

Orchestra Iowa hits a home run with Beach Boys sound

<http://hooplanow.com/2012/05/29/orchestra-iowa-hits-a-home-run-with-beach-boys-sound/>

By Diana Nollen



by Gazette Staff/SourceMedia

Good vibrations reverberated through the stands as Orchestra Iowa teamed up with Jeans 'n' Classics to kick off summer with the music of the Beach Boys.

Saturday's 4 p.m. concert at Veterans Memorial Stadium wasn't all beach ball bounce. The Canadian rock cover band and the orchestra played plenty of mellow tunes, too, some of which were unfamiliar to those of us barely bopping when the California sound was surfing the airwaves.

Jeans' singer Neil Donell flung his falsetto over the fence while the band's female trio brought home the tight, tight harmonies to deliver the Beach Boys' signature sound. When Aaron MacDonald wasn't sizzling on various saxes, he stepped into the vocal spotlight on songs in a lower register.

Purists might have preferred hearing all the vocals covered by men, but I didn't miss that at all, since the women were so strong in both ensemble and solo singing. I rather enjoyed the variety. It was faithful to the Beach Boys without trying to clone the sound. Jeans 'n' Classics brings its own rock musicians on drum kit, electric bass and guitar and keyboards, but the real instrumental stars came from the home team.

The beauty of the arrangements by Jeans founder and guitarist Peter Brennan is the way the orchestra fleshes out all the rock 'n' roll classics with lush strings, lively horns, twinkling woodwinds and standout percussion. Just when you're barely aware they're there — because it all just sounds so right — one of the orchestral sections would step to the plate, sending up a rousing cheer from the crowd of 1,400 decked out in Hawaiian shirts, ball caps and beach hats.

An audience accustomed to cheering on the orchestra in a more formal setting didn't clap along until the third song, the 1965 megahit "Help Me Rhonda," and didn't start dancing 'til right near the end, but the applause and cheers rang throughout the 90-minute event, from the opening strains of "California Girls" through the encore of "Kokomo."

Hearing the hits was fun, fun, fun of course, but even more surprising were the lesser-known songs sprinkled throughout the show, including the mellow "Sail On, Sailor," the funk groove of "Do It Again," a Chicago-style horn interlude in "Oh Darlin'," virtuoso alto sax on "Dance, Dance, Dance" and the Beatlesque "God Only Knows."

The women's vocal harmonies were simply stunning on "In My Room," and the orchestra got to strut its stuff on a classical-meets-bluegrass mashup called "Neck and Neck," which started with "Flight of the Bumblebee," ended with "Orange Blossom Special" and featured "Wipe Out" halfway through.

Everything about this concert in the ballpark was special, heightened by the beautiful weather that broke the previous trend of rain right up to the downbeat in the orchestra's two previous stadium outings.

God must be a Beach Boys fan.

As a fitting finale, the Jeans folks announced they've been invited back for next year. Score.