

Just three chances to see 'Ring of Fire'

Life stories of Johnny and June Carter Cash told through songs

By Trish Yerges
Go! Magazine

PENDLETON — The live music of Johnny Cash and June Carter Cash are back on stage in "Ring of Fire," performed at the Vert Auditorium, 480 SW Dorion Ave., for three performances: May 6 at 7:30 p.m. and May 7 at 2:30 p.m. and 7:30 p.m.

First produced by Terry Hale of the Friends of the Opera House in May of 2016 at the Elgin Opera House, the show was sold out for three weekends. Now, back by popular demand, the original cast will reunite for an encore revival performance at the Vert.

Husband and wife performers Brent and Jeanette Smith are co-directing the show, and Hale is the producer. Brent is an attorney in La Grande and Jeanette is a music educator for the La Grande School District, and they are raising four children.

"Jeanette has more of a musical theater background,



Elgin Opera House/Contributed photo
Cast members take their turns representing Johnny Cash and June Carter Cash at various decades of their lives in "Ring of Fire," a stirring musical performance of their careers together. The show, presented May 6 and 7, showcases 30 songs and several unforgettable Johnny-June duets.

and I have more of a band performance background, so we brought together kind of the best elements of those communities," Brent said.

"Ring of Fire" is more than a jukebox musical. It's a live concert of the best of Johnny Cash.

"So many musicals today are performed by accompaniment tracks, and it's a good experience to have live music and musicians on stage with the actors," Jeanette said.

The band has the same core



Elgin Opera House/Contributed photo
Brent Smith plays Johnny Cash in "Ring of Fire" at Vert Auditorium in Pendleton on May 6 and 7. Brent and his wife, Jeanette Smith, are the directors of this story of Johnny and June Carter Cash's music careers.

members as it did in the 2016 performance: Andy Steele is the drummer, the bass is Roger Barnes, and the guitar player and band leader is Luke McKern.

"All three are tremendous and accomplished musicians," Brent said. "I talked them into coming into the musical theater role in this show."

The lives of Johnny and June Carter Cash are played by four

different acting couples, depicting different times of their lives. To grab the audience's attention, the show starts with each of the four Men in Black singing, "Hello, I'm Johnny Cash."

Playing Johnny Cash are actor-singers Brent Smith, Ashley O'Toole, Tucker Murphey, J.D. Kindle and Dr. Wesley Rampton as an aged Johnny. June Carter Cash is played by Jeanette Smith, Jocelyn Berado, Staci Elguezabal and Karen Taylor. The cast also includes Misty Hines as Johnny Cash's mother and Jordan Uhlman as a featured singer.

"Ring of Fire" will take the audience on a memorable journey through time and the poignant events that defined the lives of Johnny and June Carter Cash as told through their songs.

"Johnny Cash was as much the progeny of the Carter family as he was his own man," Brent said, "because of how important the Carter family's music was during the time that he was coming up."

The concert showcases 30 songs and several unforgettable Johnny-June duets.

"My favorite song is 'If I Were

a Carpenter' that I sing as June," Jeanette said.

Brent said his favorite Johnny Cash song he sings is "Folsom Prison Blues." The audience will be invited to sing along with "I Walk the Line."

This encore performance is a mix of chorus singers and dancing, directed by choreographer Abby Hale, as well as tender, intimate moments of song between Johnny and June.

"We're also involving as many performers and singers from Pendleton as we can," Brent said.

"We are still looking for more chorus members," Jeanette added.

"We're excited to bring 'Ring of Fire' to audiences again, and if you know these songs, you're going to love to hear them again," Brent said. "It blew their socks off last time, so it's not one to miss."

Tickets can be purchased through www.elginoperahouse.com or by calling 541-663-6324. Tickets are \$18 for lower level, \$8 for balcony or \$13 per person in a group of 10 or more. There is a \$2 processing fee for each ticket.

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