

 Winnipeg Free Press - PRINT EDITION

Jackson fans: He won't stop till you get enough



By: **Alison Mayes**

Posted: 02/9/2012 1:00 AM | Comments: 0g



[Enlarge Image](#)

Gavin Hope, centre, performs the King of Pop's oeuvre with Jeans 'n Classics.

Gavin Hope, the Canadian singer who pays tribute to Michael Jackson in the pop-meets-symphony concert For Michael, hasn't mastered the late King of Pop's signature dance move.

"He doesn't do the moonwalk," says Peter Brennan, guitarist, arranger and founder of Jeans 'n Classics, the Canadian company that creates nostalgic tribute shows to help orchestras attract fresh audiences to pops concerts.

"He does definitely dance all over the place."

And Hope has the trademark vocals down, Brennan says, from the "boy Michael" of Jackson Five hits like ABC and I Want You Back to the fierce, funky energy of Billie Jean, Beat It and Thriller, to the later artistry of Man in the Mirror.

"He sings Ben in Michael's key, way up there," Brennan adds about the Calgary-bred vocalist, who has sung baritone in the a cappella group the Nylons and performed in musical theatre, including playing Simba in the original Canadian production of The Lion King.

Jeans 'n Classics teams with the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra for three pops performances of For Michael this weekend. In other cities, audience members have shown up dressed as Jackson.

A four-piece rock band and three female backup singers, as well as the orchestra, will accompany Hope. The program of 18 hits ranges from the boppy Rockin' Robin to the percolating Don't Stop 'Til You Get Enough and the gentle Human Nature.

The ever-growing London, Ont.-based Jeans 'n Classics, founded about 18 years ago, currently has 45 different show offerings -- more than any competing outfit.

The company has teamed with the WSO about nine times before, saluting such classic-rock acts as Pink Floyd, Procol Harum, Queen, Chicago, Billy Joel, the Eagles, Elton John and the Beatles.

With a team of 30 singers, backup vocalists and musicians, it puts on shows 80 nights per season, works with orchestras throughout the world, and has orchestrated about 1,200 songs in total.

"This weekend when we're coming to Winnipeg, there's a whole gang in Anchorage, Alaska, doing Queen, and there's another group in Jackson, Mississippi, doing Elton John.... We can do three, or if we

really push it, four shows on the same night."

Hope doesn't only interpret Jackson for the company. He sings in an Earth, Wind and Fire tribute, appears in a Motown ensemble show and does Smokey Robinson numbers in a concert called Higher Ground that also celebrates Stevie Wonder.

He's not the only multi-tasker. The same singer who does a sweet James Taylor also performs the Jeans 'n Classics tribute to Sting and the Police.

In case you want to put in a request with the WSO, other available shows include Fleetwood Mac and U2.

The company has a cheesy new Guilty Pleasures ensemble show of "all those songs that you're terribly embarrassed to admit you love." In that show, Hope, a product of the '80s, tackles mortifying favourites such as Take on Me by A-ha and Everybody Wants to Rule the World by Tears for Fears.

Before Jackson's death in 2009, the company had launched a show called One Night In L.A. that, for some reason, almost no orchestra wanted to book, Brennan says.

The first half was a tribute to Michael McDonald and the Doobie Brothers. The second was Hope performing most of Jackson's Thriller album. "We only did it three or four times," Brennan says.

"Then after Michael died, Gavin phoned me and said, 'Are you thinking what I'm thinking?' I said I didn't want to appear tacky or tasteless or jump on some bandwagon....

"It's heartfelt -- that's why our title is For Michael."

alison.mayes@freepress.mb.ca

Concert Preview

For Michael -- The Music of Michael Jackson

Jeans 'n Classics with the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra

Centennial Concert Hall

Friday and Saturday at 8 p.m.; Sunday at 2 p.m.

Tickets \$23-\$87 at Ticketmaster or WSO, 949-3999

Find this article at:

<http://www.winnipegfreepress.com/opinion/columnists/jackson-fans-he-wont-stop-till-you-get-enough-138997339.html>

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.