

Tony Fenelon Concert Review
24 October 2010
Review by Mark Dresden

This was pretty much a typical Tony Fenelon Theater organ concert – about as close to perfection as you can get. It was a delightful and varied program, beautifully performed with style and grace and on a wonderful instrument. It also included a few pleasant surprises.

Tony is an internationally acclaimed artist as both a pianist and organist, and in this concert both of these skills were featured in a somewhat unusual way. Tony is also well known for programs that are nicely balanced between popular tunes and the light classics, and this very well describes the program we heard. It included material from Broadway musicals, films, operas and ballets along with some novelty pieces, and it represented compositions from the 19th century into late in the 20th century.

With the console rising from the pit, the program opened with a peppy, well crafted, upbeat rendition of the tune “Smile Darn Ya Smile” which was written in 1931 by Frank Marsales for a “Merrie Melodies” cartoon short. His second piece was quite different. It was a beautiful transcription and rendition of Tchaikovsky’s “Sleeping Beauty Waltz” written in 1890 for the Ballet. In this piece we heard nicely varied registrations including some of the Kimball’s most beautiful solo voices. Next up on the program, and providing nice contrast to Tchaikovsky, was a medley of Gershwin tunes including “S’Wonderful,” “The Man I love,” “Lisa,” “Swanee,” and the rousing “Strike Up The Band.”

These tunes were followed by a pesky string cipher (it’s getting to be that time of year) and then the 1923 Irving Berlin tune “What’ll I Do.” It featured a dreamy introduction, nice solo voices and the piano. Next we heard a brilliant arrangement of Vincent Youmans “Carioca” written in 1933 for the Film “Flying

Down To Rio” in which Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers were paired for the first time.

The “Carioca” was followed by “I Dreamed a Dream” written in 1980 for the Musical “Les Miserables” by Claude-Michel Schonberg. In this piece the voxes were used at one point to create the impression of a choir singing. It was a very nice arrangement and a clever use of the voxes. Then from the 1980s we journey back in time to the French romantic period to hear a beautifully performed rendition of the very showy “Waltz in E flat” major written by Auguste Durand. Next up on the program a surprise duet. . .

Tony is as well known as a concert pianist as he is as an organist and with his next piece he was able to demonstrate both of these talents. The piece he played was “An Affair to Remember” written in 1957 by Harry Warren as the theme for a movie with the same name. To perform this piece Tony used the Kimball’s Midi control system to record in advance an organ accompaniment to be played as a duet with his live on stage piano performance. The arrangement was partly in the style of Franz List and needless to say it was a very showy piano concerto like arrangement. After hearing this stunning duet arrangement, there is no doubt as to his abilities with both the piano and organ. There were three other wonderful piano/organ duets included in his program. However, after this piece he returned to just the organ to play a delightful arrangement of “Stella by Starlight.” Then to complete the first half of the program, the console was lowered to its accompaniment position and Tony returned to the grand piano to present a beautiful and moving rendition of “Theme From the Apartment” with his pre-recorded Midi organ arrangement playing the accompaniment. This Tune was written by Charles William and originally titled “Jealous Lover” and used in the 1949 film “The Romantic Age.” It was resurrected eleven years later and retitled for the 1960 film “The Apartment.” The Fenelon and Fenelon arrangement was smashing.

The second half of the program opened with a bouncy rendition of the Jerome Kern's 1934 tune "I Won't Dance" followed by a wonderful transcription and rendition of "The Overture To Die Fledermaus" written in 1874 by Johann Straus and which has been a part of the regular operetta repertoire to this day.

Three medleys were also included in the second half. They included tunes from Leonard Bernstein's Broadway musical "West Side Story," tunes from the 1951 film "Paint Your Wagon" and selections from Gershwin's "Girl Crazy Suite" featuring Tony once again playing the grand piano with the organ Midi providing the accompaniment. All of the medleys were beautifully arranged and all beautifully performed. These medleys were interspersed with a selection of four different popular tunes, each interesting and each quite different. The first was the 1937 Richard Rogers' tune "Have You Met Miss Jones." It was hauntingly beautiful, and it was a flawless replication of Buddy Cole's arrangement as heard on his recording "The Modern Pipe Organ."

The second of the four tunes was Hoagy Carmichael's 1941 hit "Skylark." It was a nice arrangement that featured a variety of beautiful solo voices, lush reeds and the piano. The third tune was a terrific arrangement of "Yellow Bird" with Tony playing the grand piano with a pre-recorded Midi organ accompaniment. The fourth tune was a beautiful rendering of Jerome Kern's "All The Things You Are" written for the 1939 musical "Very Warm For May."

For an encore he played a dazzling arrangement of "Roller Coaster." And just so there was no doubt about from where he hailed, he interspersed strains of two hugely popular tunes from down under – "Waltzing Matilda," Australia's unofficial national anthem, and the very popular "Tie Me Kangaroo Down Sport."

It was a delightful evening. A good and well balanced program perfect for the theater organ, a superb performance by a master musician, and played on our very own marvelous Dickinson Kimball.