

Music of Michael Jackson at Wharton

BRIDGETTE REDMAN
FOR THE LANSING STATE JOURNAL

Gavin Hope has been a fan of Michael Jackson's for as long as he can remember. It's why he's thrilled to come to Lansing as part of the "Thriller! The Music of Michael Jackson" concert the Lansing Symphony Orchestra is hosting tonight at 8 p.m. at the Wharton Center's Cobb Great Hall.

"I'm honestly the hugest Michael Jackson fan. As a kid, I had the red letter jacket," said Hope, who is the featured soloist for the concert.

"I just love Michael Jackson as a kid and getting to do this in the symphony format is such a thrill for me. I have such a passion for the music. I've done this concert for several years and each and every time it's always a rush," he said.

Hope is now part of the Jeans and Classics group that provides performers to symphonies for Michael Jackson tribute concerts and other performances such as Stevie Wonder, Earth Wind and Fire, Motown, Prince, Rocky Horror Show and others.

He also has a varied musical background that includes stage, song, TV and film.

Hope is a Juno-nominated solo recording artist who has traveled the world singing with such greats as Aretha Franklin, Natalie Cole, Jill Scott, James Brown and Deborah Cox.

In Canada, he's had lead roles in the original Canadian companies of "Rent," "Lion King," "The Tempest," "As You Like It" and "Smokey Joe West's Café." He also recorded six albums with the Canadian a cappella group The Nylons.

IF YOU GO

- » **What:** "Thriller! The Music of Michael Jackson"
- » **Who:** Jeans and Classics with the Lansing Symphony Orchestra
- » **When:** 8 p.m. today
- » **Where:** Cobb Great Hall, Wharton Center
- » **Tickets:** \$20 to \$50, www.lansing-symphony.org, 517-487-5001

He also appreciates that he gets to perform music that pays tribute to one of his musical idols.

"I've always loved Michael Jackson's music. The thing about him as an artist for me was not only was he a vocalist, he was a performer. He was so captivating to me," Hope said. "That's what we're bringing (to the concert) — the passion of his music, the instantly iconic sound."

He emphasizes that the

concert is a tribute concert — not an impersonation.

"I don't look like Michael or sound like him," said Hope. "I've done a moon walk or two. I do shake my booty uncontrolably — there might be a couple of 'hee hee's, but it isn't an impersonation. It's a tribute to the music of Michael."

He says the concert is one that always excites the audience. They often come in their own red jackets and gloves and frequently start dancing during the concerts.

"If people are sitting on the fence if they want to go or not, they should come down for a fantastic performance. People who are a huge fan of Michael Jackson get caught up in the vibe and energy that the crowd and stage always have," said Hope.

"People always leave with a huge smile on their face. If

people want to get up and dance, it's encouraged. It's a fun show. I really look forward to it every time I perform it."

He says it's always exciting to be in the room when people start singing along or start dancing and have the Michael Jackson choreography down to a tee.

"Michael will be in the room — on the stage and in the crowd. His spirit will be there, his moves will there," Hope said.

It's a wide range of people who enjoy the concerts too, said Hope. He's seen people there as young as 4 to 5-year-old and also a nun in full habit who looked to be about 75, bopping her head to the music.

"There are all types," said Hope. "There are a lot of great moments in these concerts."