

NESMS 40<sup>TH</sup> Anniversary Piano Festival  
**Joseph Long Plays Piano**

NESMS, 21 Huntly Street  
Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> September 2015

Reviewed by Alan Cooper

Sunday afternoon's jazz piano recital was something of a new adventure for Joseph Long, and if truth be told for me too. Considering that Joseph's background in piano playing has until recently been mostly classical, it was fitting that the first piece in his recital, Don't Get Around Much Anymore, should have been inspired by the piano styling of Oscar Peterson.

Brought up in an area where jazz music was abundant everywhere, the young Oscar played trumpet before a bout of tuberculosis weakened his blowing capacity and he decided to concentrate instead on piano where his earliest lessons were on classical repertoire. He did so well that he was taken on by Paul de Marquy whose teacher was István Thomán, himself a pupil of the great Franz Liszt so Oscar Peterson as a pianist was only at three removes from Liszt. Oscar Peterson worked hard daily on his scales and classical etudes developing a level of virtuosity that earned him the nickname of "The Maharaja of the keyboard".

Having heard many of Joseph Long's classical performances I was well aware that he too was no slouch in the department of classical piano technique. Such abilities are certainly able to be transferred to the world of jazz. Indeed, it can be said that they are essential and in Joseph's final piece, his own arrangement for solo piano of Gershwin's Rhapsody in Blue, we were to see (from where I was sitting) as well as to hear a plethora of virtuoso piano techniques brought into the service of a truly marvellous piece of music.

Don't Get Around Much Anymore had a firm walking bass with the right hand dazzling us with extemporisations on the tune. Sophisticated Lady was slower and dreamier with delicious chording in both hands, while Afternoon in Paris was fast, exciting and virtuosic.

Tenderly had teasing bursts of melody in the right hand and Joseph went on to prove that a slow pensive melody like Autumn Leaves (hear Nat King Cole) can be made to swing along splendidly in upbeat style.

Body and Soul was richly expansive with delicious chording and then Gershwin's Summertime with once again a strong walking bass and bluesy extemporisations in the right hand was fascinating.

There followed a Mystery Piece whose title is unknown at present but we hope to find out one day. It sounded great though.

This led into Joseph's final piece, his own piano arrangement of Gershwin's Rhapsody in Blue. I actually have a piano solo arrangement of this piece but it is nowhere near Joseph's version

which was full of the most fabulous technical fireworks from beginning to end. Watching Joseph's hands, this arrangement seemed to have every possible virtuoso flourish that it is possible to have. What a magnificent performance for a concert that was part of a Piano Festival. If Oscar Peterson was the Maharaja of the Keyboard, what could we call Joseph? The Nabob of the Piano perhaps, since the Sultan of Swing has already been taken?