

SymphonicBoom Series delivers Elton John's hits with orchestral touch

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By Jeffrey Kaczmarczyk | the GR Press



Octavian Cantilli | The Grand Rapids Press

Donald Paulton provided piano parts for such songs as "Tiny Dancer" and "Take Me to the Pilot" during Tuesday's show.

GRAND RAPIDS — Very few recording artists can fill an auditorium on a night they're more than a thousand miles away with no plans to stop by.

In Seattle tonight, Elton John opens a five-week North American tour with Billy Joel.

But Tuesday in Grand Rapids, John's songs filled the seats of DeVos Performance Hall for the Grand Rapids Symphony's SymphonicBoom Series concert.

Tuesday night's all right, apparently, for the music of one of the biggest singer-songwriters of the past 40 years.

Jeans 'n' Classics, a rock group from London — this would be London, Ontario — was in DeVos Hall in

September to open the Grand Rapids Symphony Pops Series with music from the James Bond movies.

Visually, the show was nothing at all like John's over-the-top flamboyance back in the days of his album "Captain Fantastic and the Brown Dirt Cowboy."

Vocally, however, lead singer Jean Meuller nailed John's inflections and nuances on songs such as "Rocket Man" and "Daniel."

If fact, these days Meuller sounds more like the original Elton John than the 62-year-old singer himself, who's had vocal issues in recent years.

Meuller punched out "Philadelphia Freedom" but caressed the ear with "Your Song."

Sitting in for John on the Steinway was Donald Paulton, who provided the piano behind songs such as "Take Me to the Pilot" and "Tiny Dancer."

Most every Baby Boomer has a favorite Elton John tune, and it's not hard to see why, considering he charted a Top 40 single every year for 27 years.

"The Music of Elton John" spanned some 18 songs in John's career from "Take Me to the Pilot" to "Circle of Life," but the accent was on tunes that featured orchestra on the original recordings.

Kiki Dee had the night off. So did "Little Jeannie."

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Orchestrations by Peter Brennan, leader of Jeans 'n' Classics, were faithful to the original recordings with some added twists, including imaginative use of woodwinds in place of synthesizers.

The Grand Rapids Symphony sparkled on the overture to "Tonight" before sliding into "Madman Across the Water."

"Sorry Seems to Be the Hardest Word" featured full, lush orchestral accompaniment. "I Guess That's Why They Call It The Blues" put Charley Lea in the spotlight with a showy trumpet solo.

The entire ensemble contributed to the extravaganza of "Circle of Life" from the Walt Disney movie and Broadway show "The Lion King."

Elton John himself may have been a long way from Grand Rapids, but his presence was felt through his music. That was enough for this audience.

http://www.mlive.com/entertainment/grand-rapids/index.ssf/2010/02/symphonicboom_series_delivers.html