

BY JASON EVANS
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WALHALLA — Tickets are going fast for a group that pays homage to the Fab Four.

The Return: A Tribute to the Beatles is scheduled for 7:30 p.m. Saturday at the Walhalla Performing Arts Center, and those who want to see it live ought to act quick.

"It's always been a big sellout, a packed house for us," WPAC business manager Mark Thompson said.

The Return has been paying tribute to the Beatles for more than 20 years. They began playing Beatles songs "just for the fun of it," according to their biography.

What was supposed to be a one-time gig led to the creation of the band, which was originally called the Roaches — another nod to the British invasion greats.

As the band became more polished, they began

striving for "the highest level of authenticity possible," the biography said.

That authenticity extends to small details, such as band member Richard Stelling chewing gum on stage, just as John Lennon did, to bigger ones, such as using exact replicas of the instruments and gear the Beatles used during the early 1960s.

The band has put in a lot of work over the years getting the look and moves of the Beatles down pat.

Thompson said The Return has played Walhalla many times over the past 15 years.

As of Tuesday afternoon, there were about 15 pairs of tickets available for the band's show, as well as 10-15 single tickets, Thompson said.

Concert attendees will "kind of get two concerts in one," he said.

"They'll do different sets," Thompson said.

"They'll come out in the '60s-style suits, the original look. Then they'll

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come back as the later-era Beatles."

The band "puts on a tremendous show," Thompson said.

"They are great guys, great to work with," he said. "They've got a great, great following."

The show will run about two hours with inter-

mission, Thompson said, noting the band attracts music appreciators of all ages.

"We'll have 25-year-olds there and we'll have 85-year-olds there," he said. "It'll hit the whole gamut. The music of the Beatles never seems to go out of style."

With the replicated outfits and details, Thompson said the shows have a bit of a historical re-enactment element to them.

"That's rock 'n' roll history," he said. "My 19-year-old son loves them."

The WPAC offers a terrific show "at a great, affordable price," Thompson said.

"We don't have a bad seat in our house," he said. "We've got that great new sound system in here."

The Return did a multi-show run at the Greenville Little Theatre last year.

"They had an incredible turnout," Thompson said.

With a few more shows planned for the season, the final dates for the center's season are coming together. Thompson said upcoming shows include three members of the Grand Ole Opry.

Larry Gatlin will bring his solo acoustic show to Walhalla July 28, John Barry will perform Aug. 25 and John Conlee will take the stage on Sept. 28.

"He's about sold out," Thompson said of Conlee.

Comedian James Gregory will return to the Upstate to perform a benefit show for the Shriners Hospitals for Children on Aug. 3.

Black Jacket Symphony, a popular request after its show this season, will return to Walhalla on Aug. 18. That show will focus on the Led Zeppelin album "Led Zeppelin IV."

"That show is already two-thirds of the way sold out," Thompson said.

Other shows later this year include Edwin McCain on Oct. 19, Rhonda Vincent on Nov. 10 and Guy Penrod, who'll bring his "Christmas and More" show to Walhalla on Dec. 8.

For ticket information, visit walhallapac.com or call (864) 638-2877.

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Walhalla