

## Springfield Symphony to play music of Billy Joel



*Billy Joel back in the days of "We Didn't Start the Fire"; Jean Meilleur of Jeans 'n Classics will be a featured singer Dec. 10 during the Springfield Symphony Orchestra's concert of Billy Joel songs.*

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SPRINGFIELD — Billy Joel once observed that “only the good die young.”

Those who don't apparently go on to become regulars at the symphony.

The group Jeans 'n Classics makes it clear that it exists to help orchestras build younger audiences, one concert of orchestrated rock classics at a time.

The Canadian ensemble of singers and musicians will team with the Springfield Symphony Orchestra for the first time on Dec. 10 with a program of music by Billy Joel himself.

“Given the financial restraints of orchestras today, it's a great thing to get kids into a concert hall,” said Jean Meilleur, a featured singer with the Joel show. “It gets them to think, ‘This is cool. Maybe I'll come back for some Beethoven or Mozart.’ ”

Jeans 'n Classics offers a slew of programs, from shows featuring the music of U2, Michael Jackson and Queen to concerts that feature your local orchestra performing “Dark Side of the Moon” in its entirety.

For its first time in Springfield, a show of Billy Joel hits (“Uptown Girl”) and album cuts (“The Ballad of Billy the Kid”) should prove to be an easy-to-handle gateway drug for what could come.

“You don’t want to come into Springfield doing a Kiss show,” Meilleur said. “We’ll gently ease the crowd into it.”

Oh, yes — they have a Kiss show.

Just imagine the SSO playing “Love Gun.”

Or the group’s Zeppelin show with “Kashmir.”

“I’m just an old rock ‘n’ roll player,” Meilleur said. “The first time I got up with a symphony orchestra, I had no idea what was happening.”

It’s been almost 20 years, but he remembers well his first performance — playing the Moody Blues’ “Nights in White Satin” — with a full orchestra.

“I heard the orchestra come in and I stopped playing,” he said. “I turned around and thought, ‘Oh my Lord, this is absolutely incredible.’ ”

Initially, Meilleur confessed, Jeans 'n Classics met with some resistance from more conservative symphony audiences.

“Over the years,” he said, “there have been people who’ve walked out.”

But he considers Jeans 'n Classics to be the natural evolution of an orchestra staple — the pops concert.

“From Percy Faith, which is what it used to be, pops is now Billy Joel, Elton John and Pink Floyd,” he said. “Stuff we all grew up with. It’s a natural progression.”

The Snoop Dogg show can’t be that far behind.

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