

Kenny G: Back and forth

Kenny G
Jubilee Auditorium
September 25

review by Mike Spindloe

Kenny G and his six piece band breezed through their Jubilee Auditorium concert Sunday night before a rapturous crowd of 1500 or so fans of not-quite-easy listening music. For over two hours the stage belonged to the soft-spoken, slim saxophone player from Seattle, who seems to have found his niche somewhere on the fence between jazz and pop after just one album.

The concert began with a solo soprano sax riff played offstage but sounding through the PA system. In a thin haze of smoke and dim light, Kenny G meandered onto the stage and was soon joined by the rest of the band. The lights came sharply into focus, and the ensemble ripped, or at least stepped, into the first of a series of pieces highlighting Kenny's fluent grasp of saxophone technique.

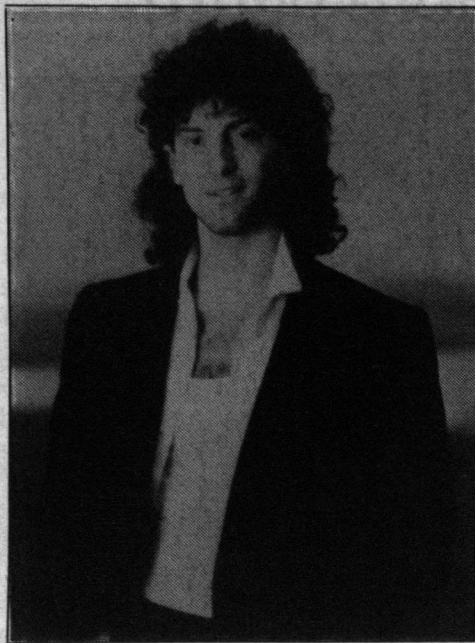
The man can play; there is no doubt about that. Alternately blowing on soprano, alto and tenor horns, he glided back and forth seemingly effortlessly, through the ranges of all three instruments. Back and forth he went. Back and forth. Back and forth.

Yet there was something missing. This became especially evident when, late in the show, he went and played on the first balcony, again via a wireless microphone, for what seemed like hours. Back and forth he went. Huge jumbles of notes running riot in a confusion of meaninglessness. Back and forth.

The something that was missing was passion. Plain and simple. It reared its beautiful head a few times, only to quickly be lost in the politeness of the whole affair.

The question is, did this make any difference to the assembled multitudes? The answer is, no. They cheered Kenny's every move.

They cheered when he waved his saxophone back and forth to show how excited he was. They cheered when he



Kenny G played a polite concert at the Jubilee Sunday night.

stumbled through song introductions. They even cheered when he held out one not particularly wonderful sounding note for about two minutes. They cheered really loudly when he came out to play "Songbird" for the encore. Then they gave him a unanimous standing ovation, but gave up as soon as the band left the stage. The show was over. A sole, plaintive, non-sheep cried out: "Encore!"

But the show was over.

The best part of it all, strangely enough, was the percussionists' solo. Wielding an unusually large tambourine, he alternately juggled, spun, threw, caught and even played it. It was a flawless performance, but there was the element of danger. He looked as though he might lose control at any moment.

Kenny G, on the other hand, rarely if ever seemed to be playing on the edge. Holding his saxophone strangely to one side of his mouth, he smirked his way through runs that would make mere mortals give up the instrument and take up knitting. In the end, though, those lightning riffs were going nowhere.

Just back and forth.

ESO impresses yet again

review by Pat Hughes

The Edmonton Symphony Orchestra turned in another solid performance Friday in the second concert of the Magnificent Masters Series, this time featuring renowned pianist Bela Davidovitch. This concert, the second time Madame Davidovich has played with the ESO, left no doubt in the listener's mind as to why her presence was requested again. She sparkled at the keyboard, displaying all of the talent and beauty that has given her such a favourable worldwide reputation.

George Frederic Handel's Music for Royal Fireworks was first on the program, a bright, powerful selection, originally composed for a 1749 fireworks display for King George II of England. Friday's performance was probably more smoothly executed however, as most of the fireworks in the original display failed. At any rate, the music was a success then and now, the precise melodies and elegant bass accompaniment so characteristic of the Baroque composer's music.

Schubert's "Unfinished" Symphony followed, the two-movement work even now raising questions of its origin. Reasons why Schubert never finished the work are unknown; some think that he was simply frustrated for an idea and discarded the incomplete piece, as he had done many times before. Regardless of the reasons, the "Unfinished" Symphony is still extremely popular, and Friday's audience reaffirmed that sentiment. Although not technically very difficult, the piece must

be played with feeling and color, and the ESO did not disappoint.

Last before the intermission was the "Fall Fair" by Godfrey Ridout, an unfamiliar yet delightful piece. Written in 1961 by the Canadian composer, this work was dazzling in its splendour, contrasting itself at every turn. "Fall Fair" brought a lively, exhilarating end to the first part of the program.

Dominating the rest of the evening was Brahms' Piano Concerto #1 in D minor, played by featured artist Bela Davidovich, and truly a joy to hear. The work took on a aggressive, exciting feel as Davidovich attacked it, playing with tangible enthusiasm and energy. Madame Davidovich sped through the rigorous cadenzas of the enormous first movement, handling the tricky work with consummate skill. She was overpowered at times during the adagio, the orchestra playing a touch heavily, but the beauty of the slow movement was still brought forth. The closing rondo was exquisite, beautifully expressive on both the orchestra's and the soloist's parts. Conductor Uri Mayer must also be commended for his excellent display of control during this work. Mayer kept the orchestra perfectly in time with Davidovich, no easy feat in such a lively and varied work. The overall effect was wonderful, an extraordinary example of precise control combined with unrestrained passion. Once again the Edmonton Symphony showed off their highly refined level of skill and style, to the appreciation of all present.

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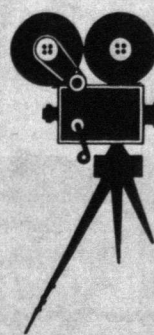
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