

**Jelani Eddington in Concert**  
**March 8, 2008**  
**Concert Review by Mark Dresden**

Jelani Eddington is a particularly gifted musician and his concert was a delight on several levels. First, of course, his technical and artistic skills are phenomenal. He also has a thorough understanding and mastery of the Dickinson Kimball. He is equally impressive as a concert pianist, and these skills were ably demonstrated with two selections played on the concert grand piano.

Second, his program selections were impressive. At least half the program was devoted to wonderful transcriptions of light orchestral concert music representing the work of renowned composers from all over the world. To play these pieces properly requires considerable skills both in getting the organ registrations right and as a musician since they are technically quite challenging. They were faithfully and artfully transcribed for the organ and were beautifully executed. Also on the program were selections from Broadway musicals including a medley from "the Phantom of the Opera," some old timers as well as some more modern popular pieces. His arrangements were impressive and his performance of these pieces was flawless.

The program offered more variety than is usual for our concert programs. There was a wide variety of material presented on the organ, there were two selections played on the concert grand, and on stage, there was a dance performance of the "Swan Lake Waltz" presented by the Longwood Dance Theater with Jelani and the Dickinson Kimball providing the musical accompaniment. It was pleasant to watch and pleasant to hear. And, it was a nice use for the Kimball.

Jelani's opening, console up, number was a peppy, upbeat rendition of "Johnny One Note," the Rogers and Hart tune from the 1937 Broadway musical "Babes in Arms." This was followed by the explosive "Gallop" from the "Comedians Suite" for orchestra written in 1938 by the Russian composer Dmitri Kabalevsky. It was an excellent transcription. It was beautifully played and it was met with thunderous applause by the audience.

Next there was a complete change of pace, with the lovely "Not While I'm Around" written by Steven Sondheim for the 1979 Broadway Musical "Sweeney Todd." For most of this piece the organ registrations were quite restrained which allowed Jelani to feature the beautiful sounds of the harp and some of the other lovely little solo voices. "Fiddle Fiddle", written for the orchestra in 1947 by the renowned American composer Leroy Anderson, followed. This piece, as you would suspect, featured the many strings found in the Kimball and sounded very much like the concert orchestra was right there on stage performing. Jelani's performance was spectacular and was very well received by the audience.

A medley of music made up of six songs from Andrew Lloyd-Weber's 1986 musical "Phantom of the Opera" was next up on the program. From the beginning and throughout medley, Jelani's performance of the music brought forth strong feelings-- mystery, beauty, evil, danger, and elation. As he played it was hard not to conjure up in your mind on screen images and actions to go with the music. It was a superb performance.

His next selection, Cole Porter's "So in Love" was played beautifully on the concert grand piano. It was a nice change of pace from the organ and showed that in addition to being a fine organist, Jelani is also an accomplished concert pianist. He then returned to the organ console to perform another piece written in 1946 for the organ by Leroy Anderson but

never published and never previously performed – “The Cambridge Centennial March of Industry.”

The first half of the program ended with Jelani providing the musical accompaniment for the Longwood Theater Ballet Company as they danced the “Waltz from Swan Lake” written by Peter Tchaikovsky. Jelani did an outstanding job as accompanist and the ballet, even with some very young dancers, was very pleasing to watch and it was a nice addition to the program.

The second half of the program opened with a very up tempo, innovative arrangement of Harold Arlen’s “Get Happy” written for the 1930 “Nine-Fifteen Revue.” It featured a nice use of the Kimball’s reeds and an innovative arrangement with many nice transitions ending with a jazzy, almost boogie woogie chorus. It was well thought out and well performed.

For yet another change of pace, Jelani turned again to the concert piano to play “Malaguena” written by Cuba’s greatest composer, Ernesto Lecuona.. Originally, “Malaguena” was the sixth movement of Lecuona’s “Suite Andalucia” but has long since become popularized as a single. Jelani’s playing was big, bold, crisp and accurate and it was quite a treat to hear. He next returned to the organ to play a dreamy medley of six songs associated with the Carpenters most of which were composed and popularized in the 70s. And, then he played a very jazzy rendition of “Who’s Sorry Now” written in 1923 by Bert Kalmar and Harry Ruby. Jelani attributed the arrangement to the late great George Wright. It was fun!

To end his program, Jelani selected “The Dance of the Hours” from “La Gioconda” an opera by the Italian composer Amilcare Ponchielle. It was beautifully performed with registrations selected to mimic closely an orchestral arrangement. And, judging from the thunderous applause ending with a standing ovation, it was well liked and appreciated by the Dickinson audience. One number followed for an encore, Billy Joel’s “Root Beer Rag” and for those not familiar with this number it is an intricate piece performed at breakneck speed. It was performed flawlessly by Jelani. In summary, a wonderful concert with great musical selections performed masterfully.