

Lew Williams Concert Review

June 12, 2010

Review by Mark Dresden

It has always been a treat to hear Lew Williams play the Dickinson Kimball and this, his 5th concert before the Dickinson Theater Organ Society was no exception.

He is a fine organist and a fine performer. His playing is clean and accurate and he displays great dexterity both with fingering and pedaling. He is well versed in the many techniques that produce the theater organ sounds we all so dearly love – glissando, portamento, arpeggio, modulation, and open harmony as examples. In addition to the mechanical aspects of his playing, he also has a fine knack for phrasing in a way that seems to charge the music with emotion.

Lew also seems to have a prodigious memory. This program included some 36 different pieces, some played spontaneously at the request of the audience. All pieces were beautifully arranged, and all were played strictly from memory. He has a pleasant manner when addressing the audience and he has a nice way of introducing his selections by providing brief backgrounds about the pieces and their composers but not over doing it.

His program was generally on the light side with many well known favorites from Broadway musicals, movies, and other pop tunes ranging from dance tunes of the 30's to some very modern rock selections. In addition there were a few light classical pieces. The Beatles were represented as was Elton John, the British Rock Band Queens, and the Led Zeppelins. Music from Rogers & Hammerstein, Russ Morgan, Duke Ellington, Glen Miller and Henri Mancini was also included along with light classical selections from Maurice Ravel and Aram Khachaturian along with others.

It was especially interesting to hear some of the modern rock band pieces transcribed for the theater organ. In Lew's hands they came off surprisingly well. They were enthusiastically accepted by the audience attesting not only to Lew's talents but also proving once again what a versatile instrument we have in our Kimball theater organ/unit orchestra.

Lew's registrations were orchestral, pleasing and appropriate for the music. Some seemed, at least to this listener, novel in that they consisted of combinations not typically heard or easily discernable. The result however was a variety of fresh beautiful solo voices, played with suitable accompaniments; and, of course, when appropriate, the fuller ensembles were employed. Over all the organ was well controlled. In just a few cases I personally would have preferred a more subtle bass line, thinking it more orchestral; but then again, this is a very well endowed organ, so it's hard to criticize the occasional use of the big basses especially when they are used judiciously.

For this concert, Lew also made full use of the percussion division. In the tuned department we heard the glockenspiel, the vibraharp, the xylophone, the chrysoglott and the tuned sleighbells which were used on several occasions. The stage piano also got a good work out and I don't think it ever sounded better. In addition to the tuned percussions there was also plenty of action for the untuned percussions -- the drums, cymbals, castanets and even a few sound effect items. In this program we heard more from the percussion department than is usual at our concerts, but the sounds were appropriate and beautifully integrated to become part of the music. I have a feeling his skill and proclivity for using the organ percussions may be the result of his experience as organist in a pizza restaurant where the percussions are on view to the audience and the customers like to see the action. While we were not able to see the action, they were still fun and delightful to hear.

In summary, it was a good concert making for a very pleasant evening with old friends and new and listening to delightful music consisting of many old favorites along with some new. Our audience repeatedly showed their appreciation with often thunderous applause ending with a standing ovation.

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