

Magical music that brings people together

BY PENNY GUMBERT

The Festival of the Sound is no stuffed shirt. When Mary Lou Fallis and Peter Tiefenbach played the piano in the Charles Stoeckey Centre for the Performing Arts in Parry Sound, there was nothing ordinary about it. At times he plucked its strings while she stroked them with a wallpaper brush before smoothing her mauve lame dress down and sliding on her back under the ebony grand Yamaha to rap it with her knuckles. It was a thrilling moment.

James Campbell, artistic director of the festival, was laughing along with the audience already uproarious with Fallis's antics. The piece, *Ode to a Star*, the performers' satirical look at the "generous" grant system in Canada, is just one sample of Fallis's and Tiefenbach's quirky sense of humour. The pair was appearing with community choirs, the Orpheus Choir of Toronto and the Festival Chamber Choir and the Sunday afternoon performance ranged from the batty to the beautiful.

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Later another fellowship of musicians took the centre by storm. They were the Swing Shift Big Band led by Jim John. "From this band's perspective this is one of the nicest rooms we've played in," he said. "We've never been surrounded by the audience like this."

The group, billed as "Ontario's Premier Big Band," performed golden oldies from the wondrous era of big band dance music. Brent Turner, the group's new musical director, played piano while directing the band in brash and jazzy numbers like *C-Jam Blues* by Duke Ellington and Glenn Miller's seductive *String of Pearls* (with the most wonderful dialogue between tenor and alto saxes). It's apparent that Turner's arrangements for the band are daring new takes on old favourites judging by his unique tempos in *Tangerine* and *Moonglow*.

This is a band with personality, plus robust section playing and singularly beautiful solos such as Rob Williams' trombone playing, James War-

burton on sax and flute and clarinet, Dave Marshall on flugelhorn, drummer Darryl Knox and Kevin Thompson on trumpet. The list could be longer as the veterans in this band know their stuff. Add two vocalists who have mastered the mood of the times and you've got a band that can tap into a huge repertoire from Basie to Kenton.

Larisa Renee came into her own when she sang to Turner's lush arrangement of *How Long Has This Been Going On* and certainly did Ella proud in her rendition of *A Tisket, A Tasket*. Baritone Dave Statham's *Theme from Spiderman* was barrels of fun - with every lyric clear as a bell - and his *San Francisco, My Kind of Town* and *Beyond the Sea* stood him in the ranks of Bennett, Sinatra and Darin. Michael Bublé, watch out.

George Bernard Shaw was wrong. Youth is definitely not wasted on the young, especially when you put brass instruments in their hands. On July 27, the National Youth Brass Band of Wales, promptly on time, marched into the Stoeckey Centre. What would a big brass band do to the acoustics? Audience members were warned to sit back of the first five rows. Ray Tizzard, executive director of Toronto's Hannaford Street Silver Band, made the introductions saying, "This is an amazing ensemble." Music director Robert Childs, euphonium player, is well known to the Hannaford Band and Tizzard was instrumental in arranging this 25th anniversary trip for the group.

Dressed in serious black, the nearly four-dozen players ranging in age from 16 to 22 still looked as if it wouldn't take much for some shenanigans to break out. Add Childs' sense of humour, throw in some choreography and a Harry Potter look-alike



BIG BAND. Swing Shift, billed as Ontario's premier big band, performed songs from the era of Ella Fitzgerald to Frank Sinatra during the Festival of the Sound.

Submitted photo

and the performance took on an exuberant joie de vivre well worth the trip. Who could resist? Especially when "Harry" took his flugelhorn for a stroll in *Carnival of Venice*, before relinquishing the piece to sections of the band who strutted their stuff with more than their instruments, not once sacrificing their musicality in this fast variation with lots of triplets.

When Childs, introducing *Trumpet Blues* and *Cantabile*, remarked, "this composer definitely got the girl" referring to Harry James and Betty Grable, he noticed the audience knew what he was talking about but the youthful band hadn't a clue. Even so, it knew how to swing the song at a pace that left the audience breathless, but not them.

Musicians come in all shapes and sizes. They may solo or perform with others in intimate groupings or in numbers that fill the stage. But all share a camaraderie like no other, an unabashed joy in music. It was all there at the Stoeckey Centre this summer.



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