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Welcome Home Superstar

Broadway, 30 Rock and Glee star, Cheyenne Jackson, returns to Spokane

by Blythe Thimsen

Performing on Broadway? *Check.* On television? *Check, check.* In films? *Check, check, check.* At the Walt Disney Concert Hall? *Check, check, check, check.* Selling out Carnegie Hall – twice? *Check, check, check, check, check.* Taking the stage at Martin Woldson Theater at the Fox? *Not yet.*

It is good to know there are still a few things that Cheyenne Jackson hasn't accomplished, though that list is dwindling by the day, as this Broadway and Hollywood star continues to conquer nearly every genre entertainment has to offer. Come May 20, 2014, he can check one more item off of his list: make his big hometown return, performing with the Spokane Symphony at the Martin Woldson Theater at the Fox.





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A Newport, Washington, native, who was born at Deaconess Hospital, Jackson's family moved to Spokane when he was a teenager. That makes him local, and we are claiming him as our own!

As is often the case with those who have worked to build a career on the Great White Way, or in Hollywood, it all started with a school performance. "As nearly every high school student is, I was in *Bye Bye Birdie* my sophomore year, at Newport High School, and in *Little Abner* my senior year," he says.

"I remember that first laugh that I got, and thinking, 'Ah, so that's how this feels,'" He latched onto other local opportunities to stretch his acting wings, performing at the Spokane Civic Theatre and with the Coeur

d'Alene Summer Theater. "Those formative years are so important," he says. "I recently did two gigs at the Birdland, the famous jazz club in New York, and while up on stage I mentioned doing a show at the Coeur d'Alene Summer Theater. I heard a laugh from the audience, and there was Roger Welch, who was the artistic director for the Summer Theater for many years, in the audience!"

Reuniting with friends and colleagues from this area is a rare treat, ever since Jackson moved away to New York City in 2001, to pursue his dream of being an actor. In 2002, one year after leaving home, he made his Broadway debut in *Thoroughly Modern Millie*, as an understudy for both male leads. It has been non-stop action for Jackson ever since, as he has showcased his

skills on Broadway, in films, like *United 93*; on television shows, including *30 Rock*, and *Glee*; releasing two studio albums, and performing nearly non-stop in live concert performances. His most recent album, *I'm Blue, Skies*, was released in 2013 and is available on iTunes.

"I definitely don't fit into one category," says Jackson. "I'm one big hyphenate. When I'm on Broadway, it is visceral, you have one chance right there with the audience. It is tangible." Television is a completely different animal, he says, explaining, "in that setting, the camera comes to you." He just finished filming his tenth television pilot. "If this one doesn't get picked up, I'm 0 for 10 with pilots," he says, laughing. It's not exactly like he doesn't have anything else to fall back on. "I

did five films last year and really honed my craft. With film you get time to ruminate as the character, and have time to do take after take until you and the director are satisfied with it. In a concert, that is your one chance to be up there with the audience. So, the long answer to the simple question is, I'd describe myself as an artist. It's who I am, I don't know what else I would be doing."

When he comes to Spokane on May 20, that artist will be on full display as he joins the Spokane Symphony to perform hits from the Great American Songbook, in the tradition of Tin Pan Alley and Broadway spectaculars.

Jackson will transport audience members as he sings his way through works of some of his most beloved artists, whose work he is drawn to, including Frank

Sinatra, Mel Tormé and Amy Winehouse, and he'll include songs that he loves, like Tom Jones' versions of *Besame Mucho* and *I Who Have Nothing*.

"My music teachers from Newport and from growing up—those who had an influence on me—said I was really born in the wrong era," he says. "I've shaped a show based on that. It is so expansive. Music is timeless, melodic and this gives me carte blanche to do what I love. It is really, really fun and enjoyable."

This will be the first time Jackson has been back to Spokane to perform in 16 years. "I've been spending the last three years focusing on writing music," he says, "and I decided, let's branch out a bit," so he asked his team if they could reach out to the Spokane Symphony.

"Cheyenne Jackson has been on our radar for a while. He recently began working with symphonies and we started discussions with his representatives to bring him back to Spokane to work with our orchestra," says Brenda Nienhouse, executive director of the Spokane Symphony. "At first those discussions were focused on next season. But then a perfect date came up in May that we all jumped at. So his regional fans and our audience don't have to wait for the experience."

Jackson's performance coincides nicely with the Symphony's recent push to break the stereotype that a symphony experience is strictly for an older crowd, and to draw in a younger demographic. "For those who say, 'Oh no, not the symphony,' you are solely mistaken. This is where the party's at," says Jackson. He admits he was initially one of those people who were skeptical about music dubbed for an "older generation" until his friend and mentor, Michael Feinstein, got him introduced to the music he'll be singing. "These songs are timeless. You have to get out of your comfort zone. The great American Songbook skews older because a lot of those songs are from an era where you had to listen to them on the radio, or buy the vinyl, but great music doesn't go out of style. I'm young and I'm up there singing this, and music is universally relatable. I relate to, respect and love this music."

Though the Fox Theater is a smaller billing than Carnegie Hall, which Jackson has sold out twice, when he takes the stage for his hometown performance, there will still be nerves.

"Always!" he says when asked if he still gets nervous before a show. "The moment you stop getting nervous means you don't care. Being nervous means you care. You have to care; you can't phone it in. You have to get up there and give everything until you've got nothing left to give. Tickets are expensive, and people paid to be there, and I want them to

be there. Plus, I think it is weird when people say they aren't nervous. I don't believe them when they say that!"

Jackson adds, "I want to be liked; I want to be loved," just like every other performer who takes to a stage. Rest assured, there will be plenty of people in the audience on May 20 who love Jackson. In addition to local fans and longtime friends, his family and parents, who lived here for 38 years and only recently relocated to another state, are traveling back to Spokane to see Jackson's homecoming. It will be a performance to remember.

There is still plenty that Jackson has on his to-do list. "I'd like to write a book, which I am in the beginning stages of now," he says. "I'd like to write a musical, and I'd like to produce films and documentaries. It is not enough to debate or talk about some things, you need to show it, which I would like to do. I want to tell great stories. I'd like to be a father. I'm also training for a triathlon in L.A. It's killing me!"

His to-do list is full, but we hope Jackson adds one more item to that list: frequently return to Spokane to perform, and let us cheer on our hometown star! **Check check. S**

For ticket information, visit www.ticketswet.com. Follow Cheyenne Jackson on Twitter @ [cheyennejackson](https://twitter.com/cheyennejackson), and visit www.cheyennejackson.com



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