

An Evening with Butch Thompson •

a review of "Yulestride" concert by Lou Kraus

Ogallala, Nebraska, December 22, 2004

If you had the good fortune to attend the Butch Thompson concert on Dec. 10, you were treated to an evening of superb piano styling. You could have turned back the calendar to 1930, because the sounds of Scott Joplin, Fats Waller, Jelly Roll Morton and many others were served up with a Christmas flavor.

Thompson opened the program with "It Came Upon a Midnight Clear," which started as a beautifully appreciated piece and progressed to a rollicking ragtime ala Fats Waller. This was followed by a blues rendition of "Silent Night" that really worked. You wouldn't think that jazz, blues and Christmas music would go together, but believe me, when "Silent Night" was over, there was nary an angel out of place.

The Fats Waller classic, "Ain't Misbehavin'," began as a stately, stride piece and then double-timed its way to a highly-improvised ending. Throughout the night, the audience was treated to a dazzling fast and at other times, relaxed and mellow with chords served up to complement the melodies. The harmonies were never boring and seemed to move with a soul of their own.

One of the most interesting pieces of the evening was "In the Dark" an impressionistic piece composed by the jazz trumpeter Bix Beiderbecke. "Precious Lord" was a beautiful number played a cappella style on an ancient Albert system clarinet. My favorite piece was "Tiger Rag," where Thompson used his entire forearm to imitate the tiger growl, which is usually played on the trombone.

The evening ended with an encore and Thompson came back on stage and led the audience in a sing-along with "White Christmas," "I'll Be Home For Christmas," and "Jingle Bells." At the end, Thompson kicked up the temp to warp speed and sent us home with his ragtime version of "I'll Be Home for Christmas."

It was a very enjoyable evening and, once again, thanks to the Arts Council for its hard work. Take the time to support their efforts. You'll be glad you did.

"The evening ended with an encore and Thompson...led the audience in a sing-along with "White Christmas," and "I'll Be Home For Christmas."