

Face Familiar With Local Audiences Makes Sharon Debut

Russell Stephens will present “Never Have I Ever: Songs From the Bucket List” on Sept. 17 at The Sharon.

By TAYLOR STRICKLAND
Daily Sun Senior Writer

The last time Russell Stephens performed on one of The Villages’ stages, he played a Nazi in “Cabaret.”

Now he’s starring in his own cabaret show.

“Never Have I Ever: Songs From the Bucket List” is the next installment in The Sharon L. Morse Performing Arts Center’s Lobby Lounge Cabaret series. Stephens will grace The Sharon’s lobby stage for one night only, singing his favorite songs from shows he has yet to perform in as well as a few of his all-time favorite musical numbers.

Patrons may recognize Stephens from his performances in “Cabaret” and in “The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee” at The Studio Theatre Tierra Del Sol.

“I had an absolute blast with ‘Spelling Bee’ and ‘Cabaret’ — two very different shows that pulled from very different areas of my skill set,” Stephens said.

He had always loved “Spelling Bee” but thought he would never get to do it. In the Studio Theatre production, he played Mitch Mahoney, an ex-convict performing his community service as the bee’s official comfort counselor, as well as two smaller roles traditionally played by the same actor.

Stephens said he is very grateful former Studio Theatre director Nathaniel Niemi wanted to shape the characters in “Spelling Bee” a little bit differently than how they were portrayed in the Broadway production. That new take on Mahoney made the role more appropriate for Stephens.

“Not only am I hitting songs from shows I’d like to do, I’ll be doing some songs that speak to experiences on my bucket list. Places I want to travel, things I want to do, and a few that reflect things I’ve already been able to check off the list”

RUSSELL STEPHENS
Studio actor

“Not to mention it really felt like the quintessential summer theater experience,” Stephens said. “In a lot of ways, it felt like we were at sleep-away camp.”

In “Cabaret,” Stephens played the role of Ernst Ludwig, the seemingly affable German man who introduces the show’s male lead, Clifford Bradshaw, to the seductively decadent Kit Kat Club. But Ludwig is later revealed to be a Nazi. Stephens said Ludwig is one of the only roles he has played that involved more acting than singing, and it required a different set of physical and mental musculature than he is used to using onstage.

“Cabaret” is also one of the most significant productions Stephen has been part of, both in terms of its status



Studio actor Russell Stephens, who has been previously seen in “Cabaret” and “The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee,” presents “Never Have I Ever: Songs From the Bucket List” at 7 p.m. Sept. 17 at The Sharon L. Morse Performing Arts Center.

Submitted photo

among musicals and its subject matter.

“Sadly, the story is very timely right now,” Stephens said. “All of us took the work very seriously because we knew how important it was to tell that story.”

The idea for “Never Have I Ever” came from a recent video trend on Instagram, in which young performers made videos listing their top six dream roles.

As Stephens racked his brain trying to think of what his six roles might be, he realized they might make an interesting idea for a cabaret. When Gary Powell, music director for The Sharon, invited Stephens to perform at the theater, Stephens figured it would be a perfect time to try out the concept.

“Not only am I hitting songs from shows I’d like to do, I’ll be doing some songs that speak to experiences on my bucket list,” Stephens said. “Places I want to travel, things I want to do and a few that reflect things

I’ve already been able to check off the list.”

“Never Have I Ever” will be a very “Russell show,” Stephens said, featuring songs that are important to him personally and as an artist. The set list features tunes both obscure and popular, including songs from blockbuster shows like “Les Misérables” and “Beauty and the Beast” and from lesser-known off-Broadway shows.

“I try to make sure every song in the set list is personal to me in some way,” Stephens said. “A good friend and mentor impressed on me the importance of striving for significance over relevance. I’ve never been the kind of artist who thinks, ‘Oh, this song is in the Top 40 right now, I’ll do it so the show is relevant.’”

Stephens is excited to share a different side of himself with patrons who have only ever seen him do scripted material.

“Never Have I Ever: Songs From the Bucket List” takes place at 7 p.m. Sept. 17 at The Sharon L. Morse

Performing Arts Center.

Tickets are \$25. For more information, go to thevillagesentertainment.com.

Senior writer Taylor Strickland can be reached at 352-753-1119, ext. 5334, or taylor.strickland@thevillagesmedia.com.

WHY WAIT MONTHS When You Can Get an Appt in DAYS? CALL US!

Village Internal Medicine and Senior Clinic, PA

Personalized and coordinated care.

Winston E. Evalle, MD

Board Certified in Internal Medicine
Board Certified and Fellowship Trained in Gerontology

Medical Degree:
Far Eastern University, Manila, Philippines

Internal Medicine Residency:
Ravenswood Hospital Medical Center, Chicago, Illinois

Geriatric Fellowship:
University of Illinois & West Side VA - Chicago, IL

Active privileges at UF Health, The Villages® Hospital

We Accept Most Insurances, Medicare, United HealthCare & Blue Cross/Blue Shield

(352) 259-0364

3351 Wedgewood Lane, The Villages, FL 32162

Temple Shalom

OPEN HOUSE

Sunday August 25th at 2:00pm

13563 County Road 101, Oxford

A vibrant Jewish community offering religious, spiritual, educational, cultural and social events

High Holy Day tickets available

Rabbi Sonnenstein will speak at 2:45pm

Our Judaica Gift Shop will be open

We welcome all residents of our community who would like to learn more about our Reform Jewish Temple.

Call (352) 748-1800 press 4 for more information

Email questions to: membership@tsclf.org

Or scan the QR code above

MOHAWK

LAMINATE SALE

MOHAWK

RevWood LAMINATE

starting at

\$5.99^{*} SQ. FT.

INSTALLED

Made in the USA

*Sale offers cannot be combined. Installed prices on laminate/LVP/hardwood do not include quarter round or transitions pieces.

Best Flooring Center

An Abbey Carpet & Floor Dealer

FRUITLAND PARK
352-728-4443
3480 U.S. 27/441
Mon-Fri 9-5 • Sat 9-3

CLERMONT
352-394-6940
833 W. Highway 50
Mon-Fri 9-5 • Sat 9-3

THE VILLAGES® COMMUNITY AREA
352-753-1739
8590 County Rd. 466
Mon-Fri 9-5 • Sat 10-4

SHOP AT HOME

352-343-0027

BESTFLOORINGCENTER.COM

Restyle & Remount

- Custom design a new ring
- Reset your diamond or our diamond
- Large variety of diamonds & settings available
- 0% Interest for 12 months - Bank Financing Available

Turn Ordinary

Into Extraordinary

CERTIFIED EARTH MINED & LAB GROWN DIAMONDS

WATCH REPAIRS

ROLEX

and other fine watches

- ROLEX ORIGINAL PARTS
- 2 YEAR WARRANTY
- ROLEX FACTORY TRAINED WATCH MAKERS

3455 Wedgewood Lane • Southern Trace Plaza
Between Publix & Ace Hardware
352-430-0303

BOOK YOUR APPOINTMENT TODAY!

Jewelry Design

for CERTIFIED DIAMONDS

Rolex is a registered trademark of Rolex Watch U.S.A., Inc. Jewelry Design is not an authorized dealer of, nor affiliated with Rolex Watch U.S.A., Inc.

1040 Bichara Blvd • La Plaza Grande
2 doors to the right of Belk
352-751-0202

www.jewelrydesignthevillages.com • Jeweler in The Villages® community since 1999