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Ticket sales for PAF shows on record pace

By **Rick LaFrombois**

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After selling a record number of season tickets this summer, Performing Arts Foundation Executive Director Jim O'Connell predicted sluggish single-ticket sales for Wednesday's opening day.

He could not have been more wrong.

The PAF sold about 1,800 tickets Wednesday to shows at the Grand Theater. That's 650 more than last year's opening-day total and 450 more than the year before.

"I think people like the shows," said O'Connell, with a hint of satisfaction in his voice. "I'm a little shell shocked."

The key to success when it comes to ticket sales is a diverse lineup that offers a high-profile show each month, O'Connell said in July. He considers 14 of the lineup's 29 shows "headliners" -- more than double the usual amount.

Already five shows are nearly sold out. Single-seat-only tickets remain for Gordon Lightfoot, Mannheim Steamroller, B.B. King, "An Evening with Lily Tomlin" and the Saturday showing of "Guys on Ice."

In response to the strong demand, the PAF was able to add a second helping of "Guys on Ice" -- a Sunday matinee Jan. 28.

"And here's the best part -- it's the Sunday where there is no football," O'Connell said. "It's the Sunday before the Super Bowl."

O'Connell was unable to add a second showing of the other nearly sold-out shows because those shows are too tightly booked. The PAF has begun to put people's names on waiting lists for the shows in the event tickets are turned in, exchanged or not used by the artists.

Of the five nearly sold-out shows, O'Connell was most surprised by the strong surge for B.B. King tickets -- not because of the act, but because of the price.

The cost of tickets to see the blues legend range between \$77 and \$97.

Building on a recording career that began in the 1940s, King shows little sign of slowing down -- he and

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To buy tickets

There are five ways to purchase individual tickets (three shows or fewer) to Grand Theater performances:

- Internet -- Log on to www.onartsblock.org.
- In person -- Stop in at the ArtsBlock Ticket Office at 401 N. Fourth St. in downtown Wausau; order forms can be printed from the Web site or picked up at the ticket office.
- Telephone -- Call the ArtsBlock Ticket Office at 842-0988 or toll free at 888-239-0421.
- Mail -- Send your show order form with payment to the Performing Arts Foundation, 401 N. Fourth St., Wausau WI 54403.
- Fax -- Transmit your show order form with payment to the ArtsBlock Ticket Office at 842-8715.

To learn more or to view the complete lineup, call the PAF at 842-0988 or log on to www.onartsblock.org.

Blues on tap

Tickets remain for tonight's 7:30 p.m. performance by The Robert Cray Band. Tickets cost \$36 and \$46.

his Gibson guitar, Lucille, have already played nearly 100 shows this year. King played in Green Bay and Madison in March and will bring Lucille to the Grand on April 3.

O'Connell pursued King, whom he ranks as a one-of-a-kind performer along the lines of violin virtuoso Itzhak Perlman, for five years. Last season patrons proved that "if you have achieved that legendary status, and there is only one of you, no price is too high," O'Connell said.

Perlman tickets, which cost about \$90, did not immediately sell out. The PAF sold enough tickets to pay the performer's \$75,000 asking price, though.

O'Connell figured some B.B. King tickets would remain up until showtime. That does not appear to be the case.

To date, the PAF has sold 16,500 tickets to series subscribers in addition to the 1,800 single ticket sales. Both are record numbers.

There's something for everyone in the upcoming lineup, which kicks off with Lightfoot Sept. 19.

The 2006-'07 season includes country acts Sawyer Brown and Diamond Rio, the family show "Cinderella & the Jungle Book" and two biblical-themed musicals, "Joseph & the Technicolor Dreamcoat" and "Jesus Christ Superstar." Both musicals are products of the legendary writing team, Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice.