

arts & culture

The Sharon’s Next Show Will Be a Tour De ‘Force’

“Star Shanties: Songs From a Galaxy Far, Far Away” touches down in The Villages at 7 p.m. Aug. 30.

By TAYLOR STRICKLAND  
Daily Sun Senior Writer

“Star Shanties: Songs From a Galaxy Far, Far Away” has charted a course for The Villages.

Suffice it to say, the show is a “Star Wars”-inspired evening of music that can leave the Emperor himself snapping his fingers and tapping his toes.

The premise of the show is that a rogue ship, The Wretched Hive, has been stranded in the Outer Rim, leaving her crew no choice but to perform shanties in order to afford repairs. he desperate crew of the “totally legitimate cargo ship” entertains the local inhabitants as they sing some of the galaxy’s favorite tunes like “Old Man Thrawn,” “Running Down from Kessel” and “Hondo Ohnaka.”

So where in the name of Jar-Jar Binks did this show come from? “The ‘Star Shanties’ project started in the middle of the pandemic — like so many projects at the time — out of sheer boredom,” said writer-director Arthur Rowan, also known as “Rowan the Bard” and “The Bardfather” in Renaissance Faire circles.

“Star Shanties” was composed during the period in early 2021 when folk songs like “The Wellerman,” a 19th century New Zealand ballad, were trending on TikTok. Although technically not a shanty, Rowan said, “The Wellerman” has the same folksy, seafaring feeling that he captured in “Star Shanties.”

Rowan has an extensive background in folk music. He and his wife, Kelly, have performed in the Ren Faire circuit for years as the musical duo known as “Rowan and the Rose,” which specialized in a variety of traditional Celtic music, historical tunes and original songs inspired by film franchises like “Star Wars.”

“When I first started writing music and songs 15 years ago, I always gravitated to what they call ‘filk,’ but what I like to call ‘geek folk’ songs,” Rowan said, “songs that reference our shared mythology ... are a means of using stories that everyone knows to get people to connect.”

“Old Man Thrawn,” a shanty based on Grand Admiral Thrawn from the “Star Wars” expanded universe, was the first song Rowan created. He posted it on Facebook to share with his Ren Faire circle, which they then shared across social media platforms until it reached the character’s

original writer and went viral.

Inspired, Rowan started to write more shanties and upload them to YouTube. The shanties he posted there had no plot, but when the 2022 Orlando International Fringe Theatre Festival came around, Rowan figured he could throw together somewhat of a plot suitable for the festival.

It wasn’t until Rowan teamed up with Ashley Willsey, who was a producer of the 2014 Fringe hit “Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson” that “Star Shanties” really became the show it is today.

“I originally thought to make it a little like ‘Cabaret,’” Rowan said. “Ashley was the one who said, ‘I think you have something with some real heart here that could make a really good show.’”

Although the show makes reference to some fairly obscure “Star Wars” lore in both verse and song, audiences can rest assured that they don’t need to be “Star

Wars” experts to enjoy the show. It was important to Rowan that the songs, characters and plot stand on their own.

“Even if you don’t know much about ‘Star Wars’ at all, it will be easy to follow,” he said. “One of my favorite compliments that I get from people who just watched the

show is they say, ‘I didn’t think I would enjoy that as much as I did.’”

“Star Shanties” concludes with a live question-and-answer session, in which Rowan and the cast discuss the inspiration behind each of the shanties.

“Star Shanties: Songs From a Galaxy Far, Far Away” lands

in The Villages at 7 p.m. Aug. 30 at The Sharon L. Morse Performing Arts Center. Tickets are \$25 and up. To purchase, go to thevillagesentertainment.com.

Senior writer Taylor Strickland can be reached at 352-753-1119, ext. 5334, or [taylor.strickland@thevillagesmedia.com](mailto:taylor.strickland@thevillagesmedia.com).



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