

Sparkle, sizzle & shine

Fireworks celebrations for July 4th weekend include:

July 1 – Town of Tonawanda, Kenney Field, 2000 Colvin Blvd., fireworks at 10 p.m.

July 2 – Gasport, Hartland Town Park, Landers Lane, Independence Day celebration starts at 5 p.m., with fireworks at dusk.

July 3 – Town of Niagara, Veterans Memorial Community Park, 7000 Lockport Road, fireworks at dusk.

July 4 – Village of Lewiston, bicentennial fireworks show, Lewiston plateau, fireworks at dusk.

✓ **Sahlen Field, downtown Buffalo, fireworks after Bisons game.**

✓ **Lockport, Outwater Park, Outwater Drive, fireworks at 10 p.m.**

✓ **Niagara Falls, Seneca Niagara Resort and Casino, fireworks around 9:40 p.m.**

✓ **City of Tonawanda, Renaissance Bridge, between Main Street and Niagara Street, fireworks at dusk.**

✓ **Town of Wheatfield, Oppenheim County Park, 2713 Niagara Falls Blvd., fireworks at dusk.**

July 4 until Oct. 10 – Niagara Falls State Park, 332 Prospect St., fireworks every night at 10 p.m. until Oct. 10.

Wiser from pandemic, Josh Groban excited to be back on tour

BY JOSHUA MALONI
GM/Managing Editor

In took a pandemic to bring Josh Groban the one thing he hadn't earned over the course of his storied career: a break.

Over the course of 20 years, the acclaimed, classical-pop crossover crooner garnered Tony, Emmy and Grammy award nominations, selling more than 35 million albums worldwide behind hit songs such as "You Raise Me Up," "Believe" and "The Prayer," and Platinum-plus albums "Josh Groban," "Closer," "Noël" and "Awake." Groban scored roles on "Glee," "The Simpsons," "The Office," "It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia," "The Crazy Ones," "Muppets Most Wanted" and "Crazy, Stupid, Love." He landed a choice Broadway debut in 2016 with a lead part in "Natasha, Pierre & The Great Comet of 1812"; what followed was a starring role in the 2018 Netflix series "The Good Cop."

When the coronavirus shuttered concert venues in 2020 and parts of 2021, Groban found time to, as he said, stop and smell the roses. While this brought benefits to his life and craft, Groban was eager to return to the live stage. In fact, he said it was as if the favorite part of his musical life was "torn away."

Though Groban would perform virtual shows for fans, the experience wasn't the same.

At the end of January, with COVID-19 numbers declining, Groban announced a "Harmony Summer 2022 Tour," inspired by his latest release, "Harmony." He said, "It is with huge excitement and gratitude to announce that I'll be back doing what I do best and love most with the 'Harmony Tour.' It will be more than a concert for me ... it will be a celebration of connection with my friends, fans and colleagues who have been my anchors during the last couple of

years and during the course of my career. I hope you'll join us for these beautiful nights of music."

Groban's tour began in June and will see the singer stop at some of the top outdoor venues this summer – including Red Rocks in Denver, The Greek in Los Angeles, The Budweiser Stage in Toronto and the Darien Lake Amphitheater.

The performer and philanthropist shared more about the past two-plus years, his return to touring, and pairing with top musical partners, in this edited Q&A.

Q: You're a few shows into this new tour. I'm hoping things are going well so far. What can you tell me about the first couple of nights? How has it been?

Josh Groban: We're settling in now. They were amazing shows. We were kind of flying by the seat of our pants, because I didn't get to rehearse for this tour. I had COVID going right into Detroit. I tested negative like the day before I got to Detroit, and so my band and my production team had to basically do all their rehearsals without me. So, Detroit was kind of like my first rehearsal (laughs). There was like a huge adrenaline to that.

You know, when you've done 5,000 concerts, my body knows what a concert should feel like; but they were amazing. It was so incredible to be kind of shot out of that cannon and be out in front of an audience, and to be with my band, and to feel that connection again after so much time doing it virtually – and so rarely. It was great.



Josh Groban (Photo by Doug Inghish)

So yeah, we got through them. They were really a lot of fun – and can't wait for the next one.

Q: You mentioned in the press release about how you felt torn away from the favorite part of your musical life these past two years, not being able to be out there and touring live. How challenging were those years for you? Were they also, maybe, a time for you to regroup or reorganize or reprioritize? What was the experience of the past two years for you?

Josh Groban: It's such an interesting thing from talking to so many people – and especially people within the artistic community – is that it was kind of both. I think that we all, psychologically ... we all were kind of kicked off the hamster wheel together.

There's peaks and valleys to any one particular singular career

– whatever career you're in; there's always going to be ups and downs. But for everybody to be in a down at the exact same time is something that I really don't think anybody has experienced – certainly in this generation; my parents either. And I hope we don't have to again anytime soon, or ever.

But I think we all kind of psychologically battled it in both of those ways. There were days when we were all just wondering what we were going to do next, and if we were going to do anything next; and kind of staring out our window – staring into the void.

I was lucky, though, that I had my health, and I had my family's health, and there were so many countless millions of people who couldn't say that. But I think we all tried, also, just to stay vital. I think it taught us, if there's any silver lining to the tragedy of it all, it was that it gave us maybe a healthy dose of

perspective – and to really focus and hone in on really what the important things are in our lives: socially, emotionally, spiritually and artistically.

And so, it gave me a lot of time that I don't think I would have given myself otherwise – because I'm always go, go, go. My life is usually planned two years in advance – to really kind of sit and reflect and think about what excites me, and what I want to write about, what I want to do next.

I try to make lemonade as much as possible but, of course, it was very, very hard.

Q: Having that time, and being able to look at your priorities and what's important to you, do you feel like you've come out of this with the potential to be a better artist, a better singer, a better performer?

SEE JOSH, continued on Page 9

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Artpark's 12th annual Fairy House Festival set for July 9

The Artpark Fairy House Festival will return from noon to 4 p.m. Saturday, July 9. Tickets are \$12 and available at the Artpark box office (450 S. Fourth St., Lewiston), and ticketmaster.com.

Now in its 12th year, the Artpark Fairy House Festival has evolved from an art walk of miniature fairy houses installed in the park by both community and professional artists to an international, interdisciplinary and immersive performing arts festival with interactive performances by international, national and local actors, performers and musicians presented in the setting of the park overlooking the Niagara Gorge.

Visitors can once again marvel at the fairy house creations and enjoy the whimsical and enchanting Artpark Fairies and roaming musicians outfitted in costume creations by Uta Bekaia, a multimedia artist residing and working in New York and Tbilisi. He creates performances and installations inhabited with wearable sculptures, exploring his historical cultural background and cycles of the universe. Currently, he is a resident artist at ART OMI in New York, and in partnership with ERTI Gallery, Tbilisi.

Featured musical guests Mucca Pazza will entertain with a rock 'n'



roll marching band, street theater extravaganza. WNYC described the group as "Seeing this irresistible band of horns and violins, guitars and accordion all parade in and eventually take the stage is infectious, chaotic fun. But it's also an incredibly coordinated and choreographed performance full of cheers and bursting with energy that is easy to get caught up in."

Aerial and acrobatic feats will be featured in a performance titled "Battements de Cirque." Created by Anouk Vallée-Charest, an in-

ternational circus artist who has previously worked with Cirque du Soleil and Cirque Éloize, it will include four performers. Poetry, prowess and unparalleled agility and grace will be on display through juggling, balance, aerial fabric and aerial hoop.

Call for Artists

Artpark is accepting submissions from local professional and amateur artists to be included in the fairy house tour. Find more information at artpark.net.

Visit artpark.net for a current calendar of events.