

## CONCERT | PREVIEW

# Two for the show

## A former Broadway star and a chanteuse team up to make magic

BY JAMES D. WATTS JR.

World Scene Writer

Even now, Rebecca Ungerman and John Sawyer can surprise themselves with the way they sound.

"We both have such different voice types, and such different styles," Ungerman said. "John's got all the formal training. He's sung on Broadway and has done all this wonderful stuff. Me — I'm a saloon singer."

"But we have this amazing blend when we sing," Sawyer said. "It amazed us sometimes, at how good we sound together."

The first time these two performers worked together was in 2004, when Sawyer joined Ungerman for one number in her cabaret show, "Indulge Me."

"Ever since then, we've been talking about doing a show together, just the two of us," Ungerman said. "And we finally got to the point where we realized if we're going to do it, then we should do it ourselves."

So, the two came up with "An Evening With Rebecca Ungerman and John Sawyer," which will be presented Saturday at the Tulsa Performing Arts Center.

"We wanted this to be special, so we decided we would do music that we have a strong personal connection to," Sawyer said. "These are songs that influenced our styles and colored our careers from the beginning."

This means everything from Cole Porter to Jim Croce, from Puccini's "Nessun dorma" to Dolly Parton's "Here You Come Again."

These last two songs are ones Sawyer plans to sing.

"I'm also doing 'Evergreen,' " he said, the Barbra Streisand song from "A Star Is Born." "I've never heard of a man singing that song. Come to think of it, I've never heard of anyone other than Barbra Streisand singing that song."

"It's like a cabaret show, but without the story," Ungerman said. "It's more like snapshots from the journeys that have brought us here. And it's fun to do things that are really outside the box we often work in."

Ungerman and Sawyer will divide the first half of the evening between solo songs, and devote the rest of the evening to duets.

"We started out with something like 60 songs we wanted to do," Sawyer said. "And it took us a lot of time to

whittle it down to about 30."

The two will be accompanied by a four-piece combo of some of Tulsa's finest: Frank Brown, who is the show's music director, on guitar; keyboardist Pat Murray; bassist Jim Bates and drummer Wade Robertson.

"Hank Charles, who's doing our sound, will probably sit in on a couple of songs," Ungerman said. "And these guys are so wonderful. The first rehearsal with the band was . . ."

Her voice trailed off, then a big smile, she said, "Heaven!"

Jack Wallace, who is directing the show, said he sees this evening as a tribute to the singers' shared hometown.

"We're going all out to put on a show that looks and sounds great, because it's important that people see these two and what they've accomplished in the best way possible," Wallace said. "John grew up in Tulsa, then went away to New York and had a lot of success there, and now has come back.

"Rebecca, on the other hand, has lived in Tulsa almost all her life," he said. "She's worked all over the country, but she always comes back home. In that way, this show is kind of a tribute to Tulsa."

Sawyer, whose career includes creating roles in the Broadway productions of "The Civil War" by Frank Wildhorn ("Jekyll & Hyde") and Andrew Lloyd Webber's "Whistle Down the Wind," said he made the decision to return to Tulsa in 2001.

"I was on my way to the West Coast when Sept. 11 happened," he said. "I had thought I was just passing through Tulsa on my way to the West Coast, but it was like the universe said, 'This is where you belong.' So I kind of planted myself here, and now I feel I really am home."

Because Sawyer is a member of Actors Equity, stage work in Tulsa is hard to come by. He was in Theatre Arts' acclaimed production of "Camelot" in 2005, and has performed in concert settings, such as "Listen to My Heart," a revue of songs by David Friedman.

He, Wallace and Ungerman all teach at Theatre Arts. "One of the nice things about doing this show," Ungerman said, "is that our students will get the chance to see us do what we've been trying to teach them."

And it's likely that this won't be the only chance to see Ungerman and Sawyer perform together. To help advertise the show, they had about 100 post-

ers printed up and distributed around the city. One of those posters caught the attention of the people in charge of the Eureka Springs Jazz Festival, who offered the duo the headline spot for this year's event, March 25.

Sawyer also will perform March 30 in Oklahoma City in a tribute concert to Florence Birdwell, the legendary voice teacher at Oklahoma City University. Among her students are Sawyer, Tony Award winner Kristin Chenoweth, Tony nominee Kelly O'Hara and former Miss America Susan Powell.

"Miss Birdwell is also coming to our concert," Sawyer said.

"And I'm petrified," Ungerman said, laughing.

### AN EVENING WITH REBECCA UNGERMAN AND JOHN SAWYER

**When:** 8 p.m. Saturday

**Where:** Williams Theater, Tulsa Performing

Arts Center, Second Street and Cincinnati

Avenue

**Rebecca Ungerman  
and John Sawyer.**

Courtesy

