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Sagging Toward the Harbor

Can a New Music and Arts Festival Lure the Rock Crowd Out to the Hamptons?[Article](#)[Comments](#)[MORE IN NEW YORK-CULTURE »](#)[Email](#)[Print](#)[Save](#)

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By ANDY BATTAGLIA



Anakin Koenig

The inaugural Escape to New York Festival will feature art by, among others, Anakin Koenig (whose CuddleFish sculpture is pictured).

Notions of "fancy dress" and craftsy outdoor music festivals need not be at odds—especially when a distinguished Englishman is involved. "In England, 'fancy dress' means costumes, like what you would wear at Halloween," said Fred Fellowes, an arts organizer from London preparing to make his New York debut. "So when I say that some people show up in fancy dress, people start asking how we run a music festival for people in top hats and tails."

He was speaking about a curious gathering, known as the Secret Garden Party, that served as an inspiration for Escape to New York, a three-day music and arts festival to take place this weekend on an open expanse of land in Southampton, N.Y. Questions of translation had come up after a mention of a fleet of "articulated lorries" (those would be tractor-trailer trucks) involved in transforming the land—on the Shinnecock Indian Reservation—into a site right for rocking by the eclectic likes of Patti Smith, Of Montreal, Psychedelic Furs and Best Coast,

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plus numerous other multimedia contributors.

"I found the idea appealing because it seemed suitably crazy," Mr. Fellowes said while in the city last week. The idea, in short, was to create a summer music festival for New York in line with the Secret Garden Party, which Mr. Fellowes, 33, has run for the past nine years on a carnivalesque site outside Cambridge, England. As at home, the music is meant to be varied and the activities around it more than extracurricular. Festivalgoers will find a series of talks organized by the Guerilla Arts Club (topics include a history of lasers and what happens when a man lies on a bed of nails), a slate of playful installation art curated by the Brooklyn-based artist duo Winkel & Balktick, and food organized by the folks behind the Fat Radish locavore restaurant on the Lower East Side.



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The festival will feature music by indie-rock bands including Of Montreal.

Kevin Barnes, whose theatrical art-rock band Of Montreal played the Secret Garden Party in 2007 and signed up to play for Mr. Fellowes again at Escape to New York. "It had a cool D.I.Y. vibe to it and felt really pure, like a festival should be." Asked about his impression of the Hamptons, where he and his band will perform in a headlining slot on Sunday, Mr. Barnes, who lives in Georgia, said, "I always just thought of it as a place where wealthy people have vacation homes. I feel like I've seen it in an episode of 'Seinfeld,' or maybe Woody Allen movies."

Indeed, the setting has proven surprising, or at least unfamiliar, to many on their way to a festival of such eccentric and enterprising provenance. "I think of beaches and wealth," said Stephen Patterson of White Rabbits, a Brooklyn band playing Saturday. "But I've never been, so I actually have no idea."

That, to Mr. Fellowes, was part of Southampton's charm. "I have an idea of the perception," he said, "but there's a lot more than originally met my eye to the Hamptons scene. When it was first presented to me it was in the same pale as places in France, like Nice, Cannes, Antibes. But I wasn't aware of the hippie and more boho aspects, the wider scope of what goes on in the Hamptons."

Those disinclined to find a bed-and-breakfast are encouraged to camp for the duration, either in sanctioned campgrounds nearby or in one of the high-end "glamping" (read: glamorous camping) tents and tepees available onsite for a premium. But unlike at the Secret Garden Party in England, day-passes are also available for \$100.

Ericka Forster won't need to worry about either as a member of Au Revoir Simone, a Brooklyn-based synth-pop band performing on Saturday. But she remains curious about who might venture to Escape to New York. "I have a bunch of friends who always want to go to the Hamptons to see the Grey Gardens house," she said. "I also went to this epic thrift store in Southampton last year. I got a picnic basket and a really nice wool blanket."

So will fans of indie-rock and installation art make the trip from the city? Will summering Hamptons habitués find their way to the Shinnecock reservation?

Mr. Fellowes said he has modest expectations for the festival's inaugural edition. Though investment in the event has been "in excess of \$2 million," an audience in the range of 2,500 to 3,000—a tenth of his last Secret Garden Party—would qualify as a success. "The most important thing is to make sure that people who turn up this year go away having had a really great weekend, with big smiles on their faces," he said. "If we manage that then we've got a future here."

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