

Simon Gledhill Concert Review

by Mark Dresden

Editor's note: This review appears in *The Vox Humana* newsletter, Summer 2007. It is a review of Simon Gledhill's appearance on the Dickinson Kimball, April 28, 2007.

Simon Gledhill's concerts are always special, but this one was extra special. To start, it was the premier performance of the new, bigger and better Dickinson Theater Organ console, the design specifications for which were authored by Simon. The console worked flawlessly and the Dickinson organ never sounded better – the result of the superb work of the organ crew, the new and expanded console, and Simon's skillful playing and artful registrations.

Technically Simon is a great organist and artistically he is even better. His arrangements are thoughtful, beautiful to hear, always appropriate for the music and very orchestral. Often while listening, if you were to close your eyes, you would think you are hearing not an organ but an orchestra. But then, you hear and feel the power of a 32' pedal note and realize this is not possible with a mere orchestra.

In this program Simon used just about all the vast resources of the Dickinson Theater Organ – a variety of brassy, brash reeds, sometimes used as solo voices, sometimes as accents. Then there were strings, strings and more strings, plus voxes, flutes and diapasons -- sometimes with tremolo, sometimes without; sometimes used as solo voices sometimes as an ensemble; and practically every pitch level from 2' to 32' featured at one point or another.

In this concert it seems he had a particular propensity to explore and use the vast resources of Dickinson's many bass voices (three 32' ranks and fifteen 16' extensions.) And, of course, the percussions, both tuned and un-tuned, were well represented. In his arrangement of the 'Girl from Ipanema', we heard the marimba with the harp and orchestral bells conjuring up a beach party complete with rum coolers, barefoot dancing on the beach, and the sound of a steel band.

His program was also something of a marvel. It included five orchestral pieces -- examples from what is known as British light music, from Opera, and from a major symphonic work. The pieces were 'Going For a Ride' written by Sidney Torch, 'Demande et Response' written by Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, 'Pierette' written by Cecile Louise Chaminade, 'The Overture to the Marriage of Figaro' by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, and two movements from "Theme from the Planets" 'Mars, the Bringer of War' and 'Jupiter, the Bringer of Jollity.' These latter two pieces were written by Gustav Holst and first performed in 1918. All of these pieces were beautifully and thoughtfully presented and "The Theme from the planets" pieces brought forth a well deserved standing ovation.

In addition to these orchestral pieces, Simon's program included four medleys. Each medley was well arranged with an introduction much like an overture, nice bridging from song to song, and nice development of each of the individual songs contained within the

medley. He highlighted the works of Duke Ellington with a selection of song titles representing almost every year from 1932 to 1944. There was a medley of the songs from the 1952 film "Hans Christian Anderson" starring Danny Kaye, and a medley of well known tunes by the Vincent Youman, mostly written in the late 20's and early 30's. There also was a medley of three songs written and performed by Richard and Karen Carpenter in the 1970s.

When you count the songs in the medleys plus his opening number 'Put on a Happy Face' (written for the 1960 musical "Bye Bye Birdie") and plus his two encores 'There Will Never Be Another You' (written for the 1942 film "Iceland" starring Sonja Heine) and 'A Foggy Day in London Town' (a 1938 Gershwin tune), and plus two stand alone pieces, 'The Girl From Ipanema,' (a 1962 Bossa Nova song written by Antonio Carlos Jobin) and 'Alone Together' (written by Arthur Schwartz in 1932 but used by and popularized by Judy Garland in a 1961 Musical Review). The medleys plus these songs account for a staggering 36 different song titles. This is more than double the number of individual songs typically presented in our concerts and yet each song was beautifully presented.

There are two reasons for mentioning this. Even though we were treated to a very large number of different songs, the medley format he used kept the program moving at a pleasant pace. And second, because of the large number of different song titles, space does not permit a review of each song individually even though they were so well performed they deserved to be reviewed.

Simon's program offerings represented work dating all the way back to 1786 with the 'Marriage of Figaro.' However, most offerings were written in the 20th century. There was a distinct bent in this concert to feature more recent music with tunes from the 50s, 60s, and 70s. These later offerings are not often heard at our concerts, but they were enthusiastically received by the audience. Also of interest and somewhat different for our concerts, the program featured the works of two black composers – Duke Ellington whose works are heard often enough individually, but whose body of work is not generally featured at our concerts; and the second, the British composer Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, who wrote the "Petite Suite de Concert" which contained the beautiful and popular 'Demand et Response' played in the second half of Simon's program.

It was a great concert. Excellent selections superbly played on an outstanding instrument. There was no doubt Simon was appreciated by the Dickinson audience as evidenced by loud and sustained applause, two standing ovations and a demand for a second encore.