

In the name of love: Symphony orchestra to show off versatility with U2 covers

Green Bay Press Gazette - Green Bay, Wis.

Author: Kendra Meinert

Date: Mar 15, 2012

Start Page: n/a

Section: GPG

Text Word Count: 1380

Document Text

Green Bay Press-Gazette

In a perfect world, The Edge would surprise everyone and sit in on Saturday's "An Evening of Irish Rock" at the Weidner Center.

But since not even a whole lot of St. Patty's Day luck is likely to make that happen, Jeans 'n Classics is betting on something they have that Bono doesn't to pull off a retrospective of U2's biggest hits: the Green Bay Symphony Orchestra.

The symphonic rock outfit out of Canada will bring a five-piece band and two singers to the stage to join the local orchestra in celebrating the legacy of Irish music -- from Thin Lizzy to Van Morrison to an entire set of U2's music arranged by Jeans 'n Classic founder and guitarist Peter Brennan.

"If you think of U2 and the massive amount of guitar sound and overdubs and effects and treatments that go on, I learned years ago when we did (Led) Zeppelin or Queen that orchestras just eat that up," said the London-born Brennan. "The symphonic wall of sound is a wonderful thing to have interpret some of the rock walls of sound, particularly with the way they came out of the studio.

"The U2 stuff just has enough of a hint of the Celtic nature to it, in terms of some of the rhythms in particular, that you can really get a little bit carried away and go a little bit more Celtic. The percussion section has a wonderful time."

While the mosaic of U2's music was a gift for Brennan to work within, tackling U2 isn't for sissies - especially The Edge's legendary guitar work.

"He's just one guitar player doing so many parts and trying to create so much sound. ... All of that delay and effect and repetition that goes on. My job was to try to capture that orchestrally speaking. You've got some very busy string work and upper woodwind work sometimes to try and recreate what had been a studio effect."

Jeans 'n Classics, which has 30 rotating musicians who fan out to play with symphonies in shows that feature the music of Michael Jackson, Elton John, Prince and a host of others, will bring two guitarists for the Green Bay concert. But Brennan jokes that "ideally, it takes about 15" to equal The Edge.

"But we've got the whole orchestra, so between the orchestra and two guitar players and the keyboard player, we manage to pull it off."

This is the second time Jeans 'n Classics has joined forces with GBSO. Last year, they performed The Beatles' "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band" in its entirety to rave reviews.

"Based on the reaction we got from our audience in attendance, we decided it was a no-brainer to re-engage them for this season," said Michael Stefiuk, GBSO executive director. "It allows us to showcase the symphony in a completely different light, showing that we're really a versatile instrument."

While a concert with "Vertigo" and "Sunday Bloody Sunday" might not necessarily appeal to classical music purists, Stefiuk says "our intention is to appeal to audiences who might not otherwise think of attending an orchestra concert."

And then, of course, hook them.

Brennan has seen not only a much greater acceptance of symphony and rock pairings, but also a hunger for it, since he launched Jeans 'n Classics in 1996. In those early days, both orchestra and band found sharing the same stage intimidating.

"Here you are in front of a big ensemble and they're all looking at you like you've got two heads," he said. "There are people who spent their entire lives wanting to perfect Mozart. 'What's all this Rolling Stones? I don't want to do this.'"

But as time has gone on, musicians and audiences have embraced bringing together two musical worlds, no matter

how unlikely they might seem on paper.

"I think audiences that come and appreciate what we do have been let down a little bit by pop music in the last 20 years. It hasn't spoken to them the way you may say it had in the '80s or the '70s or going way back into the '60s. So that always helps, because they're getting a classic pop or classic rock fix," Brennan said.

"But also the people who make up the orchestras now are a different animal than when we first started. You have people who grew up on pop music who also happen to really, really embrace classical music. They seem to be as much at home playing Beethoven and Stravinsky as they are doing a recording session playing John Williams ... and now we're going to play Led Zeppelin."

There's really no rock music that an orchestra can't play, Brennan said. It's just a matter of "learning to dance together." He and his fellow musicians often come up with new shows while killing time in airports, such as "It Came From the Jersey Shore," featuring the music of New Jersey luminaries Bruce Springsteen, Jon Bon Jovi and Frankie Valli. Another with Earth, Wind & Fire, Blood, Sweat & Tears and Chicago is "a brass player's dream." One of his current favorites is "Space Odyssey: The Symphonic Journey" with The Moody Blues, Electric Light Orchestra, Procol Harum and Peter Gabriel.

"It's a bit of dark horse, and yet when we do perform it, the orchestras just go nuts for it as do the crowds, because it's a showpiece for the orchestra," he said.

It's a tricky balancing act taking beloved pop and rock music and striking the right tone when composing the arrangements for a symphony.

"(These) songs spoke volumes to people, so I have to be very, very respectful of the artists we're covering and not butcher their material or disguise it or make it Muzak-y. Keep all those things that made it work for people," he said. "The flip of that being, these people are now coming out to hear their orchestra with us perform that music, so I very much want to make the orchestra front and center with the action. It's always that really, really nice balance. There's moments in the U2 show where that orchestra is just screaming. Its wonderful."

Brennan hopes diehard U2 fans whose curiosity gets the better of them come away from the concert impressed.

"I hope they appreciate what we try to do musically, to have U2 music take on that different face. But at the same time, I hope we haven't disappointed them by not being honest or true to their band. I hope they come away going, 'Yeah, I really dug it.' Because it isn't a Muzak treatment. There is a rock band on stage. Listen to those fiddles go! Listen to how high those French horns go in 'With or Without You.'"

Do it

* Who: Green Bay Symphony Orchestra and Jeans 'n Classics

* What: "An Evening of Irish Rock"

* When: 7:30 p.m. Saturday

* Where: Weidner Center, UWGB

* Tickets: \$12 and up, \$9 students; Oneida Casino Ticket Star outlets, (800) 895-0071 and www.ticketstaronline.com

First set

"Riverdance"

"The Boys Are Back in Town," Thin Lizzy

"Have I Told You Lately," Van Morrison

"Linger," The Cranberries

"Nothing Compares to You," Sinéad O'Connor

"I Will Follow/Vertigo," U2

"New Year's Day," U2

"Sunday Bloody Sunday/Pride," U2

Second set

"City of Blinding Lights," U2

"I'll Go Crazy If I Don't Go Crazy Tonight," U2

"Desire," U2

"The Unforgettable Fire," U2

"Stuck in a Moment You Can't Get Out Of," U2

"Hold Me, Kiss Me, Thrill Me, Kill Me," U2

"Beautiful Day," U2

"Where the Streets Have No Name," U2

Up next -- Meat Loaf? No way!

The catalog of themed rock shows Jeans 'n Classics offers to symphonies runs the gamut from ABBA to Zeppelin. There's even one titled "Guilty Pleasures: The Songs (We Are Afraid to Admit) We Love!"

But if you're waiting for one built on the music of Meat Loaf, you'll be waiting a long time.

"There are some things I won't go near. Meat Loaf is one of them," says Peter Brennan, who writes the group's arrangements. "I find Meat Loaf -- and this is just my opinion -- excessive.

"You watch, Meat Loaf will phone me tomorrow and offer me excessive amounts of money to write the show."

ID_Code: U0-120314129

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction or distribution is prohibited without permission.

Abstract (Document Summary)

The symphonic rock outfit out of Canada will bring a five-piece band and two singers to the stage to join the local orchestra in celebrating the legacy of Irish music -- from Thin Lizzy to Van Morrison to an entire set of U2's music arranged by Jeans 'n Classic founder and guitarist Peter Brennan. "If you think of U2 and the massive amount of guitar sound and overdubs and effects and treatments that go on, I learned years ago when we did (Led) Zeppelin or Queen that orchestras just eat that up," said the London-born Brennan.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction or distribution is prohibited without permission.