

# JAZZMAN THOMPSON DELIVERS A "HALFWAY DECENT" CONCERT

*from The Connecticut Post*

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The Greater Bridgeport Symphony's rescheduled Christmas concert at The Klein Saturday evening was an incredible crowd-pleaser from start to finish.

With first-time guest conductor Oscar Bustillo and pianist/clarinetist Butch Thompson at the helm, the evening jumped from big band, to ragtime, to jazz in one joyful note to another.

Thompson made rags by the likes of Eubie Blake and Scott Joplin sound fresh as the day they were written. And the GBS began the evening with a powerhouse performance of Ellington classics arranged for orchestra.

Thompson began with Blake's "Chevy Chase Rag," an amusement park of a tune, and never let up for the entire evening.

He was Mr. Versatility next, switching to clarinet and then piano for a mellow "Body and Soul" that the GBS underlined with lush strings. Later, he gave the royal treatment to Blake's exceptionally melodic ballad, "Memories of You," on both the piano and clarinet.

With his equally mellow chats, tidbits of information, and jokes between most of the selections, Thompson was like a gracious Midwest host who invited us into his home for an evening's visit. We were having such a good time that by the end of the evening, he made us feel as if we were old friends.

Acclaimed as a master of ragtime and jazz, Thompson took Blake's "Charleston Rag" to bravos early in the evening. In short order, he rolled around to Joplin's classic "Elite Syncopations" with his great piano work. This number sounded like all the Charlie Chaplin silent movies rolled into one. Thompson gave the rag a surprising, robust delicacy.

Everyone must have wanted to burst out in some furious toe-tapping for this rag, as well as Joplin's "Cleopha March."

For a change of pace, Thompson turned to a jazzy concert version of Waller's "Honeysuckle Rose." The high point was his piano floating over the top of the full orchestra in peppy frills embellishing the melody.

There was ragtime for relaxing, too, like the gentle syncopation of "Solace: A Mexican Serenade."

When Thompson got to Joplin's highly recognizable, high-strutting "Maple Leaf Rag," he made it sound sophisticated as all get-out and at the same time ready to accompany any silent film classic.

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Along the way, Bustillo and the GBS also took us on a Strauss "Blue Danube Waltz" that combined the exciting whirls of an elegant waltz with the fun of a carousel.

Then they gave a snappy salute to the big bands that they capped much to the audience's delight with a spirited "Pennsylvania 6-5000."

"Thank you for being a halfway decent audience," Thompson said. He explained in the Midwest this is the expression for the top accolade you can give.

To Thompson and the GBS, we also say, "Thank you for giving a halfway decent concert!"