

Rock On with the Best of Elton John

An interview with singer Jean Meilleur by Rosemary Phillips, November 2012, for the Vancouver Island Symphony



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“Strangely enough, the earliest artist I remember singing seriously was Elton John,” mused Jeans’N Classics singer Jean Meilleur from his home in London, Ontario. He was between gigs, ready to hit the road with another sensational concert and eager to talk about his favourite artist. You see, Jean will be performing with the *Vancouver Island Symphony* and the *Jeans'N Classics Band* for the upcoming special blue-jeans show - The Best of Elton John – at 3 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. on Saturday, January 19, 2013 at the Port Theatre in Nanaimo, BC.

“Singing Elton’s songs is fantastic! These are the songs, the older ones, like Tiny Dancer, that are from his earlier career. I was in my early teens when I heard them for the first time and I’ve had them in my head ever since. While my parents played classical music a lot, I was drawn to soul music, and Elton encompassed that for me. He really influenced me vocally, so to sing his songs with an orchestra and a band - it’s awesome!”

▶ A natural progression

Jean started singing in earnest when he was about 14. “My father was a painter. We had a large family (nine) and on Friday nights we would sit around the house drawing and painting. I know I was

going to be in the arts or music or painting but because I'm a horrible painter it had to be music. It was a natural progression for me - to sing." Like many young musicians Jean started out with bands. "I played the countryside and dive bars, then for about 20 years I got to hone my skills by doing quite a bit of solo music with guitar and voice in and around London."

The Jeans'N Classics Experience

"Then I met Peter Brennan (Jeans'N Classics founder) about 18 years ago and did a show singing Nights in White Satin by the Moody Blues. It was so powerful, singing with an orchestra and rock band at the same time. It became insatiable. You do it once and you want to do it again and again!"

Since that first Moody Blues concert Jean has performed tributes to Elton John, Pink Floyd, David Bowie – the list is endless. "With Jeans'N Classics we have the chance to sing the way we sing, doing a tribute to an artist in our own voices. With Elton John I don't imitate or clone him. I take from the soul and sensibility he sings with. His music is fun to sing and it's always different. It's such a thrill – and always special for me!"

A symphony in jeans

"With Jeans'N Classics we want the audience to see a symphony in its glory - but in a pair of blue jeans and T-shirt - to just enjoy the musicians and the orchestra playing this great contemporary music in a really informal atmosphere. We chat liberally with the audience and the conductor. We have fun with the songs, explain their history, the instrumentations and what the members of the orchestra will be playing. Pierre Simard (VI Symphony artistic director) is fantastic! We have worked with him before – he understands the breadth of popular music as well as classical music which is exceptional for a conductor!"

Jean's wish list

While Jean sings the music of so many other artists, he also composes his own music. "I have written a lot over these past 30 years. My wish list includes completing an album. I just need to buckle down, and I've been thinking that by this spring I'll have it together. My list also includes making sure that the kids grow up and are OK. They say we all have one book in us – but I'm not a writer." Maybe not of words but in music and lyrics, so for Jean his book will no doubt be his music and his CD.

And what if he were to meet up with the great Elton John himself? "I would probably say 'hi'. It would be great to sit down with him for a week and hang out and explain how I feel about his music. But I'm sure over his life he's had so many people say the things that I would say to him like – 'You've been a great influence on me, I'll always treasure your music!'"

Links and more information

For more information visit the [Jeans'N Classics web site](#).