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## Kingston Trio, Springfield Symphony Orchestra take a stroll down memory lane

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By Clifton Noble Jr.

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SPRINGFIELD – It didn't "take a worried man to sing a worried song" Saturday night as the Kingston Trio and the Springfield Symphony Orchestra took an enthusiastic audience of 1,784 on a songful trip down memory lane.

Nobody in Symphony Hall seemed worried about anything at all as they sang and clapped along with folk chestnuts like "This Land Is Your Land," "Jamaica Farewell," and the Massachusetts-specific anthem "Charlie on the M.T.A."

Current members Rick Dougherty, George Grove, and Bill Zorn have been immersed in the folk scene all their lives, and have been associated with the Trio for a long time (in Grove's case, 36 years). As Grove said in a pre-concert interview, "we ARE the Kingston Trio."

That was absolutely the case on Saturday. Many classic groups spawn tribute bands, but those bands are just that – tributes. These three guys have been singing these songs since they were kids, and have sung them with the guys who made them famous. The songs are as much a part of who they are as musicians as lullabies learned at their mother's knee, and they sing them with the care, love, and ease that comes with long-time familiarity.

For those of us who used to sing along with the record (remember those?) of "Hang down your head Tom...Dooley" as teen-agers, it was as if the years were rolled away. Only the speakers were bigger. The sound reinforcement Saturday, while not ideal, was as good as it has been at SSO pops concerts in recent seasons. The vocals were, for the most part, clearly audible and clean. The acoustic instruments were balanced with each other and with the orchestra.



The Kingston Trio

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Grove's skillful, colorful orchestrations of the Kingston Trio material showed off both the songs and the orchestra to fine effect. The most opulent of these, a delicious introduction to "This Land Is Your Land," attained a blossoming of symphonic fullness worthy of John Williams. Grove clearly aimed to satisfy the musical needs of everyone involved as he crafted these frameworks for the classic folk tunes. While introductory harmonies might explore the rarefied harmonic territory of Hollywood film music, they always led back effortlessly and seamlessly to the down-home tonic-dominant world where the songs themselves lived.

Grove also picked miracles on both banjo and guitar during the evening, as compatriots Zorn and Dougherty provided chordal cushioning on guitar and tenor uke. Upright bassist Paul Gabrielson kept the Trio rhythmically honest, giving credence to Zorn's remark that there were never really only three guys in the group.

Zorn soloed with orchestra on the sultry swing of "Scotch and Soda," and Grove offered up a forthright and touching account of the career of circuit-riding preacher "The Reverend Mr. Black."

Their encore of Pete Seeger's heart-rending "Where Have All the Flowers Gone?" with Dougherty's clear tenor soaring above Grove and Zorn's warm baritones, was one of the highlights of the evening.

Grove graciously reminded us all of the treasures we have in the Springfield Symphony and in Maestro Kevin Rhodes. Their talents were on brilliant display in the concert's electrifying first half in which they steamed through a barn-burning "Hoedown" from Copland's ballet "Rodeo," tore up Leroy Anderson's "Fiddle Fiddle" (featuring an impromptu tap riff by the maestro) and "Chicken Reel," and offered a majestic version of "This Land Is Your Land." The finale from Beethoven's Seventh Symphony fit right in, sounding for all the world, as Rhodes noted, like a German hoedown, and John Williams' rousing "Cowboys" Overture wrapped up the orchestra-only portion of the evening.

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