

Marshall Artists Series presents 'Jesse's Doll – Ghost Stories and Spookier Things' on Tuesday

By DEREK HALSEY For The Herald-Dispatch Oct 23, 2022



The Marshall Artists Series will present storyteller Adam Booth performing "Jesse's Doll — Ghost Stories and Spookier Things" at 7:30 p.m. on Tuesday, Oct. 25, at the Keith-Albee Performing Arts Center.

Courtesy of Pantography

HUNTINGTON — If you're looking for some thrills and chills this spooky season, the Keith-Albee Performing Arts Center is the place to be.

No, we aren't talking about the rumored haunted basement — although that will undoubtedly add to the creepy ambiance when storyteller Adam Booth takes the stage to deliver "Jesse's Doll — Ghost Stories and Spookier Things," at 7:30 p.m. on Tuesday, Oct. 25.

The haunted — er, the Keith-Albee is located at 925 4th Ave. in Huntington. Tickets are \$25. More information can be found at www.marshall.edu/muartistseries/#/.

With the right mood being set combined with an open mind and an active imagination, storytelling can bring to life a frightening tale as effectively as a horror movie. Many of us still remember a scary story told around a campfire or in a dark back yard.

Booth, who will be performing Tuesday night's "Jesse's Doll—Ghost Stories and Spookier Things," is a Huntington native who has become an acclaimed storyteller almost by accident.

"Storytelling comes to me through my family and by the passing on of family traditions," said Booth. "I really got into it when I was in college and I took a class on Appalachian culture and I learned about storytelling. Then, I began going to storytelling events, specifically the West Virginia State Liars Contest, which is a part of the annual Vandalia Gathering event."

Booth, 40, began his storytelling journey 20 years ago when he found himself telling a tall tale in front of an audience for the first time.

"It all began at that Vandalia Gathering Liars Contest when I got up the nerve to do it," said Booth. "It wasn't really that hard because I had studied music and I was used to performing in front of people. I tried out storytelling because I loved the novelty of it. If you win the Vandalia Gathering Liars Contest, you get the title of West Virginia's Biggest Liar and I liked that and went for it."

Once he was hooked and realized he had the talent to successfully tell a good story in front of a lot of people, Booth began to seek out interesting tales to tell.

"I researched a number of stories found in different archives in West Virginia and I spent some time doing that same kind of work in Kentucky as well," said Booth. "I also learned stories from other people. I often find that when I'm out telling stories somewhere, people then want to tell me their stories afterwards. And, just about everyone tells me, 'You can have this one. You can use it if you want to.' Every now and then, you come across something that is a real gem."

The art of storytelling is ancient, preceding the invention of the written language, and techniques and patterns for the skill have developed over the centuries based on how the human mind works.

"The technique is pretty standard," said Booth. "If it is something that I have created or something I have learned from someone else or a folk tale, you always want to open the story by welcoming people into it, to give them an idea of where the story takes place and give them a few ideas as to what is going to happen in it. That way, they can get themselves situated into the story, and then they are more ready to go forward with wherever you want to take them. When I tell spooky stories, as I will on Tuesday night, you want people to feel comfortable in the story, yet you also want them to begin to think about what might happen as soon as possible. That is how a good story works, by creating images that you carry with you, sometimes for your whole life."

Booth is the 2022 West Virginia Folk Artist of the Year, an accolade given out at the Governor's Arts Awards program. Topping that honor off with a performance in his hometown of Huntington will make Tuesday a truly special evening for Booth.

"To be affiliated with Marshall University this way, it is such a privilege for me," said Booth. "I grew up in Huntington and my family has a lot of connections to Marshall. But, also, to get the opportunity to play the Keith-Albee Performing Arts Center will be special as well. I grew up going to movies there, I've gone to Marshall Artists Series concerts there, and it's always been a dream of mine to go back and perform there, so this is a huge honor for me."

With it being the Halloween season, Booth has chosen some choice tales for the Huntington audience.

"I do a lot of archival digging to find stories, such as in the collection of Ruth Ann Musick (1897-1974), who lived in Fairmont, WV," said Booth. "She collected and published a lot of spooky stories, but there are many that she never published. So, I have looked through boxes and boxes of her materials. I've also gone through a lot of boxes of stories that were collected and are kept in the library at West Virginia University. A lot of them are stories that people don't tell anymore and I am making the point of trying to keep them alive. Once I find those stories, then it is all about crafting them and adding my own voice to them. And, a lot of knowing where a story is going to go onstage comes from telling it to people in person and see how they react."



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