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Orchestra London Red Hot Weekend – Rik Emmett's Guitar Heroes

Written by Richard Young



Centennial Hall

Friday, November 13 & Saturday, November 14

8:00 p.m.

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If soaring guitar solos are your thing, then Orchestra London's current Red Hot Weekends offering – Guitar Heroes featuring Rik Emmett – is the place you ought to be this weekend.

Emmett, the former guitarist for iconic Canadian rock band Triumph and now a successful jazz solo artist, is a long-time Jeans 'n' Classics collaborator. For this concert he pays tribute to some of his own guitar heroes, including Eric Clapton, Jimi Hendrix, Carlos Santana, Mark Knopfler and Pat Metheny. Backed by a scaled-down Orchestra London and arranger Peter Brennan's very competent Jeans 'n' Classics band, the affable Emmett did not disappoint the Friday evening audience.

After opening the show with the rocking *All Along The Watchtower*, a Jimi Hendrix staple written by Bob Dylan, Emmett joked that the orchestra was a "very expensive backing band" before launching into the more subdued *Sultans of Swing* by Dire Straits.

Emmett shifted gears throughout the concert, changing guitars several times to elicit the sounds and tones he desired for each particular number. Proving that he is no nostalgic head-banger, Emmett played a variety of tunes, ranging from the ethereal jazzy sounds of *Santa Fe Horizon* and Pat Metheny's *Last Train Home* to Cream's *White Room* and a rousing version of Eric Clapton's *Layla*.

He also included Santana standards, *Black Magic Woman* and *Samba Pa Ti*, a soulful version of Clapton's *Wonderful Tonight*, the classic *Sleepwalk*, first made famous in 1959 by Santo & Johnny Farina, and three originals. Emmett preceded *A Midsummer's Daydream* aka "Rik's Classical Song," an original song from his Triumph days, with an explanation of how rock audiences used to "fire up doobies [marijuana joints], giving me the munchies whenever I played it."

Under the capable direction of Conductor Mitch Tyler and playing from charts arranged by Brennan, the orchestra musicians appeared to shine on most pieces adding just the right balance of nuance and fullness – while on some, particularly the rockier pieces, they appeared uncomfortable and were relegated to providing accents. At times, Emmett's voice faltered, but it was his guitar playing that the audience came to hear, so this is a minor quibble.

To be sure, the Jeans 'n' Classics mix of rock and classical music has proven to be popular with London audiences over the years and the two-day Red Hot Weekends concerts continue to be best sellers for Orchestra London.

Emmett was brought back to the stage for two encores. For the first, he played George Harrison's popular *While My Guitar Gently Weeps*, which featured a very well received call and response component between himself and "Smokin' Joe Lanza," the term he used to describe Orchestra London Concertmaster and First Violinist, Joseph Lanza.

Because Emmett and company have a repeat show on Saturday night, I prefer not identify his second encore song, other than to say he plays his iconic double-necked Gibson guitar and it is one of the most famous pieces in the rock canon.

The appreciative audience filed out of Centennial Hall, having heard what they came for...and more.

Richard Young is the Managing Editor of The Beat – Arts in London.

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