pavilion rises on the grassy plot across from the Virginia Arts Festival's headquarters, the home for intimate seated shows catering to listeners, something that's often a quaint notion elsewhere.

The venue's fourth season once again promises a tasting menu of performances, everything from country royalty to a lounge core queen.

The series opens with old country transformed by a modern twist with Miko Marks and Kristina Train, singers headed for bigger things (much like Perry alumna Allison Russell from two years ago). They headline the [Trailblazing Women of Country](#) show on May 1. Along with a crack all-female band that includes guitar hero, Anne McCue, they bring life to the songs of Virginia native Patsy Cline, Coal Miner's Daughter Loretta Lynn, and the legendary Dolly Parton. "To go on tour with Trailblazing Women of Country is a childhood reimagined," says Marks. "I used to sit at my grandmother's house while she played records and I remember being drawn to these three women for their unique strengths. The life stories and their music. They are inspirations and I'm honored to pay tribute to these icons of music."

The series moves from trailblazing country of decades past to trailblazing country and Americana of today with [Brandy Clark](#), a 2024 Grammy winner for Best Americana. Clark is a singer/songwriter for these times, a gay woman with an unyielding point of view not afraid to pour out her heart on her latest, a collaboration with Brandi Carlile.

If Clark moves from country to Americana to folk, the May 28 Perry performers, [Mipso](#), don't slide easily into even three boxes. The band started as friends at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. They're a string band. They're a folk band. They're a little alternative. They're acoustic, but they went electric with their last album. What they are is a good listen.

[Storm Large](#). The name says so much -- and it's her real name. She broke big on the reality show, Rock Star: Supernova. And the big bang continues to echo. She's got a voice, oh does she have a voice, but there's so much more to her show than belting it out. She is one part chanteuse and one part HBO late-night comedy special. She's played dives and Carnegie Hall. She calls herself "sexually omnivorous." Her performance is also omnivorous, mixing originals and covers as diverse as songs from The Pixies and Edith Piaf. Who could resist 90 minutes of that on May 31?

[Aoife O'Donovan](#) first played Norfolk a decade ago solo under a big tent in a driving rainstorm. She returns for the fifth time on June 1 with a special offering, curating a day of music and workshops titled "Light in the Eastern Sky" with her husband, Virginia Symphony director Eric Jacobsen, Appalachian roots brother and sister The Wildmans, and innovative guitar instrumentalist Yasmin Williams, another Virginia product.

O'Donovan, a Grammy winner, writes and sings in the folk tradition, but her songs aren't limited by its boundaries. During the pandemic, she recorded "Live from Black Birch" with Jacobsen, and his brother, the violinist Colin Jacobsen. "I remember having a moment of panic when I said, 'Sing along!' And then I spent the rest of the song being, like, 'No, don't sing, don't open your mouth!'" she says. See if he sings in The Perry on June 1.

If you saw "Hadestown" during its recent run at Chrysler Hall, then you've already heard the songwriting talents of Anais Mitchell, one of the members of the supergroup [Bonny Light Horseman](#). Mitchell, who has forged a captivating Americana career in addition to Broadway, joined Eric D. Johnson of Fruit Bats and Josh Kaufman, a multi-instrumentalist, to form the band.

The Grammy-nominated band's latest tour debuts on June 11 in Norfolk, the smallest city they're playing to support the band's third album, Keep Me on Your Mind/See You Free.

Their first album mined ten traditional folk songs from the British Isles. Their second contained 11 songs written by the band. What's astonishing is they sound like one band writing at one time. "They're both like ancient love songs, but also like the soundtrack to a John Hughes movie," Johnson said. What will their third album sound like? Find out in The Perry.

The big tent keeps moving with a May 25 performance by The Virginia Arts Festival's Rhythm Project, a world percussion ensemble that serves middle school and high school students throughout Hampton Roads. They've played the Kennedy Center. Can't you hear the ringing sound of steel drums? Irresistible. Bring the family and let the music move you.

*Tickets for all performances are available at [vafest.org](http://vafest.org), by phone at 757-282-2822, or in person at the Virginia Arts Festival box office at 440 Bank Street in Norfolk.*

--end---