

## **Jonathan Ortloff Concert Review**

**20 November 2010**

Review by Mark Dresden

This was Jonathan's first concert at Dickinson and by every measure it was a huge success. While still in his twenties, his presentation was that of a seasoned performer. He is technically proficient as an organist with renderings those of an artist. In addition he seems to have honed the many specialized skills we expect from a theater organist. The body of work he presented was eclectic. There were classical pieces beautifully played with registrations that seemed to turn the Dickinson Auditorium in to a cathedral. There were popular novelty tunes taken from contemporary television shows and made to sound as if they were written for the theater organ, and there were tunes from Broadway and the movies. The preponderance of his program however was contemporary.

Because of the inclusion of so many contemporary tunes, as well as his youth, it was a concert different from that which we typically experience. It was as if we were witnessing the passing of the baton to the next generation and the interesting thing about it, our audience seemed to love it.

He opened his program with a peppy rendition of "You've got a Lot To See" written by Walter Murphy in 2002 and the theme for the animated TV show "Family Guy." It was a good up beat opening number. It was also the first of three tunes in his program from the same TV show. What was interesting to me was that while this music is about as contemporary as you can get, it still seemed right at home being played on a 1920's theater organ and was well accepted by the Dickinson audience the average age of which we will not go into.

The opening number was followed by a beautiful arrangement of “Can’t Help Falling In Love With You,” a song written by George David Weiss, and made famous by Elvis Presley in 1972. This was followed by “Charade” the Henry Mancini tune that served as the theme for the 1963 Audrey Hepburn film of the same name. In both of these tunes he used a selection of hauntingly beautiful solo reed voices for the melody.

Next up on the program was another tune from television called “Puffin’ Billy.” This tune was written in 1952 by Alan Rowe and served as Captain Kangaroo’s theme song from 1955 to 1974. As arranged and played by Jonathan it made a great piece for a theater organ presentation. This was followed by “Almost Like Being In Love” a popular song written Alan Jay Lerner and used in the 1947 Broadway musical “Brigadoon” and a medley of tunes written in 1957 by Leonard Bernstein for “West Side Story.”

Three (three and a half depending on how you count) classical selections were included in the program. They were Robert Schumann’s “Canon in B Minor” in which the flutes and diapasons were nicely presented, Lang’s “Tuba Tune” which made great use of the reeds, and conjured up the idea of a wedding or other procession and Karganov’s “Scherzetto.” For the half selection, Jonathan presented an arrangement of Gershwin’s “I Got Rhythm” starting and ending in a form reminiscent of a Widor’s “Toccata and Fugue.” Included between the Widor bookends however was the straight jazz rendition of the tune along with a down and dirty version. It was an interesting arrangement, fun to hear and it nicely displayed his skills at improvisation.

He ended the program with “Trolley Song” from the 1944 Judy Garland film “Meet Me In St. Louis” and then an encore of “We Open In Venice” from the 1948 Cole Porter musical “Kiss Me Kate.”

Judging from the applause, the Dickinson audience thoroughly enjoyed both Jonathan and his program. By the same token, Jonathan seemed to thoroughly enjoy the Dickinson Kimball and the Dickinson audience. He was at home with the Kimball. His registrations were thoughtful, novel in some cases, and always appropriate. While enhancing the music being performed, they also did marvelous job of revealing the wondrous sounds our Kimball has to offer.

Jonathan, more than any other performer I can recall, seemed aware of, and interested in embellishing the stereo effects created by the right and left, solo and main chambers. In addition, he seemed to be having great fun in just batting sounds back and forth between them. Lest we forget, the theater organ gave us stereo long before the advent of the stereo players and Jonathan’s arrangements often made this point.

It was also fun to watch him playing on the big screen. He displayed considerable dexterity with his fingering and pedaling along with a remarkable ability to wrap his arms around himself playing in the far upper registers with his left hand while playing in the lower registers with his right hand. It was dizzying to watch but through it all he never missed a beat and perhaps more importantly, didn’t fall off the bench. Kidding aside, he is a very good organist, interesting and pleasant to hear, and he rightfully deserves a place along with the other fine artists who have performed for us. mk