

Symphony gets its groove on with Canadian Jeans 'N Classics

By Lana Sweeten-Shults/Times Record News

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Platform shoes were all that were missing from Saturday night's symphony concert. The Wichita Falls Symphony Orchestra and Canada-based Jeans 'N Classics gave us everything else in this sassiest and sauciest of symphony shows, one that transported us by way of resplendent disco balls and Chuck Mangione grooves back to the '70s.

The orchestra gave us: disco, thanks to feisty "Lady Marmalade," '70s television theme songs (like from "Charlie's Angels"), "Sukiyaki," and yes, even a smidgen of the music of the featured bands - Blood, Sweat and Tears and Chicago. And that might be the complaint for mega Blood, Sweat and Tears and Chicago fans - that this concert, a far cry from the land of the piano concerto - was more of a tribute to the '70s than it was an evening of the bands' greatest hits. In fact, about five hits from each came barreling through on winged, brassy horns at the Memorial Auditorium concert. But I won't fault Jeans 'N Classics for that.

This was one dazzling show resplendent with smart, refreshing arrangements, courtesy of Jeans 'N Classics leader Peter Brennan. He has a talent for gingerly melding the worlds of '70s rock and symphonic music into a harmonious duo for the Baby Boomer crowd, which symphonies are so desperately seeking. Beyond those dazzling arrangements, the guest artists astonished with some startlingly remarkable talent, particularly trumpet player Paul Stevenson. He plays the instrument like it should be played: Without hesitation and with all the bravado one can muster. His tone is smooth - the jazzy butter on this Jeans 'N Classics toast. His playing is confident, grand, crisp, rich and wispy, all at once, on selections like "Concierto de Aranjuez" and particularly on "God Bless The Child." He wailed. Vocalist Denise Pelley added the sweet spot to the evening with satiny smooth renditions of Etta James' "At Last" and "Sukiyaki," though she added sassy bite on "Let the Good Times Roll" and "Lady Marmalade."

On the opposite end of the spectrum, vocalist Jean Meilleur is, simply, concentrated soul. He hits those bass notes with rumbling ease and belts it out everywhere else, like he did for "25 or 6 to 4" and "And When I Die." Not that the Candler Schaffer-led symphony got lost in this '70s show. Thanks to Brennan's arrangements, they tackled, with ease, virtuosic solos - even a surprisingly refreshing bassoon solo in "Go Down Gambling." The symphony's concertmaster Kristin Van Cleve, with such richness in her tone, proved what an amazing talent she is on "Concierto de Aranjuez," and the horn section in particular got to really let go, like on "25 or 6 to 4." They didn't hold back.

For those who left early, they missed a beautiful, sweetly done rendition of "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" featuring Stevenson and Van Cleve. It was the perfect end to an incredible show.