

Good Times

 **The Bristol Observer**

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Our Night on the Town

After long career in music, Sedaka's busy, busy, busy

By MIKE CHAIKEN
EDITIONS EDITOR

No one can accuse pop singer Neil Sedaka of taking it easy.

The singer-songwriter who gave the world such hits as "Calendar Girl," "Breaking Up Is Hard To Do," "Love Will Keep Us Together," and "Laughing in the Rain" would give artists half his age a run for the money.

Sedaka comes to Connecticut this March when he plays the MGM Grand at Foxwoods.

Speaking from his home in New York City, Sedaka said he has "four very exciting projects" in the works.

First of all, Sedaka said he is working on his second children's book. Secondly, he is working on a musical of his life, which is moving into the West End of London after making the rounds in regional theaters in the U.K. Thirdly, the trained classical pianist is expanding beyond the pop music universe by composing symphonies.

Additionally, he is getting ready to release a new "unplugged" album.

Finally, he is coming to Connecticut to perform for fans.

Phew.

The children's book, "Dinosaur Pet," is inspired by his grandchildren, Sedaka explained. It's a story about a little boy who opens an egg and finds a dinosaur inside. The dinosaur grows and grows, and eventually eats the family out of house and home.

Sedaka said the book includes a three-song CD, featuring a take on Sedaka's big hit, "Calendar Girl." For the book the song is transformed into "Dinosaur Pet." And Sedaka has the thrill of his granddaughters singing back up vocals on the track.

Sedaka, whose first book was called "Waking Up Is Hard to Do," said his foray into children's literature began when he was playing the piano for his grandchildren. As he was playing his hits "Breaking Up Is Hard to Do" and "Sweet 16," with his grandchildren singing along, he thought it might be interesting to use those melodies for the inspiration for a children's book. He also thought writing books—and tying in his music—was a "wonderful



Neil Sedaka, who will be coming to Connecticut in March, is keeping on his toes with several projects in the works.

way to introduce children to the power of reading."

If becoming a children's author wasn't enough to occupy Sedaka, who is marking 55 years in the music business, he also is preparing for the opening of a musical based on his life. The musical entitled "Laughter in the Rain," will be opening soon in the West End of London. The musical, with a book written by Philip Norman, follows Sedaka's life from his birth to age 35, when his

career was given renewed life thanks to the help of Elton John. The music includes 37 of Sedaka's hits.

The musical arose when two theater producers approached him with the idea, explained Sedaka. They thought Sedaka's life would be a terrific story for the stage.

The musical uses Cinescope screens to show photographs of his high school days, his days at Julliard School of Music, his vocal groups, etc. It gives

Sedaka a chance to relive those old memories and thinking about those old days leaves him with a "good feeling."

Sedaka began his musical career as a classical pianist so that world of music is no stranger to him. And now he is going back to his orchestral roots, having written his first symphonic piece, "Manhattan Intermezzo," which was performed by the London Philharmonic.

Don't worry, though.

It's not a stuffy piece of classical artistry, explained Sedaka. He said the piece was written specifically for people who might not normally be fans of classical music. It plays with melodies that evoke the many different ethnic groups of New York City.

"Very few pop performers attempt this," said Sedaka of the classical composition. "But it was a wonderful experience."

And it was successful detour, said Sedaka, noting

the Kentucky Orchestra has commissioned him to write yet another classical composition.

Finally, Sedaka is also working on a new album of pop songs. This time around he is presenting the songs just as he has always written them—just his voice accompanied by a piano.

"This is the first time I've tried unplugged," said Sedaka. He's still exploring the format for the CD. He said he is considering include commentary between the tracks explaining the inspirations for the songs and offering explanations of the writing process.

Sedaka's not only back, he's busy, busy, busy.

Sedaka said he is always trying to push himself rather than rest on his laurels. He's done children's albums, Christmas albums, albums sung in Yiddish, and more. "I'm always trying to get out of my comfort sphere, to develop and grow," said Sedaka.

Although he has been in the music business for over 50 years, Sedaka still keeps in touch with contemporary music.

Sedaka said he loves Peter Gabriel's latest pop/symphonic album, "New Blood." He also is fan of groups such as Maroon 5 and Coldplay. "I prefer the melodic pop groups," he said.

Sedaka also likes the old standards, as well. He said he loves jazz singers such as Dinah Washington, Mel Torme, Sarah Vaughn, and Ella Fitzgerald. He also enjoys composers such as George Gershwin, Irving Berlin, and Rodgers and Hart.

When he hits the road and arrives at the MGM Grand March 2, Sedaka said fans can expect a varied set list. He said he will sing his big hits as well as new songs. And you'll also find few standard "evergreens."

"I'm very personable," said Sedaka of his stage show, taking time to talk to the audience about his songs as well as his personal history.

Neil Sedaka comes to MGM Foxwoods on Friday, March 2 at 8 p.m. For more information, go to MGMatFoxwoods.com or NeilSedaka.com.