

Suds & Co. impress during Orillia Wind Ensemble concert at St. Paul's

JOHN SWARTZ, Special to The Packet & Times
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At the start of the second half of last Saturday's Orillia Wind Ensemble (OWE) concert at St. Paul's United Church, Suds Sutherland took the podium.

Normally, it would be Roy Menagh doing that to conduct a tune. We all knew the first song was Summertime and featured Suds with a saxophone solo. It was in the program. I figured Suds was going to say something. He did.

It was with his sax to play Summertime. No one else joined in. The rendition of the song came only from Suds's horn. That was probably the most dramatic thing that could have been done and, to me, was the best moment of the concert.

The first half was an up-and-down affair. The OWE handled themselves well with two tunes, Ashokan Farewell and La Storia, but had difficulty with the rest.

Suds set the tone for the second half and the band played quite a bit better. It was fortunate two featured pieces, both written by Suds, were in the second half.

The band also has a tendency to do marches very well, regardless of how they are doing generally on any given night, and there were two marches to play. Both of Suds's pieces, A Taste of Austin and Sutherland, which seemed to be over too soon, and The Plunkett Suite came off very well.

Suds was also featured in another production on the same stage the week before, Missa Gaia, as presented by the St. Paul's choir and assembled musicians. Suds wasn't the only focal point, but he had several significant contributions, one mimicking a wolf.

Alyssa Wright also gave a great performance, and the only purely instrumental one in Missa Gaia, which paired her with recorded birdsongs.

The music seemed to swing between the ethereal bits (Suds, Alyssa and a couple of other spots) and just plain grooving when the whole ensemble was activated. Paul Winter, a jazz saxophonist, wrote the music, so hearing the syncopation and swing was expected, yet refreshing to hear in the setting.

On the whole, both concerts were quite enjoyable. Both were amateur productions, supported with professional help. In the case of the OWE concert, it is to their credit they can overcome unsteady performance issues and replace first impressions with solid musicianship as they move through their program.

The Orillia Opera House staff has for the last couple of years tried to promote to young people there is a place for them within the building. It's done through what has become a twice-a-year day of learning and entertainment mostly directed by teens.

May 10, In the Spotlight: A Youth Showcase features performances by local band Darker Still, along with Aaron Mangoff, the Blacklight Theatre, Rob Wallace, Gaelen Swartz (with some help from his dad) and more.

Paisley Ferguson, a student at Orillia District Collegiate and Vocational Institute, is the MC. She'll have some help preparing for her role from Bruce Pirrie. Pirrie is a comedy scriptwriter, who once upon a time was attached to The Red Green Show.

These daylong events also feature workshops in the morning and Pirrie will lead one in improvisation. Dave Campbell will also do one about choreography. Campbell is part of the production team that brings us summer theatre each year.

The event is aimed at young people, but not restricted to them. You can get tickets at the box office. Showtime is 7 p.m.

Saturday night, Ronnie Douglas and his band of merry bluesmen are doing something special. They are playing a gig at Brewery Bay Food Company. Sure, they've played there before and over the last 20 years have played many other places in town, too. But it has been 20 years for them, so they thought they'd throw their own party.

We've been quite lucky during that time to have been presented with lots of blues music because of the Spring Blues Festival, the Jazz Festival and other opportunities. We've had more than our fair share of nationally and internationally recognized artists performing at those events. Ronnie and company have shown over and over they are not just the local element, an obligatory throw-in to round out menus. They are every bit as good.

Did you know the Ronnie Douglas Band was the first act to play any notes at the Mariposa Folk Festival when the festival returned to Orillia? It's time to acknowledge their contribution to our enjoyment, so go and see them play at 8 p.m.

Rants! Raves!! Info? Write John at watchthisproductions@encode.com.

SWARTZ'S SHORTS

- I goofed. Saturday's story said Dave Austin was one of Suds Sutherland's students. My brain was typing, but my fingers thought otherwise.

- Tonight, some Twin Lakes Secondary School art students have their work showing as part of a larger exhibit at the McLaren Art Centre in Barrie. It's for the Sarjeant Company Design Project and other Simcoe County schools are involved. Some of the art will be reproduced on the side of the company's cement trucks, so if you can't go, keep your eyes open on the road.

- The Mariposa Folk Festival annual Showcase auditions are happening Sunday at the Aladdin Banquet Hall. It starts at 1 p.m. and you can hear Andy McGuire, Erin Bolton, The Express & Co., Grady Kelneck, The Unseen Strangers, Sarah Beatty, The Slocan Ramblers, Sarah Calvert and Anne Walker. Good luck.

- Anne Walker is also doing a concert at the Coulson Church May 26. First question: They have a church in Coulson? Yes. It's of pioneer vintage, restored by Anne's brothers, Ian and Neil. Anne has a CD out and might be headed to Mariposa.

- Three great art exhibits are up. The annual High School Student Art Show is at the Orillia Museum of Art and History (OMAH). Industrious Orillia is also up at OMAH; Paints, Pens and Pixels by Gayle Schofield, Susan McTavish, Tammy Peppler and Victoria Brown is up at Zephyr; and Evan Cooke and Mike Morris have their stuff at the Brownstone.

- Mary Lou Fallis, accompanied by Peter Tiefenbach, will sing a few tunes and Linda McQuaig will say a few things at a fundraiser for Project Umbrella Burma and Paso Por Paso at St. Paul's United Church May 15 at 7:30 p.m. You can get tickets at Manticore Books.

- Chamber Music Orillia (Jeffery Moellman, Marie-Caroline Bourque and Christina Heppelle) have a concert at Guardian Angels Church May 20 at 3 p.m. Admission is by freewill offering with proceeds going to the organ fund.

- With all the news about Booker T. Jones headlining the Orillia Spring Blues Festival and the lineup for Mariposa (headliners Jann Arden, Billy Bragg and Johnny Clegg) and The Tragically Hip at Burl's Creek July 1, it might be easy to overlook the Waterfront Festival in August (for planning purposes). Even Steven and Ronnie Douglas play the first night, Aug. 10, and Dr. Krane and Alan Frew (Glass Tiger) the second.

- Coming up: Era 67 has Dave Chun playing Saturday. Sixteen Front has Shawn Mei playing Friday; Christina Holton is in Saturday. At the Brownstone, Eyeside plays Friday night; Graydon James and The Young Novelists with Chris Thompson opening are in Saturday (\$5 cover). McCabe's has a jam tonight with Jamie Drake hosting. Darrin and Amy Davis play Alleycats Music Sunday at 3:30 p.m.