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Audra McDonald in Concert at the Brevard Music Center

BMC 2023 Summer Festival Welcomes Emmy, GRAMMY®, and Tony Winner for Two Concert Performances

Brevard, North Carolina—On July 25 and 26, Emmy, GRAMMY®, and record-breaking six-time Tony Award winner Audra McDonald makes her first appearance at the Brevard Music Center for a double-header with two legendary performances. Ms. McDonald brings her luminous voice and dramatic incisiveness to two programs of beloved Broadway classics, as she presents popular standards and lesser-known treasures in both the intimate setting of Parker Concert Hall, and with full orchestra on the big stage at Whittington-Pfohl Auditorium. Ms. McDonald's appearance is made possible by Legendary Artist Series Sponsors – Drs. Joanne and Tom Parker and The Robinson-Hill Humanitarian Fund.

Both performances will be directed by conductor and pianist, **Andy Einhorn**. On July 26, Ms. McDonald and Mr. Einhorn will be joined by the musicians of the **Brevard Music Center Orchestra**, as well as **Jeremy Jordan (piano)**, **Gene Lewin (drums)**, and **Mark Vanderpoel (bass)**.

Ms. McDonald's July 25th concert at Parker Concert Hall is currently sold-out. Tickets to the July 26th concert at 7:30 PM at Whittington-Pfohl Auditorium are still available and can be reserved online at brevardmusic.org/tickets or by calling the BMC Box Office at **828-862-2105**.

The following Audra McDonald Q&A from an interview with BroadwayShowBiz.com is available for reprint:

Q. When you are home listening to music, who do you listen to?

Audra McDonald: *It's pretty eclectic here, some of the music that's playing. We listen to all different styles of music. Some of the music that we're listening to a lot lately has been... We've been listening to Lizzo, we've been listening to Roberta Flack, we've been listening to Martin Sexton. Dolly Parton is another one that plays a lot right now. Deb Talan, who was once a part of the group called Weepies. There's been a lot of Deb Talan.*

Q. Is there a song you remember ever in your life having put on repeat?

AM: *There's two. There's two I can think of. One is "Got to Get You into My Life," the Earth, Wind & Fire version, because you have to be happy after you hear that song. You cannot not be happy after you hear that song. So that's one. Another one that I had on repeat a lot was "Just the Two of Us," Bill Withers and Grover Washington Jr.*

Q. Can you give us a preview of your concert? Any themes or composers you plan to highlight?

AM: *I will be singing songs from the Great American Musical Theater Songbook. I'll be highlighting composers such as Duke Ellington, Charlie Smalls, Stephen Sondheim, Joe Raposo, Jule Styne.*

Q. Who are some of the female jazz singers who served as an inspiration or an influence and why?

AM: *I would say Sarah Vaughn is someone who has influenced me greatly because she was so versatile. And her voice, she could have been an opera singer if she wanted to, but I think most people would classify her as a jazz singer. She sang songs from the Great American Songbook. The versatility in her voice and the story she was able to tell and the color in her voice, and the fact that it was a large voice that could go all the way up into the stratosphere. She could sing super big, operatic high notes, but then she had the versatility to move it and scat with it. The agility that the voice had and the incredible soul that she had that she brought to whatever style of music that she was singing is something that absolutely inspires me and just continues to inspire me.*

The other female jazz singer that has been an inspiration to me is Shirley Horn, because not only is she an incredible interpreter of song, but she's an incredible jazz pianist as well. There's no one like Shirley when it comes to the economy with which she uses her voice. She, at the same time, has the incredible brilliance and the harmonic language that she has in the piano. The way she pays attention to the lyric is breathtaking to me. So those are the two.

Q. How difficult was it to adjust your singing style to fit Billie Holiday in Lady Day at Emerson's Bar & Grill? What was the biggest challenge and which among Holiday's songs are your favorites?

AM: *It was a big challenge trying to find Billie Holiday's voice. That then all of a sudden, after months of trying to figure it out, became an aha moment when I realized that she sounded a lot like my grandmother. I used to imitate my grandmother to my grandmother when I was little because I thought it was funny. Once I figured that out, that Billie Holiday sounds a lot like my grandmother, then all of a sudden, portraying Billie's voice became an easy thing for me, because it turns out I had been doing it my entire life, but not realizing it because I was just being my nana. So that's the answer to how difficult it was.*

But doing that every night on stage was difficult just because to keep up the stamina of singing in a voice that is not naturally your own, that can be a difficult thing muscularly. I still had to continue to warm up and take voice lessons with my own voice so that it would be healthy enough to approximate the Billie Holiday sound night after night.

My favorite Billie Holiday songs of hers that she sings are What a Little Moonlight Can Do. I love the way she plays with the lyrics. Each of the recordings of her singing it is slightly different. But the rhythm of that and the way she swings so hard on that song, the way she swings with that is just brilliant. And the joy in that is brilliant and don't explain the pain and the resolution in that lyric. And that's her lyric. That hits me really hard. So those are the two.

Q. I read that you sang "In My Solitude" as a tribute to Duke Ellington in a performance at the London Palladium. What does Duke Ellington mean to you?

AM: *I did the tribute to Duke Ellington because I think he's an icon and incredible. What he did for Black artists, not only in jazz, but to bring it to a wider, W-I-D-E-R, audience was immeasurable and moved the needle for forever.*

Q: Many musicians have told me that when performing an instrumental version of the standard by someone such as Gershwin or Cole Porter, it's important for them to know the lyrics. Could you comment on that?

AM: Well, when you're interpreting a song, you want to know where the song came from or why it exists. Lyrics are very important to that. You want to know what the song is about. If you're singing, even if you were to change the tempo the way you would sing something like Don't Explain, you got to know that that song is born out of a really dark place. If you want to turn it on its head, that's fine, but you have to know the origin of which you are interpreting. I think it's the utmost importance as an artist. And then however you choose to interpret it is how you choose to interpret it. But without the knowledge of where the song came from or what it's about or what the composer intended, even if you choose not to do what the composer intended, it's important to know the history.

BMC TICKET INFORMATION

Individual tickets for all 2023 BMC Summer Festival performances are available for purchase at **brevardmusic.org/tickets or by calling 828.862.2105**. The Box Office at Whittington-Pfohl Auditorium – on the Brevard Music Center Campus at 349 Andante Lane – is open from Monday through Saturday, 10:00 AM to Intermission and also Sundays from 12:00 PM to Intermission.

Children and Student Tickets*: Tickets are available for children ages 6-17 for \$15. Children under 6 are not permitted inside Whittington-Pfohl Auditorium. Students 18 and older receive a 50% discount for tickets inside Whittington-Pfohl Auditorium. Children (17 and under) and students (18 and over) can sit on the lawn free of charge* with a paying adult. *Does not apply for BMC Headliner events — Opening Night, Season Finale, BMC Presents, Legendary Artist Series.

ABOUT BREVARD MUSIC CENTER | SUMMER INSTITUTE & FESTIVAL

Founded in 1936, the Brevard Music Center stands as one of this country's premier summer classical music training programs and festivals. Each summer, over 700 gifted students come to the Music Center from across the United States and around the world to study with a distinguished faculty and renowned guest artists. Brevard's hallmark is the powerful sense of community that re-emerges each year as faculty and students present inspiring concerts and events to summer audiences. For more information, visit brevardmusic.org, "like" the Brevard Music Center on [Facebook](#), follow [@brevardmusic](#) on [Instagram](#), stream season highlights via [SoundCloud](#), and visit the Brevard Music Center [YouTube](#) channel to enjoy performances from previous festival seasons.

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