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2022 AN APPALACHIAN SUMMER FESTIVAL

Tony Award-Winner Renée Elise Goldsberry

One of Many Highlights

By Keith Martin



Renée Elise Goldsberry / Photo by Robert Cummerow

It may be hard to pick just one sparkling jewel from the glittering cultural crown that is the 2022 edition of AN APPALACHIAN SUMMER FESTIVAL (AASF), especially with a slate of twenty-four events taking place during their 38th season, but it would be a fun debate as to which gem you think shines the brightest.

Very strong ticket sales have already indicated that **Boz Scaggs** and his “Out of the Blues Tour” on July 27 is the early favorite of many audience members, with the celebrated artist marking his first return to the AASF since 2013. Others are looking forward to the July 3 concert by **Marty Stuart and His Fabulous Superlatives**, an outdoor event on State Farm Road at The Greenway that will include food trucks, beverage tents, and vendor booths plus, in collaboration with the Town of Boone, family activities earlier in the afternoon leading up to the concert and post-show fireworks.

The July 23 return of **Postmodern Jukebox** is a date circled on many calendars with their time-twisting musical collective known for putting “pop music in a time machine,” making the ‘20s roar again with The Grand Reopening Tour performing some of modern music’s biggest hits

in the classic styles of bygone eras. Dance enthusiasts will welcome **MOMIX: Alice in Wonderland** on July 30 with their internationally acclaimed dancer-illusionists conjuring up the magical world of the White Rabbit, Mad Hatter, and the Queen of Hearts in this stunning reimagining of Lewis Carroll’s novel. Or maybe **Broadway’s Next Hit Musical** on July 7 in the intimate Valborg Theatre is a wise choice. A cross between *Whose Line Is It Anyway?* and the Tony Awards, the show is different every night. “It’s all improvised and it’s all funny... the only unscripted theatrical awards show.”

Perhaps a screening on the **Weicholz Global Film Series** will strike your fancy, or one of the many chamber and classical music concerts sprinkled generously throughout the month. Presentations on the always-informative “**Lunch and Learn**” Series each Thursday in July are always well-attended, as are the young and emerging artists showcased during the **Rosen-Schaffel Competition** on July 24, or the unique Rosen Sculpture Walk on July 9, marking its 36th year at AASF.

If given the chance, most folks would simply choose “all of the above,” and why not? No matter your taste in cultural pro-

gramming, AASF has programmed something for everyone, and tickets may be purchased online at www.appsummer.org, in person at the Schaefer Center box office, or via phone by calling 828-262-4046.

But for this writer, an acknowledged musical theatre geek, one extraordinary talent sticks out on the schedule: **Renée Elise Goldsberry**, who will grace the Schaefer Center stage on July 16. For those of you unfamiliar with this multi-hyphenate actress and singer who has delivered award-winning performances both on Broadway and the screen, here is some background information from her official bio.

Renée Elise Goldsberry is perhaps best known for her role as Angelica Schuyler in the musical phenomenon *Hamilton*, which received rave reviews across the board and has become a cultural touchstone for the ages. Renée’s performance earned her a Tony Award, Grammy Award, Drama Desk Award, and Lucille Lortel Award. In July 2021, she was nominated for an Emmy Award for the Disney+ film adaptation.

Renée currently stars on Tina Fey’s new series for Peacock, *Girls5eva*, which is currently in production for season Two. Up

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Renée Elise Goldsberry / Photo by Bertuzzi Photography

next, she will be seen in Billy Porter’s *What If*, which recently wrapped production. Other highlights from her film and television career include co-starring in A24’s critical darling *Waves*, opposite Sterling K. Brown; the Netflix series *Altered Carbon*; lending her voice to bring characters to life on the Netflix animated series *Fast & Furious Spy Racers* and *Centauroworld*; *Documentary Now*’s cult favorite “Original Cast Album: Co-Op;” *The Good Wife*; *The House with a Clock in its Walls*; *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*; *The Get Down*; and her creation of the beloved character Evangeline Williamson on ABC’s *One Life to Live*, for which she received two Daytime Emmy nominations and two NAACP Image Award nominations.

On stage, Renée’s appearances include her Outer Critics Circle Award-nominated performance opposite Frances McDormand in the play *Good People*, and the original Broadway version of *The Color Purple*. She made her Broadway debut as Nala in *The Lion King*, and her performance as Mimi in Broadway’s closing cast of *RENT* was immortalized in film. Off-Broadway, Renée’s performance as Sylvia in the Public Theater’s production of *Two Gentlemen of Verona* for their Shakespeare in the Park series garnered her across the board rave reviews.

CML first got the chance to interview Renée (no disrespect intended; she insisted that we call her by her first name) on June 12, 2016, just minutes after she won her Tony Award for “Best Performance by an Actress in a Featured Role in a Musical.” The Broadway League set up the media room—I’m not kidding—at the Meyerson Jewish Community Center next to the Beacon Theatre in NYC, because the expansive Radio City Music Hall was unavailable.

“*Hamilton* has been one once-in-a-lifetime moment after another,” Renée said in her acceptance speech, while graciously acknowledging the entire company. “When one of us wins, we all win,” she said, not knowing at the time that hers was but one of eleven awards the show would receive during that evening’s historical sweep from a record 16 nominations, during an event which will be forever known as the “Hamiltons.”

In a follow-up interview this week, almost eight years after she began work on a project originally titled “The Hamilton Mixtape” in late 2014, and six years after winning the award, Renée reflected on the entire *Hamilton* juggernaut.

“Oh, my God... has it really been that long? I’m so grateful to have been a part of the original family, and consider myself to be an ambassador for the show. It means a lot to so many people, especially kids.”

The July 2020 release of the live film recording of the stage version on *Hamilton* on Disney+ had particular resonance for Renée with regard to her own two children, a 13 year-old son (“...who’s now taller than I am!”) and nine year-old daughter who recently played her mother’s role at her elementary school and whose performance is a viral hit on Instagram. “I’m so grateful that they get to experience what ‘mom’ did back then when they were far too young to remember or appreciate.” She noted that Angelica Schuyler was a, “tremendously influential figure in history as advisor and confidant to many of our founding fathers.”

When asked what AASF audiences will see when she appears in Boone, Renée revealed plans to perform numbers from her personal Broadway history, from her debut in *The Lion King* to *RENT* to *The Color Purple*, and, of course, *Hamilton*. She

will also pay tribute to the legends, such as Sarah Vaughn and Aretha Franklin, in an homage to their artistry. “Before you sing your own songs” Renée said, “you must first uplift and celebrate the remarkable women who paved the way.”

She said “my band” has never sounded better since they resumed performing together for the first time since 2020. “We’re still catching up, growing closer, and getting better with each show.” Renée promises a night of powerful music, a few audience sing-alongs, and perhaps one or two of her original songs. “Sometimes they will just start playing the intro to a new song we’ve recorded but have yet to perform in public, and all I can do is just smile and jump right in.”

Renée will arrive in the High Country sporting, “a new haircut and a new attitude,” which she shows off online via social media. “It was an outside change to lift my spirit,” she said of her new ‘do, “It makes me more daring, and matches my excitement for the music we’ll be sharing.”

“I’m most excited about telling my own story. My whole career is thanks to the brilliant storytellers” with whom she has had the privilege of working, and listening to, her entire life. Renée said she is trying to take more risks and tell more stories while, “weaving in some personal anecdotes. The band says the best part of our show is my patter, and I want the audience to leave with the feeling that we’ve spent some real, quality time together.”

A Schaefer Popular Series event, Renée Elise Goldsberry will perform at 8 p.m. on Saturday, July 16, at the Schaefer Center for the Performing Arts on the campus of Appalachian State University. Additional information and tickets are available at www.appsummer.org.