

LOCAL NEWS

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■ **ARTS:** Busy spring coming up at the local theatre

Don't worry, Festival Hall is alive and well

It would seem that Festival Hall is blossoming again with the darling buds of spring, as popular theatre manager/director Rick Wharton beams with pride for the schedule he has managed to secure for the upcoming 2015 season.

Taking time from his frantic schedule, Rick Wharton was only too happy to share all about his newly revamped entertainment venue.

Festival Hall is thriving again since September's wonderfully popular second Ottawa Valley Doc-Fest, the brainchild of Wharton and sponsored by NBC UNIVERSAL. The film fest matched it's numbers from the previous year and showcased speaker guests like General Lewis Mackenzie and the Bruce Cockburn team to name a few.

The theatre has been alive with

capacity shows such as The Barra McNeil's, Echoes of Erin, Hotel California, Rocky Horror Live and Interactive, Chamber of Commerce Gala, Peter Pan Jr., Pembroke Symphony Orchestra, Dai Bassett and Friends and the Kiwanis Music Festival.

"It's been a long hard ride and a lot of work, yet we are starting to see a light at the end of the proverbial tunnel," Wharton said. "The most touching thing we have witnessed is the outpouring of support. People want to see top quality entertainment on stage as much as we do! New lights, staging and much needed sound improvements all have been completed. It's like Pinocchio becoming a real boy!"

Wharton breaks out laughing with his signature Cheshire cat smile.

He not only had his work cut out for him when he was hired in May

2012 to revitalize the hall. The hall was underused and strife with issues for years. Work never stops, and he knows what is required to keep the 600-seat theatre venue open and running.

"I live and breathe it everyday 24/7," the director said.

He has started the Patron of the Arts Campaign. People can buy a star and get their name on the theatre wall.

"I am trying to spread awareness that the theatre cannot just survive on the funding from Petawawa, Pembroke and Laurentian Valley and program revenue. There has to be different streams of revenue. We need Festival Hall and the time is now the theatre needs us," Wharton says very seriously.



Rick Wharton

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■ **ARTS**

Wide range of musical acts to grace the Festival Hall stage

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The theatre is about community. His Patron of the Arts Star fund has already generated great interest.

"I wish many people could be like Dianne Wallace, Lou Hamill from Giant Tiger, Stephane Levesque and Ross Fitzpatrick from SRBT Technologies and their wives who were not solicited, but just walked in and said...we love this place...How can we help?" Wharton recalled.

His response is easy "Buy a star, buy a ticket. Everyone loves their names in lights! Everybody should see a show!"

He jokes he's had to ring in a few favours, promised my first born son and mother-in-law to acquire some of the talent on this year's playbill as he reveals his new entertainment line-up.

On April 18 the Pembroke Symphony returns with its show Solo Time at 7:30 p.m. featuring young talent of Will and Emma March and Kelvin Leung. Wharton has been a huge supporter of the symphony even performing comedy at one of its shows.

On April 25 The Rising Stars of Country - featuring some top-notch up-and-coming Canadian singers who are all destined to

make it big. Lindsay Broughton, Shane McNulty and the one and only Miss Olivia Charette. It promises to be a real country fest. It is a show for all ages.

On April 30 John McDermott will be lending his husky Irish/Scottish tones to the stage as he performs his 'Traditionally Yours' show. We are lucky to have John McDermott - a Canadian Legend. The tour kicks off in Pembroke.

One of the biggest bands in Canada and on Much Music "The Spoons" are performing May 2 with special guest Malcolm Burn formerly of Boys Brigade and formerly from Deep River. Malcolm has gone on to producer and engineer some classic recordings. Daniel Lanois, Blue Rodeo,

Emmylou Harris, Midnight Oil, Patty Griffin, Crash Vegas and Patti Smith and Bob Dylan. The night will celebrate great music from the '80s.

"We are thinking of making '80s attire mandatory - maybe a little '80s dance party in front of the stage," Wharton laughed. "We had everyone up dancing for the Eagles 'Hotel California' packed show and that was awesome."

It's the Spoons 30th Anniversary and Festival Hall's 35th Anniversary so we have great pricing on that show, he added.

On May 9, is the truly amazing Marty Stuart and his Fabulous Superlatives. Marty Stuart has performed all over the world and won many Grammy's. He's a

Grand Ole Opry favourite Stuart cut his teeth in country music and went on the road at 13 with Lester Flatt's bluegrass band.

In the '80s and '90s he was one of Nashville's newest country talents, working on solo records and touring constantly. Stuart recorded duets with Steve Earle, Willie Nelson, B. B. King and Travis Tritt. He is considered royalty in the country world and to many new country artists today.

On June 1 will be one of the finest stand-up comedy shows you will see. Three top Canadian Comedians John Wing (Tonight Show and Just for Laughs), Carla Collins and David Merry hit the stage for a hilarious night of laughs.

All three local dance troupes - Atyeo, Starz in Motion, Michelle's - return to the theatre for various dates in May and June.

Dai Bassett and Simon Clarke return with their revue June 5 at 7:30 p.m. with special guests.

Along with the onstage events, Wharton assures everyone that there are many new and exciting ventures happening at the Festival Hall.

"We've been leading a Sacred Circle for Blocked Creative Artists, that's been really well received and fascinating to watch," he said. "We are also implementing new artists in the Foyer Gallery

monthly, which is working as a great showcase for local artists and their works. Also we are starting to put together a Theatre/Improv Drama camp for the summer which we hope will lead on to creating our new in-house acting theatre group later this year. This will hopefully in turn help to put more drama plays onto the local stage."

For full listings of upcoming events check out www.festhall.ca or <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Festival-Hall-Theatre-Centre-for-the-Arts>. For tickets call Toni at the box office at 613 735 2182.