

Philharmonic, Jeans 'n Classics 'Bond' with audience

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BINGHAMTON — Double entendres. Derring-do. Dastardly seekers of world domination. All are trademarks of Bond, James Bond, movies.

And so is the music, both the instantly recognizable John Barry theme and the string of title tunes sung by the voice du jour.

Saturday night (Dec. 4), the Binghamton Philharmonic and Maestro Jose-Luis Novo transported their Pops Series audience from The Forum in Binghamton to a world tour of exotic Bond locales. We didn't wear tuxes or quaff martinis, but we definitely were both shaken and stirred by the Pops' third successful teaming with the Canadian artists of Jeans 'n Classics. The folks who previously fronted Pops performances of Beatles and Elton

John music offered a collection of Bond themes (and a few songs from the Austin Powers Bond spoofs) interspersed with emcee/pianist John Regan's clever commentary. Regan's remarks, a combination of Bond trivia and bonding with the audience, elicited a constant stream of chuckles (and an occasional guffaw) from his listeners.

Jeans 'n Classics' formula, developed by Peter Brennan, is simple: "Combine rock musicians and headlining stars with world-class symphony orchestras" in programs of classic rock designed to attract younger audiences to the orchestra's performances. Brennan's Bond arrangements successfully balanced the brass, woodwind and lush strings of the orchestra with the electronically amplified rhythms of guitar and bass, while skillfully dividing percussion duties between the Philharmonic's musicians and Jeans 'n Classics drummer Dale Anne Brendon. Novo was always in charge, but Brendon occasionally set the beat with her drumsticks. The concert, not surprisingly, opened with the classic Bond theme, a showcase for both the Philharmonic and for Brennan himself, playing the iconic melody on guitar.

The headliners Saturday were two extremely talented vocalists, Rique Franks and Neil Donnell. Frank's strong power-pop voice was a perfect match for songs popularized by Carly Simon ("Nobody Does It Better"), Nancy Sinatra ("You Only Live Twice"), Sheena Easton ("For Your Eyes Only") and, in a hoped-for encore, Shirley Bassey ("Goldfinger"). Donnell, an accomplished musical impressionist, did Franks one better by not only interpreting the songs with his impressive four-octave range, but by imitating the original artists. His Louis Armstrong ("We Have All The Time In The World") needs a bit of work, but his Tom Jones ("Thunderball") and Marvin Gaye ("Let's Get It One" from an Austin Powers flick) were absolutely spot-on. Donnell also excelled with "A View To A Kill" and, teamed with Franks, the "Live And Let Die" finale.

Regan's pleasant patter included more than one reminder that we are fortunate to be able to call such a top-notch orchestra our own, and he was liberal in his praise of such local soloists as trumpeter Frank Campos (a better Louis Armstrong than Donnell), oboist John Lathwell and violinist/concertmaster Uli Speth (whose name, Regan joked, would be good for a Bond villain).

The standing ovation for the very entertaining "Shaken Not Stirred: The Music of James Bond" was richly deserved. Regan made it clear that Jeans 'n Classics would be glad to return to Binghamton, and I hope the offer is accepted. An evening spent with the folks of Jeans 'n Classics is a evening well-spent. Might I suggest their newly developed "Jersey Boy" concert (Bon Jovi, Frankie Valli and "The Boss")?

JEANS' n
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