

## **Rich Lewis Concert Review July 17, 2010**

Reviewed by Mark Dresden

Rich Lewis grew up with the Dickinson Kimball as a student at the High School and as a volunteer on the organ crew. This concert, however, was his first performance at Dickinson as a featured organist and it was a huge success.

His program was fresh and exciting and it consisted of a wide variety of material – novelty pieces, popular ballads, jazz standards, transcriptions of operatic arias, light orchestral pieces, classics and music from Broadway and the movies. All of his selections were well performed and they were well received. In performing these pieces he displayed not only the technical skills expected of the theater organist but also an artistry revealing a high degree of sensitivity for the music being performed.

His arrangements were well thought out; his registrations were interesting, pleasant, and always appropriate for the music. His stage presence and rapport with the audience also showed a high degree of professionalism.

He opened his program with a peppy upbeat rendition of Harry Warren's "All's Fair in Love and War" from the 1937 movie "Gold Diggers." This was followed by the 1923 novelty piece "Last Night on the Back Porch" in which we could hear the Kimball xylophone. These tunes were followed by a slow dreamy rendition of "Nancy with the Laughing Face" which was written 1942 by Jimmy Van Heusen and then the 1934 novelty piece "Serenade for a Wealthy Widow" written by Reginal Foresythe.

Then, in quite a different vein, Rich introduced and played "Un Bel Di" from Giacomo Puccini's opera "Madame Butterfly." This aria is hauntingly beautiful and Rich's transcription and presentation couldn't have been lovelier.

On a lighter side, he next presented a medley of eight Irving Berlin tunes from the 1946 Broadway musical “Annie Get Your Gun.” The medley was nicely arranged, well played and judging from the enthusiastic applause, well received by the audience. Then on a more serious side he presented two beautiful Richard Purvis pieces “Les Petites Cloches” which featured most if not all the ringing tuned percussions the Kimball had to offer, and a selection from the Purvis Suite “Four Dubious Concerts.” These were nicely played, beautifully registered and made for good listening.

To end the program’s first half, he chose three selections from Mussorgsky’s “Pictures at an Exhibition” – “Promenade,” “The old Castle,” and “The Great Gates of Kief.” As he was performing these pieces, scenes relating to the music were projected on the stage screen. The music, which was beautifully played, enhanced the visual scenes and the visual scenes suggested interpretations of the music. This was a novel approach and it was very successful.

For the second half of his program Rich opened with a powerful arrangement of the spanish fantasie “Granada” in which castanets could be heard along with featured solo reeds. Granada was followed by another well played and registered Purvis composition “Of Moor and Fen.”

Jazz was next up on the program with three Duke Ellington selections – “Don’t get Around Much Anymore” written in 1940, Sophisticated Lady written in 1932, and “Satin Doll” written in 1953. These were well played and demonstrated yet another dimension, namely a familiarity and proficiency with the jazz idiom.

These tunes were followed by a return to the world of opera with a transcription of what may be the best known of all arias for tenors, “Nessum Dorma” (None Shall Sleep) from Puccini’s “Turandot.” This powerful and moving piece was followed by “Ecstasy Tango” and then the Adagio from Gershwin’s 1925 “Concerto in F.” All were nicely performed.

To end his program Rich presented a rather lengthy medley of tunes from Andrew Lloyd Weber's musical "Phantom of the Opera." Most of the medley was well arranged and well played but perhaps not quite up to the level of proficiency displayed in the rest of his program. Regardless, the Phantom Medley was well received and he was given a thunderous and sustained applause.

For an encore he played a cute rendition of "My Heart Belongs to Daddy" from the 1938 musical "Leave it to Me" which starred a very young Mary Martin.

As stated at the outset, and which can be seen from the wide selection of pieces that he played, his program was fresh, interesting and varied. It was beautifully performed and it was a wonderful first concert with special meaning for both Rich and our audience since, as a Dickinson student and organ crew volunteer, the associations go back a long way. I have no doubt the Dickinson audience will be hearing more from this young artist in the future.