

arts & culture

# Florida Native John Anderson Headlines At The Sharon

The country music star blew into town on a “Seminole Wind,” delighting his fans in The Villages.

By TAYLOR STRICKLAND  
Daily Sun Senior Writer

Many beloved stars and legendary musicians play The Sharon L. Morse Performing Arts Center, but it’s not every day that the star is one of Central Florida’s own.

John Anderson, an Apopka native and recent Country Music Hall of Fame inductee, just came home to count the memories. Days before Hurricane Milton hit, the country music star made a stop at The Sharon, where he performed an acoustic set of all his greatest hits, such as “Swingin’” and “Black Sheep.” He was joined on stage by longtime friend and fellow musician, steel player Glenn Rieuf.

The concert opened with Billy Joe Shaver’s “I’m Just an Old Chunk of Coal (But I’m Gonna Be a Diamond Someday),” followed by Glenn Ray and Bobby Wright’s “I Just Came Home to Count the Memories.”

“That’s always a special song for me to sing down in this

part of the country these days,” Anderson said. “I drive up and down the road, and I have a lot of great memories from this area of the country.”

Anderson grew up in Apopka, hoeing orange trees and dreaming of pursuing music. At 17 years old, he set off to Nashville and took a job as a construction worker.

One of the sites Anderson helped build was a brand new performing arts center called the Grand Ole Opry House. Staring down into the dark theater, he saw where the stage would be and swore to himself that one day, he would perform on that stage. And that’s exactly what he did.

Starting in 1977 with the release of his first single, “I’ve Got a Feelin’ (Somebody’s Been Stealin’),” the Nashville legend has released 22 studio albums and more than 40 singles on Billboard’s U.S. Hot Country list. He is best known for his No. 1 singles “Wild and Blue,” “Swingin’,” “Black Sheep,” “Straight Tequila Night,” and “Money in the Bank.”

In addition to singing and playing the guitar, Anderson shared stories about other country music legends like Merle Haggard and Waylon Jennings. The audience hung

on every word, listening as he explained how he and Haggard’s 40-year friendship and working relationship started with their rendition of Danny Dill and Marijohn Wilkin’s “Long Black Veil.”

“Me and old Merle has some great, great times,” Anderson said. “I believe we’re on six different records together, and probably did 100 shows together.”

For the encore, Anderson did a little more name dropping. About 20 years ago, he was sitting in his Nashville home one morning, working on songs and getting nowhere. The phone rang, and he almost ignored it, but decided to answer anyway. To this day, it’s one of the best decisions he’s ever made.

“On the other end, a voice said, ‘Hey, hoss, this is Waylon,’” Anderson said. “I said, ‘Man, what are you doing calling me here?’ He said, ‘I’m fixing to

make a record down here at the Ryman Auditorium, and I sure wish you’d come and help.”

Anderson told Jennings to name the time and place, and he’d be there. Together, the two recorded a rendition of Jennings’s 1975 song “Waymore’s Blues.” It was their first and last collaboration.

“Folks, I’m so glad I got to do this, because this would be the last album Waylon would make while he was living,” Anderson said. “I’m glad to have had a little part in it.”

Throughout the concert, Anderson shared his appreciation for the fans who supported him all these years, crediting them for his recent induction to the Country Music Hall of Fame. He also specifically singled out those who live in Central Florida, sharing his love for the area and praying for everyone’s safety ahead of

hurricane Milton.

“I’ll be praying for good old Central Florida here for this big hurricane,” he said. “The last one caused a lot of trouble down here, but up in the mountains — up in Tennessee — it’s pretty tragic what’s happening. We’re praying for those people too.”

The audience was reluctant to let Anderson go, cheering for encore after encore. Many were Central Florida residents from outside The Villages, such as LeeAnne and Bob Drake of Ocala. The pair were accompanied by their friends, Kim and Bob Hutchinson, also of Ocala.

Bob has always been a big fan of Anderson, so LeeAnne bought The Sharon tickets for his birthday a few months ago. In her own words, the surprise was ruined when Bob insisted on buying the tickets himself, but he was still overjoyed by the gift.

In addition to being a big John Anderson fan, Bob is a bit of a musician himself.

“I play guitar a little bit — not good, not stageworthy,” Bob said. It’s just for myself, but I love playing John Anderson. My favorite ones are ‘Chicken Truck,’ ‘Wild and Blue,’ ‘Black Sheep’ and ‘Would You Catch a Falling Star.’”

None of the group had ever scene Anderson in concert before, and they all appreciated the unplugged sound of the acoustic set. Kim particularly liked the addition of Glenn Rieuf, and LeeAnne really enjoyed all the stories Anderson shared.

“I think it’s more intimate when it’s this way, because I feel like you’re a part of it and not just a big show,” she said.

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Country music star John Anderson, left, sings and plays the acoustic guitar next to his longtime steel guitarist Glenn Rieuf on Oct. 7 at The Sharon L. Morse Performing Arts Center.

Joseph Cooke,  
Daily Sun

# The Villages®

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