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The gang's all here

Dennis Warner & the D's ready for the Paramount show 10-11

Photos by Jason Wachter
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Dennis Warner and the D's to play Paramount

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Folk artist Dennis Warner spends a lot of his performing time solo. So it's always a treat when he can get together with his backing band, the D's.

And the band is playing April 22 in one of Warner's favorite spots, the Paramount Theatre. "Shows like the Paramount are just awesome," said Warner, who lives in rural Clearwater. "We do a few of those a year, and I'd love to do more of those a year. ... When you get the bigger rooms, it just opens up the possibilities. It's a whole different feel of what's going on."

And Warner and the D's will have some special accompaniment: The Youth Chorale of Central Minnesota is going to join in on two songs. "It's a great experience for them — they get to step out of their normal choir zone — and it's a great experience for me because I've never worked with a choir," Warner said.

One of the songs that the Youth Chorale of Central Minnesota will do is "Have a Little Faith." When Warner recorded it, he had JD Steele, who recorded with artists such as Prince, supply the background music.

"He just cut all these different parts, 19, 20 different vocal tracks, and made this whole choir of sound behind me," Warner said. "That's what the choir's going to be doing. We need a whole choir to replace JD."

Warner also will perform separately with the Youth Chorale of Central Minnesota during its finale concert April 17 at Calvary Community Church.

artistic director Garrett Lathe said the students are enjoying working with Warner. For many of them, it's a different type of music than they're used to performing. "They surprised themselves with how well they could find harmonies," he said.

Some new tunes

Warner and the D's will perform a few fan favorites ("If I pull those songs out, the loyal people will let me know about it"), and because it's an Earth Day concert, attendees can expect to hear songs such as "Solar Power." But there will be a few new songs that Warner is working on for his 11th album; his last one, released about a year ago, was his first for kids.

The new album is "going to be along the same lines, but we're debating about trying to add a few new things to it, whether it's voices or instruments," Warner said. "We've been pretty much an acoustic band over the last seven albums. I'm tossing around maybe putting in a little bit of something different."

When asked what influences his songwriting, Warner said it's whatever happens in the moment. For example, one song he wrote for the new album captures the feeling when you're canoeing and the loons make up the musical background.

"I really like that song," he said. "I'm anxious to get that out there." Warner drives to most of his gigs, so that's when he works on some of his music.

"You never know when something will hit you," he said. "I always keep a sheet. If I see something interesting, I'll write it down in a notebook, just a line or a phrase or an idea or something." Warner said he doesn't find travel grueling; he loves it. "I get kind of fidgety sitting in my office," he said. "There's something about being on the road where you can work on music and get in front of the audience. That's what it's all about, being in front of an audience. That's why we rehearse and practice and write these songs and record these songs. We want to play them for people."

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A musical life

Music has long been a part of the 54-year-old Warner's life. He grew up in St. Cloud and attended St. Cloud Technical High School. He went to Bemidji State University for a year on a partial music scholarship for the cello. He ended up transferring to St. Cloud State University.

"I knew I was going to be a musician, singing and traveling with my guitar," he said. "Cello was just going to be something fun."

He spent a few years trying to make it in Nashville ("they wanted me to wear the hat and the whole thing"), but the fit wasn't right. Folk music was more natural. And in the mid-1990s, he linked up with the D's — Dan Neale, Derrick Raiter and Dennis "DK" Kennedy.

Warner likes the energy of being with the group. "When it's just you and your guitar, it's about the lyrics," he said. "When

If you go ...
What: Dennis Warner and the D's.
When: 7:30 p.m. Friday, April 22.
Where: Paramount Theatre, 913 St. Germain St.
Tickets: Advance tickets: \$17, day of show, \$19. Buy by calling the box office at 259-5463 or by visiting www.paramountarts.org.



Dan Neale, (from left) Dennis Kennedy, Dennis Warner and Derrick Raiter are shown April 5 at the Paramount Theatre. The members of Dennis Warner and the D's will be performing at the Paramount Theatre.

there's a band, it's still about the lyrics, but you can add other elements in that really make it interesting. It's just fun to do. I wish we could do a lot more shows together. Hopefully, someday we'll be able to do a lot of traveling together.

That's our hope." Kennedy said the band members enjoy getting to embellish Warner's message. "We just really enjoy the opportunity to work together as a group and with

Dennis," he said. Warner likes not only the variety on stage with the D's, but especially the interaction. "These guys are fun," he said. "They're not afraid to give it back to you

on stage, and you know each other so well, you've been such close friends for all these years that you can just look at each other and almost know what you're thinking." Warner said all things considered, his

career has been a great ride so far. "It's folk music. It's not rock and roll. We're not making tons of money. But it's enough to make you happy," he said. Follow Kate Kompas on Twitter @copygirlkate, or call her at 259-3620.