

Jonathan Edwards, folk icon, will perform at The Kate this Friday. And, he promises to be singing — just like in the lyrics of his megahit, “Sunshine (Go Away Today.)”

# BRINGING sunshine

Legendary folkie Jonathan Edwards to light up The Kate

By Lisa Reisman

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One night in May 2011, legendary acoustic folk-rock artist Jonathan Edwards, known for his gold megahit “Sunshine (Go Away Today),” spontaneously decided to nix the planned \$25 cover charge for his show, instead offering a free gig to anyone who wanted to mosey on by.

“It just felt like the right thing to do,” he said in a recent telephone interview in a voice as laid-back and unaffected as the bare feet in which he customarily performs. “Why not?”

Edwards, who will return to the Katharine Hepburn Cultural Arts Center in Old Saybrook at 8 p.m. this Friday, has not been one to embrace convention throughout his 50 years on the stage, in other words. Unlike other artists who tire of playing their biggest hits over and over again, “Sunshine,” which in 1971 climbed to the upper reaches of the Billboard charts and sold more than a million copies, is still an integral part of the 66-year-old tunesmith’s set.

Said the Minnesota-born, Portland, Maine resident of the catchy, anti-authority, anti-war melody: “That song has meant a lot to a lot of people over the decades. Almost every night, even now, someone comes up to me and tells me how it’s gotten

them through some rough times.”

Besides, he said, “when you only have one major hit, you dance with the one that brought you,” he said, adding that he’s constantly altering the arrangement to keep it fresh.

It’s that simple, bare-foot sensibility that prompted Edwards, after playing over 200 concerts coast to coast and across the globe in the year following his chart-topper, to tell his manager to stop booking gigs. The chaotic travel required of a popular musician wasn’t for him. Nor were the limos, the staged television and radio appearances, the trappings of celebrity. At age 25, the toast of the pop-folk world turned away from the call of fame.

Asked about that decision, his answer was spare. “No regrets,” he said. “Ever.”

It certainly didn’t slow him down. Amidst stints in Boston, the Caribbean, Austin, Texas, and a houseboat, the happy-go-lucky troubadour has continued to write, record, and tour, collaborating with artists like Emmylou Harris and Jimmy Buffett, and releasing no less than 16 albums in five consecutive decades.

His latest release “My Love Will

Keep” should sustain his loyal fan base. Edwards’ first studio album in 14 years, it features five well-crafted originals, among them the raucous “Crazy Texas Woman,” the bluegrass romp “How Long,” and

“Johnny Blue Horizon” inspired by John Denver.

But it’s his interpretation of the Beatles’ “She Loves You” that shows Edwards at his most musically — and unconventionally — eloquent. In it, he transforms the winsome pop song into a country-folk ballad that is more meditation than celebration.

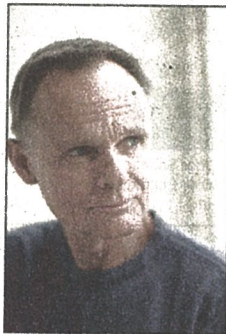
That the highlight of his new album is a cover should come as no surprise.

Unlike most singer-songwriters of his generation, Edwards dismisses the notion that he has to perform his own songs exclusively.

“It’s always been about the song to me. It doesn’t matter who wrote it or when it was written.”

And if that means riding “Sunshine” into the sunset, that’s okay by him. Just don’t count on The Kate waiving the cost of the ticket.

The Kate is located at 300 Main St., Old Saybrook. For tickets, call 877-503-1286 or visit [www.katharinehepburntheater.org](http://www.katharinehepburntheater.org).



Jonathan Edwards