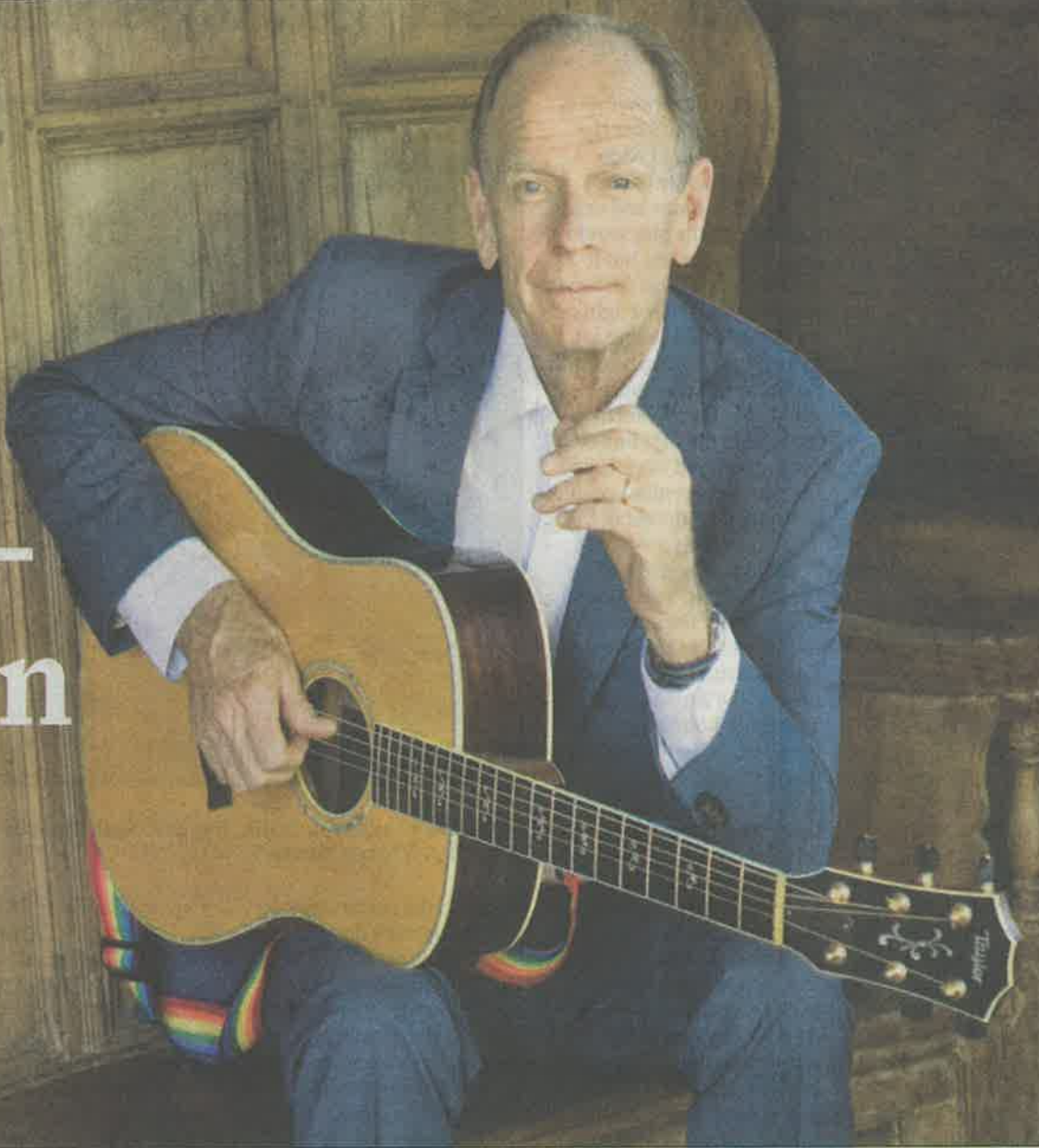


'Music royalty' — Livingston Taylor



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Livingston Taylor, who says "I love playing live, I love being on the road, I love touring," will appear at The Kate in Old Saybrook on Friday, Sept. 14.

Singer-songwriter brings his sweet melodies to The Kate

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By Lisa Reisman

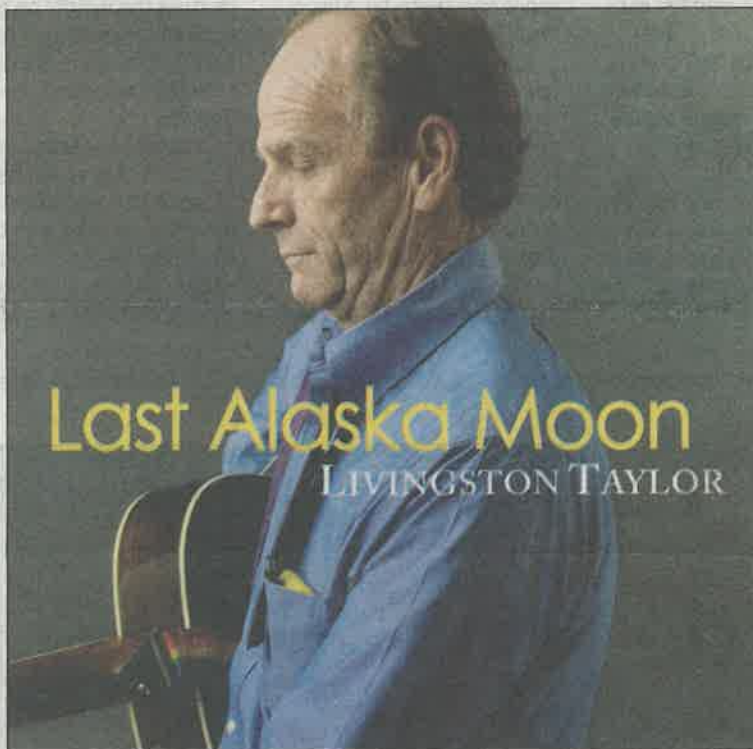
OLD SAYBROOK — One day, while in the kitchen, Livingston Taylor's mother Trudy held up a can of vegetables and challenged her four children to invent a jingle about it.

Thus began the "kitchen concerts," in which Trudy, a New England Conservatory-trained lyric soprano, would target miscellaneous items around the house for impromptu musical sloganeering, according to Taylor, who will appear at The Kate on Friday, Sept. 14.

"I played banjo, my sister Kate dulcimer, Alex was on violin, and James did cello," said Taylor, 67, in a telephone interview from St. Albans, Vt., where he was picking up an old motorboat.

"Music was everywhere, but there's music in lots of families," he said. "Yes, we're good at music. But really we're circus performers. We're good on stage. That's where those kitchen concerts come in. We could have easily been actors, lecturers. Music is the vehicle. Our real skillset is being good in front of a crowd."

Perhaps, but it's tough to discount the sheer chops in a family that reviewer Harris Fogel dubbed "music royalty." Kate, a singer-songwriter, formed her own band at 15, then scored a record deal four years later. Alex, who died in 1993, enjoyed success as a recording artist. As did Hugh, the youngest of the clan. He's now an innkeeper on Martha's Vineyard.



Livingston Taylor has been in the music business for 50 years and has released 19 albums. "Last Alaska Moon" came out in 2010.

Then there's James, the five-time Grammy Award winner, the Rock and Roll Hall of Famer and, having sold more than 100 million records worldwide, among the most successful musicians of all time.

Not that living in the shadow of his brother, who's three years older, has fazed him. Quite the opposite, it seems.

"James Taylor," he told NPR, "is a truly wonderful world class

artist who's willing to tolerate celebrity and visibility ... Fame and celebrity aren't necessarily desirable things. I think it was T.S. Elliot who said this wonderfully. 'A little fame is wonderful. A LOT of fame is a nightmare.'"

That "little fame" had Boston mayor Marty Walsh and Massachusetts governor Charlie Baker declaring Jan. 18, 2017 "Livingston Taylor Day" on the occasion of his 50th year in the music business.

It came in recognition of Billboard hits like "I Will Be in Love with You" and "I'll Come Running," as well as "Going Round One More Time" and "Boatman," which were recorded by James on the Grammy-winning album Hourglass. And 19 albums, the most recent of which, "Safe Home," he released in 2017.

Not to mention sharing the stage with major artists that range from Linda Ronstadt to Fleetwood Mac to Jethro Tull. And maintaining a schedule of 80 concerts a year, entertaining audiences with his own well-crafted melodies, an occasional cover of folk rock, a classic Gershwin, or something from the best of Broadway.

"There are the clean, clearly plucked and complex passing chords and melodies on the acoustic guitar," music columnist Hector Saldana writes, and "the timbre of his soothing voice, a blend of the Carolinas and New England professorial charm, [that] is distinctively part of the family tree."

That he also has "a subtle way of working a crowd and the obvious gift of pleasing one," as the Courier-Gazette of Rockland, Maine put it, is arguably no wonder.

"I love playing live, I love being on the road, I love touring," said Taylor, a seasoned pilot who regularly flies his Cessna 204 from Boston to Martha's Vineyard to beat the congested highways. "Most of all I love being around

my audience. I feel energized and infinitely renewed in their presence."

Which might explain why his class on stage performance, which he's taught at the prestigious Berklee School of Music since 1989, is consistently voted the most popular course at the college.

"When you teach, it really forces you to think about how you've been doing something for years," said Taylor, who counts the award-winning artists John Mayer, Susan Tedeschi and Liz Longely among his former students.

Specifically, overcoming stage fright.

"The core of my course is 'How do you find and care for an audience?'" Taylor said. "The problem with a performer being nervous is that when you're nervous, you're thinking about yourself, but the audience is paying you to think about them."

Of course, as he acknowledged, that's not something he's had to contend with. Due, at least in part, to the "kitchen concerts" of his youth.

Livingston Taylor appears at the Katharine Hepburn Cultural Arts Center at 8 p.m. on Friday, Sept. 14 at 300 Main St. Old Saybrook. For tickets and information, visit www.katharinehepburntheater.org or call 877-503-1286.

Lisa Reisman may be reached at lsareisman27@gmail.com.