

Dave Wickerham Concert Review

June 11, 2011

Review by Mark Dresden

Dave was not originally scheduled to play this concert but agreed to step in pretty much at the last minute when we became aware our scheduled artist could not make his appearance. I mention this because it is a testament to

Dave's skills and professionalism to step in with little time for preparation and still come up with a terrific performance. When he was last here, it was in January and it was in the middle of a blizzard. Maybe for his next concert appearance we should see to it he is not rushed and that we provide nice balmy weather. All of this is by way of saying Dave is a very good organist who can provide good entertainment even under adverse circumstances.

This program was well played, interesting and varied. In many ways it was not unlike programs Dave has presented in the past. There was music from the movies and from TV. There were ragtime pieces, jazz, patriotic music, marches, waltzes and a hymn plus a medley of some 20 tunes submitted as requests by the audience. His arrangements for the most part were interesting as were his registrations which included ample use of the Kimball's tuned percussions including the stage piano as well as many of the untuned percussions and other toy counter sound effects. Ample use, perhaps even a tad too much, was also made of the very prominent 16' diaphone.

Dave opened the concert with a tune entitled "On With The Show," sometimes referred to as the "Bugs Bunny Overture" as it was used as the theme for a Saturday morning children's TV cartoon show. This was followed by a nice arrangement of Duke Ellington's "I'm Beginning To See The Light" and then a summertime medley including songs such as "In The Good Ol' Summer Time" played to mimic the sounds coming from an out-of-tune calliope, Gershwin's

"Summertime" from "Porgy and Bess" along with others.

Next, he played "The Ragtime Dance" written by Scott Joplin. It was nicely arranged and well played featuring the stage piano with back-up from the Kimball. Following this, he played a quite long, seventeen minutes, medley of Beatles tunes and then a romp in the woods with the "Teddy Bears Picnic" which he played at quite a fast tempo. The tune was interspersed quite liberally with a number of bass horn hits presumably to resemble the bears belching or some other such sounds.

Following the picnic Dave presented "It Is Well With My Soul," a hymn written in the 1870s by the hymnist Horatio Spafford inspired in part by the tragic loss at sea of his four daughters. The music for the hymn was written by Phillip Bliss. Dave's presentation of it was beautifully arranged, beautifully registered and beautifully played.

Next on the program was a well played arrangement of "Calcutta," a tune written in 1958 by Heino Gaze and recorded by Lawrence Welk. The recording was a huge success and became the biggest instrumental hit of Welk's career.

Dave ended the first half of the program with the "Washington Post March." If you ever wondered how this march was named, read on. In 1889 the owners of the Washington Post newspaper asked John Phillips Sousa, then the leader of the United States Marine Corps Band to compose a march for the newspaper's essay contest winners ceremonies He did and named it the "Washington Post March." Almost immediately it became very popular and remains so even today. A Newspaper essay contest, who would have thought?

To open the second half Dave played a nice peppy arrangement of a song called "Doin' the New Low Down" written by Jimmy McHugh and Dorothy Fields for a 1929 musical show called "Black Birds." Dave next returned to Joplin with an arrangement of "The Maple Leaf Rag" featuring the stage piano augmented with sections picked up by the Kimball. It was a good arrangement and well

played, although a bit on the fast side for my tastes.

Joplin was followed by a medley of Mancini tunes from various movies and then followed by the beautiful "Petite Waltz" written in 1953 by the Belgium composer Joe Heyne. It was a good arrangement but again the tempo was perhaps a bit fast. During the intermission Dave asked those interested in hearing him play their requests to write their choices down. At this point in the program he reviewed the various requests and formed them into a medley of some 20 different tunes which he then played. It was well done and fun to hear, and a rather remarkable example of his ability to improvise more or less on the spot. The audience was quite pleased and offered a sustained applause.

The concert then ended with another medley, this time of patriotic tunes. The medley ended with the entire, or at least it seemed that way, Dickinson audience joining in and singing "God Bless America." It was a moving experience and a nice way to end the evening. The audience expressed their pleasure by giving Dave a great big thank you in the form of a standing ovation along with thunderous and sustained applause. It was a pleasant evening.