

Dave Wickerham Concert Review

Performance on the Dickinson Kimball Organ -- January 30, 2010

Review written by Mark Dresden

Despite extremely adverse conditions, heavy snow, and cold temperatures Dave Wickerham came through with a terrific concert. The Dickinson Kimball performed beautifully, and in a sense miraculously, in view of the changing outside temperatures and the rather low inside humidity brought on by the cold weather. And the Dickinson audience deserves more than honorable mention for driving and wading through who knows how many inches of snow to attend.

Dave's program had something in it for everybody – popular pieces, classical works, a waltz, marches, orchestral pieces, hymns and patriotic songs. His arrangements were fresh, interesting and did a splendid job of highlighting the many beautiful voices the Kimball has to offer. His execution of these pieces was close to flawless. He is a very good and very experienced organist.

To open the program, Dave presented a three tune medley consisting of “Come On and Let's Get Happy,” “Sing Hallelujah” and “It's Gonna Be a Great Day.” These were played with a peppy upbeat bass line and they featured some of the organs interesting solo reed voices. I especially liked his use of the saxophone.

Another Medley followed the opening with a tip of the hat to acknowledge the weather with renditions of “Let it Snow” and “Winter Wonderland.” In the introduction to “Let It Snow” Dave used an assortment

of lush, shimmering strings the sound of which seemed to inspire the image of gently falling snow.

Scott Joplin's "Original Rag" was next up on the program. It was a good arrangement and one that put the stage piano through its paces. As an aside, it's interesting to note that this piece was written 1899 and was Joplin's first published rag marking the beginning of his remarkable career in ragtime composition. It was fun to hear and it was a worthwhile addition to the program.

Joplin was followed by a very lovely arrangement of "The Bell's Of Saint Mary's." This song was originally written in 1917 and then revived in 1945 for the Hollywood musical starring Bing Crosby and Ingrid Bergman. Dave's arrangement made use of many of the Kimball's tuned percussions including the chimes and celestas. There were also many modulations and many iterations from light and airy to a final tremolo, full organ chorus.

There was then another medley of light tunes followed by a great arrangement of George Schering's 1952 jazz hit "Lullaby of Birdland" written to honor Charlie "Bird" Parker and the Birdland Jazz Club named for him.

For his orchestral selections Dave presented a medley of John Williams' compositions – "Raiders of the Lost Ark," "Theme from ET", "The Olympics Theme" and the "Theme From Star Wars." This medley ran approximately 17 minutes so that each piece was fully developed. There was a full and excellent use of percussions. The arrangements and registrations

were excellent. They seemed to conjure up the idea of a journey through a dimly lit cave with brilliant illuminations, in this case sounds, revealing great beauty and diversity of things contained therein.

The first half of the concert ended with the “Colonel Bogey March” written in 1914 by Lieutenant F.J. Ricketts, a British Military Bandmaster and later used as a theme in the Movie “Bridge Over the River Kwai.” Dave’s arrangement featured the snare drums in the introduction and later we could hear the piccolos along with the orchestra bells, trumpet and tuba. It was a splendid arrangement.

To start the second half of his program, Dave selected the “Rondo in G.” This piece is attributed to John Bull, an early 17th century organist and composer. There seems to be something of a consensus however that this was actually written or at least very significantly arranged much later by the 20th century American composer Richard Ellsasser. In any case it was a nice addition to the program and Dave’s presentation of it was good even though some of the bass lines were a bit heavy for my taste. Nevertheless, it was well played and it made a nice change of pace.

Leaving the classical tradition for yet another change of pace, Dave’s next piece was Edward Elzear “Zez” Confrey’s 1923 piano novelty composition, “Nickel in the Slot.” Once again, the stage piano got a real work out as did some of the novelty sound effects including the Klaxon auto horn and assorted whistles. This was followed by yet another change of pace with the well known Strauss Waltz, “An der Schonen Blauen Donau” or

more familiarly, “The Blue Danube Waltz.” Dave’s arrangement included a nice introduction which featured shimmering strings and tinkling bells.

Next on the program were two more medleys. The first, a medley of beautifully and reverently played hymns that were dedicated to the memory of long time Dickinson Theater Organ volunteer Proctor Greg. The second was a medley of two nicely arranged and played Irving Berlin classics “What’ll I Do” and “Always.” These were dedicated to the memory of our long time friend and volunteer, Bob Nichols.

Perhaps in an effort to get our mind off the weather outside, Dave next presented a medley of seven songs each having to do with Hawaii. Each song was fully developed, nicely arranged and made for good listening.

To end his concert, he played a rousing American medley comprised of our nation’s service songs – Army, Navy, Air Force and the Marine Corps along with a very nice arrangement of “America the Beautiful” the final chorus of which was played only on the pedals. Then for a very credibly performed encore, he chose Widor’s famous “Toccata from Symphony No. 5 in F.” The Dickinson audience showed their pleasure with enthusiastic and sustained applause. All in all, it was a wonderful evening despite the weather.

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