

FHSU pleased to bring back Encore Series

Something special happened at Fort Hays State University last month: the return of our Encore Series. On Dec. 2, the Beach/Schmidt Performing Arts Center in Sheridan Hall was filled with patrons and Christmas joy as our community gathered to watch Christmas in Killarney – the first Encore show since 2020. It was a fabulous evening of Christmas carols and Irish traditions witnessed by an audience of more than 500 people.

According to Edie McCracken, director of the Memorial Union and overseer of the series, the Encore committee decided to schedule six shows for this first season back after the pandemic.

“At the time we started booking shows for 2021-22, we just were not sure what the fall would look like and did not want to risk having to cancel shows,” Edie said. “There are no Broadway musicals this season, because those shows are just now getting back to full touring capacities. But we are planning on a return of musicals for the 2022-23 season, which we are already in the midst of planning. We are at full capacity for the theater. Masks and sanitizing stations are being provided at each show for our patron’s safety and comfort.”

In the spring, we will begin with The Flying Karamazov Brothers on Monday, Feb. 14. Some of our long-term audience members may remember the Brothers from their previous Encore performance in the 1990s. This time, they are back with their off-Broadway comedy juggling show, 4Play.

Next up is the Roy Orbison & Buddy Holly Rock 'N Roll Hologram Dream Tour on March 2,. This show will feature a live band fronted by hologram performances by the two rock and roll legends.

On March 26, the Encore Series will present Cross That River. This musical drama is based on historical recounts of a runaway slave who escapes to the American West to find a new life as a cowboy.

We will wrap up the season with two shows in April. The first is The Queen’s Cartoonists on April 21. This talented music ensemble performs jazz and classical pieces as scores to both classic and contemporary cartoons. Their mission is to instill a love and appreciation of these music genres in audiences of all ages.

The final performance, Canada’s Ballet Jorgen presents Anne of Green Gables the Ballet, is rescheduled from the abbreviated 2019-20 season, This is a newly commissioned work based on beloved book series. We are excited to bring the first-ever production of this ballet to Hays!

Edie also shared that she is closely monitoring any changes to tours or schedules that might occur due to the pandemic.

“We have had one small change to the 2021-22 season already. The Golden Dragon Acrobats, who were scheduled to perform on Feb. 14, 2022, have had to postpone their tour for one year due to travel restrictions in and out of China. We will bring the show to Hays in February 2023 as a result. Fortunately, the agency we worked with was able to help us find a substitute, so we will still have a full season.”

We used the past year to make a few upgrades to the Beach/Schmidt Performing Arts Center, including an improved projection system and additional audio and lighting capabilities. What might be most noticeable to our patrons is we have a new and improved accessible seating area on the lower level of the theater. This allows us to accommodate more patrons with accessibility needs in a more comfortable location in the theater.

Patrons purchasing tickets for a single show also now have the option of printing tickets at home or using their phones as a digital ticket.

“One of the great things about living in a ‘college town’ is the opportunity to take part in the activities that go along with a university. FHSU’s Encore series has brought in quality entertainment that I would never have the chance to see otherwise. The Broadway musicals are always top-notch, but the series also brings in unique experiences from the world of music, dance, and theater,” shared Mary Ann Thompson, a community member who serves on the Encore Series selection committee.

Along with Edie, the committee, and the entire university community, and with a full heart, I thank our season ticket holders, show sponsors, and advertisers who make the Encore season possible. The Bob and Pat Schmidt Foundation generously sponsors the series. Show sponsors this year include Larry and Lyn Fenwick, Todd and Andrea Sandoval, Chartwells, and eyeSmile. And everyone who attends a show contributes to the success and sustainability of the Encore Series.

Season tickets are still available until Feb. 14. Those tickets, as well as tickets for individual performances, may be purchased by visiting fhsu.edu/encore or calling 785-628-5306.

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