



Livingston Taylor will be appearing at the Meyer Theater, La-Z-Boy Center at 7:30 p.m. this Friday.

## Livingston Taylor to bring color, comedy to concert

BY ALEX ALUSHEFF  
For The Monroe News

For Livingston Taylor, there's always excitement in performing at a venue he hasn't played at in some time.

"It's the freshness of it," said Mr. Taylor, who has been playing music for roughly 45 years. "It's a very nice feeling."

Mr. Taylor will get to experience that feeling when he takes the stage Friday at the La-Z-Boy Center at Monroe Community College.

He performed here in 2006, and his return engagement is part of the college's 50th anniversary celebration and the La-Z-Boy Center's 10th anniversary celebration.

Fans of the singer-songwriter, folk rock artist will get to hear music from his older albums, such as "Life Is Good," to newer work like "Last Alaska Moon," as well as his yet-to-be-released album, "Blue Sky."

"I got a lot of colors to choose from," Mr. Taylor said of his set list, which includes his own music and covers of George Gershwin with some comedy sprinkled in.

Those colors sprouted from his youth, when his older brother, Alex, introduced him and his brother, James Taylor, to rock 'n' roll, gospel and pop in the 1960s, shaping his musical style.

"I'm a very melodic-oriented singer," he said. "I love sounds and sensibilities. And I deeply admire other singers like Tom Rush and John Gorka; I'm a big James Taylor fan."

Though Mr. Taylor said his brother has had a "fabulous career and is a wonderful musical force," his fame also might alter live performances unlike his.

"James is required to play the songs on

### IF YOU GO ...

**Who:** Livingston Taylor  
**When:** 7:30 p.m. Friday  
**Where:** Meyer Theater, La-Z-Boy Center, Monroe County Community College, 1555 S. Raisinville Rd.

**Tickets:** \$22 for reserved seats; \$32 for VIP seats in balcony with cash bar and munchies. Available at online at [www.monroecc.edu/theater](http://www.monroecc.edu/theater), in person at the cashier's office in the Warrick Student Services/Administration Building, by calling the 384-4272 or at the door if available.

his hit records, where I have a little more flexibility," he said, allowing him to do more covers and insert his comedy as part of his stage presence.

Another aspect that Mr. Taylor said sets him apart from his contemporaries is his lyrics.

"The songs I play are well crafted," he said. "Regardless of the shows I'm playing, they're well put together."

One of the driving forces behind Mr. Taylor's songs is plot.

"It's fun to write a song around characters," he said, noting songs like "Yes" and "Best of Friends," which are some of his favorite to play. "I wrote those songs because I liked them. They are lyrically intact and tell good stories."

However, none of it would matter to him if it weren't for his fans.

"I need my audience; I need to see them, I need to be around them," Mr. Taylor said before reciting advice he tells his music students at Berklee College of Music in Boston, where he is a professor. "The audience isn't my problem, it's my salvation."

## 'Distance' author hopes story unites readers

BY DANIELLE PORTEUS  
dportteus@monroenews.com

Reyna Grande was drawn to writing because of her desire to learn English and no longer be the outcast at school.

"Whenever I would learn new words, I would write short stories or poems using those words," Ms. Grande said in an e-mail to The Monroe News from her home in California. "As I became better at writing, I realized that in writing you couldn't hear my accent, so writing became my favorite way of expressing myself."

Once she learned the language, the need for writing changed, she said.

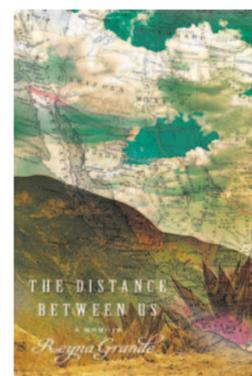
"I discovered that by writing down my experiences, I would somehow start to understand why things happen," she said. "Writing gave meaning to the difficulties in my life."

Her memoir "The Distance Between Us" was selected as this year's suggested read for the One Book, One Community event.

Ms. Grande will speak Wednesday at Monroe County Community College as part of this year's events.

The author plans to continue the discussion about the book and update the audience on her life after the book ends.

"My message is that we can't allow tragedies and bad circumstances to bring us down, rather, we must rise above it and strive to find the place within ourselves where forgiveness, hope and redemption exist," she said.



### AUTHOR'S CHILDHOOD

The memoir was published in August, 2012, and depicts her life before and after illegally immigrating to the United States from Mexico.

When she was just 2, her father left Mexico to find work in the United States. Her mother followed two years later, leaving Ms. Grande and her siblings behind.

During her young life, Ms. Grande was separated from her parents, who eventually split. She and her siblings coped with abandonment. When she was 10, she entered the country and later became the first person in her family to graduate from college.

She wanted to graduate from college because of her family. Her grandparents had little schooling. Her father attended to the third grade, and her mother to the sixth grade.

"I wanted to do it for the children I knew I would one day have and for my nieces and nephews I would one day have," she said. "I believe that it only takes one person to change a family's path. That person just happened to be me. I knew that if I accomplished my goals — going to college, having a successful career — I would then be able to pave the way for the future generations."

Ms. Grande received a bachelor's degree in creative writing, film and video from the University of California, Santa Cruz, after spending two years at Pasadena City College. She received a master's degree in creative writing from Antioch University.

### NOVEL 'SET ME FREE'

Writing the memoir was cathartic, the author explained.

"After I finished writing it, I felt liberated, free of all the weight from my emotional baggage and childhood traumas," she said. "During the four years I spent on the book, I felt that I was on a roller coaster of emotions. Reliving all those memories was painful, but I also loved getting to spend the time with my sister, Mago, all over again."

While writing, she said she could go back to being the little sister whose big sister was there to protect her.

"Also, writing about my parents was very difficult at first, but in writing about them, I learned a lot more about them, about who they were, and I discovered that my parents are human beings with virtues and flaws,"

### IF YOU GO ...

**Who:** Reyna Grande  
**When:** 7 p.m. Wednesday  
**Where:** Meyer Theater, La-Z-Boy Center, Monroe County Community College, 1555 S. Raisinville Rd.  
**Cost:** Free





— AP/Disney Enterprises Inc. photo by JAY MAIDMENT

Muppet characters (from left) Scooter, Rowlf, Kermit, Walter, Fozzie and Gonzo appear in a scene from “Muppets Most Wanted.”

## Muppets reteam with mixed results

BY JAKE COYLE  
AP film writer

A strange sense of doom hangs over the rebooted Muppets, and it's not from the Swedish Chef's cooking.

“The Muppets” (2011) may have been an earnest and largely successful relaunch for Jim Henson's troupe, but it also had a hangdog melancholy, fretting about the obsolescence of Kermit and the gang. Pop-culture insecurity looms in “Muppets Most Wanted,” too, which begins with the same self-conscious tone as the last film in the musical number “We're Doing a Sequel.”

Though Dr. Bunsen Honeydew notes this is technically the Muppets' seventh sequel, they nevertheless sing: “And everyone knows the sequel's not quite as good.”

The Muppets don't need a sequel. They need a shrink. It seems they've swapped “the most inspirational, celebrational, Muppetational” show for an ongoing pity party.

“Muppets Most Wanted,” thankfully, soon enough dispatches the previous film's mopey nostalgia and sets things on a more madcap course: a European caper, not unlike 1981's (alas superior) “The Great Muppet Caper.” The ingredients are here: Tina Fey as a Broadway-loving

Gulag guard in Soviet chic; Ty Burrell in Inspector Clouseau mode; Ricky Gervais as the comically obvious bad guy (name: Dominic Badguy). But “Muppets Most Wanted” fails to whip up the kind of furry frenzy that makes the Muppets special.

What's missing? Many would say Jason Segel, the star and co-writer of “The Muppets.”

But the bigger problem with “Muppets Most Wanted” is a failure to find the right human-to-Muppet ratio and a screwball feel for how the species interact. Most successful are Fey (who emerges as an unlikely rival to Miss Piggy for Kermit's heart) and Burrell (an Interpol policeman paired with the CIA's Sam the Eagle).

The Muppets instead feel upstaged by the parade of celebrity cameos (they range from Lady Gaga to Christoph Waltz), as if the movie is one big selfie for stars to be seen alongside their Muppet heroes. The plot, too, doesn't yield much time to favorites like the lovingly harebrained Gonzo the Great, the endlessly chipper Fozzie the Bear or the mellow, melodic Rowlf the Dog.

The film picks up literally where “The Muppets” left off, as they disassemble the movie set. Unsure of their next step, the Muppets are persuaded by a slick British agent (Gervais) to embark on a theater

tour in Europe. Only Kermit is suspicious, but he's soon kidnapped by an escaped Russian criminal mastermind, Constantine.

Constantine (voiced with a playful Russian accent by Matt Vogel) happens to look precisely like Kermit (again voiced by Steve Whitmire), only with a mole on his cheek and a slightly more pinched nose. While Kermit is mistakenly sent to the Gulag in Siberia (fellow inmates are played by Ray Liotta and Danny Trejo, as himself), his evil doppelganger replaces the Muppet leader on tour. He and Badguy use the performances as a distraction for robbing banks.

Much of the humor stems from the Muppets' failure to recognize the clearly different version of their long-legged impresario.

Judging the Muppets against their own high standards is perhaps unfair, particularly when we've been absent of Henson's genius for nearly 25 years. “Muppets Most Wanted” may not rise to the irreverent slapstick the gang once did, but it is still, after all, the Muppets.

Yet instead of trying to be like other globe-trotting, star-studded sequels, the Muppets ought to be happy with simply being themselves.

**2½ stars out of four.**

### ► FROM PAGE 1C

## Book (cont.)

she said. “I learned to forgive them and understand them. Sharing my story with the world was scary.”

Ms. Grande said writing fiction was a way to shield herself from feeling exposed, but when it came to writing the memoir, there was no hiding from herself or her emotions.

“You bare your soul for everyone to see,” she said. “But that to me is what eventually set me free.”

### BOOK'S 'UNIVERSAL TRUTHS'

“The Distance Between Us” touches on what the author called “universal truths” that many readers can relate.

“It doesn't matter our background or where we come from, we have all experienced loss, family separation, alcoholism, abuse, childhood traumas — though in different degrees of variation, of course,” she said. “They are difficult issues, and we all deal with them differently. Some learn to cope, some don't. I want people who are going through difficulties in their lives to take a little inspiration from my book, to feel less alone, less defeated. I want them to find that strength inside of themselves and to break free of whatever is holding them back.”

The memoir also was written to put a “human face” on immigration, she explains.

“I wanted people to understand that immigration affects the entire family unit and that most immigrants living in this country who have attained the American Dream have done so at a great cost,” she said. “I don't have a political agenda, nor do I want to change people's minds about immigration, but I do want people to be more understanding, perhaps be a bit more compassionate, towards our immigrant population living in the country today.”

### A MESSAGE OF HOPE

The tone of her book is hopeful. She said her childhood in Mexico

### AUTHOR AT A GLANCE

In addition to her memoir, “The Distance Between Us,” Reyna Grande has written “Across A Hundred Mountains” and “Dancing with Butterflies.” She now is working on a historical novel about the U.S.-Mexican War, which mainly focuses on the Irish immigrant soldiers who defected from the U.S. military and switched to the Mexican side. She also teaches creative writing at the University of California Los Angeles Extension.

Ms. Grande has received an American Book Award, the El Premio Aztlan Literary Award and the Latino Book Award. In 2012, she was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Awards.

made her a strong person.

“Once I survived the poverty, the abandonment, the limitations I encountered there, I knew I could survive whatever else came my way when I got to this country,” she explained. “What has always kept me going — even to this day — is the memories of those years of poverty in Mexico. I never wanted to experience that again. And to me, everything I have done — going to college, pursuing a writing career — are things that I would have never been able to do if I had remained in that poverty in Mexico.”

The author said she has always been “deeply grateful” for the opportunity to come to America.

“I have always done my very best to be the best version of myself I can be,” she said. “I was afraid of failure. Failure to me was not doing anything meaningful with my life. I wanted my life to mean something. I wanted the experiences I went through to be worth something. Those were the things that kept me going back then — and they still do.”

### ONE BOOK, ONE COMMUNITY

Monroe County is participating in the literacy program One Book, One Community, focusing on Reyna Grande's “The Distance Between Us.”

The month-long event, with a host of activities, wraps up April 28.

Following are the events coming up this week:

**Tonight — Film series: “Food for the Ancestors,”**

7 p.m., Bedford Branch Library, 8575 Jackman Rd., Temperance.

**March 24 — Film Series: “Food for the Ancestors,”**

2 p.m., Little Theater (C-3), Campbell Learning Resources Center, Monroe County Community College, 1555 S. Raisinville Rd.

The film is a culinary-history exploration of Days of the Dead (Dias de los Muertos), Mexican traditions and ancient ways of life that still exist there.

Dr. Terri Kovach, MCCC professor, reference/technical services librarian, will moderate a viewing of this hour-long PBS documentary.

MCCC culinary arts students will provide light snacks.

**Monday — International Studies Club Cultural Night, 7:30 p.m., La Fiesta Cantina and Restaurant, 102 Tecumseh St., Dundee.**

The MCCC International Studies Club will host the event with food, music and other cultural displays.

**Tuesday — Women Immigrants in History Fair, 11:30 a.m.-1 p.m.** Campbell Learning Resources Center lobby, MCCC.

The MCCC Diversity Committee is sponsoring the fair that includes information regarding notable women who have immigrated to America.

**March 27 — Brown bag discussion, 12:30-1:30 p.m., La-Z-Boy Center atrium, MCCC.**

For more information, visit [www.monroeccc.edu/onebook/](http://www.monroeccc.edu/onebook/).



# ‘12 Years a Slave’ author’s death still a mystery

SARATOGA SPRINGS, N.Y. (AP) — Historians know where Solomon Northup was born, where he lived and where he worked. They know whom he married and how many children he had. They know he played the fiddle and spent 12 years enslaved in the South before being freed.

What historians don't know about the author of “12 Years a Slave” is when and how he died and where he is buried. It's a lingering mystery in the final chapter of the life of the 19th-century free-born African American whose compelling account of enforced slavery in pre-Civil War Louisiana was made into the Oscar-winning film of the same title.

“That's sort of a big blank spot in the story, for sure,” said Rachel Seligman, co-author of “Solomon Northup: The Complete Story of the Author of Twelve Years a Slave,” published last year.

This month, “12 Years a Slave” took home the Academy Awards for best picture, best adapted screenplay and best supporting actress. The accolades have sparked new interest in Northup's story, which was little known until recent years, even in the upstate New York communities where he spent most of his life.

Northup was born July 10, 1807, in what is now the Essex County town of Minerva, in the Adirondack Mountains. His father, a former slave, moved the family to neighboring Washington County, eventually settling in the village of Fort Edward on the Hudson River. Northup married Anne Hampton in the late 1820s, and the couple lived in an 18th-century house in Fort Edward that is now a museum.

Northup worked on his father's farm and rafted timber on the Champlain

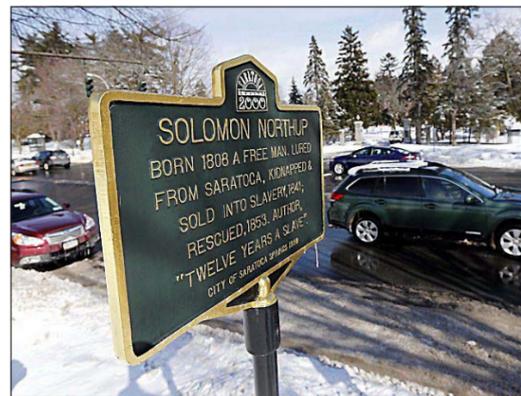
Canal. The couple and their children moved to nearby Saratoga Springs when Anne got a job in one of the growing spa resort town's big hotels. Northup found work as a musician, and in 1841, two white men lured him to Washington, D.C., with the promise of more work. Instead, they kidnapped him and took him to New Orleans, where he was sold into slavery.

Northup endured the next 12 years enslaved on a Louisiana cotton plantation before friends in Saratoga finally won his freedom. In 1853, he published a memoir of his ordeal that led to a speaking tour supported by abolitionists. He got involved in the Underground Railroad, helping escaped slaves find freedom in the Northeast and Canada. But around 1863, the height of the Civil War, he dropped out of sight and never was heard from again. Even the movie notes at the end that “the date, location and circumstances” of Northup's death remain unknown.

Theories abound about what may have happened to him. One scenario has him being captured and killed while serving as a spy for the Union Army. The man who helped rescue him said he believed Northup had taken to drink and was kidnapped yet again. Or Northup could have died in a place where no one knew him or cared to properly bury an African American at a time when a war over slavery was tearing the nation apart.

“He may have just wandered around from place to place and died somewhere nobody knew who he was, and he was buried in a potter's field,” said David Fiske, co-author the 2013 Northup book along with Union College professor Clifford Brown.

“There's no paper trail for him,” Brown added.



— AP photo by MIKE GROLL

A Solomon Northup historical marker is seen in Saratoga Springs, N.Y. Northup was the author of “Twelve Years a Slave.”

## Two on Tap

**FRIDAY, MARCH 28<sup>th</sup>**  
**7:30pm**

Take a trip down Memory Lane in this fast-paced and fun-filled show. Classic songs by Gershwin, Mercer, Berlin and other Tin Pan Alley songwriters bring audiences back in time, taking a fresh look at the exciting lost art form of duo song-and-dance.

**TICKETS: \$29 – Adults,**  
**\$26 – Seniors**  
**\$15 – Children**

**(734) 242-RRCA | 114 S. Monroe St., Monroe, MI 48161**  
[www.riverraisincentre.org](http://www.riverraisincentre.org)