



Not your daddy's country

Sugarland brings high-energy show to Country Fever's opening night event

COUNTRY FEVER

Sugarland performs opening night, Thursday

When: June 12-15

Where: Catch the Fever grounds

Admission: One-day general admission tickets to Country Fever start at \$55, and tickets for all four days are \$110 plus taxes and service charges. Camping, VIP and reserved seating tickets are also available. For more information or to order tickets online, go to tulsaworld.com/FeverFest or charge by phone at (866) 310-2288.

Online: www.tulsaworld.com/FeverFest

BY JENNIFER CHANCELLOR

World Scene Writer

“It's not that hard to drag us to Oklahoma,” laughed Sugarland frontman Kristian Bush during a recent telephone interview.

Heck, all anyone had to do was ask. He and bandmate Jennifer Nettles will headline the kickoff night of this year's four-day monster country music fete, Country Fever, out near Pryor.

It's the first time to play this part of the Sooner State, he said. And for those who haven't witnessed this popular country music powerhouse live, get ready.

“We're definitely not your parents' country music act,” he laughed. “We're just too energetic.”

And they have to be — their fans are known as some of the most excitable in the genre.

“And we're kinda crazy, too,” he said. The band flaunts a rock 'n' roll at-



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Country music powerhouse Sugarland will rock Country Fever on Thursday. Courtesy



Ben Vereen will open the 2008 OK Mozart International Festival in Bartlesville. He describes his show as “an evening of celebration and joy.” Courtesy

Hitting all the notes

Ben Vereen brings all aspects of his career to OK Mozart stage

BY JAMES D. WATTS JR.

World Scene Writer

Films and television, Broadway and the concert stage, singing and dancing — Ben Vereen has done it all.

Ask him if he prefers one form of performing to all the others, and Vereen's reply will likely be a short laugh.

“What I prefer,” he said, “is employment.”

And over the course of some 40 years — starting with his Broadway debut as an understudy in the original production of “Hair” in 1968, followed a year later by his film debut in the Shirley MacLaine vehicle, “Sweet Charity” — Ben Vereen has been employed in an almost dizzying range of shows and roles.

He's won a Tony Award (for his role as the “Leading Player” in the musical “Pippin”) and has received Emmy and Golden Globe nominations

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for his work in the miniseries “Roots” and “Ellis Island.”

Vereen's movies include “All That Jazz,” “Idlewild” and the forthcoming “Mama, I Want To Sing,” and his guest appearances on TV shows range from an award-winning turn on “Grey's Anatomy” to “Star Trek: the Next Generation” and “The Nanny.”

Even so, Vereen acknowledged, the sort of show he will do to open the 2008 OK Mozart International Festival is perhaps the most personal thing he does.

“It's just me and a quartet, and the program touches on all aspects of my career,” Vereen said. “I'll be doing songs that have touched my life — that have touched all our lives, really. It will be an evening of

celebration and joy.”

It will also be the first time Vereen has performed in these parts in a dozen years — his last visit to Tulsa was in 1996, when he performed with the Tulsa Philharmonic.

“Don't get me wrong — I love the stage and being in a theatrical show,” said Vereen, who recently concluded a stint on Broadway as the Wizard of Oz in the musical “Wicked.” “But in such a show, you're bound to the script. Of course you try to put your own stamp on what you do, but you're still having to keep to the words and notes that are written.”

“In a concert, that's out the window,” he said. “That fourth wall is gone. You feel the vibrations of the room, react to what's happening at that exact moment. You're not bound to anything you don't want to be bound to.”

Not all of Vereen's employment has been in the pursuit

of entertaining people. He has devoted a great deal of time to a variety of causes, from serving on the board of directors of Ballet Florida to being a chairman of the American Heart Association.

Some 20 years ago, Vereen founded “Celebrities for a Drug Free America,” to raise money for drug rehabilitation centers, educational programs and community-based projects to help inner-city youth.

“I know some people spend their lives trying to reblaze the trails of other people — people they admire,” Vereen said. “I prefer to blaze my own trail. The way I see it, if I have been able to touch another life — whether it be through a song I've sung, a movie I've been in, or an organization I'm involved with — then my own living has not been in vain.”

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