Balloon fest concerts to offer mix of genres

New country artists, jazz, rock will be on Freedom Weekend program

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Advance tickets hit stores Thursday for this year's Greenville Hospital System Freedom Weekend Aloft festival to be held Memorial Day weekend at Heritage Park in Simpsonville.

With each $5 ticket, visitors attending the hot air balloon and concert festival can grab a seat inside the Heritage Park Amphitheater to hear a variety of artists.

Independent artist Corey Smith will kick off the concert schedule at 9 p.m. Friday, May 28, returning for a second straight year to the stage where he was well-received last year.

"It truly is a 'back by popular demand' because we saw probably one of the largest concert crowds we've certainly had in the history of our years in Simpsonville," said Keri Hall, FWA executive director.

Concerts the following night feature new country music husband-wife duo Joey+Rory and singer-songwriter Luke Bryan, who each have been nominated as top new country artists at this weekend's Academy of Country Music Awards in Las Vegas.

Joey+Rory will play at 7:30 p.m. May 29 and Bryan will take the stage following them.

"Last year we didn't have country, so to have that genre and to have such exciting country talent is definitely a huge plus," Hall said.

Three performers will play shows on Sunday, May 30, to showcase a diverse mix of music offered at the festival, Hall said.

Jazz, blues and classic rock singer and instrumentalist Edgar Winter will play at about 4:30 p.m. just before that day's evening hot-air balloon launch. Reggae band The Wailers, Bob Marley's former band, will play at 7:30 p.m. followed by blues band Blues Traveler.

Tickets to amphitheater concerts are included in the regular gate admission. Advance discounted tickets went on sale today at area Bi-Lo stores for $5 per person through the end of April. Advance tickets will cost $7.50 each from May 1-May 27 and $10 each during the festival weekend. Children under 12 are free.

FWA will be held May 28-May 31 and brings about 80 hot-air balloonists to Simpsonville from across the country along with a variety of rides, vendors, competitions and healthy events.

The U.S. Navy Fleet Forces band and Navy Rock Band will return for a second year on Monday, May 31, during Bi-Lo Day, which will once again offer free admission to the festival. Parking costs $5.

More artists for amphitheater concerts will be announced soon, Hall said.

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