

"80s tribute puts bounce in step" - Susan Deefholts

She Bops, the first in the 2007 Electric Thursdays series by the Jeans 'n Classics Band and the K-W Symphony, was a lively tribute to the women who shaped the music of the decade--and a fun blast from the past.

Undeterred by the heavy snowfall and glacial winds, the crowd packed into the Centre in the Square in close to capacity numbers on Thursday night. Nor were we disappointed. The four divas of the evening bounced on stage, complete with retro dance moves and outfits, immediately launching into an energetic rendition of Cyndi Lauper's She Bops. Other favourites followed, presenting a strong balance between ensemble pieces and solo performances.

Peter Brennan's orchestrations and guitar, as well as the amazing work done by the other musicians, including Don Paulton's keyboards, Mitch Tyler's bass and the KWS ensemble, provided the evening with a unique flavour that was neither rock nor classical, while the propulsive crack of Jeff Christmas's drums drove the music forward. Given how widespread synthesized imitations of orchestral sounds were in many of the 1980s originals, it was a novel twist to hear the actual, acoustic instruments playing a number of the memorable riffs from well-known songs.

By contrast, it was only when I heard pieces like Here Comes the Rain Again that I recalled how much classical orchestration was featured in the original. Lis Soderberg's vocals, meanwhile, sounded uncannily like Annie Lennox's, in one of the closest matches of the evening.

And yet, Soderberg was also very comfortable taking other songs in a completely different direction to the originals -- as with her heartfelt performance of Time after Time, to the pared-down accompaniment of guitar, keyboard, oboe and cello. Rique Franks was decked out in Madonna gear, including a lethally-pointy pair of what appeared to be Fluevog shoes -- but her vocals presented a strong contrast to the pop-princess's '80s era, baby-girl trills. Her full, husky rendition of Smooth Operator was mesmerizing. As a Kate Bush fan, I was also delighted by the inclusion of Wow in the program. Wisely however, Franks declined to sing it in the original register, instead taking it down a few octaves and making it her own.

Leah Salomaa, garbed in full-out '80s flamboyance, did well with Belinda Carlisle's Mad about You, but her voice truly shone in Morning Train -- and the audience responded by clapping along to her energetic

cheer. Katalin Kiss's powerful vocals cut through the coquetry of Like a Virgin, adding a fun, tongue-in-cheek irony to the Madonna classic, though her look was more evocative of Chrissie Hynde.

Songs like Tide is High helped banish the winter chills with its tropical vibe, while a coy allusion to Lawrence of Arabia in Peter Brennan's orchestration added to the fun of Walk Like an Egyptian.

The ladies rose to the occasion by doing the sand dance in unison between verses. When they sang Venus, a few audience members even got into the spirit of things by dancing along.

A lively encore of Love Shack had us all bopping along to the B52's classic, before we headed out into the snowy night with smiles on our faces and a bounce to our steps.