

A 'Sunshine' state of mind

Jonathan Edwards at opera house on Nov. 10

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CLAREMONT - Three words succinctly sum up Jonathan Edwards' sunny disposition.

"It's all good."

He's excited about his upcoming Claremont Opera House show. Edwards performs Saturday, Nov. 10 with his long-time side man, bassist Stuart Schulman. He also plans to sit in with opening act Northern Lights.

"We share the same manager; I'm on their new album. We enjoy playing with one another, it's great," he said during a recent phone interview. "It'll be a jam-nation!"

COURTESY PHOTOS Singer-songwriter Jonathan Edwards, whose career has spanned 40 years, will be at the Claremont Opera House with Northern Lights, below, 8 p.m. Sat., Nov. 10.

The singer-songwriter's ebullient mood is infectious; his conversations are inevitably punctuated with smiles, laughter and those three words. He's been making music for more than 40 years, and appears to still love every minute.

After the success of his self-titled first album in 1971, which yielded the international hit "Sunshine," he harbored a few doubts.

"When Nixon was president, and my second album met with no promotion - it was like I was dropped from the label - I decided to move to Nova Scotia and learn how to do some other stuff that I'd really wanted to do for years, like work with horses, raise a garden, work with friends and family and try to make a little community out of the bare bones essentials of self-sufficient farming," he says.

"I was there for about five months, and then Emmylou Harris called me up."

Harris coaxed him to Los Angeles to work on "Elite Hotel." She helped him land a deal with her label. "I did two albums ("Sailboat" and "Rockin' Chair") for Warner Brothers, and before I knew it I was right back in the middle of it," says Edwards.

"It was all good."

Edwards' latest project is a film score for "The Golden Boys." The movie, with a cast including Mariel Hemingway and Charles Durning, is due next spring.

Working from his new Manhattan home, Edwards recruited several musician friends to work with him, including fellow songwriter Jesse Winchester, guitarist Bob Golub (Rod Stewart, Billy Squier) and Stuart Schulman.

Edwards also has a small acting role in the period film. When the director, who's also a friend, offered him the music direction role, he recalls, "I said OK, but only if I can be in it. I was kidding, but he said OK, done, you're in it.

"I play the Reverend Pearly," he says. "It's pretty ironic, because I preach against the evils of rum in the town. I tell all my friends, and they go, 'yeah, right, that's a hot one.'"

"Golden Boys" isn't Edwards' first time in front of the camera. He hosted the PBS series, "Cruising America's Waterways," in 2001. The travelogue show ventured "all the way from St. Lawrence to Champlain, to the canal system of the Hudson, the Erie Canal, Key West, the Dry Tortugas and everywhere else in between," says Edwards. "It was a blast, and I think a lot of people learned a lot from that series."

Though he's made 12 albums over his long career, Edwards is forever known for the energetic, upbeat "Sunshine" - a song that, interestingly, almost wasn't recorded.

"Another song on the record was accidentally erased," he says. "I'd just written the song, and I put it down and it sounded real good."

"I bet a lot of the songs that we know and love were conceived and created through just such an effort of chance," says Edwards. "It's all good."

If he's perceived as a one hit wonder, he has no regrets. "If I never play another note but that song, and left that as a legacy I'd be satisfied," he says. "I still hear at the shows how much it meant to someone going through a hard time, or a great time, or people who were in Vietnam when it came out and how it helped them kind of understand that they weren't in this alone. So I love the fact that the song chose me to have one hit with."

"As I told someone recently, one hit's better than not having any."

Besides, he's had the last laugh, building a solid regional following - not to mention a huge fan base in, of all places, the Netherlands.

"Surreptitiously, someone bootlegged the two records I did with Emmylou Harris, this was years ago," says Edwards. "They became quite popular."

Edwards enjoys helping performers find their way. He discovered Lisa McCormick in a Peterborough, N.H., club, and produced her first record. "It's been real fulfilling and rewarding for me to find young artists who are starting out and to maybe give them some advice, maybe some musical help," he says.

"That's really been fun for me, to work with other artists and try to sort of launch them on to the next level."

What kind of advice does he give them?

"Get a good attorney and take it from there," he says, and guffaws heartily. "That's the cynical answer."

"I do have some advice for young singer-songwriters starting out, and that is - acquire an audience ... three little words, a lot easier said than done. Do whatever you can to try and attract an audience and they will show you the way. They will lead you down the path that makes them happy and entertained."

It's certainly worked for Jonathan Edwards. With a musical career that shows no signs of slowing down, he's unflappable. There are those three little words again:

"It's all good."

Tickets for Jonathan Edwards and Northern Lights are \$20, \$18 for seniors and \$12 for students. They can be purchased by calling the box office at 603-542-4433 or online at www.claremontoperahouse.com

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