

The Canadian Tenors

Royal Theatre,
June 04, 2005
Victoria, BC

The Canadian Tenors left the stage after their first encore and I stood with the rest of the audience, clapping enthusiastically.

"This is not your average opera crowd," I thought. Conductor Clyde Mitchell bowed and bounded off the stage. The noise surged, whistles and foot stomps elevating the ovation to a roar.

"This is not your average Victoria crowd," I thought. I was on the main floor near the front, and glanced around. We were a mix of young and old, couples and groups, even a few children – all loudly expressing our appreciation.

The Tenors came back, almost hesitantly, genuinely grateful for the raucous ovation, and Mitchell came out after them. The stunningly talented Joey Niceforo looked at Mitchell with his hands out as if to say, "What do we do for a second encore?" They huddled and Mitchell took his place in front of the orchestra. The crowd settled in anticipation.

Mitchell looked out at the audience, smiled and said, "All we could think of after all that was to play "Funiculi, Funicula" again." The crowd roared, Mitchell started up the orchestra, and thus, the concert ended as it had begun.



The Canadian Tenors are a National Treasure. I know this for two reasons: first, it says so, right there on their website, and second, I have seen them live. If you have seen them or heard their new self-titled debut CD, then you will know this too. This trio of classically trained tenors, Craig Ashton, Joey Niceforo and Leon Leontaridis, commands the stage.

Alone, each of these artists is a standout performer, and they have the resumé's to prove it. They have performed as international solo artists and individually with a wide range of opera and musical companies across North America. From onstage banter, we learned that each of these talented tenors have won competitions. The eldest, Ashton, humourously bemoaned that he did not receive as much prize money as the other two.

He described their opening piece, Denza's stirring "Funicili, Funicula," as an early PR song. "There was a funicular lift going up the side of Mount Vesuvius that no one wanted to travel on," he said, "so Denza wrote this song to get people excited about it." I don't know if the song got more people riding up the side of Mt. Vesuvius, but it was the perfect way to start the concert and the crowd. The lively song revealed immediately that these three have chemistry on stage. They are obviously happy to be performing together and that joy comes through in their music.

They followed with Ennio Morricone's "Nella Fantasia," an ode to harmony and peace that begins slowly and moves quickly into a soaring melody. Next Leontaridis' solo (and his winning song), Schonberg's "Bring Him Home," from *Les Misérables*, showcased his extraordinarily strong voice to its full extent. Under his mastery, the song haunts the heart. The trio then reunited to perform "Sempre Vicino," a quiet ride that built to a stunning crescendo, after which Niceforo left the stage to Ashton and Leontaridis. Their voices meshed beautifully on "Fantasma d'amore."

Niceforo's solo followed, and if you aren't completely sold on the idea that operatic-style music can be fun and exciting, his performance of the Neapolitan "Torna a Sorriento" would win you over in a heartbeat. Niceforo's voice may be the strongest of the three, and is one of the most robust and exciting I've heard in a long time. He is riveting; his voice pins you to the song and does not let you go until the last stirring note.

Then Ashton, again exercising his wit, commented on how difficult it was to follow such a performance...and proceeded to win the audience over with his solo. Before launching into Puccini's "Nessun Dorma," he described it as "the most difficult aria I could choose as an 18-year-old." He unleashed his voice, displaying his incredible range and power. Reminiscent of classic Russian tenors such as Sobinoff or Lemishev, his voice is the most mature of the three.

The first guest performer, Victoria's own Stephanie Greaves, then joined the trio to perform "We Rise Again." The line "We rise again in the voices of our song," as sung by these four, made for an unforgettable moment. Vancouver Island fiddler Daniel Lapp jumped in and joined the orchestra in an instrumental set of jigs that had the audience clapping and moving in their seats.

The set ended with the Tenors and Greaves singing the inspirational, almost martial hymn "Raise Your Voices." While

Greaves possesses a strong and wonderful voice, she paled slightly alongside the strength of the tenors, providing a soft counterpoint to the power of the three men. The blend produced several wonderful pieces.

After the intermission, the orchestra launched into David Foster's arrangement of "O Canada," and the tenors were soon back on stage, lending their power to our national anthem. The crowd instantly rose to their feet, and in a wonderful, moving moment, sang along.

The jigs with Daniel Lapp and the performance of "O Canada" really let orchestra conductor Clive Mitchell strut his stuff. Mitchell is an engaging conductor. He immerses himself in the performance, drawing the audience in and working with the performers all around. He is a joy to watch.

Following our anthem, the Tenors performed Tosti's "A Vucchella," a love song from 18th century Italy, once again displaying Niceforo's strong voice. The last guest performer, a Canadian operatic veteran, Paul Oulette, then took the stage, performing a fantastic version of "Hymne A L'Amour," in an almost classic crooner's style. Greaves and Leontaridis followed with a duet of "You Raise Me Up," highlighting Leontaridis' astonishing voice.

The tenors then slipped into Canadian folk with "Song for the Mira," breathing life into an old-fashioned folk song and making it their own. They followed with a medley of more Canadian folk songs, including "I'll Be Home for the Bye," and once again had the crowd moving, laughing and clapping along.

The second set wound down with Rita McNeill's "Home I'll Be." The Tenors then invited Greaves and Oulette to join them as they finished the set, having a grand time with Allister MacGillivray's "Here's to Song." Each had the opportunity to show off their individual voices and all five joined in an emotionally stirring finale.

That's when the ovation began, and became louder as a small troupe of little girls marched onstage to deliver a bouquet of flowers to each performer. Funny and heartwarming, the girls were unabashedly amazed at standing before such an adoring crowd. As the little ones tramped off stage, the Tenors launched into their first encore, a terrific "Oh Solo Mio." And that's about where we came in...

The Canadian Tenors are currently on tour. Visit their website, www.canadiantenors.com, to view their schedule and listen to clips of their songs. The self-titled debut CD, distributed by Warner Music, is in stores now and available online on Pacific Music's website (www.pacificmusic.net), or on amazon.ca.

