

# Strumming home

Eau Claire native to open Phil Vassar show Sunday at The State Theatre

By KATY MACEK

Leader-Telegram staff

**E**au Claire native Jim Hoehn will be the first to say he's not the best singer, and he's not the best guitarist.

What he really loves to do is write, and telling his stories comes out, in one form, as music.

Since he won a songwriting contest and made his first public appearance at Milwaukee's Summerfest in the early 1990s, Hoehn has been fortunate to open performances for American songwriters such as Rodney Crowell, Jerry Jeff Walker, Don Williams, Mac McAnally and many others through the years.

"If I'm on stage with a guitar, it's the only way I have of getting my writing across," Hoehn, currently living in Seattle, said. "People seem to like them, and it gets me out of the house."

On Sunday, he'll be returning to Eau Claire to open for country music singer Phil Vassar, whom Hoehn has had the pleasure of opening for in the past.

Hoehn describes his own writing as Americana folk music, which fits Vassar's deep country roots.

He has released four records and one greatest hits album.

He expects he'll play several of his original songs, some of which touch on topics an Eau Claire audience will recognize, such as a song about a local rock band that formed in the 1960s called The Thundermen, of which his oldest cousin was the original lead guitarist.

That local connection is still what he enjoys most and why he's looking forward to playing at The State once more.

"Whenever I have played at The State Theatre, there has not been a time where I have not known 10 to 12 people in the audience," he said. "They'll come up and ask questions. When you get a response to your writing, it's kind of fulfilling."

He describes his music as "a really fun part-time job." He has several new songs in the works and is hoping to put out at least one more album.

In the meantime, though, he stays busy. Hoehn is a journalist by trade, currently working in the Seattle Times newsroom as a web editor.

He also is a freelance sports writer, mostly covering professional and major college sports. When he travels to perform for his music, he said he often contacts media to see if he can slip in covering a game in whatever city he's playing in.

"I work hard, do the best I can and ultimately just enjoy writing," Hoehn said. "I like being busy and writing is something I can do well."

For him, it's all about the experience. And songwriting has led him to work with "brilliant writers" such as Vassar, he said.



Contributed photo

Jim Hoehn, an Eau Claire native, will return to open Phil Vassar's concert at 7:30 p.m. Sunday at The State Theatre, 316 Eau Claire St.

## If You Go

**What:** Jim Hoehn opening for Phil Vassar.

**When:** 7:30 p.m. Sunday.

**Where:** The State Theatre, 316 Eau Claire St.

**Cost:** \$30 or \$35.

**Information:** 715-833-2787 or eauclairearts.com.

doors as a writer.

"You're hanging out with some of the best writers on the planet, which is a learning experience," he said. "You just try to soak it up."

When opening a show, Hoehn said he is really there to get the audience excited for the headliner, which is his plan for Sunday. And he thinks there's plenty to be excited about.

Vassar released his ninth album "American Soul" in 2016, which had been his first release in seven years.

According to his website, the

album illustrates his growth as an artist.

Prior to "American Soul," Vassar is the artist responsible for hits such as "Just Another Day in Paradise," "American Child," "Carlene" and "In A Real Love." He has won ASCAP Songwriter of the Year twice as well as Billboard Country Songwriter of the Year.

Catch Hoehn and Vassar at 7:30 p.m. Sunday at The State Theatre, 316 Eau Claire St.

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## CUES FROM KATY

**Editor's note:** Cues From Katy is a list of events entertainment reporter Katy Macek thinks are worth checking out this weekend.

**1. A videoconference with author Carmen Maria Machado** (7 p.m. Sunday at The Oxbow Hotel, 516 Galloway St.): How often do you get the chance to talk with a National Book Award Finalist author alongside other passionate writers and readers?

Not often. Thanks to independent bookseller Dotters Books, everyone is welcome to attend this videoconference with Machado, author of "Her Body and Other Parties," which is Dotters Book Club's February read.

**2. ArtFly's "Touch Me Baby"** (5 to 9 p.m. Saturday in downtown Eau Claire.): If you haven't yet been to an ArtFly pop up (this is the third), this is a must for a quiet weekend in February. ArtFly shows are held at random in various locations and feature around 10 local and regional artists with work related to a different theme.

This one promises all manner of "touchable, wearable, audible, rideable or play-with-able" artwork, which is enough to pique interest.

To add to the excitement, the location of the show won't be announced until Saturday, either on the gallery's Facebook page or you can send "ARTFLY" to artflygallery@gmail.com to receive an exclusive invitation the day of the event.

**3. UW-Madison's Varsity Band** (7:30 p.m. Friday at The State Theatre, 316 Eau Claire St. \$15, eauclairearts.com.): Put on your Bucky Badger gear and head to The State Theatre Friday night for an energetic show featuring some of the state's most talented musicians.

There's nothing like the full sound of a band, and if you weren't able to get to Madison to enjoy them this year, take advantage of the band coming to you.

**4. Leinenkugel's Summer Shandy Release** (5 to 8 p.m. Friday at the Leinie Lodge, 124 E. Elm St.): In the midst of yet another snowfall, hearing Leinenkugel's is set to release my favorite (and its most popular) seasonal beer THIS WEEK was exactly the sliver of hope I