

Dr. John brings music of New Orleans to Raue

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Call it blues, jazz, pop, zydeco, boogie woogie, funk or rock 'n' roll.

To Dr. John, it's simply the music of New Orleans. And he's the living embodiment of that music.

At age 72, and performing since the 1950s, he'll take the Raue Center for the Arts stage in Crystal Lake Nov. 8 to do what he can't imagine not doing.

"I love to play music," he said. "It's kind of an inspiration for me. ... All I think is that music is a very healing thing, and I think that it's a blessing unto itself."

Overcoming addiction and living a colorful life in New Orleans, Dr. John has done plenty of healing through the years. A gunshot wound to his left ring finger brought an end to his career as a guitarist, but led to the piano becoming the singer/songwriter's main instrument.

He'd work 12-hour days, he said, learning piano and playing in the studio in between.

"When you're young, you can do all that," he said.

Over the years, Dr. John, or Mac Rebennack as he's known to friends and family, has won six Grammy awards and been involved with some of the greatest records to come out of New Orleans.

He's played on records by Sonny and Cher, Van Morrison, Aretha Franklin, Art Neville, Professor Longhair, Joe Tex and the Rolling Stones' infamous "Exile on Main St."

His solo career landed him his own hits, such as "Right Place Wrong Time" and "Rite Away."

Releasing his first album in 1968, his latest, "Locked Down," produced by Black Keys guitarist Dan Auerbach, came out in 2012 and earned him his most recent Grammy. He won Best Blues Album this year.

"It makes you feel good, and I think when people give you props, it keeps you on your toes," said Dr. John, who took his stage name in the 1960s as he combined New Orleans blues with psychedelic rock.

As for the Nov. 8 concert, he said, expect everything.

"We're going to play some new stuff, some old stuff and some of the middle stuff," he said.

Inspired by greats, such as Louis Armstrong and B.B. King, he's become a legend himself. His contributions stretch from his work with artists such as Christina Aguilera and Gregg Allman, to his performance of the opening song on Disney's "The Princess and the Frog" in 2009.

He's even the inspiration for Jim Henson's Muppet character, Dr. Teeth.

"You know, I look at a lot of the old-timers, whether it's B.B. King or whoever, they set a path for the rest of us to follow," he said.

One of his latest titles is perhaps the most surprising to him. He was the recipient this year of an honorary doctorate of fine arts from Tulane University in New Orleans.

"Getting some kind of degree was a trip and a half," he said. "I had just never made it all the way through school, so I felt it was a real blessing to get honored that way."