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C2G show a chance to see legendary rocker Leon Russell in a small venue

By James Grant of The News-Sentinel
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The name Leon Russell, who will appear Friday night at C2G Music Hall in Fort Wayne, may not ring a bell with many casual fans of rock music or fans of Top 40 radio. But a cursory listing of some of the songs he's written or co-written may elicit quite a different response.

Classic pop-rock staples such as "This Masquerade" (a top-10 hit for George Benson in 1976 and winner of a Record of the Year Grammy in 1977), "Superstar" (a No. 2 hit for the Carpenters in 1971), "A Song for You," "Everybody Loves a Clown," and "Tight Rope" all flowed from Russell's pen.

Born Claude Russell Bridges, he began his long and storied career in music as a session player.

As a member of the legendary Wrecking Crew, an elite group of session players who played on most of the hit songs on pop radio in the 1960s, Russell played piano on a host of recordings by such acts as Ike and Tina Turner, Glen Campbell, Herb Alpert, the Beach Boys, Jan & Dean, the Byrds, Gary Lewis and the Playboys, the Everly Brothers, and several of the hits produced by Phil Spector.

Russell also performed as a member of the house band for one of the first television rock variety shows, "Shindig!" which ran on ABC-TV from 1964 to 1966.

That house band not only featured Russell on piano, but also other musical luminaries such as Glen Campbell, Billy Preston, James Burton and Delaney Bramlett.

As the 1960s ended and the 1970s dawned, Russell recorded with Delaney & Bonnie (he co-wrote the song "Superstar" with the duo's Bonnie Bramlett). He also toured as musical director for Joe Cocker, who had a hit with Russell's song "Delta Lady" on his "Mad Dogs and Englishmen" tour, which became a best-selling live album of the same name and paved the way for Russell's career as a solo artist.

In 1971, Russell also took part in the Concert for Bangladesh charity concerts put on by ex-Beatle George Harrison at Madison Square Garden.

Two shows were recorded and released as a three-album set, as well as a theatrical movie called "The Concert for Bangladesh," which featured Russell as not only a player but also performer and vocalist on "Medley: Jumpin' Jack Flash/Young Blood."

Throughout the 1970s, Russell earned several gold-selling albums as a solo artist. One album, "Carney," hit No. 2 on the Billboard Hot 200 albums chart in 1972 and also produced the hit song "Tight Rope."

Russell's career waned after the 1970s. But in 2010, he got a major boost when Elton John collaborated with him on an album called "The Union," which reached No. 3 on the Billboard Hot 200 albums chart. A song from that album, "If It Wasn't for Bad," which Russell wrote, was nominated for a Grammy.

Russell was also inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame by Elton John in 2011.

With such an impressive career, it's notable that Fort Wayne concertgoers will be able to catch a live performance by Russell in a relatively intimate concert venue at C2G Music Hall.

Wooden Nickel Music is helping to promote the show. Owner Bob Roets says he was involved with getting the Russell concert off the ground and making sure people are aware of the event.

"Pete Kernan (Pacific Coast Concerts), the promoter (of the Leon Russell show), and I go back 30 years," Roets said.

"Leon is one of the artists that I kind of asked Pete if it was possible we could get," said Roets, who also worked with Rick "Doc" West from local rock radio station WXKE, 103.9-FM, to bring Russell here.

"Basically, we're selling the tickets for him obviously at our stores, and I'll be taking care of all the photography and things like that at the show," Roets said.

"So that's mostly my involvement with it, and Rock 104 is obviously promoting it."

Roets says he is pleased to see his customers get the chance to experience a veteran act in a small setting.



More Information

Rock legend

What: Rock and Roll Hall of Famer Leon Russell will perform in concert.

When: 8 p.m. Friday

Where: C2G Music Hall, 323 W. Baker St.

Cost: \$46 in advance, \$48 day of show. Tickets are available at <http://c2gmusicall.com>; Wooden Nickel Music locations in Fort Wayne at 3627 N. Clinton St., 3422 N. Anthony Blvd. and 6427 W. Jefferson Blvd.; www.ticketmaster.com; and 1-800-745-3000.

“When Leon's up on stage playing piano, there's just not a bad seat in the house,” Roets said.

He expects “between 400 and 500 people there. That's really a nice, intimate way to see a legend like him.”

“It's a once-in-a-lifetime chance to see a Rock and Roll Hall of Famer that's played with the likes of every one from Elton John on down,” Roets added. “It's going to be quite a night.”