

Orchestra Iowa smacks home run with concert

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Jeans 'n Classics vocalist Jean Meilleur performs Saturday with Orchestra Iowa at Veterans Memorial Stadium in Cedar Rapids. Becky Malewitz/SourceMedia Group News

CEDAR RAPIDS — With strong vocals, sparkling solos and an orchestra in top form, Saturday's Orchestra Iowa concert at Veterans Memorial Stadium was a grand slam home run.

Orchestra Iowa, under the direction of Maestro Tim Hankewich, was joined by the Canadian group Jeans 'n Classics for a performance of some of the greatest hits of Blood, Sweat & Tears, Chicago and Earth, Wind & Fire.

Lead vocalist Jean Meilleur opened with "Only the Beginning," a fitting start for a nonstop trip through some of the greatest hits of each group. Meilleur nailed the rich vocals of BS&T's David Clayton Thomas, earning strong applause for "You're the One," "Spinning Wheel," "God Bless the Child" and Laura Nyro's classic "And When I Die."

Gavin Hope, who must have a four-octave range, soared with Earth, Wind & Fire's "Let's Groove," "Boogie Wonderland," "Got to Get You Into My Life" and "Shining Star."

Trumpeter Paul Stevenson of London, Ontario, delivered a bravura performance of the Chuck Mangione classic "Feels So Good" and more than capably handled the solos on Chicago classics like "25 or 6 to 4," "Colour My World," "Make Me Smile" and "If You Leave Me Now." Vocalists Katalin Kiss and Stephanie Martin were a perfectly matched duo on "If You Leave Me Now."

Orchestra Iowa Concertmaster Holly Mulcahey showed that she can easily make the transition from the classics to rock 'n roll with a solo turn on "25 or 6 to 4," and the orchestra's brass section was spot-on throughout the concert.

Meilleur singled out percussionists Tom Mackey and Alan Lawrence for praise, saying Jeans 'n Classics performs with many orchestras each year, but Mackey and Lawrence are the best percussionists they've ever worked with in concert. Meilleur also praised the orchestra's brass section, saying they're second to none.

The only disappointment Saturday was the low audience attendance. While the rain may have been a factor earlier, the skies cleared well in advance of the concert.

Hopefully the weather will not be a factor in September when Orchestra Iowa opens its 2011-2012 season with what is becoming a tradition, a concert on the lawn at Bruce more.

<http://easterniowalife.com/2011/05/28/orchestra-iowa-smacks-home-run-with-concert/>



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