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Rick Springfield, who plays Sunday night at Foellinger Theatre, loves his fans

By James Grant of The News-Sentinel
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Fans of day time television may remember him best as the character Dr. Noah Drake from the soap opera "General Hospital," but Australian-born Rick Springfield's greatest success has come as a recording artist.

With more than 19 million albums sold, Springfield has graced the airwaves with 17 Top-40 hits, including "Jessie's Girl" (a Grammy-winning No. 1 hit from 1981), "I've Done Everything for You," "Don't Talk to Strangers," "Affair of the Heart" and "Love Somebody."

Springfield aficionados can hear a sampling of his hits at 7 p.m. Sunday when he performs live at Foellinger Outdoor Theatre.

Most people may not realize it, but Springfield's music career began long before he appeared on "General Hospital." Springfield had some success in his native Australia as a member of the pop group Zoot in the early '70s, and he had his first U.S. Top-20 solo hit in 1972 called "Speak to the Sky."

After moving to the United States in 1972, Springfield was marketed as a teen heartthrob along the lines of David Cassidy, but he didn't have much musical success beyond his one hit.

While his music career's momentum slowed, he began to take acting roles and appeared in several TV shows in the late '70s, such as "Rockford Files," "Wonder Woman" and "Battlestar Galactica."

In 1981, his career exploded when he appeared on "General Hospital" and his song "Jessie's Girl" hit No. 1. Springfield managed a dual career on television and music until 1983, when he departed "General Hospital" to focus on his musical success.

Several years of hits followed, but Springfield also suffered through many personal problems, culminating with an arrest in Los Angeles in May for suspicion of drunken driving.

Springfield has not shied away from discussing his private demons, which he chronicled in his memoir titled "Late, Late at Night," which was released in October 2010.

Though some may have been put off by his revelations, Springfield says most fans have welcomed the candor he displayed in writing about his life.

"It's been positive," he said in a telephone interview about fan reaction to his book. "I'd say 98 percent positive. A couple of them got a bit freaked out by it. I think they appreciated the honesty, you know."

Springfield values his interaction with fans and keeps tabs on their reactions through his website - www.rickspringfield.com - and through Twitter and Facebook.

While the Internet age frightens some established performers, Springfield feels the Internet allows fans to have more personal contact with artists, and he sees that as a good thing.

"The great thing it's (the Internet) done is artists, whether they want to or not, have had to embrace their fans," he said. "Because they realize now that it all depends on touring and fan loyalty. And that's great. I think fans deserve that after so long."

His relationship with his fans and their connection to him will be the subject of a documentary called "Affair of the Heart," which will be released this fall.

"It's actually really amazing," Springfield said of the documentary. "The director's incredible. ... She's done an amazing job on this thing."

"When they first came to me, I thought it would be a film about us playing our songs and fans going, 'How great,'" he said. "But she went really deep. There's some things in there that people might go, 'Wow, why would you want that in the documentary?' But it's very real. It's an amazing story. ... I'm actually very excited about it now."

Springfield said he enjoys touring now much more than he did years ago. He doesn't have to go on the road for long stretches, and he thinks that helps keep the music and the concert experience fresh for him and his fans.



More Information

Springfield live

What: Rick Springfield in concert

When: 7 p.m. Sunday

Where: Foellinger Outdoor Theatre, 3411 Sherman Blvd. in Franke Park

Cost: \$25, bleachers, or \$30, back rows of reserved seats. Other seats are sold out. For more information, call the box office at 427-6715 or the Fort Wayne Parks and Recreation Department at 427-6000, or go to www.fortwayneparks.org on the Web.

To hear an audio recording of our interview with Rick Springfield, go to www.news-sentinel.com and click on the Entertainment link.

"It's much more fun now," he said. "I do it the way I want to do it now. Before, we'd go out on the road for three months, and I'd end up by the third week you hate the set and can't wait to finish the show. ... It becomes a grind.

"Now we just go out for a couple of days and go home, so it keeps the show fresh and we like each other. Our show now is very, very audience interactive, which I love."

Springfield is also a gifted songwriter whose ability sometimes gets overlooked. His proudest accomplishment is being able to write songs people appreciate.

"I've been very proud of all of them," he said of his albums. "They all had their great highs and great lows. I can still listen to them.

"I love writing. And seeing successful things that I've written that people embrace is the biggest reward for me."