

# Indie folk rock's poster boy leads Red Butte finale

**Conor Oberst »**  
Erstwhile Bright Eyes frontman promises an energetic show.

By **AUTUMN THATCHER**  
Special to The Tribune

Red Butte Garden closes its 2014 outdoor concert season and says goodbye to summer on Sunday through the talents of singer/songwriter Conor Oberst.

A staple in the indie music scene for nearly two decades, Oberst began recording music when he was 13 years old and has been labeled everything from Indie's Boy Wonder to the Bob Dylan of his generation. The alt-folk rocker helped put Omaha on the musical map through co-founding the independent label Saddle Creek Records. Oberst switched gears in May and released his first major-label album, "Upside Down Mountain," on Nonesuch, a Warner Bros. subsidiary that boasts bands such as Wilco and The Black Keys.

The album was three years in the making, and certainly pulls him out of that "emo" genre that critics have loved to throw him into over the years. "That was a funny term," Oberst said recently in an interview.

Oberst is kind and gracious, if not a bit awkward and



Conor Oberst performs at Red Butte Garden on Sunday, closing out the 2014 Outdoor Concert Series.

seemingly unable to come across as confident in his music, even though mass amounts of critical acclaim for his latest album give him every reason to boast. He said he doesn't want to be "pigeonholed," but he also doesn't mind the emotional part of "emo."

"In my opinion, emotion is a very necessary component to music — unless you are purposefully stripping emotion away, which is a cool experiment. But to me, it just feels like that's something that should be

in a lot of music."

At 34, Oberst has written a serious amount of music — as a solo artist, as frontman for Bright Eyes, with rotating band members, and with groups including Mystic Valley Band, Desaparecidos and Monsters of Folk. "Upside Down Mountain

is a reflection of his evolution as an artist and as a human; it is the sound of life experienced and perhaps even some contentment.

"It just reflects where I am at in my life as a person," he said. "The songs sort of come from more of a subconscious space

## Summer goodbye

Conor Oberst closes the Red Butte Garden 2014 Outdoor Concert Series, with opener Jonathan Wilson.

**When »** Sunday, 6:30 p.m.  
**Where »** Red Butte Garden Amphitheatre, 300 Wakara Way, Salt Lake City

**Tickets »** \$40, \$35 for garden members; [www.red-buttegardenticketfly.com](http://www.red-buttegardenticketfly.com)

in my mind. Every experience I have, and the things I absorb — like little observations I make in daily life — get filed back in my head and end up blending together in a way that I don't fully understand. That's the mystery of creativity," he said.

At the time of the interview, Oberst was working on lining up his band members for the Red Butte Garden performance. He is excited to have "Upside Down Mountain" producer Jonathan Wilson join him on the amphitheater stage playing guitar. Oberst found it "pretty awesome" when he learned that he would be closing out the popular outdoor summer concert

season.

"I suppose there's always a bit of sadness at the end of summer — no more fun in the sun. We'll try to send it off right and do our best," he said.

"It will be a pretty energetic performance. I'm not very good at selling myself to the uninitiated, but hopefully they will walk away somewhat satisfied."

While Oberst may not feel comfortable touting his talent, Red Butte concert series organizer Chris Mautz is more than happy to speak to the musician's skills.

"He puts on some really high-energy, passionate performances. He really wants people coming to his live shows to walk away feeling like, 'Wow, that was a really unique moment,' and something pleased to be a part of," Mautz said.

After working with Oberst on a couple of occasions, Mautz identifies him as not only an authentic man who sincerely cares about his work, but as someone who deserves attention.

"Anyone who has been able to put out consistently strong material," he said, "I think that speaks to their true dedication, to their craft and who they are."

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