

Review: Cleveland Orchestra at Blossom: Classical Mystery Tour celebrates 50 years of The Beatles in America (August 24)



A packed house and lawn at Blossom on August 24 (photo by Roger Mastroianni)

by Robert Rollin

On Sunday evening August 24, the Cleveland Orchestra, with guest conductor and Philadelphia Pops Orchestra director, Michael Krajewski, celebrated the 50th anniversary of The Beatles coming to America. Classical Mystery Tour, a group that transcribed and performed note for note over two dozen well-known Beatles songs, made the concert truly exciting.

The four musicians played accurate versions of many songs originally created in the studio with orchestral arrangements, but never fully played live during the original group's performing days. Producer/arranger George Martin helped create many of these intricate works in consultation with The Beatles.

Classical Mystery Tour has appeared with over 100 orchestras in the United States, Canada, Europe, Asia, and Australia. The personnel included Jim Owen, rhythm guitar, piano, and vocals, whose singing was very close to John Lennon's quality; Tony

Kishman, bass guitar, piano, and vocals, approximating Paul McCartney's sound; David John, lead guitar and vocals, whose excellent guitar playing simulated George Harrison's; and Chris Camilleri, drums, vocals and Ringo's *Doppelgänger*.

Each half of the program began with purely orchestral versions of well-known Beatles songs: the first half, with *Eleanor Rigby* (1966), and the second with *Lady Madonna* (1968) and *My Love* — the latter composed by McCartney after The Beatles broke up. All three arrangements were solid and displayed the orchestra's skills, but inevitably lacked the punch of vocals, electric guitars and drums.

Tony Kishman did a wonderful job with the vocal and simple acoustic guitar accompaniment on McCartney's ballad, *Yesterday* (1965). Unfortunately, covering the orchestra with a transparent Plexiglas screen made the accompanying string quartet sound muffled. The group and the orchestra recreated the complexities of *All You Need Is Love* (1967), including the challenging Baroque style trumpet solo, and the interesting saxophone line. The vocals were excellent. In *Penny Lane* (1967), the performance again duplicated the studio elements, including another fine Baroque trumpet solo. Harrison's *Here Comes the Sun* (1969), with its lovely rock progression of VII to IV to I, absolutely sparkled.

Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band, the title song of the great Beatles album, was fun to hear, as were the more philosophical, *A Day in the Life*, the more wistfully drug-related, *A Little Help From My Friends*, the thought-provoking exposé of fake parental love, *She's Leaving Home*, the enjoyable *Sgt. Pepper Reprise*, and Lennon's indictment of modern society in *A Day in the Life*. The entire medley was a delight, and supplied a sense of the creative excitement of 1967, one of the Beatles most stimulating years.

After intermission, the performance of McCartney's *Hello, Goodbye* (1967) scintillated, especially in the Indian music-related closing fadeout. Lennon's quirky and abstruse, Bob Dylanesque, *I am the Walrus* (1967) was effective, as was Camilleri's *Yellow Submarine* (1966) in imitation of Ringo's vocal and drums. Lennon's surreal and bluesy *Come Together* (1969) came off beautifully, particularly with David John's excellent version of Harrison's solo. The fadeout was also terrific.

Harrison's evocative-but-simplistic rhymes in *Something* (1969) had a cumulative effect, and David John's version of Harrison's lead guitar solo was good. McCartney's dreamy, piano-driven ballad, *The Long and Winding Road* (1970) was excellent in Kishman's version, as was the powerful *Live and Let Die* (1973) in the George Martin arrangement. Lennon's charming anti-war song, *Imagine* (1971) was the product of his teaming up with Yoko Ono and producer Phil Spector. Classical Mystery Tour performed it well. Camilleri's tom toms highlighted McCartney's *Golden Slumbers* (1969) and *Carry that Weight* (1969), originally presented as a single cut on the Abbey Road album.

The concert ended like the grand finale of a fireworks display, with the entire audience standing, waving, and thrilling to the familiar strains of *Hey Jude* (1968). The song seemed an anthem of love — a rendition memory-filled enough to cause a sensation! Many remained transfixed for several more encores, including an exciting version of *Twist and Shout* (1963).

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