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Jeans 'n Classics, Erie Pops salute the '80s

BY JOHN CHACONA, Erie Times-News
Contributing writer



Gavin Hope, at right center, and the rest of Jeans 'n Classics will perform with the Erie Philharmonic Orchestra on Oct. 22, 2011.
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Orchestra programmers love '80s music. The Erie Philharmonic season began with music from the '80s. But while Richard Strauss' "Don Juan" was a tale of lust and high passion from the 1880s, the opening pops concert updates the century, if not the theme.

Everywhere you go, from television's "Glee" to nearly every Erie bar with a bandstand, the '80s are the number to call. There's a reason for that, Peter Brennan thinks: "It might have been one of the best eras of songwriting, and we want to present the many sides of the decade."

Brennan is the founder of Jeans 'n Classics, the popular London, Ontario-based musical collective that brings pop music styles into the concert hall for a series of well-made and fantastically successful pops shows. Jeans 'n Classics shows are meticulously crafted, a quality that Brennan also finds in the best pop music of the 1980s.

The decade's music, he told me by phone from London "had that amazing British wave of really well-written pop songs that had a whole vibe and style to them. It got a little more sophisticated and still maintained that pop edge."

That last statement might describe "Don't Stop Believin'," a program that was crafted specifically for Erie with a great deal of input from music director Daniel Meyer, himself a fan of '80s music.

Brennan also cites the great melodies that were written in the decade. To prove the point, he's bringing in five vocalists, only one of whom has ever performed in Erie. The Eurythmics' "Sweet Dreams," Cyndi Lauper's "Time After Time" and U2's "Where the Streets Have No Name" are on the program.

Meyer sweetened the pot with the offer of the Erie Philharmonic Chorus and that changed everything.

"That made me think of those great '80s hits with choruses," Brennan said, citing "We Are the Champions" (Queen), "Man in the Mirror" (Michael Jackson) and "I Wanna Know What Love Is" (Foreigner) and Sir Elton John's "Don't Let the Sun Go Down On Me."

"I know it's from the '70s," Brennan demurred, "but I really wanted to hear that song with a full chorus."

He probably won't be alone.