

MUSIC

Preview

So you wanna dance?

'La Bottine' bring a boot tapping evening to the Winspear

LA BOTTINE SOURIANTE

Wednesday, May 14
Winspear Centre

Twenty-five years and 11 Gold and Platinum records later, Quebec's La Bottine Souriante (The Smiling Boot) just gets better and better. With a blend of salsa, ska, funk, Cajun, Latino, African, and some of the slickest jazz moves around, the group has achieved iconic status with their innovative embrace and fusion of musical genres. Hailing from Quebec's musical heartland, Lanaudiere, (where La Bottine started their career back in 1976), these artists, at the core, remain true to their roots, drawing from their home region's rich heritage of Irish, Scottish, and French influences, which they bring to the world through their exceptionally tight, unified sound and energetic stage show.

But, along with their reels, jigs and ballads, come liberal dashes of salsa, funk, and big-band jazz, combined with world-beat flavours that stretch from the Orient to the Caribbean. Indeed, La Bottine have created a dancehall of music that no pair of boots can resist.

About ten years ago, they introduced a new line up of instruments. The addition of pianos, strings, and an airtight brass section to the band resulted in an even more dynamic mix of sounds. Régent Archambault brought his big bass rhythms to the ensemble in 1987; when asked what it's like playing with such an energetic group, he says, "It's a very nice experience to be a part of a big family, and because it so large, with so many different instruments, there's a lot of music being created. Our musicians have to play a lot of different styles. As well, our performance is a very lively one, and asks its musicians to be in it full time. We've toured many countries—the US, UK, France, Germany, etc.—and have had fun. We're a very universal act, and our music has got quite an unusual style."

Replacing Yves Lambert earlier this year, a young Pierre-Luc Dupuis (vocals, button accordion, harmonica) now leads the nine-piece band. "The average age of this band is about 40 years old, but we hired Pierre, who's only 22, and the sound of the band has completely changed. Pierre is spirited, plays the accordion and harmonica very well, and is a very funny guy."

Aside from Dupuis, Éric Beaudry (foot tapping, bouzouki, mandolin, guitar, vocals), André Brunet (fiddle, guitar, vocals), Pierre "Pedro" Belisle (piano, piano accordion) and Archambault (acoustic and electric bass), put together the more traditional sounds of the band. They've reshaped and reorganized their rhythms and tones, along with Jean Fréchette on the saxophone and arrangements, Robert Ellis and André Verreault on the trombones, and Jocelyn Lapointe on the trumpet. The four-piece horn section has created an exciting dimension to La Bottine's incomparable sound (we'd be remiss not to mention Sandy Silva as well, who's their percussive dancer).

And if that weren't enough, they also use flutes, whistles, and claquettes (tap shoes) to spice up their vigorous sonic cocktail. Needless to say, La Bottine Souriante represents the best of Quebec culture, with brilliant performers who continually rejuvenate music, but remain faithful to their folk roots. The "bottinien" performance wraps up the World at Winspear 2002/2003 season.

TARA ZUROWSKI