

Symphony creates beautiful music from Kiss's glam-rock

SUSAN DEEFHOLTS

KITCHENER (May 31, 2007)

Fans of the rock band Kiss had a whole lot of fun last night at the Centre in the Square. In another successful collaboration between the Jeans 'n' Classics band and the Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony, Shout It Out Loud -- Symphonic Kiss was a foray into '70s glam-rock nostalgia with an extra touch of flair.

Michael Shotton surged onto the stage, turbo charged with energy as he urged the audience to join in the fun. "This isn't one of those shows where you sit in your seats quietly and clap and say, 'Wasn't that sassy!'" he admonished.

And well he might say so. The energy stayed high as the evening progressed. After all, it's not often we get to hear Love Gun performed to the accompaniment of a full orchestra, the hard-edged guitar riffs reinforced by the entire string section, making for a big, energetic sound.

Now, I admit, when I first heard about the concert, I wondered whether a symphonic adaptation might not be a case of gilding the lily, given the pared down, hard-rock minimalism of so many of the originals. But, after hearing the bigger, fuller sound, I was swayed -- indeed, who wouldn't be, particularly given the history of the band itself?

Even in an age of shock rock and ultra glam, Kiss burst onto the scene with the kind of showmanship savvy that turned everything up a notch or 10.□□From their outrageous costumes -- Gene Simmons's Demon, Paul Stanley's Star Child, Ace Frehley's Space Ace and Peter Criss's Catman -- to their even wilder, blood spitting, fire-breathing antics, Kiss's popularity was one part music, three parts over-the-top chutzpah.

Given that Kiss has always revelled in taking things to the next level, Symphonic Kiss makes perfect sense. Peter Brennan's fabulous arrangements were ideally poised between staying true to the original rocker spirit and creating a new sound -- it wasn't just about being louder, but rather about filling in the instrumentation and going big.

The first half ended with a lively rendition of the catchy classic I Was Made For Lovin' You, complete with trumpet flourishes and swooping violin embellishments.

The rock ballad Beth, in contrast to much of Kiss's other work, has always been a symphonic piece -- usually performed, even by Kiss, to a taped accompaniment. So, it's a rare treat to hear it as it was recorded, but rarely performed, with the full, live orchestration.

Hard Luck Woman, like Beth, also has a softer, more mainstream sound, with a catchy rhythm that isn't as hard-driving as some of the band's other fare. I couldn't resist bopping along to the energy generated by the dynamic lighting and the bright sound.

Gene Simmons's signature song God of Thunder even came complete with demonic vocal effects -- and it was great to see the Jeans 'n' Classics band in Kiss makeup. The audience also responded to the spirit of the evening, with shouts and yells of enthusiasm. The second set ended with Rock and Roll All Night, a fitting tribute to the evening that had the entire crowd on its feet, clapping, dancing and singing along.