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Brave Combo brings unique sound to Fort Worth's Botanic Garden

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FORT WORTH — Rock 'n' roll and polka: They don't seem like the easiest forms of music to mix, but Denton's Brave Combo has been doing an excellent job of just that for nearly 30 years. The quintet, led by multi-instrumentalist Carl Finch, brought its quirky take on traditional dance music to Concerts in the Garden on Sunday.

The music:

A witty meld of Tex-Mex, polka, salsa and jazz combined with elements of alternative rock and new wave. In less capable hands, heaping so many styles together might sound awful, but Finch's crack set of musicians seems to have a master's understanding of each genre.

Throughout the set, the band incorporated familiar tunes and melodies into its own nontraditional polkas, sambas and salsas. *Louie, Louie* flowed seamlessly into a hypnotic take on George Gershwin's *Summertime* then back to *Louie, Louie*. It helps to appreciate polka, but one thing's for certain, this is a band that truly comes alive on stage. No disc they've released, including last year's Grammy-nominated *Polka's Revenge*, can match seeing the band rip into a polka-influenced version of *In the Mood*.

The mood:

In a word, jubilant. Finch and the rest of the Combo had the sparse crowd on its feet for almost the entire show. It was only fitting. The band played one up-tempo tune after another, and Finch yelled dance instructions from the stage, so the only thing to do was dance.

Memorable moment:

There's always a handful of dancing couples at Concerts in the Garden, regardless of the act, but Brave Combo led a majority of the crowd first in a conga line, then the Twist and finally the goofy, but oh so fun, chicken dance. As memorable moments go, that's pretty much the trifecta, but the band also provided a very sweet counterpoint to the silliness as couples swayed to *Joy Waltz*, based on Bach's *Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring*.

Concerts in the Garden Through July 7

Gates open at 6:30 p.m.; shows begin at 8 p.m.

Fort Worth Botanic Garden

Lawn seating \$15 in advance; \$18 at the gate; free for children 10 and younger

Table seating is \$22-\$45.

Parking is \$5 at Farrington Field, at University Drive and Lancaster Avenue. Patrons can ride a free shuttle to the Botanic Garden. Shuttle service begins at 5:30 p.m. and runs continuously during each concert.

817-665-6000, www.fwsymphony.org