

‘Nashville Backstage’ spotlights hitmakers

BY MYRNA PETLICKI | Contributor February 27, 2013 11:44AM

The hits will keep coming at “Nashville Backstage: A Country Cabaret.”

Three of the top country songwriters will perform some of their most popular tunes and tell the stories behind them March 1 at Raue Center for the Arts.

Tony Haselden’s songs have been performed by Shania Twain (“What Made You Say That”), George Strait (“You Know Me Better Than That”), Martina McBride (“That’s Me”), Shelby Lynne (“I’ll Lie Myself to Sleep” and “Don’t Cross Your Heart”), Glen Campbell (“We Will”), Toby Keith (“In Other Words”), and many other top country singers.

Despite the dozens of hits he has penned for others, Haselden insisted, “I’m probably one of the least prolific writers in Nashville. The most songs I have ever written in a year is about 23, 24. There are people who do 150, 160 songs a year.”

Keeping that count down to a reasonable number sort of follows a family philosophy. “My grandpa always said, ‘You can’t judge a carpenter by how much sawdust he makes,’” Haselden related.

Haselden won’t bring any sawdust to “Nashville Backstage,” just perfectly constructed tunes. The performance will also be at a very high level because Haselden, a founding member of the Louisiana group LeRoux, is considered a brilliant guitarist.

There’s no simple way of describing Haselden’s music. “There’s not a Tony Haselden style of song,” he said. “It goes from Texas swing to rhythm and blues to rock.”

During the show, Haselden will play a number of his hits plus several funny songs.

Songwriting is only one of many talents for Sherrie Austin, who has appeared in two films and a dozen television shows, including being a series regular on NBC’s “The Facts of Life.” Her Broadway credits include “Ring of Fire” and a lead in “The Ballad of Bonnie and Clyde.” She has been the opening act for a half-dozen country singers, including Clint Black and Martina McBride.

“I always make the joke that I’ve done everything but porn and gospel,” Austin said.

Despite all those activities, Austin doesn’t shortchange her songwriting. “I write every day so it’s my job,” she said. In terms of inspiration, “You never know when it’s going to hit. But after a while, you start to train your brain a little bit, and it usually turns up if you turn up.”

At the show, Austin will be singing a number of selections from, “Circus Girl,” an independent album she released last

year, as well as some of her older numbers.

The third featured songwriter, Will Rambeau, is one of Austin's main co-writers and co-producer of her "Circus Girl" CD. His first hit was "Wild One," performed by Faith Hill in 1993. His other Top 10 singles include "Nobody Gonna Rain on our Parade" (sung by Kathy Mattea) and "Can't Get Enough" (Patty Loveless). Dolly Parton, Jo Dee Messina and Lee Greenwood are a few of the artists who have recorded his songs.

There's no set plan for "Nashville Backstage." "The show will kind of follow whatever it dictates," Haselden said. "Some people expect to see a group. It's three individuals. We'll each take turns singing songs." At times, the other two performers may sing along or play along.

"These kinds of events are always fun because you never really know what's going to happen," Austin said.

"Things that happen onstage are purely spontaneous," Haselden added. "That seems to be the magic of that situation."

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