

Concert Review: Trio con Brio

Artists: Martin Ellis, Donna Parker and Jonas Nordwall

Concert Date: September 29, 2007

Reviewer: Mark Dresden

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The Trio con Brio concert was exciting in many ways. The players are excellent musicians, well versed in their knowledge of the theater organ in general and of the Dickinson Kimball in particular. They are also well versed in the art of playing together with creative, original and exciting arrangements.

It was also exciting to see and hear for the first time the two Dickinson consoles on stage. But there was more. Also on stage with the Dickinson consoles were two grand pianos and a third organ which was an Allen Organ. All in all, it was a visually exciting prelude to that which was about to follow.

Whether playing together as the Trio or playing individually, their music was clean, crisp and imaginative. As a trio however, we were treated to sounds that were quite special. Six hands, thirty fingers and six feet can and did produce wonderful arrangements just not possible by a single organist.

Each of the divisions were played much as they would have been played in an orchestra – brass, with individual voices and ensembles as appropriate, woodwinds, strings, piano and other percussions. And this is made possible by the extra hands which permit greater latitude and precision in the use of riffs, counter melodies, “horn hits” and percussions and the like. All in all, it was a performance not to be missed.

The program started with the Trio playing an upbeat rendition of Cumana, a 1947 piece written by Barklay Allan and made famous by the Freddy Martin Orchestra. The trio followed with Monkey Doodle Doo a novelty piece written by Irving Berlin in 1913.

Martin Ellis then played Land of Pure Imagination a 1978 piece written by Roger Joseph Manning as a solo and this was followed by Donna playing Avenue C, a 1944 jazz piece written by Buck Clayton for Count Bassie and his orchestra. These were followed by the Trio playing Rhumba. Then it was Jonas' turn playing the 1902 Scott Joplin ragtime piece Elite Syncopations with much use of the piano. It was fun and a great arrangement.

Donna was next with Espana Waltzes composed in 1886 by Emil Waldteufel. It's been nearly 50 years since I have heard this piece played, but it was instantly recognizable and a delight to hear once again. Then the Trio came back with a beautiful rendition of George Gershwin's 1938 hit, Love Is Here To Stay. Then Martin played Polly a 1926 novelty number not unlike Nola. It is interesting to note that the composer, J.S. Zamecnik was at one time the most widely performed composer in this country and today is almost unknown. Polly is a good piece that requires a good bit of finger dexterity which was ably provided by Martin.

Jonas followed playing Hora Staccato written in 1906 by Grigoras Dinicu. This piece, usually played with violin and piano also required a good bit of finger dexterity.

The first half of the program concluded with the Trio playing two songs from the 1982 off Broadway show ‘Little Shop of Horrors’ – Somewhere That's Green and Mean Green Mother.

The Trio started the second half of the program with music from television and cinema – Theme From the Simpsons and music from the Harry Potter films. Then Jonas took us back to 1914 when W.C. Handy's Saint Louis Blues was written, but possibly to 1929 when the song was made famous by Bessie Smith singing it in an all Negro 16 minute two reel film.

Three more beautiful pieces followed: Donna playing Jesus Christ Super Star from the 1970 Andrew Lloyd Weber Opera of the same name; Martin playing Love Is Where You Are from the 1999 film 'At First Sight' and Jonas playing The Serenade from Sigmund Romberg's 'Student Prince' written in 1925.

The final number, Procession Of The Sardar utilized the Allen plus all the resources of the Kimball from 32' to 1' — raucous reeds, foundation stops, woodwinds, strings and last but not least, the percussions. And of course the most important component, the Trio with all 30 fingers busy at their work. The Procession Of The Sardar, is from the 4th movement of the 'Caucasian Sketches' written in 1894 by the Russian Composer Mikhaylovich Ippolitov-Ivanov. It was quite an undertaking and it was very well performed.

And then the Encore which was the Entrance of the Gladiators also known as Thunder and Blazes and also known as circus music, or the Barnum and Bailey theme. It was written in 1897 by Julius Fucik and still well received in 2007.

In reviewing the program, it is interesting to note there were examples of music written in most every decade from 1880 to 2000. Regardless of when written however, the music was fresh, interesting and beautifully presented by the Trio who provided us with an evening to be fondly remembered.