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Top Alabama musicians to culminate bicentennial with free Montgomery concert

More than a dozen of Alabama's top musicians will present a free concert of the state's greatest hits in front of the Capitol in Montgomery on Dec. 14 as part of the celebration of the culmination of Alabama's three-year bicentennial.

"American Idol"-winner Taylor Hicks and Hank Williams daughter Jett Williams will co-host the 4 p.m. show.

Performers include Allison Moorer, who has been nominated for Academy, Grammy, Americana Music Association and Academy of Country Music awards, John Paul White, a four-time Grammy winner, Martha Reeves, a Rock and Roll Hall of Fame inductee, Jimmy Hall, who led Southern blues/rock band Wet Willie, Eddie Floyd, who had the hit "Knock on Wood" and recorded and toured with the Blues Brothers, Candi Staton, the R&B great who had the disco hit "Young Hearts Run Free" and Dan Penn, who co-wrote such classics as "I'm Your Puppet," "Cry Like a Baby" and "Dark End of the Street."

All these artists will be backed up by the 14-piece Muscle Shoals Allstars with David Hood and other legendary session players who have played on hits by artists such as Aretha Franklin, Wilson Pickett, Bob Dylan, Paul McCartney, The Staple Singers, Paul Simon, Bob Seger and Percy Sledge.

"The state of Alabama played a seminal role in the history of rock and roll, and many of the musicians who helped create that history are performing in this concert," said Lee Sentell, the director of the Alabama Tourism Department, which is sponsoring the show.

Following the concert will be what is expected to be the most spectacular, high-tech laser light show ever witnessed in the state. It's sponsored by the Poarch Band of Creek Indians.

The concert lineup features:

Taylor Hicks, the Alabama-born musician who won the fifth season of "American Idol," will co-host the show. His single "Do I Make You Proud" debuted on Billboard's Hot 100 at No. 1. Hicks, whose fervent fans call themselves the Soul Patrol, released the autobiography "Heart Full of Soul: An Inspirational Memoir About Finding Your Voice and Finding Your Way."

Jett Williams, the Montgomery-born daughter of legendary country singer Hank Williams, will also co-host the concert. She has released a string of popular albums and the autobiography “Ain't Nothin' as Sweet as My Baby.”

Eddie Floyd had the top-20 hit “You’re So Fine,” when he was with The Falcons before going solo and having three top-40 hits of his own, including “Knock On Wood” and “Bring It On Home To Me.” He has toured and recorded as a member of the Blues Brothers Band.

Jimmy Hall is the Mobile musician best known as the leader of the band Wet Willie, which had a series of top-40 hits in the ‘70s. including “Keep On Smilin’,” “Street Corner Serenade” and “Weekend.” He had another top-30 hit in 1980 as a solo artist with “I’m Happy That Love Has Found You.” Hall, a noted songwriter who has more recently toured with Jeff Beck, will be joined by his siblings Jack Hall and Donna Hall Foster, both members of Wet Willie.

Allison Moorer, an Alabama-born singer/songwriter, has released 10 critically acclaimed albums including her latest “Blood” and “Not Dark Yet,” the latter with her sister Shelby Lynne. She has been nominated for Academy, Grammy, Americana Music Association and Academy of Country Music Awards.

Dan Penn, born in Vernon, Alabama, is one of the country’s greatest songwriters, having written or co-written such classics as “I’m Your Puppet,” the Aretha Franklin hit “Do Right Woman, Do Right Man,” “Dark End of the Street,” and “Cry Like a Baby.”

Martha Reeves & The Vandellas, inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1995, had a dozen top-40 hits. including the top-10 hits “Heat Wave,” “Dancing in the Street,” “Quicksand,” “Nowhere To Run,” “I’m Ready For Love” and “Jimmy Mack.” The group also supplied background vocals on some of Marvin Gaye’s greatest songs, including "Stubborn Kind of Fellow," "Pride & Joy," and "Hitch Hike." Martha Reeves and the Vandellas are listed among *Rolling Stone* magazine's "100 Immortal Artists."

Candi Staton, born in Hanceville, Alabama, has earned hits and accolades in R&B, disco and gospel. Her biggest hits were “Stand By Your Man” in 1970 and “Young Hearts Run Free” in 1976. But she had a string of R&B hits, including “I’d Rather Be an Old Man’s Sweetheart (Than a Young Man’s Fool),” “I’m Just a Prisoner (of Your Good Lovin’),” “Sweet Feeling,” and a cover of “In the Ghetto” that remains nearly as celebrated as Elvis Presley’s original. Along the way, she’s garnered four Grammy nominations.

John Paul White gained initial fame as half of The Civil Wars, a groundbreaking duo that won four Grammy Awards before disbanding in 2012. The Muscle Shoals-born musician has gone on to a successful career as a solo artist, songwriter, producer and co-owner and operator of Single Lock Records.

The Muscle Shoals Allstars, which will serve as the house band for the concert, is made up of legendary session players from Muscle Shoals who have played on countless hit recordings by artists such as Aretha Franklin, Wilson Pickett, Bob Dylan, Paul McCartney, The Staple Singers, Paul Simon, Bob Seger and Percy Sledge. The 14-piece band includes David Hood of The Muscle Shoals Rhythm Section (also known as the Swampers), Clayton Ivey and Mickey Buckins of the FAME Gang, Will McFarlane, Kelvin Holly, Harvey Thompson Jr., The Muscle Shoals Horns and the Shoals Sisters (Carla Russell, Cindy Walker and Marie Lewey).

The concert and light show are just part of the Dec. 14 all-day culmination of Alabama's three-year bicentennial celebration. Other activities include a 10 a.m. bicentennial parade, the noon dedication of Alabama Bicentennial Park, which tells the story of Alabama in 16 mounted bronze plaques, a 1-4 p.m. festival with games, arts, crafts and historic re-enactors and the free exhibition of "We the People: Alabama's Defining Documents," featuring all six of Alabama's constitutions.

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