

Local bands to share the screens with Costello, Wyclef Jean at Memorial Park concert

Betsie Freeman Aug 25, 2021 Updated Sep 30, 2022 0



Elvis Costello & The Layabouts and Wyclef Jean will perform at this year's City of Omaha Celebrates America concert Saturday at Memorial Park. The event also will feature videos by local musical artists shown on big screens next to the stage.

BRENDAN SULLIVAN, THE WORLD-HERALD

Omahan Dave Berman is excited to see headliner Elvis Costello on Saturday, but he's equally as jazzed about one of the videos that will be shown throughout the day at the City of Omaha Celebrates America concert.

Berman is one of about 40 acts that won a place on the big screen during the annual event at Memorial Park.

The competition came about after organizers thought more Omaha talent should be recognized, said Heidi Walz of Vic Gutman & Associates, the local firm that manages the concert.

A local band (this year, it's The Firm) always opens for the concert, but planners were looking for a way to showcase other performers, Walz said.

"We thought, we have these giant screens (next to the stage). Why not put them to better use?" she said.

Nearly 100 musical groups responded to a call for entries. Most had their own videos, but 15 of them recorded videos at a studio set up by KPAO, the Omaha public-access television station.

All of the videos went in a pool, and area musicians helped the organizers choose winners using criteria such as genre and diversity. The competition was open to any individual or band that performs original music.

Berman, 69, was one of the chosen. He recorded a video for a song he wrote, “Norma Lee,” at KPAO.

“It’s about a small-town girl who is trying to make it as a musician and eventually ends up back in the small town,” he said. “And the truck driver who’s infatuated with her.”

He may have had an edge with diversity. He’s 69 years old, for one thing — “Most of the popular musicians (in Omaha) are younger,” he said.

And his genre is folk music, not as prevalent as, say, rock.

“Everything I play sounds like a folk song,” he said.

Berman has been playing in bands since he was about 14 and has been focusing on solo gigs and songwriting for about 10 years. He works as a freelance project manager but plans to retire at the end of the year.

He plays on the second Saturday of the month at the Village Pointe Farmers Market and recently performed at the Infusion Tap Room in La Vista, Burrito Envy in Benson and the Rose Blumkin Home.

There’s no set schedule for the videos at the concert, Walz said. They might play during sound checks, band set-up or other random times. A couple will play between Wyclef Jean’s and Costello’s performances. They start at noon.

The park will open at 5 a.m. Saturday so people can stake out places for blankets and chairs. Those who attend are asked to keep a healthy distance between blankets. Tarps, tents, canopies, umbrellas and anything else staked to the ground are forbidden, as are glass containers and drones.

The show starts at 6 p.m. with The Firm, then Wyclef Jean and finally Elvis Costello & The Layabouts. Fireworks will start at about 10 p.m. with a soundtrack from Classic Rock 105.9.

Berman plans to be there.

“We live just a few blocks from the park and we never miss it,” he said.

He hopes he makes it in time to see his video. Regardless, he and the 15 other acts that recorded at KPAO — some of whom weren’t selected for the concert — will get copies of their videos to keep.

That was his main motivation to apply for the contest.

“I entered because I would have the opportunity to record two songs and we would get edited videos for personal use,” he said. “I’ll put it on my website and social media.”