

ARTS

Opera meets rock and roll this weekend in Springfield

The Ozarks Lyric Opera is holding its 'Opera Rocks' show on Saturday night at the Gillioz Theatre



by Mary Ellen Chiles
March 18, 2025



Sean Spyres performs at a previous Opera Rocks, presented by Ozarks Lyric Opera. (Photo by Mary Ellen Chiles)

Once a year, the Ozarks Lyric Opera (or OLO) teams up with local musicians and presents a night of classic pop, rock, and soul-inspired covers with a little extra vibrato.

This year, the 10-piece band M-Dock will add guitars, vocals, and a lot of horns, which means crowd-pleasers like Chicago and Wilson Pickett might see extra downloads after the evening.

Michael Spyres and Tara Stafford-Spyres add sweetness to the sound, and Michael's sister Erica – in town from New York City – brings a Broadway spin. Sean Spyres channels his inner 70s rock god, while special guest Dr. Richard Todd Payne adds considerable soul.

Limited tickets remain for Opera Rocks, which is on Saturday, March 22, 2025, at the Gillioz Theatre in downtown Springfield. Doors open at 6:30 p.m., and the show starts at 7:30 p.m. Free valet parking is available.

Father and son guest on guitar



George Timson gears up for a solo during an Opera Rocks rehearsal on March 12 in Springfield. (Photo by Mary Ellen Chiles)

But there's more.

Jon Timson and his son, George, work together at **SignalPoint Asset Management**, which has long supported the opera. Susan Belcher serves as secretary of OLO, and she knew the Timsons' noodle on the guitar. She asked if they'd like to play at Opera Rocks.

"Susan just suggested it, like, 'Hey, wouldn't this be fun?'" Jon Timson said.

Luckily, M-Dock and the Timsons have similar taste in music and quickly picked a favorite to play on Saturday.

Jon Timson will add rhythm on his Paul Reed Smith electric guitar. He's likely to take the lead among a few friends on a back patio, he said, but he wants to stay in the background at the Gillioz.

“I’m not a serious musician,” Jon Timson said. “I love it, but I’m a hobbyist, so I’ll let these guys do their thing.”

His son George, though, will split a solo with M-Dock’s Brent Hendrix. They rehearsed it recently, but it may sound different at Opera Rocks, as jams are wont to do.

“It’s cool because everybody will have a chance to improvise a little bit,” George Timson said. “That’s part of the fun of it; not having to play it the exact same way every single time.”

License to rock



Brent Hendrix said his vintage Fender Falcon is his favorite guitar – “for now” – at an Opera Rocks rehearsal on March 12 in Springfield. (Photo by Mary Ellen Chiles)

Hendrix started playing guitar around age 15 and has been with M-Dock for 30 of its 33 years. Years ago, the group decided to mix up the sound.

“We were doing our own New Year’s Eve show one year, and we decided that we wanted some horns,” Hendrix said.

He took a hand off his vintage Fender Falcon and waved at the gathering musicians tuning up a at recent rehearsal in Springfield.

“We asked Steve Quinn over there – he’s an oral surgeon – to play sax, and he goes, ‘Well, I know a couple of guys, a trumpet player and a trombone player. They can play, too.’”

M-Dock started adding horns to some of their songs at the Bearded Clam down in Kimberling City. They played in Japan and Mexico, and at the classic Springfield Fourth of July party Firefall for years.

The band used to play 25-30 shows a year, but, as it happens, people got older. They've got five gigs on the docket so far, but Saturday marks the second of 2025.

The whole band just played a benefit in Zihuatanejo, Mexico, raising money to help educate local kids.

A few years ago, lead singer Howard Cotner got to talking with Tara Stafford-Spyres's dad, Keith, about creating a show with a little extra punch.

“(Cotner) told us one day that we were going to do this opera thing with the opera singers, and it sounded like it was going to be a fun deal,” Hendrix said.

They play a little differently during Opera Rocks, Hendrix said, but drumming remains consistent, which is sort of the point of the instrument.

M-Dock drummer Scott Griggs doesn't read sheet music, but no matter:

“Music's music,” Griggs said. “I play it by ear and feel.”

‘Opera chose me’



Richard Todd Payne (left) rehearses vocals with Sean Spyres while Brent Hendrix accompanies on guitar at an Opera Rocks rehearsal on March 12 in Springfield. (Photo by Mary Ellen Chiles)

Dr. Richard Todd Payne will sing a handful of songs, and they’ll be the ones you end up humming afterward. Payne teaches music at Missouri State and has performed in numerous operas, including with OLO. But as a young man he patterned his voice after a different kind of industry giant: Luther Vandross.

“That’s the man who made me want to sing,” Payne said.

It started by accident, so to speak. After losing BB gun privileges after shooting out a neighbor’s window, young Payne sat down one night and watched Soul Train.

“This guy twice my size came out, and he stood in front of a mic, and he started singing,” Payne said. “And yeah, I saw the ladies just look up there and I thought, ‘Oh, I can do that.’”

From then on, Payne stuck an oval-shaped hairbrush on the top of a bedpost and pretended it was a microphone.

“Just like Luther, I would stand in front of it and just sing, and just sing,” he said.

Payne wanted to study studio live performance, but the department head at then-Memphis State (now the University of Memphis) suggested opera.

Years later a reporter asked him why. Payne typically credited a professor or singer in response, but that night he changed his answer.

“After many years and having some maturity, I just simply said to (the reporter): ‘I didn’t choose opera; opera chose me, and it’s just another feather in my hat,’” Payne said.

He made his Lincoln Center debut in 2018. But one of his most treasured local shows was with the then-Springfield Regional Opera in 2021, when he played the role of Louis Armstrong in “The Real Ambassadors.” After the curtain call, he sang one more song.

“With Sean and Michael’s permission, they allowed me to sing Louis Armstrong’s ‘What a Wonderful World’ to the audience,” Payne said. “And it went well.”

Meet Michael in St. Louis



Michael Spyres performs a song from Pagliacci in March 2022. (Photo by Dean Curtis)

Michael Spyres, creative director of OLO, has been performing abroad, per usual. He typically spends 8-9 months per year singing elsewhere.

He recently starred as Bacchus in Richard Strauss’s “Ariadne auf Naxos” in Vienna. Earlier this month, he joined mezzo-soprano Marie-Nicole Lemieux to perform pieces by Donizetti and Berlioz under the direction of Carlo Rizzi.

Soon he will be back in Vienna for the Philharmonic’s 125th jubilee, then he’ll play the title role in Handel’s Jephtha (alongside mezzo-soprano Joyce DiDonato) in six countries. This summer, he returns to the Bayreuth Wagner Festival

in Germany to star in “Die Meistersinger von Nuremberg” and “Die Walkure.”

But first, meet him in St. Louis.

[Spyres performs Debussy and Liszt with the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra on March 28 and 30. Click here for more information on a chance to grab brunch with Spyres in St. Louis.](#)



Mary Ellen Chiles

Mary Ellen Chiles is a freelance photographer and writer based in the Ozarks. She graduated from Missouri State University with a bachelor’s in creative writing and a master’s in English, Creative Nonfiction Writing. **[More by](#)**

[Mary Ellen Chiles](#)

