

Donovan performance mends Fairfield hearts

- Sep 4, 2016



Mark Newman/The Courier

Donovan works with a crew member to assure everything is in place before his Fairfield concert. The riser where he will spend the show is in the foreground.

FAIRFIELD — In a theater devoid of an audience, Donovan pushed a wheeled hand truck from center stage to the wings; a number of stage hands were doing their own jobs, but clearly, the musical icon of the 1960s and 70s isn't afraid to do physical work.

Still, there were calls of "let us get that for you," and, from an unidentified source, a single plea of "they've got people to do that for us, Donovan." The singer, his signature, worn green guitar slung across his shoulders, would wave away help saying in his mild Scottish accent something along the lines of, Oh, I've got it.

As soon as he arrived for the community's Fairfest at the Sondheim Center Sunday afternoon, he went into rehearsal.

Rehearsal went on longer than Fairfest organizers expected, though no one panicked: Donovan, 70, is a very hands-on musician. The singer/songwriter moved a few chairs, asked lighting and sound techs to show him lights and microphones, then instructed crew on (and soon assisted with) the assembly of a small riser on the stage.

Outside of the music practice and sharing notes with other musicians he'd perform with in a few hours, he spent the most time helping place a Persian rug on the riser, waving away crew members and asking trusted Fairfield volunteer Ken Chawkin to "go get the sheepskin." Donovan laid the fluffy white skin atop the back of the rug. Then, giving Chawkin one end of a long piece of red cloth, Donovan went to the other side of the riser, and the pair settled the cloth on another part of the rug.

“Yes, that way, just a little more,” he said.

Aside from offering to do the work for him, assistants and stage hands didn't question Donovan on why he was doing that part by himself. But really — why was he doing it himself?

“There's a concept in China called Feng Shui,” he told the Courier during a quiet moment in his dressing room. “I know where I want these [things] placed; I know what's right for me; I can feel when [these things] are in the right place.”

He said he doesn't walk around during his concerts; he sits on his rug. In fact, it looked kind of like he was preparing to have guests over.

“I am. I'm inviting people into my home; I'm setting up my living room,” he said.

In the 60s, songs like “Season of the Witch” and (They call me) “Mellow Yellow” were considered influential to other artists, including, according to “Making Time”, a British program on music of the 60s, The Beatles. In return for contributions like helping with the lyrics to Yellow Submarine, Donovan accepted payback by having Paul McCartney sing backing vocals on one of his songs.

These days, the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame singer known by his first name is celebrating the 50th anniversary of his groundbreaking album, “Sunshine Superman,” and is credited by some rock historians as the first singer to have the relatively new term “flower power” applied to them.

“My music has been described by a young advertising man in New York as ‘hopeful melancholy.’ And that is why they like using it for commercials or in movies,” Donovan said Sunday afternoon backstage at Fairfield’s Sondheim Center. “He said your music reminds us that life is hard. But inside that melancholy is hope.”

There are those with hearts so broken, they may be hopeless; music can help them heal, even if the musician isn't there in the room with them.

“Do you know about invisible mending?” asked Donovan. “When you have an expensive shirt with a rip in it, you take it to an [especially skilled] tailor.”

They repair the tear in such a way that you’d never notice it.

“Of all the arts: Acting, sculpture, painting, dance ... they’re all visible art forms. Music is the one that’s invisible. Music can mend a heart.”

Though seats in the hall were empty during rehearsal, they’d soon be full: The Sondheim Center had sold out completely: Even a director of a Fairest-affiliated organization could not find themselves a vacant seat or spare ticket.

The audience Sunday night was not his typical audience, however.

The meditative connection

“About 80 percent of them are meditators,” Donovan said. “Fairfield is a very different experience because every time I come, it’s an audience that has experienced meditation.”

The singer said he and The Beatles had gone to India decades ago “searching for pure meditation.” They found TM.

Through Transcendental Meditation, practitioners hope to find peace in their lives, and show that it can bring peace to others.

While he normally seeks to encourage relaxation in all his listeners, he merely says it to himself during a performance. In Fairfield, he can tell the audience, “I want you to listen to this song and meditate.”

As someone with an audience, Donovan feels a duty to help people “release obscure emotions” from their hearts, and find peace.

“I’m a poet,” he said, explaining that being a bard is a tradition from his native Scotland as well as Wales and Ireland. “It’s my role — not my job, but my role — to reunite the audience with the Source: I want to [help them] open their hearts. You can call it open-heart music.”

*Reporter Mark Newman can be contacted
at mnewman@ottumwacourier.com and followed on Twitter @couriermark.*

https://www.ottumwacourier.com/news/donovan-performance-mends-fairfield-hearts/article_517c2844-7315-11e6-ae9e-8fdcdc292628.html