

JACK LONDON PARK PIANO CLUB
Concert February 14, 2015

“Soul Mates” was the theme of the Valentine’s Day concert, an apt tribute to Charmian and Jack London during the 100th anniversary of Jack’s death.

Dr. Ralph Hoyal welcomed the sold-out audience to a “ho hum day in Paradise,” charming them with a lovely collection of love songs from Lerner & Loewe, Rodgers & Hart, and George & Ira Gershwin, among others. Accompanying him in grand style on the piano was local musician Jenny Jones. Dr. Hoyal sang “In the Valley of the Moon,” a favorite of Jack and Charmian’s and then a new song dedicated to them – “Jack’s Ode to Charmian ” written by Judson Goodrich, the JLP Piano Club founder. Jud wrote the lyrics from Jack’s love letters to Charmian about “living on a land of love, not on the sand but on the rock.” It was a moving tribute to the power of love to last a century.

Deborah Knapp then played two pieces from the extensive repertoire of piano music left by Charmian in the music cabinet. She played “LaFille,” an early Debussy love poem to a Scottish girl, with musical coloring from both Scotland and France, as well as the favorite “Claire de Lune.” She closed with an original ragtime-inspired composition, “California Quail Rag,” her own valentine to California, its landscape and beauty.

JLP’s piano man, Jim Wittes, played a mélange of love songs of different eras – some lush and expressive (“Dancing on the Ceiling”), some witty (“Darn That Dream and “Don’t Blame Me”), some yearning and smoky (“Smoke Gets in Your Eyes” by Jerome Kern, a pioneer in ragtime), and some just unforgettable melodies such as “The Heather on the Hill.”

Rubina Mazurka, a charming and versatile young member of the JLP Piano Club both played a confident, expressive solo piano work, “Expectation,” and also sang four love songs by famous composers. These included “That was Not the Wind That Blew,” by Rimsky-Korsakov, a love song about the beloved’s voice; “Serenade” by Schubert; “Del Cabello Mas Sutil” by Obradors, a passionate lover’s ode to a strand of his beloved’s hair; and Mozart’s “Dans Un Bois Solitaire” about the power of Cupid’s dart.

Once again, Rubina and Esfir Ross played a set of four-hand pieces, “4 Waltzes” by Brahms, each in a different style, as always played with great spirit and style.

Last but never least, Esfir Ross treated the audience to three pieces with “international flavor” and flair. First was an exquisite rendition of the famous “Liebestraume” by Liszt, the ultimate piano virtuoso, as well as Dvorak’s dancing, gypsy-themed “Slavonic Dance” and the “Caprice Espanol,” a Spanish tune by the Russian salon composer Moszkowski. As always, Esfir harnessed the full power and range of Charmian’s piano to captivate the sold-out audience with her professionalism and panache.

Review by Nancy Watson-Tansey