

# The Times of Chester County

## On Stage: No place quite like Camelot

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By Denny Dyroff, Staff Writer, The Times

There simply is not.... a place like Camelot.

This week, the Playhouse on Rodney Square (1007 Market Street, Wilmington, Delaware, 302-888-0200, duponttheatre.com) is presenting one of Broadway's all-time classic musicals — "Camelot."



"Camelot" tells the story of the legend of King Arthur who rules his kingdom with new ideals — with the intention of bringing peace to a troubled land. But when the two loves of his life — his beautiful new Queen Guinevere and his most trusted knight Sir Lancelot — give in to their passion for one another, troubles develop.

One of the most fabled love triangles of all time starts to take shape. At the same time, Mordred, King Arthur's illegitimate son, sees these troubles and realizes that it is a kingdom in chaos. He attempts to take advantage of the situation and destroy all that is Camelot.

The show not only tells a great story, it also features a celebrated score that includes such classics as "If Ever I Would Leave You," "The Simple Joys of Maidenhood" and the title song "Camelot." The show features Adam Grabau as King Arthur, Mary McNulty as Guinevere, Tim Rogan as Lancelot and Mark Poppleton as Merlin and King Pellinore.

"The producers have streamlined this show," said Poppleton, during a phone interview earlier this week. "They cut it down from three hours-plus to a little over two hours. They cut anything that was superfluous or unnecessary."

"The story is still there — the love triangle — but all the dances were taken away. They wanted to have a story that the audience could still get involved in. The changes really enhance the story."

"Actually, this production changes as it goes. It's a living, breathing entity. It has been becoming more intimate. For me and the other cast members, it doesn't feel like a job. The cast is great and the set is gorgeous."

Poppleton is onstage early in the show as Merlin.

"My costume as Merlin is amazing," said Poppleton. "It weighs about 40 pounds so it's a workout for me every night. Merlin has some funny lines. Playing an iconic character like Merlin is amazing. A lot of people love Merlin so you have to live up to expectations."

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"I bring some comedy edge to it. I don't patronize Arthur. I help him learn. I'm his friend and I'm there to help him."

The real comedic edge for Poppleton comes when he plays the eccentric King Pellinore.

"King Pellinore is just great," said Poppleton. "He's crazy as a loon. He's the only one who stands up to Mordred. And, he's the only one who stands up to Lancelot."

Video link for "Camelot" — [https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=HhlzUJhzdn8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=HhlzUJhzdn8).

"Camelot" is running now through April 19 at the comfortable theater in downtown Wilmington. Show times are 7:30 p.m. on April 16, 8 p.m. on April 17, 2 and 8 p.m. on April 18 and 2 p.m. on April 19. Ticket prices range from \$35-\$79.

On April 18, the Sellersville Theater will host Garland Jeffreys, a veteran rocker who has been making interesting music for more than four decades.

Jeffreys first came into his own as a professional musician in New York City in the mid-1960s. He released his first solo album "Garland Jeffreys" on Atlantic Records in 1973. Around the same time Atlantic also released a Jeffreys 45 titled "Wild in the Streets, a song that was not on the album. The guitarist/singer/songwriter wrote the song after hearing about a pre-teen rape and murder in the Bronx. He was joined on the record by a number of top musicians including Dr. John, David Spinozza, Rick Marotta and the Brecker Brothers on horns.

"Wild in the Streets" has continued to have iconic status in the skate community and been covered by a variety of musicians including The Circle Jerks, Chris Spedding, Hurriganes, British Lions and Hot Water Music.

"We continue to get covers of 'Wild in the Streets,'" said Jeffreys, during a phone interview this week from his home in New York. "I even sing it with some of these bands."

In 1992, Jeffreys released his "Matador and More" album in the states. The two albums after that were only released in Europe. Finally, he came back with a pair of stateside releases. He put out the "The King of In Between" album in 2011 and followed with "Truth Serum" in 2013.

"The King of In Between" was hailed by NPR as "as good a classic roots rock record as you're going to hear from anybody" and earned glowing reviews from a number of publications.

It also led to a performance on David Letterman as well as appearances onstage with artists such as Bruce Springsteen, Levon Helm, Lou Reed, Alejandro Escovedo and Chuck Ragan. "Truth Serum" was equally well-received.

"I worked on 'Truth Serum' for quite awhile," said Jeffreys. "It had a lot to do with the players I was working with — guys like Brian Mitchell. I've always tried to have the best players around to support my music. My band now is Mark Bosch on guitar, Tom Coriano on drums, Brian Stanley on bass and Charles Roth on keyboards."

Jeffreys, who will be 72 in July, is showing no signs of slowing down. He keeps making and playing music — and he has an 18-year-old daughter doing the same. Savannah Rae Jeffreys just released an album titled "Ask Me Anything."

"My direction is very clear — to get onstage and play my songs," said Jeffreys, who has recorded more than a dozen albums on his own, including the classic "Ghost Rider." "I'm grateful to still have an audience after all these years.

"I'm doing as many shows as I can do. I have all the vitality I need. I'm blessed with that and blessed with my health. I travel a lot and play everywhere. Last year, I did shows in Australia and Tokyo. And, I'm playing four festivals this year.

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“Right now, I’m playing songs from ‘Truth Serum,’ songs from my catalogue and some new things. The song ‘Truth Serum’ is a fun song to play because it’s blues and I don’t usually do blues.

“My band knows 90 per cent of my material — songs like ‘Rough and Ready,’ ‘96 Tears’ and ‘Lift Me Up.’ I also do the Velvet Underground’s ‘I’m Waiting for My Man’ as a closing tribute to Lou Reed. Lou and I go back to our college days together at Syracuse University.”

Video link for Garland Jeffreys — [https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=TyEyCAjrJxk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=TyEyCAjrJxk).

Nalani & Sarina, talented twin sisters from New Jersey, will be the opening act for the 8 p.m. show. Tickets are \$29.50 and \$40.

The Sellersville Theater will also host a matinee show on April 18 at 12:30 p.m. featuring promising new song stylist Jessi Teich.

On April 19, the theater will present Robben Ford. The highly-acclaimed guitarist has released close to 20 solo albums, 10 with the Ford Blues Band and more than 20 collaborations. His most recent solo disc “Into the Sun” was just released by Mascot Record Group.

“This is a tour supporting ‘Into the Sun’ and we play a lot of it,” said Ford, during a phone interview Monday en route to a show in Minneapolis. “There are 11 songs on the record and only four that we don’t play. We cut the tracks in September in Nashville because my rhythm section was there.”

The album features a wide array of guests, including Allman Brothers guitarist and Gov’t Mule frontman Warren Haynes, slide guitar master Sonny Landreth, Americana and blues icon Keb’ Mo’, pedal steel ace Robert Randolph and vocal sensation ZZ Ward.



Robben Ford

“After doing a lot of tracks in Nashville, we did the rest of the record piecemeal,” said Ford. “I did ‘Same Train’ in Carpinteria (CA) with a different band and ‘Breath of Me’ with ZZ Ward and a different rhythm section.

“It’s always pretty organic when I make a record. I’ve worked very hard to develop myself and have written a record from a particular point of view. There are blues elements in there. There are R&B elements in there. And, there are pop elements in there — different tastes with different colors.

“I just sit down and start writing. I keep a notebook. With this album, I had the luxury of three months off before tracking because I didn’t have that much time on the road. I keep ideas — a little notebook of ideas. Maybe it’s a tile or just one of two lines.

“Sometimes, you sit down and get pretty far. I like to take my time — work on a song, work on something else and then come back to that song. As soon as it starts getting bogged down, I let it rest.”

Ford has made a name for himself with his expertise playing blues guitar. But “Into the Sun” is different. Instead of a heavy plate of blues as the meat-and-potatoes, the album is more like a table of tapas featuring an impressive selection of tastes and textures.

“I have to admit — since the record was finished, I’ve listened to it a lot because I’m so happy with it,” said Ford. “One thing I wanted to make sure was that the record sounded contemporary and not like old blues. It sounds like a record that was made today. It’s fresh.”

Video link for Robben Ford — [https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=9Ud7A8OrU4Q](https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=9Ud7A8OrU4Q).

Ford’s show will start at 7:30 p.m. with tickets priced at \$35 and \$45.

Other upcoming shows at the Sellersville Theater are Shawn Colvin along with Rebecca Braslow / April

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Other upcoming shows at the Sevensville Theater are Shawn Colvin along with Rebecca Fronscky (April 17), a sold-out concert by the Michael Schenker Group (April 20), Over the Rhine (April 21) and Jake E. Lee's Red Dragon Cartel (April 22).

The Flash (102 Sycamore Alley, Kennett Square, 484-732-8295, <http://www.kennettflash.org>) will host Mojo Stu on April 17 and Big Daddy Graham with Matt McCusker on April 18.

Fans of Johnette Napolitano are in for a treat this weekend. On April 17, she will perform a solo show at the Grand Opera House (818 North Market Street, Wilmington, Delaware, 302-652-5577, [www.thegrandwilmington.org](http://www.thegrandwilmington.org)) and will have a special offer for those in attendance.

"I just finished making a three-song EP titled 'Naked,'" said Napolitano, during a phone interview Tuesday afternoon from her home in Joshua Tree, California. "It's a signed, limited-run of 500. The only place you can get it is at these shows. If there are any left after the tour, they will be available on CD Baby and/or iTunes."

Don't bank on any being left after her short four-date swing through the Northeast. Fortunately for local fans, the Wilmington show is preceded by a show in Massachusetts and followed by gigs in New York and Washington, D.C.

"I've been working at a studio here with producer Brian Mansell," said Napolitano, who formerly was the lead vocalist, bass player and songwriter for Concrete Blonde. "He has a mobile unit and he brings it here to my place in the desert.

"I moved out here because there was too much of everything all the time in L.A. My whole goal in life is to calm down. With Concrete Blonde, playing all that hard-driving stuff was intense. After awhile, it gets hard to turn it off."

Napolitano's new songs are powerful, intense, melodic and honest. They provide a perfect exposition of her distinctive voice and insightful songwriting.

"Brian and I have been recording like crazy," said Napolitano, whose gang at Joshua Tree includes a horse, a goat and several dogs. "It's just me and my guitar in his mobile studio.

"I'm going to expand the EP into an entire album because I'm really happy with the way the EP turned out. I hope to get the album done by July. I got four more songs done already. We work pretty intensely.

"It's also just me and my guitar on this short tour. The solo acoustic show was really hard to develop — especially the pacing. In addition to playing music, I do readings from my book. I love reading from it."

Napolitano's book is titled "Rough Mix."

She also is involved in another writing venture.

"I'm writing a screenplay for a show which has 'Witch' as its working title," said Napolitano. "I'm scoring it as I'm writing it and then will expand the score into an album."

Napolitano described "Witch" in a press release — "This is a true story about the 1962 trial of my recently departed dear friend who was my mentor and a New Orleans medium for 40 years.

"They took her to court in Arkansas — basically a witch trial — and she won, but told me to not tell the story until after she was gone. This music is very thick, dense, and written to reflect the thoughts of the characters involved. It's an intense story."

Because "Witch" is a score, Napolitano will not be playing any music from it this weekend. But, she will be playing plenty of her old material along with the three new tracks — "Jazz on Vinyl," "Here" and "Memory Go."

Video link for Johnette Napolitano — [https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=G7GC465Rj4g](https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=G7GC465Rj4g).



Napolitano's show at the Baby Grand will start at 8 p.m. with Laurie Sargent as the opening act. Tickets are \$28.

World Café Live at the Queen (500 North Market Street, Wilmington, 302- 994-1400, [www.queen.worldcafelive.com](http://www.queen.worldcafelive.com)) will have Blitzen Trappen with Spirit Family Reunion (April 16), April Singer Songwriter Showcase (April 17), Rust — A Neil Young Tribute (April 18), The Album Leaf (April 19), the James Hunter Six (April 21) and Wilmo Wednesdays (April 22).

The Steel City Coffee House (203 Bridge Street, Phoenixville, 610-933-4043, [www.steelcitycoffeehouse.com](http://www.steelcitycoffeehouse.com)) will present Vocal Fusion (April 17), Cheryl Wheeler (April 18) and Dan Bern (April 22).

Chaplin's (66 North Main Street, Spring City, 610-792-4110, <http://chaplinslive.com>) will have Hooch, Loss of Effect, Andorra, and Take Back on April 17 and nxt2normal on April 18).

When the Portland Cello Project comes to the area for a concert, you can never be sure how many musicians there will be onstage or which ones they will be. But, you can be sure that it will be a good show.



**The Portland Cello Project**

On April 17, the Portland Cello Project is returning to Philly for a show at Johnny Brenda's (1201 North Frankford Avenue, Philadelphia, 215-739-9684, [www.johnnybrendas.com](http://www.johnnybrendas.com)).

The line-up of cellists for this tour includes Diane Chaplin, Kevin Jackson, Skip vonKuske, Kelly Quesada and Julian Kosavonic.

The all-cello band is touring in support of its most recent album "to e.s.," a 12-

song studio album paying homage to Elliott Smith. "to e.s." features instrumental covers of the Elliott Smith's songs, as well pieces by contemporary composers that were inspired by the late Portland artist.

Portland Cello Project was inspired by the 10th anniversary of Smith's passing (starting the project in 2013) and his influence on the Portland music scene. The album consists of 6 covers of Smith's songs as well as commissioned pieces, with Smith's compositional style as a starting point.

"We're definitely featuring Elliott's songs on this tour," said Chaplin, during a phone interview Wednesday afternoon from a tour stop in New York. "We'll be doing six or seven of them most shows. "It was a group decision to do Elliott Smith songs. We had worked with Larry Crane, who was Elliott's business partner and now is his archivist. We had the opportunity to hear some of his unreleased songs. We chose one of them — 'Taking a Fall' — on our previous album.

"After that, we decided to do more of his songs coinciding with the 10th anniversary of his death in 2013. We started the project in 2013 and did the recording last year. We collaborated with Larry Crane and he co-produced the album at his Jackpot! Studio here in Portland."

The Portland Cello Project, which has Chaplin, Jackson and vonKuske as its core members, has made cello music in a variety of genres.

"We really do have a wide variety with the songs we play," said Chaplin. "We do jazz, folk, classical and heavy metal. I think the most outrageous was when we did Pantera's 'Vulgar Display of Power' album — the entire album.

"We try to keep our line-up of musicians as stable as possible but it's hard to get people to make long-term commitments. We've had a lot of musicians in the group. We've had as many as 14 at once when playing in Portland. When we're on tour, it's more like a chamber ensemble — not necessarily classical but a small ensemble."

Video link for Portland Cello Project — [https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=GYWCTIBUGZo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=GYWCTIBUGZo).

Portland Cello Project's show at Johnny Brenda's will start at 9 p.m. Tickets are \$18. Also on April 17, Waters will return to Philadelphia for a show at the Electric Factory (421 North Seventh Street, Philadelphia, 215-627-1332, [www.electricfactory.info](http://www.electricfactory.info)).

Waters is a band from the San Francisco Bay area that originally began as a solo project for guitarist/vocalist/songwriter Van Pierszalowski. The latest line-up of the band also features Brian DaMert, Greg Sellin, Andrew Wales and Sara DaMert.

"We've had two albums so far with different line-ups on each," said Pierszalowski, during a phone interview Wednesday afternoon from a tour stop in Richmond, Virginia.

"Waters started as a solo project. Then, through the process of making the new album 'What's Real', the current band has come together. This band has been together for two years and I hope I have these guys with me forever.

"We recorded the album over the last two-and-a-half years. It was done piecemeal in Los Angeles. We'd go down there at different times to work with our producer Ryan Rabin. The songwriting process for this album was definitely more collaborative.

"Some of the songs were just me and some were with other writers. The last few — like 'The Avenue' and 'Stupid Games' — were all done by the band. I wrote them and then brought them to the band to finish them.

"I knew going in to the making of the new album that I wanted songs like the ones that were my favorites years ago with bands like Weezer, Nirvana and Green Day. I wanted to do modern-day versions of that stuff."

Waters is now out on a rather long tour in support of "What's Real."

"We'll be out for at least another month," said Pierszalowski. "We're playing a lot of songs from the new record and a couple from the old record. We're also doing a cover of Taylor Swift's 'Blank Space.'

"Our first single from the album was 'Got To My Head' and the second was 'I Feel Everything.' We're getting ready to release the third single but we haven't decided yet which song it will be."

Video link for Waters — [https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=0usSQHLMaXw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=0usSQHLMaXw).

At the Electric Factory, Waters will be opening for Matt and Kim. The show starts at 8:30 p.m. with tickets priced at \$30.

Hippo Campus is a band from Minnesota that appears to be on the brink of breaking through in a big way in 2015. On April 17, the quartet will make its area debut with a show at Union Transfer (1026 Spring Garden Street, Philadelphia, 215-232-2100, <http://www.utphilly.com>).

"We all went to high school together — to an art school in St. Paul," said Hippo Campus' Jake Luppen, during a recent phone interview from his home in Minnesota. "We were in two bands — competing bands.

"After we graduated from high school, we joined together. We were all pretty good friends. Our first gig was June 2013. Zach and I decided to go to college at the University of Minnesota. We did that for a little while and then decided that this was the path we were going to follow.

"It started getting serious in fall of 2013. We all agreed to make music our main thing. We recorded a demo EP in my basement. The word-of-mouth spread by winter. By February 2013, we had a better quality single — 'Little Grace' — and we were getting on the radar."

Things kept going the band's way.

"We continued to play shows," said Luppen. "Scott Stranberg, a lighting guy in one of the clubs saw us

perform. He was the lighting guy for Trampled by Turtles. As we continued to play more shows, he'd come and watch us. After awhile, we began to trust him and he got us in touch with Trampled by Turtles management. We met with them in 2014 and signed a contract with them."

Luppen cites the band's main influences as Widespread Panic, the Police, Grateful Dead, Bob Dylan and the Beach Boys. Some of these influences can be heard on the band's debut EP "Bashful Creatures."

"We recorded the EP last September," said Luppen. "The songs were all prepared ahead of time because we only had two days of recording in the studio. We all write together. It's one, big organic process. Nathan and I do the lyrics and then we work all together."

Video for Hippo Campus — [https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=jV3bIvRGX8w](https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=jV3bIvRGX8w).

The show at Union Transfer, which will start at 8:30 p.m., also features The Mowgli's and Night Riots. Tickets are \$17.

Another relatively new band will be visiting the area on April 17. Pianos Become the Teeth will perform at the First Unitarian Church (2125 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia, [www.r5productions.com](http://www.r5productions.com)).

The Baltimore-based quartet — Kyle Durfey (lead vocals), Chad McDonald (guitar), Mike York (guitar), Zac Sewell (bass) and David Haik (drums) — is touring in support of its recent album "Keep You."

"We released 'Keep You' in October 2014," said York, during a phone interview Wednesday afternoon from his home in Maryland. "We've toured a lot since the record came out — the states and Europe — and we just played SXSW.

"We'll be touring the rest of the year. We're on Epitaph and they have offices world-wide. They heard our music, liked and signed us. Our EP has already been released in a lot of countries. Prior to that, we were on a Boston label called Topshelf Records for our first two albums."

Pianos Become the Teeth traveled north to the Delaware Valley to record "Keep You." They came to Studio 4 in Conshohocken to have Will Yip produce the album in his studio.

"We recorded the album with Will last June," said York. "We spent a whole month in Conshohocken working on it. We rented a place there and it was a fun time. We came in with all the songs ready and then Will helped us tonally.

"We did a lot of pre-production on our own because we have our own practice space and equipment at home. We all do the songwriting. Everybody has an equal part in the songwriting — especially on this record.

"Our music has gradually been changing. Our earlier stuff is more aggressive. The newer stuff is much more subdued. It's soundscape ambience with some heavy stuff. As of now, we're more just a rock band with our own sound — melodic post-hardcore."

Video link for Pianos Become the Teeth — [https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=AZyBL4WMufg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=AZyBL4WMufg).

Pianos Become the Teeth will headline the 8 p.m. show with Loma Prieta and Gates as the opening acts. Tickets are \$14.

The Ardmore Music Hall (23 East Lancaster Avenue, Ardmore, 610-649-8389, [www.ardmoremusic.com](http://www.ardmoremusic.com)) will host The Heavy Pets, The Mantras and Eat Your Beats (April 16), Turkuaz with Tweed (April 17), Red Molly with John Paul (April 18, 7 p.m.), Splintered Sunlight (April 18, 10 p.m.) and "Dark Side of the Moon played over Wizard of Oz" (April 19).

Burlap & Bean Coffeehouse (204 South Newtown Street Road, Newtown Square, 484-427-4547, [www.burlapandbean.com](http://www.burlapandbean.com)) will have Frank Fairfield with Tom Marion and Zac Sokolow (of The Americans) on April 16, Hannah Aldridge with Robinson Treacher on April 17, Jess Klein and Rod Picott on April 18 and Jennifer Knapp on April 22.

Melodies Café (2 East Ardmore Avenue, Ardmore, 610-645-5269, [www.melodiescafe.com](http://www.melodiescafe.com)) will host Matt Santry, Matt Cusson and Jason Adamo on April 17 and Vulcans, Matt Wheeler and The Bumperyachts on April 18.

“Respect: A Musical Celebration of Women” has just begun an eight-week engagement now through May 31 at the Penn’s Landing Playhouse (211 South Columbus Boulevard, Philadelphia, 855-448-7469, [www.plplayhouse.com](http://www.plplayhouse.com)). The popular, high-energy smash-musical celebrates the exciting story of women in the 20th century through more than 60 Top 40 songs.

The show looks at the journey of women told through Top-40 hits. It features excerpts of 60 songs with women’s own stories about finding dreams, lost love, relationship issues, entering the workforce and gaining independence. Show Times are 2 and 7 p.m. on Wednesdays, 7 p.m. on Thursday and Fridays, 2 and 8 p.m. on Saturdays and 2 p.m. on Sundays. Ticket prices range from \$45-\$65.

Rainbow’s Comedy Playhouse (3065 Lincoln Highway East, Paradise, 800-292-4301, <http://rainbowcomedy.com>) is presenting “The Hallelujah Girls” now through May 23. Matinee performances are every Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and selected Saturdays with an 11:30 a.m. lunch and a 1 p.m. curtain.


Evening performances are every Friday, Saturday and selected Thursdays with dinner at 6:30 p.m. and the show following at 8 p.m. There will also be “Twilight Performances” on selected Sundays with dinner at 2:30 p.m. and the show at 4 p.m. Ticket prices range from \$30-\$55.

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