

TONY BENNETT LIVE

Hello, I'm Edgar Loessin with Loessin at Large. The second song that Tony Bennett sang last night at the fabulous Ferguson Center was "The Best is Yet to Come". It set the scene perfectly for the elegant, sophisticated musical evening that lay in store.

Mr. Bennett went through some two dozen classics from the American song book. Each one seemed to top the one before it.

Noel Coward, in one of his plays, remarks about the potency of cheap popular music. He's referring, jokingly, to one of his own tunes. Well, there's an abundance of emotional power and potency in Tony Bennett's repertoire, but there's certainly not one cheap note to be heard. For me, his songs are a sad reminder of the rise and fall of popular music in general.

One is also reminded that Tony Bennett is the last of his kind of musical artist.

He's a great stylist but never overpowers the number he's performing. He goes seamlessly from quiet, sensuous, mellow tones, rich in subtext, to full voice belted climaxes. The latter are clear and sure and totally free of vibrato. He can hold a note as long as he chooses, and, you never feel he's working "to sell" a song as he goes through a wide range of tunes.

He gives great depth to Hank Williams' "Cold, Cold, Heart", for instance, and then instantly swings through "All of Me" and follows that with Kurt Weill's seductive "Speak Low" made famous by Mary Martin in ONE TOUCH OF VENUS. He does lots of Gershwin including the rarely performed "Who Cares?" from OF THEE I SING. In that song there is a lyric that says. "life is one long jubilee." And so it is with the legend that is Tony Bennett.

I've not mentioned his age because it's irrelevant. However, he recently turned eighty. Happy Birthday, Mr. Bennett.

Unfortunately, a rather strangely put together play bill does not name the four great musicians who work so closely and so well with him or does it list the songs and their composers.

As a tribute to the acoustics of the world class fabulous Ferguson Center, Bennett sang "Fly Me to the Moon" with the sound system turned off. And you know what? You could hear every vocal shading of this truly grand old saloon singer.

This is Edgar Loessin with Loessin at Large and I'll see you at the next opening.