

## **Dick Smith Concert Review**

**29 January 2011**

Review by Mark Dresden

This was Dick Smith's 30<sup>th</sup> concert performed for the Dickinson Theater Organ Society. In many ways though, this appearance seemed less like a concert and more like a get together with old friends – Dick, the Dickinson audience, and the Dickinson Kimball tripping down memory lane together.

The format of this program was much like many of his former concerts – his standard opening, a few rousing production numbers, tunes from the movies and Broadway, a hymn, a classical piece, a tribute to Jesse Crawford, a tribute to the big band era, a sing-a-long followed by a movie, and a rousing medley of patriotic tunes.

As expected, this program opened with Dick's theme song of some forty plus years, Steve Allen's "This Could Be the Start of Something Big." It is an up tempo piece that is a good vehicle for bringing the console up, and for presenting the organ with its many beautiful and varied voices. His arrangement of this tune was exciting and it did a good job of displaying Dick's virtuosity.

Following this opening number he played two selections, "Moonlight in Vermont" and a little later, "My Heart Belongs to Daddy." Both were nicely played. He also supplied a vocal for both tunes. The vocal was something of a feat particularly hanging on to the microphone while still playing and not missing a beat. It was interesting to hear the lyrics for these songs. On the other hand, Dick is no Frank Sinatra or for that matter Margaret Whiting, and for this reviewer this kind of vocalizing is better for a cocktail lounge than it is for the concert stage.

Also during the first half, he played a very nice low key arrangement of "He Touched Me" from the Elvis Presley Gospel Album of 1972. Then, and a bit later,

he played a very smooth and rich arrangement of the Dietz and Swartz tune “Dancing in the Dark” written for the 1931 film “Band Wagon.”

Also in the first half, he played an interesting arrangement of Scott Joplin’s “The Entertainer” where the stage piano was used quite effectively. In general it was a nice light airy arrangement until the end of the piece when the bass drum entered with a dirge like clump, clump clump.

The tribute to Jesse Crawford, which seems to have become a permanent fixture in his programs, also appeared in the first half. The tribute consisted of a medley of two Crawford tunes played in the Crawford style and accompanied with accounts of his playing for Crawford when he was 14 and then later before Crawford’s daughter. We have heard these stories before at previous concerts, but heck at the rate my memory seems to be going, a review from time to time isn’t all bad.

Then to end the first half of his concert, Dick presented a fabulous rendering of the popular 1930 jazz standard “Bye Bye Blues.” This arrangement was typical of Dick Smith – the Dick Smith we have come to know and love - big, bold, boisterous, intricate, interesting, accurate and fast paced with fingers, feet and sounds all over the place. The audience approved and this was evidenced by a thunderous and sustained applause.

The second half of the program opened, as is his custom, with “The Stanton Kimball Waltz,” a tune he wrote. Also, as is his custom, he gave us an explanation of how he came to write the tune along with the detailed story of his employment as a theater organist at the Stanton playing the Kimball at quite a tender age.

Following the second half opening, he went right into an audience sing-a-long in which the audience did a pretty good job of singing along. He used the same four tunes for this sing-along as he used when he was with us two years ago. In any case, the audience did a splendid job of singing. Maybe this extra practice

helped. From the sing-a-long the program went right into the 1928 Laurel and Hardy silent movie “Two Tars.” It was a good movie and Dick did a good job of providing the organ accompaniment. Following the movie he played “Liebestrod” from “Tristan and Isolde” and then the hymn which consisted of a big bold arrangement of “God of Our Father” with enough bass to rattle the rafters. This hymn is interesting as it was written in 1876 to commemorate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the *United States Declaration of Independence*.

Following the hymn, it was time for the salute to the Big Bands. The tunes included in the medley seem to also have become a pretty much a standard feature in his concert programs. Then moving on from the 30s and 40s we were transported to the musical theater of the late 70s with a very pleasant arrangement of “Not While I’m Around” from the 1979 musical “Sweeney Todd.”

To end the program he presented a rousing medley of patriotic tunes starting with tunes by George M. Cohen and ending with the “Sousa March Stars and Stripes.” The march was well played but perhaps not quite as “on” as Dick can be. His encore piece was a very pleasant rendition of “With a Song in My Heart.”

In summary, even though there was a lot of recycled material and a lot of recycled banter from the console, Dick is still a very good theater organist and the audience gave him a big final round of applause as if to say, not only did we enjoy hearing you again, but it was good seeing you dear old friend. mk