

June 21

## [A special homecoming](#)

Musician and Scranton native says he was given second chance at life, will perform Saturday at St. Luke's.

By Stephanie Longo

Times Leader Correspondent

Sometimes, what looks like your greatest tragedy can actually set you on the path to your greatest triumph. At least, that's what happened for Scranton native Jack Woodbridge when a life-changing medical diagnosis almost spelled the end of his musical career.

Now, fully recovered and better than ever, Woodbridge will give the debut performance of his sophomore album, "Jack of Hearts", at St. Luke's Episcopal Church, 232 Wyoming Avenue, Scranton, on Saturday, June 26, at 8 p.m.

"I couldn't be more excited to go back home to Scranton to perform," Woodbridge said. "I have so many friends there and so many great memories. A lot of my lifelong friends from that area haven't seen me perform because when I went to New York, I came as a songwriter. I was behind the scenes writing."

Woodbridge, 54, grew up in Scranton's West Side and attended St. Ann's School, now part of All Saints Academy, where he began to learn piano.

"I never had vocal lessons, I never really wanted to be formally trained in music for college but I did write my first song when I was 11," he said. "From that time on, I was always writing and recording even through college."

"I never really felt like I wanted to do anything else," he continued. "Even though I got an advertising degree from [Penn State](#), I just knew that there was nothing else that I really ever wanted to do but music. Everything else just seemed unnatural to me. There is a great quote that 'Mozart must write music', you have to do what you have to do because it is your nature and I just feel that music is in my nature and it has been since I was very young."

Woodbridge left Scranton in 1985 for New York City in the hopes of pursuing a career in music. Since then, he has worked with CBS records, composed songs for a variety of artists, written two off-Broadway scores, and even a rock opera for National Public Radio. He released his first album, "Picture This" in 2006, the same year he received his shocking medical diagnosis.

While participating in a 10-day study group at the National Institute of Health in Bethesda, Md., doctors discovered a rare tumor at the bottom of Woodbridge's spine.

"That's pretty huge because it controls a lot of the parts of the body, like your organs, your bodily functions, and other things," he said. "It was in a very precarious place. The potential risks that they spelled out to me weren't too pleasant. They never said anything like I might never walk again but they did say things like 'you may live in the rehabilitation center for several months and have to learn how to walk again' and that I might not have use of certain functions in my body for a while."

"I was more in shock than anything that this would happen to me," Woodbridge added.

It was from Woodbridge's shock and confusion over his diagnosis that the album "Jack of

Hearts” was born. Doctors at the National Institute of Health gave him ten days to get his personal affairs in order back in New York so he could return to Maryland for the potentially life-altering surgery. While preparing himself mentally for what was to come, Woodbridge had a vision.

“I had an instant vision dream at some point of me coming out of the surgery lying across the top of a grand piano,” he said. “It told me that somehow everything was going to be okay. I knew that the record should be called ‘Jack of Hearts’ from this dream, the name just came to me. It was all like a brainstorming that came to me. I started to write the songs and hear the songs in my head.”

“I came back to New York and instead of going into panic mode and checking out of life and being depressed or doing something crazy, like going on a cruise or going to Hawaii since I didn’t know how I would come out of this surgery, I started to work on this album,” he continued. “I called up the producer, Dean Bailin, who produced the first record. I told him I wanted to start recording this album.”

Woodbridge explained that he wrote, composed, and recorded the music for “Jack of Hearts” during the ten days he had before his surgery.

“I sang and played the piano and did the recording live with the thought that something might happen to me in this surgery, like if my body was mangled or my voice was gone or I couldn’t play again,” he said. “I was told my arms and hands would not be affected but it is always risky. I didn’t know what to expect so at least if I was recuperating for 3-6 months in recovery, I could work on this album and it would be good for me mentally. I recorded and wrote as much as I could for this album and then figured we would produce it later. It was like fate had lined everything up.”

Ten days after he recorded “Jack of Hearts”, Woodbridge was back in Bethesda for the 11-hour operation.

“They went in and rearranged the furniture, so to speak,” Woodbridge said. “When I came out of it, it was just like the image in my head. Some of the songs I wrote beforehand even had the underlying message that everything would be alright and it was. They flew me back to New York five days after the operation. None of their risks or the things that could have happened, happened.”

Woodbridge spent a year recovering from the operation and took that time off from producing “Jack of Hearts”. Woodbridge now lives with chronic back pain as a result of the surgery and had to leave his job to go on permanent disability.

“Whenever I get bummed out about what I can’t do because there are certain limitations, there are good days and bad days, I think of the alternative and I feel like I am one of the luckiest guys in the world,” he said. “Now I have the time to spend on my music. When I came out of this situation, even the year before I had the operation there were a lot of things happening in my life, there were a lot of challenges, I felt like I went through an epiphany. Maybe a little bit of redemption was involved or just an epiphany.”

“I followed my heart, which was my music. Apparently it is not my time to die or to be mangled. I think I have been given a second chance and time to really follow my heart,” he continued. “I don’t know why I was spared. I know I was given a gift. I believe I was given a gift as a kid. I think we’re all given gifts and that is what I am trying to say, even on this record. The last song on the CD is called “Send Me” and it says, ‘Love, send me on my way to do what I am supposed to do here.’ Maybe it is to help other people through my music.”

Besides, “Jack of Hearts”, Woodbridge’s music will reach a wider variety of audiences as on the same night of his Scranton performance, a film he scored the music to will debut at the Palm Springs Film Festival in California.

“The movie is an independent short called ‘My Secret Friend’,” Woodbridge said. “This happened as I was wrapping up ‘Jack of Hearts’. I had one of my songs, as a fluke, in another

movie by the same director called 'Even in My Dreams' about two years ago. The director then asked me to score this short for him."

"When I fell in love with music and when I fell in love with writing songs I felt that my songs could make pictures," Woodbridge continued. "I always pictured my songs being in movies; in fact, a lot of people would tell me my songs should be in movies because I am very visual." Given all that he has been through since 2006, Woodbridge has some advice for people who may be going through a difficult period in their lives.

"It turned my life around to think I was given this second chance," he said. "I got a message that just said there is some reason why this bad stuff didn't happen and why I was spared." "A lot of times when people go through a rough patch in life, they lose hope," Woodbridge continued. "But I say don't quit five minutes before the miracle because right around the corner your dream can come true."

Woodbridge's homecoming performance on June 26 will be at 8 p.m. at St. Luke's Church in downtown Scranton. Doors will open at 7:30 p.m. There will be a meet-and-greet with Woodbridge following the show. Tickets are \$20 in advance and \$25 at the performance, with children under 12 admitted free of charge with an accompanying adult. A portion of the proceeds from the concert will be donated to the music program at St. Luke's. Tickets are on sale at Duffy Accessories, 218 Linden St., Scranton, and The Fanciful Fox, 342 Adams Ave., Scranton, or online at either <http://www.PocoNotes.com> or <http://www.nepatickets.com/>.

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