

Review

Bob Milne - Bring performer back

BY FRAN SCHATTENBERG
Beacon special writer

Arts Council of White Lake Concert Series Director June Smelzer only had to go to Lapeer but when she engaged Bob Milne we got a world-class ragtime piano player, composer and arranger.

Another huge crowd enjoyed outstanding playing last Tuesday at the Montague Band Shell.

While it was a one-man show, Milne's ragtime and barrel-house playing and interpretations were so exuberant, competent, and complex, he often was a one-man orchestra.

Adding to the concert's impact was a series of short lectures and

performances that expanded our understanding of ragtime, the origins of various styles, and even musical entertainers. In all of these, Milne's left hand on the bass notes was a consistent percussion instrument, while his right hand was dazzling.

Milne was a suave vaudevilian Bert Williams in the "Lend Song," and he had the audience in the palm of those talented hands when he played and acted out the evolution of barrel-house style from blues to ragtime.

He moved us from the rather stately Plantation dances from the early 1800s to their feeding into the St. Louis ragtime style in such compositions as "Frankie and

Johnny," a song so popular there were endless variations. The left hand rhythm here was also a precursor of a later familiar style, boogie woogie.

Milne included two selections from piano rolls, explaining that piano rolls were thought to play more notes than humans, but he proved that to be wrong. In John William Boone's 1912 five different styles in "When You and I Were Young Maggie," and "Do You Ever Think of Me" from the 1920s, that distinctive piano roll sound did not stop Milne from tearing up the keyboard, matching human hands for the mechanics of piano rolls.

The last half of the concert

was Milne's own tribute to the Fourth of July in his arrangement of "Songs About America." Playing nonstop, he started with music of the Revolution and ended with 9-11, utilizing music as an eloquent expression of historical perspective of American triumphs, pain, despair, horror, and a final expression of a love of America that triumphed over it all. A remarkable and imaginative concept that made the tradition of the Fourth even more personal to us all.

The next Arts Council Montague Band Shell concert will be Tuesday July 9, with the ever popular Scottville Clown Band. There is a free will contribution.

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