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# Interview: Post-pandemic, heart surgery & bike wreck, Amy Grant is cherishing life

Returns to Riviera Theatre on Wednesday

BY JOSHUA MALONI  
GM/Managing Editor

It's been an eventful decade for Amy Grant.

A few months after performing at the Riviera Theatre in North Tonawanda – early into the pandemic – the acclaimed Christian/pop singer had open-heart surgery. Just as she was fully recovered and the world was reopening, a bike accident led to additional surgeries and more time off the road.

The news isn't all bad, though, as the 2020s have also brought Grant three record rereleases – “Un-guarded,” 35th anniversary; “Heart in Motion,” 30th anniversary; and “Behind the Eyes,” 25th anniversary; two significant honors: induction into the Nashville Songwriters Hall of Fame and a Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts honor; inclusion in one major motion picture, “The Jesus Music”; and, more recently, new songs “Trees We'll Never See” and “What You Heard”; plus an 18-song project, “Lead Me On Live 1989.”

One week before a Sept. 20 return concert at the Riviera Theatre, Grant said, “I feel great. I quit drinking after the bike wreck (laughs). I needed to give my brain a few years to totally iron out the issues. But yeah, I feel great.”

She explained, “This sounds crazy, but everything that has happened, including COVID, open-heart surgery, the bike wreck and the two surgeries that I had to have because of the bike wreck, there have been so many hidden gifts – and I just feel so much gratitude and energy.”

“And part of me, I just feel like – I don't know how to say this – but like an older-model car that was running just fine, but kind of hanging in there. And I feel like all of those unexpected changes were like being taken to a detail shop and having all the rust ground off, and then a fresh paint job, and coming out going ... ‘Hey, I feel differently about myself, about the music I've made, about just going, ‘Hey, let's just celebrate that we made it this far.’”

“I hope I still make music. I was thinking of a song idea this morning. It just felt like I've had the chance to take a deep breath and



Amy Grant returns to the Riviera Theater for a 7:30 p.m. concert on Wednesday, Sept. 20. (Image courtesy of the media collective)

high five a lot of people who've made this journey with me.”

On Grant's website and in each of the press releases sent on her behalf, there is a section that states, “Conventional wisdom has it that Grant put contemporary Christian music on the map becoming the first contemporary Christian artist to have a Platinum record (‘Age to Age’), the first to hit No. 1 on the pop charts (‘Baby Baby’), and the first to perform at the Grammy Awards. With that, her legacy as one of the most influential artists of the past four decades is assured.”

In speaking with Grant, though, it's clear that sales numbers, awards and status mean little in the grand scheme of things.

“I got a call from this man whose sister is a successful songwriter. ... He called and he said, ‘I have glioblastoma.’ ... He said, ‘I've just lived through so much; I know I've got a purpose bigger than this glioblastoma.’ And I just said, ‘All of us, maybe our purpose is just to connect in the day’” Grant said.

“Every day that is a big purpose for all of us. So many things in nature are connecting every day. The compassion of elephants. The hidden life of trees. But we humans, whoo! We are all about dividing lines and, ‘What jersey are you wearing?’ It's like, ‘Oh,

my gosh!’ We have the greatest capacity for connection of anything on the planet, and we just keep abdicating our role – that superpower – by focusing on the wrong stuff. ...

“It's so much deeper than all the issues. It is such a deep connectedness of all of us, beyond belief systems, beyond political leanings, all those things; our capacity to be there for each other is a superpower. And divine. And a lot of things. And every day we have the choice of stepping into it or removing ourselves.

“It doesn't take a bank account. It just takes being present.”

At the Riv, there's a good chance fans will hear Grant's new music; hit songs including “Baby Baby,” “Every Heartbeat,” “That's What Love Is For,” “Good For Me” and “I Will Remember You”; and maybe a surprise or two.

Four years ago, one unexpected delight was Grant tackling the vocally challenging “Galileo,” a deeper cut on “Heart in Motion.”

“Well, it's several decades of music, and I try to be brave enough to tackle anything that comes to me,” Grant said of her live show. “I included ‘Galileo’ because somebody shouted it out. I mean, dear God, I hope nobody shouts out something terrifying like that song (laughs)!”

“But, because of the release of this recording that I have from 1989 – forgotten for years – I've added ‘Lead Me On’ to the set. Another song from that record called ‘All Right.’”

“And then another new song that I just put out on social media called ‘Say It With A Kiss.’ I've added that. ...

“I don't know what the setlist is going to be like – and it's actually the first night of the tour. And so, I think we'll just find our way through it.”

“I've loved touring in this stretch of life. I feel so grateful to the audience who would come and buy a ticket, which actually enables me to continue doing something I love.”

“I'm just kind of always picking songs off the carousel from the past, and also trying to include one or two new things.”

## Youngstown Presbyterian Church presents free play performances for its bicentennial

Free ice cream social after shows

Youngstown First Presbyterian Church invites the community to “We Gather Together,” a one-act play with music that features the church's 200-year history in under one hour. Free performances will happen at 7 p.m. Friday and Saturday, Sept. 29-30, at 100 Church St., Youngstown. It will be followed by free, old-time ice cream socials.

“We Gather Together” is narrated by actors portraying two founders of the church from 1823:

Judge Ashbel Hinman and Rev. Ebenezer Everett. The 20-member cast introduces many of the people who played a part in the growth of the church, with references to village and world events that influenced the church's growth. The story is accompanied by hymns and music that represent different time periods. Images of the church and village will also be shared on screens during the performances.

The play was written by church members Claudia Andres and

Dr. Jerry Andres of Youngstown. Dr. Andres is a local physician, musician and history buff who drafted the play based on his research of the church and village history. Claudia Andres, who is a school music educator, local musician and lifelong member of the church, took the draft and edited it, adding stage direction and music. This is their third play together. Jean Siddall and Mark Miller assisted the Andres by gathering information and photos to support the storyline and production.