

ARTPARK: Discover what goes into staging events enjoyed by 100,000+ each summer



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Concerts are a Production

Inasmuch as Artpark & Company has diversified its offerings since President Sonia Kozlova Clark took the helm in 2015, concerts are still the main draw. The award-winning stages have welcomed everyone from Styx to Lynyrd Skynyrd, Steven Tyler to Lindsey Stirling, “Weird Al”

Yankovic to Mt. Joy. “There’s a lot that goes into it before the band shows up on the day of the concert,” carpenter and steward Jack Wrobel said the night of the BNL concert. Taking a moment to chat as one of the largest events of the season (7,000-plus tickets sold) was underway, the 48-year team member said, “What goes into it for us the

day of the concert is the trucks roll in. It could be from one truck, it could be a bus with a trailer on the back of it, full of equipment. It could be up to three or four trucks sometimes; and the crew is appropriately sized, per the requirements from the road crew and their whole production team. They figure out how much local help they need. That will add to the people that travel with them, the roadies that travel with them.

“So, eight o’clock in the morning, usually, the trucks roll up, and we start going. And it’s physical work; it’s pushing and lifting and carrying. It’s a pretty tough job. I mean, right now, what is it six o’clock, and the first band just started playing; and we’ve been here since eight o’clock this morning. We get compensated, there’s no question about that; but it becomes a long day, definitely.”

Not even slightly intimidated by that particular week’s calendar, head electrician Tim Wrobel said, “It doesn’t really make a difference. We’re here to do the job. We come in, we do the job, and it doesn’t matter if it’s one, two, three, four. We do what we have to do.”

He should know, having worked

at Artpark for 42 years and counting.

Among their many duties, the Wrobel, members of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, Local 121, oversee onstage activity before and after concerts.

“What makes it work is everybody,” Jack Wrobel said. “You know, we do have new people but, quite often, people move on. People take this as a part-time job, college students from the Niagara University Theatre Department, from the NCCC Theatre Department. And we also work with people from Erie County.

“People pretty much know; they have a feeling what has to be done. You’ve got to work safely, first of all. You’ve got to work efficiently, economically. All that fits into it. But the big thing is keeping an eye out. Just having an awareness of what’s going on around you; and jumping in when somebody needs a hand. You know, it takes four guys to pick a piece up, or a road box up, a piece of scenery, whatever it is, and there’s three guys on it, and you know that, ‘Oh, they need four guys.’ So, we’ll have people that will jump in.

“It’s playing on the team. I guess that’s what it is. I’ve been doing this for a long time, and I try and instill in people to pay attention and help out, jump in where you can – it’s going to make the day go smoother.

“Having a good attitude, too. We get some road crews in here and, right off the bat, they start (complaining). They might’ve had a bad night in Pittsburgh, or maybe they were 500 miles away. And so, you’re always dealing with different personalities at dif-

ferent levels of happiness or unhappiness. But, again, most of the road crews that come through are also professionals.

“We all have the same goal, man. Curtain is at eight o’clock, or six o’clock, whatever it is, and the show has to be up and running. Everybody works towards that goal.”

Production Manager Susan Stimson is responsible for the artists arriving at the Village of Lewiston venue, ensuring performers have what they need to do their job, and making sure those musicians leave with a positive experience.

Rock stars – celebrities, in particular – come with riders (items they “request” to be on hand when they arrive), as well as careful handlers who ensure their headliners are treated like royalty.

Though this could be a daunting task, Stimson and her team of 20-30 workers have backstage down to a science – even when asked to navigate 18-hour days and late-night, post-concert pizza runs.

“No. 1, because we’ve done it for years, we’re all trained and skilled,” Stimson said. “A lot of people have actually gone to school for it, to a degree. So, we’re already at a level where we can do things really fast and pivot really fast and be flexible.

“The benefit of this, like any event, is that there are probably five to 10 bullet points that you have that you check off. We do what we call an advance with the tour. We have a phone call, many times a Zoom, and you go through and you look through your questions, they look through their

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