

Nelson twins pay tribute to famous father

BY DAN PEARSON | Contributor January 16, 2013 11:46AM

Matthew and Gunnar Nelson return to the Raue Center for the Arts Saturday to perform their loving multi-media tribute to their late father in "Ricky Nelson Remembered."

"For the most part we play the songs that I'm sure that everybody wants to hear," said Matt Nelson, 45, from his home in Nashville.

So expect to hear hits such as "Hello, Mary Lou," "Travelin' Man," "Poor Little Fool," "Lonesome Town," and "Fools Rush In."

The musical selections are based on the set list found in his father's guitar case after his plane carrying the entire Stone Canyon Band crashed and burned on New Year's Eve in Texas in 1985.

"I use that as the foundation of the show and build around it," Matt Nelson said. "We also tip the hat at our musical career as well."

The twin sons of Ricky and Kristin Nelson also perform as Nelson, and released their first album, "After the Rain," in 1990.

"We were fortunate through the years to become successful and sell a few million records to people who had no idea who our dad was," Matt Nelson said.

He describes his father as "the most televised rock star in history," thanks to his years of appearances on "The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet," which ran from to 1952-1966 on ABC.

"At that time, rock was the devil's music. The fact that Ozzie and Harriet's kid smuggled real rock 'n' roll, not Pat Boone-type stuff, but the real deal, into American living rooms was really subversive."

Ricky Nelson and his sons, along with their grandfather Ozzie Nelson, share the distinction of being the only family with No. 1 hits in three successive generations, according to The Guinness Book of World Records.

Ricky Nelson, born Eric Hilliard Nelson in Teaneck, N.J., was inducted posthumously into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1987.

"The true genesis of this show goes back to my brother and myself attending my dad's concerts," Matt Nelson said. "I think we have the right and the duty to honor his work and his memory. We tell stories between the film clips and between the songs and sing the songs the way we remembered him singing them."

Matt Nelson said he went through all 435 episodes of "Ozzie and Harriet" and also secured interviews with Paul McCartney, John Fogerty, Kris Kristofferson and Chris Isaac about his father for the show.

“I’m in the process of editing in other people talking about him like Johnny Cash, Roy Orbison, Waylon Jennings and Fats Domino.”

The clips from “Ozzie and Harriet” don’t feature any scenes of their mother, who was a series regular in the final years of the show.

“Our parents had an incredibly tumultuous divorce,” he said. “It was pretty mean-spirited from my mother’s point of view. My brother and I were close to my dad and we were made to live with our mom.

“We moved in full time with him when we turned 18 and we were there only a few months before he died. The greatest gift I ever had was reconnecting with him over those months. I would give away everything that I have in the world for five more minutes of time with my dad.”

That sentiment is expressed in the show’s closing number, “Just Once More.”

“Everything can change in one second, either for you or someone around you. I learned that lesson very young.”

Matt Nelson confirms that he and his brother were supposed to be on the ill-fated flight in 1985.

“We were packed and ready to go and at the last minute our Pop said, ‘Why don’t you fly and meet me in Dallas?’ which is where he was on his way to when the plane went down. I think he just had a feeling.”

The Nelson twins feel they owe it to the memory of their father to stay connected to his fans.

“We stay after shows — sometimes two or three hours — just to shake everybody’s hand and they always tell us stories,” Matt Nelson said.

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