

Tyler play ‘Sins of My Father’ explores fatherhood, faith and identity

JENNIFER SCOTT

Years before it hit the stage, ‘Sins of My Father’ lived in Tracy Paul Williams’ head — a personal project born from real-life struggles, spiritual breakthroughs, and the kind of lessons you don’t learn in a classroom. Now, the gospel stage play returns to the East Texas stage, offering audiences a powerful look at identity, faith, and the legacy of fatherhood.

Williams, who currently serves as the Director of Reentry Services at Lee College in Huntsville, draws on decades of experience working with justice-impacted families and in higher education. In addition to managing a Pathways grant and teaching government courses, he’s an author, playwright, motivational speaker, and subject matter expert on criminal justice and education. He holds degrees from Southwestern



Tracy Williams authored a gospel play that speaks for his personal experience, finding himself and God. (Contributed Photo)

Baptist Theological Seminary and UT Arlington, and is pursuing a PhD at Texas Tech University.

Set at the fictional Tyler University, ‘Sins of My Father’ follows four college-aged men as they pledge a fraternity and confront the lasting impact of their fathers — both

present and absent. Written, produced, and directed by Williams, the story draws heavily from his own journey growing up in Tyler without a father, and the hard-won discovery of his identity in Christ.

“This play is a story of redemption and hope,” Williams said. “I was a young man that didn’t have a father in my life. I used to think my identity was tied up in knowing who my father was because he didn’t want anything to do with me. For a long time, that made me feel like I was a monster.”

After graduating from Robert E. Lee High School (now Tyler Legacy) in 1994, Williams was headed for the U.S. Air Force Academy until, as he puts it, “bad choices” led him off course.

“I realized — during what I call a self-imposed exile — that my identity wasn’t in a man, it wasn’t in things, it wasn’t in success,” he said. “My identity was in Christ,

and that changed everything.”

Williams’s faith continues to guide his work both on and off the stage. He is an associate pastor at God’s Way Baptist Church in Tyler, where the play is presented in partnership, and credits his family — his wife, Alexis, and his role as a devoted husband, father, and grandfather — for their unwavering support.

This year’s performance of ‘Sins of My Father’ — set for Saturday, Aug. 16 at Caldwell Auditorium, located at 300 South College Avenue in Tyler — is a revised and updated version of the original, first staged in 2012 and again in 2016.

Tickets are \$10, available on Eventbrite or at the door. “People always ask why the tickets are so low,” Williams said. “Because money isn’t the point. The goal is to bring people together and maybe change a life.”

At the center of the play are questions many young

people face but rarely voice: What does it mean to be a man? What does it mean to be fathered, or not? And how do you build identity in a world that often hands you the wrong blueprint?

“A real man is someone who acknowledges God first, who provides for his family, and who takes responsibility for his community,” Williams said. “If something needs to be done, he steps up.”

The story speaks to women as well. “A lot of young ladies grow up not seeing what a real man looks like,” he added. “So they settle. This play shows them what love and respect should look like, and what they deserve.”

According to Williams, although the story is fictional, the themes hit close to home in many communities, especially for those who grew up without strong male role models. Williams hopes ‘Sins of My Father’ will inspire personal reflection,

healing, and conversations that ripple far beyond the auditorium.

“One bad choice does not define the totality of who a person is,” he said. “If someone walks away from this play encouraged to do better, to be better, or to lift someone else up — that’s everything.”

Williams’ contributions have been recognized statewide. He received the Lee College Distinguished Alumni Award in 2022, was selected for the VERA Institute of Justice Correctional Education Leadership Academy in 2023, and appointed to the Texas Prison Education Program Advisory Committee in 2024. For him, the play is more than art; it’s ministry and mission.

“I’m just trying to do kingdom work in the community,” he said. “To give back to the place where I once lost myself, and now, by the grace of God, I’ve come full circle.”



HOMECOMING

WES JEANS AND BLUES BAND TEXAS FLOOD TO HEADLINE MARSHALL BENEFIT CONCERT

Wes Jeans and blues band Tommy Katona and Texas Flood are set to perform Aug. 23 in support of the Serenity Club of Marshall. (Contributed Photo)

ROBIN Y. RICHARDSON

MARSHALL — Award-winning blues artist Wes Jeans says he is excited to return home to Marshall as he plans to perform great hits for a great cause at Memorial City Hall Performance Center.

The Aug. 23 concert, featuring blues band Tommy Katona and Texas Flood, is in support of the Serenity Club of Marshall, which houses 12-step recovery or support programs — a purpose that’s close to Jeans and Katona’s hearts.

“I’m nine years sober, and my buddy Tommy Katona, who is the world’s number one Stevie Ray Vaughan tribute artist, he’s sober as well,” Jeans said. “He and I are best friends, so we kind of helped each other through it. For me, (music) is really a way to deal with life and deal with

everything it throws at us. And you know, as musicians, we’re just lucky that we have this outlet, so to speak, to deal with life.

“(The concert is to) benefit something that we believe in and help other people see the light and help other people realize that, just because you slip and you have a problem with drugs or alcohol or whatever, it’s not the end of your life,” he said. “There’s always going to be somebody with these 12 step programs... somebody there for you to call and reach out to. And so it’s just important for us in our recovery to pay it forward and help other people to recover.”

The Aug. 23 concert is a tribute to Vaughan, the legendary Texas blues artist who died in a 1910 helicopter crash.

Jeans said he met Katona in 2006 at a Stevie Ray Vaughn birthday bash in

Dallas where Jeans was a frequent performer.

“He gets up and jams with me, and within no time, and I’m like, ‘Wow, this kid is something special!’ And we just became friends after that. And here we are, 19 years later, we’re still best friends,” Jeans said.

They’ve also been performing together since, incorporating never-before performed music by Vaughan and Vaughan’s brother, Jimmie, in their concerts.

“Right before Stevie passed, he and his brother did an album together called ‘Family Style.’ But before they could ever do any live shows or tours, Stevie passed,” Jeans said. “So what we do now, I go into a lot of these shows, and I’ll play the part of Jimmie the big brother, and he’ll do Stevie Ray’s parts, so we get to do ‘Family Style.’

And to my knowledge, I don’t know of anybody else doing a lot of those songs from ‘Family Style’. But it’s natural for the two of us — he plays like Stevie; I play like Jimmie, and we just kind of do our things.”

Jeans said the performance will be his first time at Memorial City Hall since the building’s renovation.

“It’s really exciting to get to play this venue. I’m always excited to get to play at home, because I’m always gone,” Jeans said.

As a husband and father of a blended family of five sons, Jeans said he stays close to his home in the Dallas area, touring around Texas, and producing albums in his recording studio in Athens.

Jeans’s career at age 17, opening up for the legendary Bobby Blue Bland Band. He has toured around the world and recorded several studio

albums.

“I was lucky enough from the get-go to be opening for heroes of mine and getting to jam with Jimi Hendrix band members and stuff like that, because I did the Hendrix competition when I was a teenager, when I first started. So that was my introduction into the music industry,” Jeans said. “But, I’ve been doing this for almost 30 years now, but it’s very seldom I can do anything at home.

“There’s so much musical history in this part of Texas, especially in the blues,” he said.

Tommy Katona and Texas Flood have kept a busy calendar as well, traveling across the country for shows.

“We both have played all over the country,” Jeans said. “And so to get to play here together is exciting.”

Organizers invite the community for an amazing

night of music.

“Besides helping the 12-Step program, obviously, that’s great, but we’ve got a world-class, beautiful music venue here in this town, right on our town square. And you know, I’m born and raised here, so I couldn’t be more proud of downtown Marshall,” Jeans said. “And so I’ve talked to a lot of people and told them about the show, and they’ve said ‘I haven’t been (to Memorial City Hall).’ Well, then this is your chance to come see this beautiful auditorium and get to hear some Texas blues.

“It’s just a good night of helping support people in their sobriety, and also helping live music and the scene in downtown Marshall. It’s just a win-win all the way around.”

Tickets are on sale now at www.memorialcityhall.com or by calling (903) 934-7992.