

THE NEW YORK POPS

SKITCH HENDERSON FOUNDER

Notes on the Program

by David Charles Abell

Friday, April 4, 2008, 8:00PM, Carnegie Hall
Oscar Hammerstein II: The Song Is You

Storytelling through music has always been a great passion of mine. That's why I admire Oscar Hammerstein 2nd so much; he was always searching for the perfect marriage of words and music. Great musical storytelling made Hammerstein's **Show Boat** (1927) and **Oklahoma!** (1943) revolutionary, and he went on to write four more classic shows with composer Richard Rodgers which approach, and perhaps attain, musical theater perfection. He never stopped experimenting, and even his less-successful shows contain great songs. His lyrics, like those of his protégé Stephen Sondheim, teach us about ourselves while entertaining and delighting us at the same time.

In his shows, Hammerstein took on big themes and created big characters with big emotions. This required big orchestras and singers with big voices, which have now almost disappeared from Broadway's theaters. Thanks to The New York Pops and tonight's soloists, you will be hearing the original, BIG sound of Broadway's Golden Age. Close your eyes, and you could be at the opening night of one of Oscar Hammerstein's great musicals.

Oscar would have loved Sutton Foster. She's the total package: singing, dancing, acting and oozing charm. My theater-savvy New York nieces idolize her! He would have been equally delighted by our other stars as well: Rosena Hill and Aaron Lazar. They prove to me that the Broadway tradition of great singing does survive. Having these three wonderful soloists made it very easy for me to plan the program: I knew that whatever Rodgers, Kern, Romberg or Bizet required of them, they could handle it.

How do great musical traditions get passed on? By great teachers, of course. During tonight's concert, the Mr. Holland's Opus Foundation will be presenting awards to five outstanding music teachers from all over the country. These are the people who inspire the professional musicians, as well as the audiences, of the future. The awards will be presented by another great singer we all know and love, Roberta Flack.

If you'll forgive the pun on my last name, I'll leave you with a quote from Oscar Hammerstein 2nd about one of his favorite subjects, love:

"A bell is no bell till you ring it,
A song is no song till you sing it,
And love in your heart wasn't put there to stay...
Love isn't love till you give it away!"



-- David Charles Abell