

St. Francis goes to Broadway

One-man musical based on the life of the saint from Assisi



Author and musician James Twyman brings St. Francis
to life on the off-Broadway stage

He's often regarded as the patron saint of animals, pictured surrounded by birds, wolves, or an assortment of other forest creatures. In fact, statues of St. Francis of Assisi, who lived eight hundred years ago in Italy, populate gardens almost everywhere you look today. For most people he's little more than the "birdbath saint," but that's something James Twyman is trying to change.

In February, 2020, the NY Times bestselling author will present his one-man musical based on the life of St. Francis on the off-Broadway stage. To get there he'll travel across the US penniless, from Santa Barbara to New York, with no real plan of how he'll get from city to city, relying completely on the generosity of others.

“That’s how Francis would have done it,” Twyman explained. “His life was centered on serving humanity in simple, down to earth ways. If he was alive today he’d probably embrace things like social media, but he’d also travel with no money and no possessions. In my case I’ll hitchhike, walk when I have to, and rely upon others for food and places to sleep.”

This would seem like a radical endeavor to most people, but to James Twyman it’s just the latest in a long list of unconventional ventures. Known internationally as The Peace Troubadour, he has performed his peace concert in countries like Iraq, Bosnia, South Africa and Northern Ireland, often while wars and conflicts raged around him. In 1998 he was invited to perform in Baghdad by Saddam Hussein, and several years ago gave a peace concert on a hill overlooking a village in Syria held by ISIS. On his show *Real Time*, Bill Maher called him "the idiot singer from Portland," a label Twyman embraces, but this new project strikes even closer to his heart.

“I’ve always been in love with St. Francis,” he said. “When I was eighteen I left home and entered the Franciscan order, so when I decided to become The Peace Troubadour it felt like a natural progression. Now I’m getting to express myself as St. Francis himself through this musical. I wrote all the songs as well as the dialogue, and it feels like stepping back in time. It’s actually the most fun I’ve ever had, and the chance to perform it in New York for two weeks feels amazing.”

The New York performance will take place from February 20 to March 1 at The Church in the Village, and on the way he’ll share the musical, which is called *Brother Sun, Sister Moon*, in Santa Barbara, Sedona, Phoenix, Santa Fe, Dallas, and at least five other cities. But it’s the New York performance that has him most excited.

“We’re going to be doing something very unusual before each off-Broadway show,” he explained. “I have a team of people who’ll join me around the theater and we’ll be handing out free tickets to homeless men and women,

inviting them to come to the show as our guests. Then before each performance begins we'll share a meal of soup and bread together, both the paid ticket holders as well as the guests. Once again, I want to get as close to how St. Francis would have done this as possible. He would have wanted people of every group to come together, not just those who can afford the ticket."

Twyman's latest book "Giovanni and the Camino of St. Francis" inspired the writing of the musical.

"The book is a novel, one I'm very proud of," he said, "but I couldn't figure out a good way to share it on tour. It's hard to talk about the story without giving too much of it away. Then I was watching a recording of Bruce Springsteen doing a one-man show on Broadway. It was brilliant and I thought 'Maybe St. Francis can do the same thing - a musical where he tells stories about his life and what he learned along the way.' That's how it all started."

If you want to stay tuned while James makes his way across the country you can visit his website: www.JimmyTwyman.com.