

CONCERT REVIEW

Gershwin tribute gave audience much to rhapsodize about

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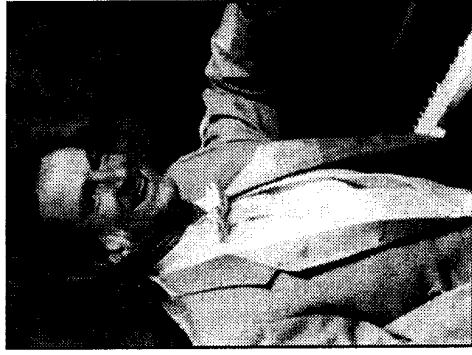
Last Saturday night, Broadway, New York, U.S.A., and the lilting music of George and Ira Gershwin filled the Cabrillo College Theater, in the opening performance of the Distinguished Artists' Concert and Lecture Series, now beginning its 15th ever-more-successful season. The cast was small, but the effect big time. "An Evening with Glen Rose" featured this natural, versatile musician-showman and his touring partner, the attractive, sultry-voiced cabaret singer Linda Day. Completing the trio was Michele Rivard, special guest artist, Cabrillo's own super administrator-teacher-vocalist, who gave us a rare chance to hear her great voice locally and on campus.

The stage setting was bare except for the Steinway grand and a wooden hatrack, from which Rose occasionally plucked and donned a bowler, a straw, a cowboy hat, a piece, as appropriate to the number. Ever the perfect host and entertainer, Rose is a seasoned composer, performer, and tourer with over 30 years' worth of perfecting his routines, a masterful musical magician, as organized as if from a Fellini flick, to lead the evening's festivities. His assistant, sidekick, and silent partner was the illuminated-from-behind backdrop of a magic screen, filling the stage at the rear, and changing from red to blue to green as it alternatingly displayed

these large, abstract scenes: an on-the-street view of Broadway theatres, a look at the early 1930s Manhattan skyline (including the Chrysler building), and a musical staff with notes scrolled upon it.

1927 was the starting point for Glen Rose's introduction: the year that Lindbergh flew the Atlantic solo in "The Spirit of St. Louis," Babe Ruth was home run king, Johnny Weismuller the Olympic golden swimmer. And the Gershwin brothers were riding the crest of fame on Broadway with the musical "Funny Face," its hit lyric "S Wonderful" containing the then-shocking word "amorous"! Maybe that's because Calvin Coolidge was president. Then the blond, relaxed Linda Day, attired in a pleated, matte black gown, arrived on stage to join a fine duet from 1924, "Somebody Loves Me," followed by her bluesy solo, ever a favorite since 1926, "Someone To Watch Over Me."

As the evening progressed, Glen Rose informally presented a non-sequential history of the Gershwin brothers: Ira the scholar and lyricist (who knew exactly when and where to use bad English for good effect), and George, the street-wise scholastic dropout who lived and breathed music, loved to play the piano 'round the clock, and became at 15 the youngest "song plucker" ever, publishing his own first piece in 1919 when only 17. In 1924 he did the Broadway smash



Glen Rose

"Lady Be Good" for the Astaires; what had already put him on the map was "Swanee," picked up by Al Jolson. During this background, our entertainer would pluck his mandolin, sit while he sang and played the piano, and strut his stuff on stage, including tap dance routines with wicked, airborne heel clicks.

Not only was George Gershwin the star of "Tin Pan Alley," he had a remarkable second career as a self-taught symphonic composer. In 1924, in only four weeks, he composed "Rhapsody in Blue" at the request of the great Paul Whiteman, for his famous orchestra. At this point, Glen Rose gave us all a musical demonstration and lesson not to be forgotten

(perhaps different from when he taught notation and wrote a book of piano instruction at Cabrillo 25 years ago): he showed what a fine pianist he is by playing a long excerpt from the "Rhapsody," which proved he has both crystalline technique in the bravura passages and a warm, singing tone in the tender moments. With his innate musical sense and timing, he could play the piece in his sleep with big name ensembles.

Indeed, the whole evening was near-perfection. To conclude it, Glen Rose had us all join voices to sing: "I say 'potato' (you say 'potato'), I say 'tomato' (you say 'tomato')..." All of us left the hall satisfied. But only temporarily. Why? Because other "Evenings with Glen Rose" are similar tributes to Irving Berlin and Cole Porter. So we'd like a couple more performances, if you please, with the same cast as this one. We'll be waiting to hear them.