

Mendel Center announces 2016-17 lineup

Gordon Lightfoot, Ben Vereen among highlights of 25th anniversary season

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BENTON HARBOR — Folk-rock icon Gordon Lightfoot and actor-singer-dancer Ben Vereen are among the performers for Lake Michigan College's 2016-17 Mendel Center Mainstage Theatre season, which opens Sept. 23.

The venue, which is celebrating its 25th anniversary season, announced Thursday it has booked 14 shows in all for the 1,573-seat theater. Offerings range from Broadway theatrics to YouTube sensations.

"Since this is the 25th anniversary we really wanted to do some special things, and getting big-name acts like Gordon Lightfoot and Ben Vereen are pretty special," Mendel Center Executive Director Mike Nadolski said. "Gordon

Lightfoot has had such classic songs, and Ben Vereen sings, and dances and is a master showman. He's also a real motivational personality with everything he has gone through in his life. I had a chance to talk with him in New York, and he's pretty inspirational."

Lightfoot, the Canadian singer-songwriter who has been credited for helping define the folk-pop sound of the 1960s, performs Oct. 9. His rich song catalog includes hits such as "Early Morning Rain," "If You Could Read My Mind," "Carefree Highway," "Sundown," "(That's What You Get) For Lovin Me," "The Wreck Of The Edmund Fitzgerald," and "Rainy Day People," to name a few.

"Gordon Lightfoot In Concert: The Legend Lives On" tour, however, will not only feature his well-known hits, but some deep album cuts for die-hard fans. All of which will be woven together with some of Lightfoot's own behind-the-scenes stories from his 50-year musical career.



Photo provided

Folk-rock icon Gordon Lightfoot will perform Oct. 9 at the Lake Michigan College Mendel Center Mainstage Theatre. The 2016-17 season was announced on Thursday.

Tony Award-winner Vereen, meanwhile, brings his "Steppin' Out with Ben Vereen" show to LMC on Feb. 25. He has performed in some of the most notable Broadway productions in history from "Jesus Christ Superstar" to "Pippin" to "Wicked," but is perhaps still best known for the

role of "Chicken" George Moore in Alex Haley's landmark TV miniseries "Roots."

The production is filled with tributes to the icons of Broadway, including Frank Sinatra, and Vereen's own mentor, Sammy Davis Jr., as well as the songs Vereen himself made famous.

The Mendel season opens Sept. 23 when Internet sensation, The Piano Guys, perform the pieces that have garnered more than 500 million YouTube views, including an innovative multi-handed version of One Direction's "What Makes You Beautiful" and their reinvention of the hit "Let It Go" from Disney's "Frozen."

There's also plenty of family-oriented shows on tap with Enchantment Theatre Company's production of "Peter Rabbit Tales" on Oct. 15; The Russian National Ballet Theatre's "Cinderella" on Jan. 20; "Odd Squad Live!" on March 18; and Erth's

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“Dinosaur Zoo Live!” April 22.

“We know that this is a family-oriented community and we wanted to make sure we were giving families and kids an opportunity to see some really great shows,” Nadolski said. “I think we’ve accomplished that.”

The high-flying Broadway production of “Pippin,” which will be performed March 15, is another highlight. Winner of four 2013 Tony Awards, including Best Musical Revival, this updated production features acrobatics – think “Cirque du Soleil” – additional songs from the composer of “Wicked,” as well as well-known Broadway standards “Corner of the Skv.” “Maëric To Do.”

“Glory,” “No Time at All,” “Morning Glow,” and “Love Song.”

The rest of the season lineup includes the Michael Jackson concert experience, “King Michael – A Glorious Tribute to the King of Pop,” Oct. 7; Aquila Theatre’s production of Agatha Christie’s “Murder on the Nile,” Oct. 21; “The Second City Hits Home,” a new show featuring sketches, songs, and improvisation

about Southwest Michigan, Nov. 5; “The Motor-town All-Stars’ Christmas Spectacular,” featuring members of The Capitols, The Miracles, and former members of The Temptations, Dec. 14; guitarist Bryan Lubeck’s “Rejoice – A Holiday Musical Tap-estry,” Dec. 22; and “Letters Home,” which brings to life actual letters written by soldiers serving in the Middle East. May 21, 2017.

Series ticket packages, which start with three or more shows, are now on sale at www.themendelcenter.com or by calling the box office at 927-1221.

Individual tickets, which range from \$14-\$100 depending on the show, go on sale at 10 a.m. June 14. Contact: jbonfiglio@TheHP.com, 932-0364, Twitter: @HPBonfiglio



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