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By: Phillip Ramati

Gregg Allman 'excited' to be back in Macon for Big House opening

It's funny how the years seem to run together.

When Gregg Allman was told Wednesday that Friday night's Allman Brothers Band concert would be the group's first show in Macon in almost 19 years, the singer couldn't believe it.

"Has it been that long?" he asked. "We tried to get it booked (last year) for the 40th anniversary (of the band's founding). I told them to book Macon, or at least somewhere in Georgia, but they didn't do it. I'm so glad we are doing (Friday's show). It'll be good."

Friday's sold-out show at the Macon City Auditorium marks the first time the band will play together here since December 1991, though Allman and other members have played solo shows in the city since then.

Fans are eager to have them return to the city that the band, which formed in 1970, once called home. Tickets for the show sold out in less than five minutes.

"I'm am very excited," said Robert Francis of Macon, who bought six tickets for Friday's concert. "This is a great thing for Macon. Hopefully, the people will turn out to support them. ... I love a good 15- or 20-minute song that's full of emotion. I want the band to feed off us, and I want us to feed off them."

Fans might wonder why the band won't be playing in the much larger Macon Coliseum, which could hold more than 9,000 fans, many more than the 2,700 the auditorium holds.

But Allman said a Coliseum concert wouldn't be the same.

“(The Coliseum) has the worst sound,” he said. “It’s like a 15,000-seat men’s room. We went round and round with that years and years ago. Eric Clapton even put sound columns in, but it didn’t help.”

The concert is the centerpiece of a three-day celebration of the band as original members Allman, drummer Butch Trucks and drummer Jaimoe officially open The Big House Museum, the Vineville Avenue house that the late Duane Allman and Berry Oakley used to live in with their families and that served as the band’s unofficial headquarters during the group’s early years.

Gregg Allman made a surprise visit to the museum in February to check it out.

“I thought it was out of sight,” he said. “It’s just gorgeous. I was amazed that there was so much memorabilia made about the Allman Brothers. There was so much of that stuff, and I don’t have any of it!”

Allman was able to tell museum personnel that the organ he used to play that’s on display at the museum had one of the drawbars replaced, small details that still remain fresh for him after all these years.

Peggy Winters-Thompson, the interim director of the museum, said Allman Brothers fans from around the world will be descending on Macon for the museum opening and concert. Some of them want to be a part of the festivities any way they can.

“We’re trying to spruce the place up,” she said. “We had a gentleman who came down from Michigan for the show, and he mopped our floors. It’s been all kinds of fun, and all kinds of crazy.”

Winters-Thompson said fans will be arriving in Macon from England, Japan, Mexico, Germany and Canada, as well as across the United States.

The band will leave Saturday for concert dates in Huntsville, Ala., and at the New Orleans Jazz Festival. But Allman said the Macon show is a highlight for the band.

“I can’t wait,” he said. “We should have played (in Macon) three nights straight. ... I’m just glad to be there. I’m looking forward to it big-time.”

Francis said this could be one of the most important shows in the band’s history.

“I think it’s very significant that they are playing in Macon,” he said. “This will probably be the last time they ever do. It’s important for Macon to go out and say good-bye, because they are what Macon calls ‘our band.’ ”

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