

THE NEW YORK POPS

SKITCH HENDERSON FOUNDER

Notes on the Program

by Marvin Hamlisch

Monday, May 8, 2006, 7:00PM, Carnegie Hall
23rd Birthday Gala: 88 Keys for Skitch – A Celebration

I grew up watching the original *Tonight Show* with Skitch Henderson as the orchestra leader. Many a time someone would come on the show and, buoyed by supportive applause, would be coaxed to sing a little something. He'd get to center stage and find Skitch raring to go. No matter what key the singer began in, Skitch was ready. Instantaneously, he would land on the right notes, and would steer through this musical minefield with ease and agility. All by memory of course! Why let sheet music get in the way?

A conductor needs to rehearse the orchestra to make sure everyone knows what they are doing. But when serving as accompanist/pianist there might be no rehearsal at all. That's when you need someone totally "at home" at the piano. And I cannot think of anyone more "at home" than Skitch.

His facility, his musicianship, his technique, his musical taste, they all came together in one delectable package. And because of his skill, so many vocalists would feel his support. And that allowed them to shine.

Tonight we celebrate the keyboard. But we also celebrate the life of a man who didn't just play it. No, Skitch inhabited it.

-- Marvin Hamlisch

On behalf of the musicians, Board of Directors, and staff of The New York Pops, welcome to our 23rd Birthday Gala. No one is more closely identified with the musical instrument we are celebrating tonight, the piano, than our gala honorary chair, Van Cliburn. His first musical collaboration upon returning in triumph from Moscow in 1958 was on Steve Allen's *Tonight Show* with Skitch Henderson. We are honored that Van Cliburn has lent his name to tonight's celebration on behalf of the orchestra Skitch founded. We are equally flattered that music industry legend Ahmet Ertegun has agreed to serve as tonight's gala honoree, fulfilling a request made shortly before Skitch died in November 2005. In addition, we are proud to salute the young impresario Damon Dash, who has already made a deep impression on the worlds of music, fashion and film, and who inspires us with his work on behalf of New York City's youth.

The leader of our musical festivities tonight is Marvin Hamlisch, to whom we are indebted for sharing his incredible talents. Our grateful thanks also go out to the incomparable Elaine Stritch for hosting tonight's concert. All the guest artists appearing tonight offer their services in support of The New York Pops and its

education programs and free summer concerts. We are deeply grateful to our special guest Liza Minnelli and our featured artists Broadway's Jersey Boys, Chu-Fang Huang, Kid Rock, Bob Lappin, Darlene Love, Paolo Nutini, and George Wein. Joining them on stage are the richly talented musicians of The New York Pops and 24 young instrumentalists who participate in our *Salute to Music* education program. We welcome our young musician friends and the over 800 young participants in our *Kids in the Balcony* music education program who will cheer them on.

Working behind the scenes to ensure the success of tonight's gala are a superb group of gala co-chairs: Karen and Gordon DuGan, Mica Ertegun, Suzanne E. Murphy, Julie Turaj and Robert Pohly, Donna and Richard Soloway, and Andy Unanue. We thank Gala Leadership Committee Chair June Freemanzon and her effective committee, as well as Catherine I. Forbes, Chair of the Young Friends Committee.

Finally, we are especially thankful for your support, particularly in this year of sadness and change for The New York Pops. It was Skitch Henderson's greatest wish that The New York Pops continue to grow and flourish after his years on the podium had ended. With your support, we will carry out his wish.

The inspiration for tonight's gala concert was our dear friend and founder who would have turned 88 in January. Skitch Henderson loved the piano, and loved playing it with his orchestra. We dedicate this evening to his memory.

John A. Griner III
Chairman

Ruth Henderson
President

James M. Johnson
Executive Director