

Every Breath You Take

Saturday March 12, 2011 - by Brian Hay



LONDON — The rhythm section really dominated most of the proceedings. Big surprise considering the songs were written by a bass player (Sting) and the original band included one of the best drummers (Stewart Copeland) the music industry's ever produced. Drummer Jeff Christmas captured the essence and rhythmic complexity of Copeland's work beautifully and bass player Kevin Muir had a field day rolling out one great riff after another. There's a favourite saying about drummers and bass players being "in the pocket". These two weren't just in the pocket, they were the pocket. John Regan handled the keyboard parts beautifully and laid down some especially tasteful piano work throughout the concert. Jeans n' Classics leader Peter Brennan played rhythm and acoustic guitar while Dave Dunlop handled the lead chores. Peter delved some delicious playing on the acoustic and Dave played some fine lead passages. Dave also presented an array of effects but did so with a sense of subtlety and restraint so as to work within the music rather than overpower it.

The orchestra played fabulously. The work of the string players (still without Joe Lanza and Mary Beth Brown) was impeccable. Their part of the arrangements (by Peter Brennan, Jeff Christmas and Mitch Tyler) gave them plenty of work that was rich in texture and demanding of their capabilities. There was a huge amount of pizzicato playing in their sections and they made it look as easy as falling off a log. The orchestra's wind and percussion players maintained a dialogue with the rhythm section from the Jeans 'n Classics ensemble that felt symbiotic. Under the baton of Mitch Tyler and direction of Peter Brennan the two groups became a single.

The singing was sensational. Dave Dunlop and John Regan sang some harmony vocals but the bulk of the work fell to Kathryn Rose and Neil Donell. Kathryn is an excellent singer in her own right, strong in both range and expression. She's also a superb and superbly disciplined harmony singer. Her pitch and control are stellar. Whether she has to mesh with the lead vocal or stand apart her volume is always spot on. And she lands squarely in the middle on every cue. Harmony singing is an art in itself and she's a consummate master of it.

Neil Donell was amazing. (He seems like a really modest guy who may be embarrassed by reading this but it has to be said). His resume states that his range spans four octaves. What it can't begin to express is the pure power and stellar quality in all parts of it. He can hold and sustain extremely high notes long past the time when most voices shut down with a choked croak. His baritone seems swathed in layers of fine silk. His mid range encompasses the complete range of many singers. And it comes wrapped in layers of plush velvet. When he

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combines his gift for mimicry (which is also stunning) with his individual prowess the result is something impeccably faithful to the original performances and stunningly original at the same time. When he and John Regan ran through a few excerpts from his performance in the 'Hollywood Crooners' show somebody close by blurted out "My God! How musical is he?" in tone of sheer awe. It's a good question. About the only thing he doesn't seem to be able to sing is a bad note.

The evening was nothing but highlights but a few things stand out. The cover of 'Every Breath You Take' was stunning. The arrangement and execution of 'Englishman in New York' combined all the features that make these shows work so well in a way that stood above even much of what these ensembles often do together. The harmony singing in particular was magnificent. The three way percussion arrangement between drummer Jeff Christmas and percussionists D'Arcy Gray and Karen Pincombe produced one of the neatest visual effects I've seen in a concert in some time. During the chorus each had a different visually similar part to play. Because the parts were staggered it look like a sequence programmed by a machine. The three were flawless and it was a hoot to watch.

Fields of Gold

Sometimes everything comes together in such a way that it stands above all else that's happening. The arrangement of 'Fields of Gold' began with a superb mix between the rhythm and brass players. Jeff Christmas laid out the backbeat while Kevin Muir delivered the principle melodic line on his bass. The brass players came in with a passage that underscored the riff beautifully before being joined by the string players who took up another section of the melody. It was a sublime moment of ensemble playing. Neil Donnell began singing and put everything he has, musically and emotionally, into the delivery. When the instrumental break came in the orchestra subsided while Dave Dunlop and John Regan delivered some incredibly tasty guitar and piano passages. They carried it until the vocal line resumed and the ensemble began playing as a whole again. It was a moment where spiritual depth and technical expertise came together on the highest plane.

Fantastic!

This show took place at Centennial Hall in London Ontario on Friday March 11, 2011. It'll be performed again tonight (Saturday March 12, 2011) in the same venue at 8:00 p.m. This review was written to convey an impression of what it was like to be there. It was great and this writer wholeheartedly recommends that anyone who thought about attending on Friday and didn't, make up for lost time and be there tonight. Nobody will walk away disappointed.

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