

‘Douglas Webster and Friends’ lands at the Kroc Center tonight

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Nearly five years ago, Douglas Webster performed as Jean Valjean in the Coeur d'Alene Summer Theatre production of "Les Misérables."

If you go An Evening with Douglas Webster and Friends

When: Today at 7 p.m.

Where: The Kroc Center, 1765 W.
Golf Course Road, Coeur d'Alene

Cost: \$25 for adults, \$15 for students

Call: (208) 391-2867 for tickets

It all started with "The Music Man."

Douglas Webster first took the stage in a production of the famous Meredith Willson musical when he was in sixth grade, and from then on performing became his primary pursuit. "I was singing loud and obnoxious into a microphone, and I thought that was the coolest thing ever," he said.

But Webster turned a childhood hobby into a thriving professional career. Since that modest theatrical debut, he has toured in numerous companies all over the world, playing everywhere from small regional theaters to Carnegie Hall and the Vatican. That's a far cry from shouting "Shipooopi" at a grade school audience.

Tonight, Webster will appear at the Kroc Center in Coeur d'Alene for "Douglas Webster and Friends," where he will be joined by a handpicked group of regional vocalists, including Jadd Davis, Robby French and Aaron Baldwin, all of whom Webster met during a Coeur d'Alene Summer Theatre production of "Les Misérables."

Webster has invited his fellow performers to showcase material of their choosing, and the program should prove to be eclectic: You'll hear some old standards from Cole Porter and Andrew Lloyd Webber alongside numbers from more modern shows like "Next to Normal" and "Once."

“I want to bring out the best in the colleagues I have,” he said. “It’s a group of artists sharing their points of view.”

His initial plans were to study forestry in Colorado, but a high school teacher persuaded Webster to follow his musical aspirations. After majoring in voice performance at Indiana University and receiving an MBA at Northwestern University, Webster found himself auditioning for a Broadway production of “Les Misérables,” unexpectedly landing a gig as an understudy for the role of Jean Valjean when he was only in his mid-20s.

“But I realized that if I were to be a Broadway singer,” Webster said, “I’d be working seven nights a week and I wouldn’t be able to put my kid to bed.” So after years of touring with “Les Mis” and Leonard Bernstein’s “MASS,” among others, he turned exclusively to concert work, singing Broadway and opera numbers with symphony orchestras around the country.

Webster has also created an extensive two-week musical seminar that he teaches in Colorado, where he and fellow musical experts teach and train college-age actors and singers the ins and outs of theatrical performing. Several of his former students have gone on to success – one has been nominated for a Tony, Webster said, while another went on to play Ariel in the “Little Mermaid” on Broadway.

Whether he’s playing to sold-out Broadway shows or to intimate groups of a couple hundred people, Webster always aims to establish a musical relationship with his audience, and after so many years of experience, he’s comfortable on any stage.

“This is what I’ve been doing since I was a kid,” Webster said. “I’m still basically that 12-year-old boy with a microphone.”

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