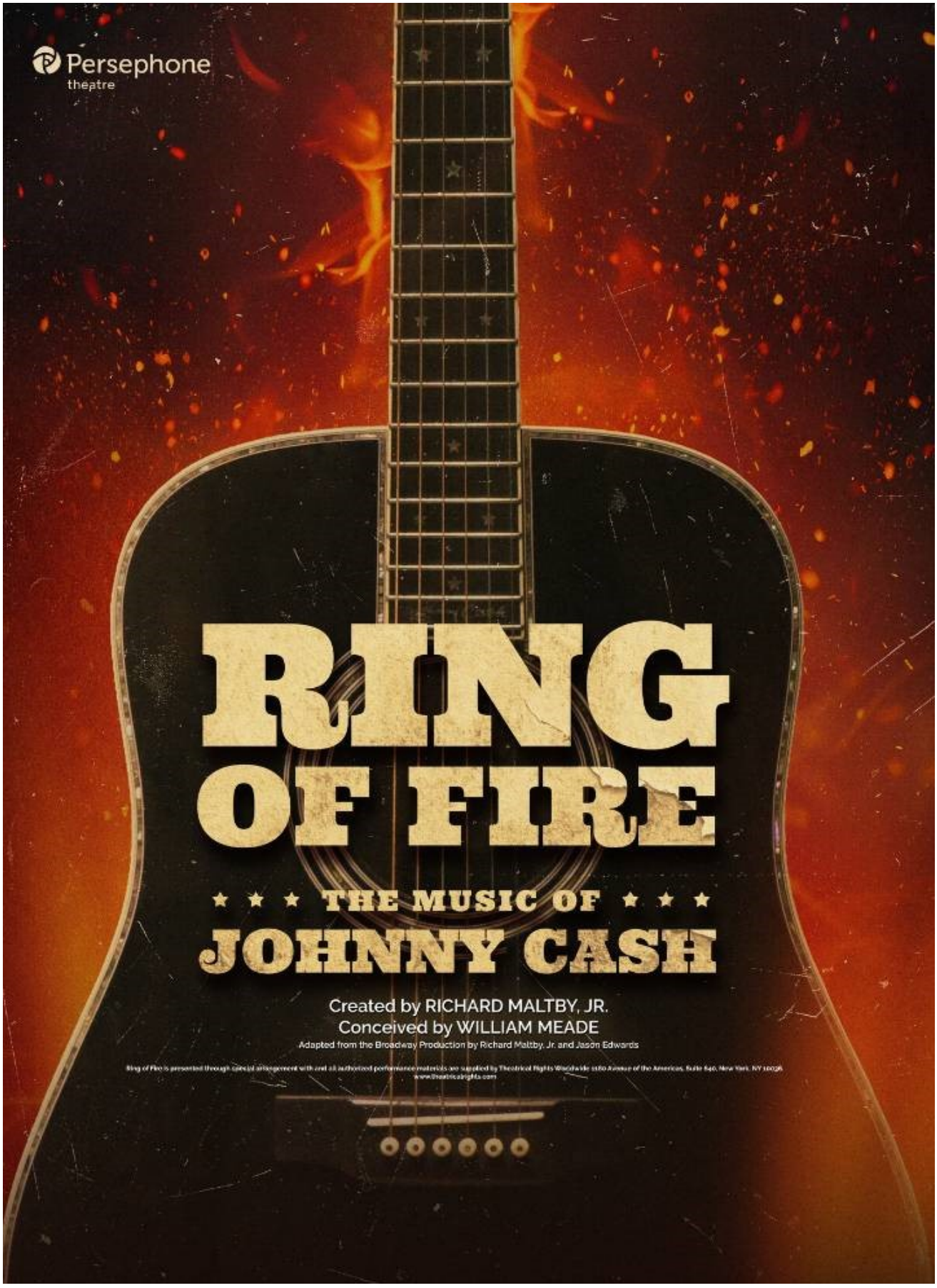


Enrichment Guide

Persephone Theatre is located on the beautiful lands of Indigenous peoples who have lived here since time immemorial, including the Nêhiyawak, Nêhithawak, Anishinabek, Nakawe, Nakota, Nehinawak, Lakota, Dakota and Dene peoples. This place is also the homeland of the Métis. At Persephone, we also like to acknowledge the contributions of the Whitecap Dakota and Round Prairie Métis peoples in establishing our city of Saskatoon. Persephone Theatre is located on Treaty 6 territory and is committed to living in good relations with our Indigenous neighbours, in the spirit with which the Treaties were intended.

THE ROLE OF THE AUDIENCE

IMPORTANT INFORMATION: *Several of the Persephone School Matinees are integrated with our Subscribers Wednesday Matinee. Our subscribers are paying full price for their tickets and many of them are seniors. Bringing youth and elders together has proven to be important and valuable for both mental health and social skills of all ages, which is one of the reasons why Persephone Theatre decided to program the Wednesday matinees in this way. Some of the seniors in attendance may have hearing or visual impairment, so we ask:*

- ***Students*** *to please be respectful by turning off their phones, not talking, and staying in their seats for the duration of each act.*
- ***Teachers and chaperones*** *please step in when needed to remind students of theatre etiquette.*

Here are some other ways in which the audience can contribute to make this a positive experience for all:

- *If you purchase items at the concession - please be mindful of the noise the packaging can make. Open your bags, packages, and lids before the show starts. The concession is NOT open during the performance, only before the play begins and at intermission.*
- *Try to use the washroom before the show starts. If you cannot wait until intermission, please try to leave the theatre discreetly. Our volunteer ushers will let you know when it is an appropriate moment to return to your seat. You may be seated in an alternate seat upon return.*

What makes theatre unique is that it is a communal experience and we can all work together to make it a positive one for everyone. The actors present the audience with their characters and specific events. The audience in turn responds to the story in real time whether it is through laughing at comedic moments, crying when something meaningful happens, or even gasping in surprise – even if their reactions are not visible or audible, the energy is palpable. Everyone goes home with a special experience to reflect on. And of course, applause is always greatly appreciated.

CONTENT OVERVIEW

CHARACTERS

PERFORMER 1 - Female vocalist, doubling on acoustic guitar
PERFORMER 2 - Male vocalist playing acoustic guitar and various percussion instruments
PERFORMER 3 - Male vocalist playing acoustic guitar, electric guitar and various percussion instruments
PERFORMER 4 - Male vocalist playing electric guitar, banjo, mandolin and fiddle
PERFORMER 5 - Male vocalist playing bass (preferably double bass but electric bass can be used), acoustic guitar and various percussion instruments

NOTE: The production is performed by a small ensemble of actor-musicians who switch between playing instruments and portraying various figures in Cash's life. The cast includes roles for an older Johnny (the narrator) and a younger Johnny, along with characters like his first wife Vivian and his second wife, June Carter.

SETTING

Various places in Johnny Cash's life

RUNNING TIME

90 minutes, plus intermission

CONTENT ADVISORY

This musical celebrates the iconic Jonny Cash, illustrating through music moments from his career and covering topics such as substance abuse, prison, violence, murder, and mature relationship issues.

SYNOPSIS

THEATRICAL CONVENTION

This play does not have a typical linear plot with spoken dialogue. Instead, it illustrates Johnny Cash's story through his music, using the songs themselves as the dialogue and action.

ACT ONE

The first act introduces the unique sound of blending a stripped-down rock and roll undercurrent with country music that made Johnny Cash's music famous, with early songs depicting his Arkansas childhood, family, and early touring days.

ACT TWO

The second act focuses on Cash's struggles with substance abuse and rowdy touring life. It also features his strong religious faith, his connection to outcasts and prisoners, and his relationship with June Carter.

CONTEXT

Johnny Cash - Johnny Cash, known as "The Man in Black," was a pivotal figure in the evolution of rock 'n' roll, blending elements of country, blues, and rockabilly to create a sound that resonated across genres. Born in 1932 in Kingsland, Arkansas to a family of Arkansas sharecroppers in the middle of the Great Depression, Cash's deep voice and storytelling style earned him a unique place in the music world. His fusion of traditional country with rock elements helped bridge the gap between the genres, influencing both country and rock artists. Hits like "I Walk the Line," "Folsom Prison Blues," and "Ring of Fire" showcase his ability to craft songs that were emotionally raw and authentically rebellious, making him a foundational artist in the development of rock 'n' roll. Cash's legacy extends beyond his music. His anti-establishment persona and dedication to social issues also contributed to his lasting influence on rock culture.

Jukebox musical- an original stage musical, not based on a film, that features a compilation of well-known, popular songs in its score that may or may not have any direct relation to the story. These songs are woven together by a specific time period, or sometimes reveal an intimate view of an iconic performer's life and body of work. The music is integrated into the plot and presented as a singularly unified story; sometimes the plot is completely fictional. The genre began to take off with the smash-hit Broadway success of *Mamma Mia!,* a fictional story told through the iconic music of the 1970s international super group ABBA. Today, there are dozens of jukebox musicals like *Ring of Fire* that have captivated audiences on Broadway and around the world, bringing brand new fans to the theatre.

The Great Depression- the Great Depression was an unprecedented economic crisis that affected almost every American across the nation. In the South, farmers and sharecroppers, already facing economic hardship due to wartime overproduction and lower post-World War I demand, faced especially tough economic conditions. Agricultural workers suffered severely during the Depression as the majority were tied to the fortunes of cotton and tobacco cash crops.

Sun Records - an American independent record label founded by Sam Phillips in Memphis, Tennessee, on February 1, 1952. It is famous as the birthplace of rock and roll that first launched the careers of music legends like Elvis Presley, Johnny Cash, and Jerry Lee Lewis.

Grand Ole Opry - the live performance showcase that features today's country music stars, superstars, and rising stars all on one stage, every week in Nashville, Tennessee. This world-famous show is where aspiring stars dream of playing and where music lovers connect with their favorite artists up close at the Opry House. For nearly 100 years, the Opry has been a home for country music's greatest talents, and today remains enormously influential in the genre's growth and change across the world. From the radio show that made country music famous in 1925 to the

cultural landmark and global music phenomenon it is today, the Opry is the biggest stage in country music.

June Carter Cash - an American country singer, songwriter, comedienne, actress, and author. A five-time Grammy Award winner, she was a member of the Carter Family (an influential folk music group in the earlier part of the century) and the second wife of singer Johnny Cash. Before her marriage she performed as June Carter, a name she continued to use professionally, including on songwriting credits. She played guitar, banjo, harmonica, and autoharp, and acted in several films and television shows.

GLOSSARY

Porter - a person employed to carry luggage and other items, especially in a railroad station, airport, or hotel.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

PRE-SHOW

1. How do social and economic issues still affect contemporary music today?
2. What makes Johnny Cash and his music still relevant today?

POST-SHOW

1. What was your takeaway from this musical concert tribute to Johnny Cash's music and life?
2. Why do you think Johnny Cash himself was not a character in this production?
3. What makes a signature Johnny Cash song? What recurring themes, subjects, or ideas are there throughout his discography?

RESOURCES

FILM

1. **Walk the Line** (2005) PG-13 Walk the Line (2005) Trailer #1 | Movieclips Classic Trailers

   A chronicle of Johnny Cash's life, played by Joaquin Phoenix, from his early days on an Arkansas cotton farm to his rise to fame with Sun Records in Memphis. Streaming on Crave and Disney+

PODCAST

1. **The Music Podcast for Kids - Rock Music**

SUGGESTED CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

1. **Writing prompts**
   Have students choose a writing prompt that helps them think about the play they witnessed in greater depth.

a. *Reader's/Listener's Response*
Have students choose a song that is performed in *Ring of Fire*. After listening to the song, print off the lyrics and have them respond to it, like a poem. Some sample prompts could include:
What sort of instruments are used? What does this tell you about the song/songwriter?
How does this song make you feel?
Is there a particular line or image that stands out to you? Why?
What are the main ideas or themes of this song?
What connections can you make to your own life or experiences?
What questions or thoughts does the poem evoke in your mind?
What is the author's purpose for writing this song?
It is very common for artists to cover each other's songs in this era. Find another artist that has recorded this song and listen to their version. What similarities do you notice? Differences? Why do you think that artist covered that song?

b. *Thematic exploration*
Ring of Fire uses Johnny Cash's music as a lens to examine love, faith, struggle, success, redemption, and family in his personal country/rock style of the mid-20th century. Choose a theme from above and trace its path through the concert musical. How do different songs at different stages in the musical address that theme? What lessons are imparted through the music regarding that theme?

2. Research - Addiction and rock n roll

Johnny Cash famously struggled with addiction throughout his career. We see in *Ring of Fire* his difficulty with staying awake as his entry point into drug use, but he is not alone in this path. An estimated 60% of musicians in the mid-20th century had similar substance abuse struggles.

Investigate another artist in this time period who had similar addiction issues to Johnny Cash. What effect did it have on their career, their lives, and their health? If this artist was someone you knew, what sort of resources or help could you provide this person?

3. Jukebox musical creation

Many artists and bands have had their music turned into a jukebox musical where their discography is compiled into a narrative. In *Ring of Fire*, the story is much looser and autobiographical than that of *Mamma Mia!* or *Jagged Little Pill*, where the music is interpreted into a story separate from the artist who wrote it. Take an artist you know well, and mold their music into a story. Use at least 10 songs to inspire a narrative, and write a short synopsis of the action/exposition needed between the songs to fill out your story.

4. Johnny Cash music lesson

If you have a class set of guitars, what better time to learn some of the best singalong songs than after being introduced to Johnny Cash! In this video, we are taught the iconic boom-chicka strum pattern that makes a song recognizably Cash and the simple chords to play 3 of his most popular songs.

3 Johnny Cash Songs Every Beginner Guitarist Should Know...

If you do not have access to guitars, try your hand at writing your own blues music! This teacher in the following video uses glasses with water to demonstrate the 12 bar blues pattern, but boomwhackers or any other keyed musical instrument would work for this too.

How to Write the Blues in 5 Steps

5. **Emotion Orchestra Drama Game**
   Have your students sit or stand in rows or small groups, as though they were musicians in an orchestra. Instead of having a string section or a brass section, however, the conductor (the teacher) will create "emotion sections" - a sadness group, a guilt group, a confused group, etc. Each time the conductor points or gestures to a particular section, the performers will make noises that communicate their designated emotion. Encourage participants to avoid using words and come up with sounds that convey their given feeling. Provide this example: "If your group has the emotion "Annoyed," you might make the sound "Hmph!" Although voices are the main "instruments," the use of clapping and other body percussion sounds is definitely permitted. Warm them up by pointing to one section at a time, then add another and another, eventually building to a climactic frenzy if you wish. Bring your piece to a close by fading out one section at a time and ending with the sounds of only one emotion. Explain that when you as the conductor raise your hands high, that means that the volume should increase. Hands low means a decrease in the volume. A variation on this could be creating a setting like downtown New York or a rural cottage and letting each group decide what part of the soundscape they want to be - the babbling brook, the honking of car horns, etc.

RESOURCE LINKS FOR TEACHERS

1. **Lessons | The Academy of Music**

CURRICULAR OUTCOMES

Arts Ed CP7.7 - Investigate improvisation using the voice, instruments, and a wide variety of sound sources from the natural and constructed environment.

Arts Ed CR6.3 - Examine arts expressions and artists of various times and places.

Arts Ed CH8.4 - Examine and respond to the work of artists who incorporate more than one art form in their work (e.g., combining poetry and music).

Guitar CP10.2 - Demonstrate beginner guitar techniques to create and play a musical product.

ELA CR8.4 - View critically and demonstrate comprehension of a variety of visual and multimedia texts including videos, television broadcasts, informational presentations, dramatic presentations, websites, and news programs to locate and interpret key messages and details, to develop conclusions, opinions, and understanding, and to evaluate the effectiveness of the text.

ELA CC9.8a - Write to describe (a profile of a character), to narrate (a narrative essay), to explain and inform (a researched report), and to persuade (a review).

Health USC9.6 - Analyze the health, economic, and social supports and challenges of addictions (e.g., tobacco, shopping, alcohol, gambling, Internet, drugs) on self, family, community, and the environment.

ENRICHMENT GUIDE CONTRIBUTOR BIO

Sam Fairweather

Sam (she/her) is a theatre artist based in Saskatoon on Treaty Six Territory, working as an actor, educator, stage manager, and peacemaker. She is a substitute teacher with Saskatoon Public Schools and loves to teach primary years and high school math - a strange combo for a teacher who doubles as an artist! Sam learned to play piano from a young age, but was never as good as her brother was on guitar. She grew up listening to all of these classic rock tunes spilling out of her brother's room, and developed a deep love for live music after that. Outside the theatre, you can find Sam at the dog park or snuggled up with Pippa, her wonderful 5-year-old border collie, who makes more noise than any instrument ever could.