

Jonathan Ortloff, *theatre organ*

Shanklin Music Hall, Ayer
Friday, June 27, 2014, 2:15 & 4:15 p.m.

- | | |
|--|--|
| “Give Me the Simple Life” from Wake Up and Dream (1946) | Rube Bloom
(1902–1976) |
| “It’s Bad for Me” from Nymph Errant (1933) | Cole Porter
(1891–1964) |
| “Where Do I Begin?” from Love Story (1970) | Francis Lai
(b. 1932) |
| Jaywalk (1927) | ZeZ Confrey
(1895–1971) |
| Tribute to Duke Ellington
arr. George Faxon (1913–1992) and Jonathan Ortloff
Take the “A” Train (1939, with Billy Strayhorn)
Sophisticated Lady (1932)
I Let a Song Go Out of My Heart (1938)
Mood Indigo (1930)
Don’t Get Around Much Anymore (1940) | Edward Kennedy “Duke” Ellington
(1899–1974) |
| “Rainbow Connection” from The Muppet Movie (1979) | Paul Williams and Kenneth Ascher
(b. 1940) (b. 1944) |
| Tico Tico no Fubá (1917) | Zequinha de Abreu
(1880–1935) |
| “Send in the Clowns” from A Little Night Music (1973)

Joe Sheppard, <i>piano</i> | Stephen Sondheim |
| “Springtime for Hitler” from The Producers (2001) | Mel Brooks
(b. 1926) |

Organ prepared by Ortloff Organ Company.

Program Notes

Rube Bloom, along with lyricist Harry Ruby, penned three songs for the 1946 film *Wake Up and Dream*, including “Give Me the Simple Life,” which achieved moderate fame, being recorded by dozens of vocal and instrumental artists. A fine pianist, Bloom made a name for himself during the 1920s, writing novelty piano pieces, recording many of them on Duo-Art piano rolls.

Cole Porter wrote the scores to more than two dozen musicals, and while the plays themselves were not always memorable, almost without exception each produced at least one hit song for the composer. “It’s Bad For Me” comes from the 1933 West End production of *Nymph Errant*; the show would not play on Broadway until 1982. A racy and controversial musical, its plot chronicles the young English socialite Evangeline Edwards’s travails through love, seduction, and sex throughout Europe, en route home to Oxford following her time at a Swiss finishing school. She and the first of her many suitors sing this duet as she debates straying from her planned trip home to accompany him to France.

ZeZ Confrey was one of the kings of the piano novelty in the 1920s, composing and performing dozens of such pieces for the Ampico reproducing piano, most notably *Dizzy Fingers* and *Kitten on the Keys*. *Jaywalk*, written in 1927, is a fine model of its genre. Its recording makes full use of Ampico’s sophisticated reproducing mechanism, including the ability for lightning-quick accents at fast tempo. Played into the recording piano by the composer, the piece was then edited on a master roll, adding expression, correcting mistakes, and embellishing the arrangement to the point where what is played from the roll would be impossible for one pianist to play alone. The arrangement for organ was developed directly from the roll performance, and makes use of the Shanklin Music Hall’s two pianos—a rare Mason & Hamlin RBB Ampico and a Wurlitzer upright.

A heart-wrenching tragedy, *Love Story* received seven Academy Award nominations in 1970, winning Best Original Score for Francis Lai. With lyrics by Carl Sigman, “Where Do I Begin?” spent considerable time on the popular music charts in a recording by Andy Williams.

George Faxon, the dean of Boston organ-playing and church music during much of the twentieth century, was a musician of dazzling breadth and versatility. In addition to holding his longtime position at Trinity Church, he also loved popular music, performing several times on the Wurlitzer at Babson College in Wellesley. His *Tribute to Duke Ellington*, modified and embellished by today’s performer, combines five of Ellington’s most famous tunes in a medley that shows Faxon’s thorough knowledge of the style.

The Muppet Movie marked the first appearance of Jim Henson’s legendary troupe of characters on the silver screen. In the opening scene, Kermit the Frog sits on a log in a Florida swamp, singing “Rainbow Connection” while playing the banjo. The song, as well as the film’s score, received the only two Academy Award nominations for the film, and has since become widely recognized, having been recorded by a number of famous vocalists.

Choro, despite its English translation “lament,” is anything but, being a popular upbeat musical style indigenous to Brazil from the late nineteenth century. *Tico Tico no Fubá* is undoubtedly the most famous composition in the genre. Made internationally famous by Carmen Miranda in the 1947 film *Copacabana* (fruit hat and all), *Tico Tico* gained even greater fame as the signature song of Hammond organist Ethel Smith, most notably performed in the Esther Williams film *Bathing Beauty*, in 1944.

Like Porter, Stephen Sondheim is one of the rare talents in musical theatre, writing both music and lyrics. Sondheim’s early mentor was Oscar Hammerstein; he later studied composition with Milton Babbitt. Famous musicals include *Sweeney Todd*, *Into the Woods*, *A Little Night Music*, and *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, and lyrics to both *West Side Story* and *Gypsy*. “Send in the Clowns,” Sondheim’s most popular song, is a backward-looking lament about lost loves, missed opportunities, and the waning acting career of the show’s female lead, Desirée Armfeldt. Sondheim cleverly avoids traditional song form here, constantly changing meter between 12/8 and 9/8 to suit lyrics arranged in many short phrases. The song enjoyed great success outside the show through recordings by Judy Collins and Barbara Streisand, among many others. It is difficult to do justice to the piece on the organ alone; this afternoon’s performance is realized with the help of Joe Sheppard on the piano.

Mel Brooks had early exposure to “song and dance” as a teenager, while working at resorts and nightclubs in the Catskill Mountains, where he acted, performed comedy, and played piano and drums. This penchant for over-the-top production numbers figures in most of his films, including *Men in Tights*, *History of the World: Part I*, *Blazing Saddles*,

Robin Hood, and, of course, *The Producers*. Originally a film starring Gene Wilder, *The Producers* was adapted by Brooks into a wildly successful Broadway musical, in 2001, as well as a film based on the musical, in 2005. The plot concerns a Broadway producer who deliberately oversells shares to a show he know will flop: *Springtime for Hitler*. It turns out to be a fantastic success, instead, largely for the unintentionally humorous and suggestive portrayal of *der Führer*. The show's main number, in addition to being musically spectacular, has hilarious lyrics, also written by Brooks. Several unique features of the Shanklin Music Hall Wurlitzer make this arrangement a perennial favorite to perform here.

– Jonathan Ortloff