

## **Richard Hills Concert Review**

**April 30, 2011**

Review by Mark Dresdin

Adjectives like enjoyable, delightful, comfortable come to mind when describing Richard's Hills concert. His program consisted of music written mainly in the 20th century and mainly by American and British composers. There was music from Broadway and from films. Also included were popular songs, ragtime, novelty pieces and British light music. It is safe to say that most, if not all, the material was familiar to the Dickinson audience. Thus, the program, rather than presenting the audience with a listening challenge, was more a matter of a delightful trip down memory lane.

Richard is a very good musician and theater organist. His arrangements of individual tunes and medleys were wonderful. His command of the vast resources of the Dickinson Kimball is unsurpassed. His registrations were varied, interesting and wholly appropriate for the music being performed.

His technical skills including finger dexterity and pedaling as well as masterful control of the Kimball's vast array of voices was wonderful to watch and to hear. Without doubt he is one of our great performers.

To open the program he chose "The Deadwood Stage," a peppy upbeat selection from the 1953 movie "Calamity Jane" which starred Doris Day. This was followed by "I Know Why," a very beautiful song written by Harry Warren for the 1941 film "Sun Valley Serenade" featuring Glen Miller and his orchestra. Then, picking up on the western theme of his opening, he played an interesting, very well arranged medley called "Boots and Saddle Cowboy Fantasy." It included songs such as "Home On The Range," "She'll Be Com'in Round The Mountain," "On Top Of Old Smokey," and "Mexican Cowboy" along with a few others. The medley was then followed by a very lovely, very orchestral

arrangement of Leonard Bernstein's "On the Town" written in 1944 for a musical of the same name and repeated later in a 1949 film version.

Next on the program Richard presented a medley he called "Sounds of the '60s." The medley included four tunes each written by a British composer. The first, "Georgie Girl" was written by Tom Springfield for the 1966 film of the same name starring Lynne Redgrave. This was followed by Paul McCartney's 1966 hit "Here, There, Everywhere." Next was "Downtown", composed during a visit to New York in 1964 by Tony Hatch with lyrics written by the British singer Petula Clark who also performed the song. Richard chose to end the medley with the hauntingly beautiful Beatles piece "Yesterday," also composed by Paul McCartney. These tunes, all written in the 60s, were fun to hear and Richard seemed to be having great fun playing them for us.

For his next piece Richard played a tune called "Midnight In Mayfair." It was written in 1937 by the British composer Newell Chase originally as a piano novelty piece. In playing this for us, the stage piano figured prominently in his arrangement.

Next on the program was a slow, lush dreamy rendition of "I Cover The Water Front" with at least part of the melody line carried very simply and hauntingly by a single 4' Tibia; and then to end the first half, a medley of Romberg tunes written in 1928 for the musical operetta "New Moon."

As he has done in the past, Richard opened the second half of his program with "The Dam Busters March" written by Eric Coates and used in the 1954 British patriotic film "Dam Busters." This was followed by a medley of songs written by Irving Berlin over a span of several years for the movies. This material was nicely arranged with smooth effortless transitions from one tune to another, varied and interesting tempos and modulations and an array of the many wonderful and beautiful solo voices our Kimball has to offer.

Next, a bit of British Light music, "High Heels" composed mid 20th century by the British composer Trevor Duncan and then selections from the Lerner and Lowe musicals "Paint your Wagon" written in 1947 and "Brigadoon" written in 1952. These were followed by a very beautiful arrangement of Hoagy Carmichael's "Star Dust." "Star Dust" was written in 1927 and became one of the most recorded songs in the 20th century.

To end his program Richard presented a collection of tunes written for the movies during the 20s by the American composing team of Da Silva, Brown & Henderson. The medley included tunes such as "Best Things In Life Are Free", "Birth of the Blues," "Black Bottom" played mostly on the piano, and the "Varsity Drag" to name a few. At the conclusion the audience showed their appreciation with a thunderous and sustained applause along with a standing ovation. Richard then returned to the console for an encore playing the famous Dixieland Jazz piece "12th Street Rag." His arrangement was terrific, amazing, and dazzling. It featured many organ voices from sweet to down and dirty, orchestral to calliope, wild and wonderful chromatic runs. It also included extensive use of the piano. In listening to him play this piece one wonders how he managed to do it with just two hands and two feet. Watching him play gives the answer -- super, almost magical pedaling and keyboard dexterity. Needless to say it was a very carefully thought out and well practiced arrangement. It was fun to hear and fun to watch and it brought down the house with a thundering second standing ovation.