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Review: Renowned tenor shines on Border Concert stage

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By Wayne Barron

He's billed as "God's Canary," and when Robert Robinson appeared on stage at Backus Auditorium last Friday evening, he left no doubt as to why he has earned that title. In the second of this season's Border Concerts, Robinson thrilled the audience with a glorious tenor voice that can only be described as soul-stirring.

Accompanied by brilliant piano improvisation from Sam Reeves, Robinson performed a program of gospel songs, spirituals and pop numbers designed to lift the spirit and soothe the soul. He possesses the rare ability to make any song his own, pushing and pulling the melody and shaping it as a sculptor manipulates the clay. And each time, he produces a masterpiece.

Robinson's concert featured

several traditional spirituals including "I've Got a Robe," "Joshua Fit the Battle of Jericho" and "O' Freedom," which he performed a cappella. And in what was surely a first in Border Concert history, he had the audience stand, and after a few preliminary instructions on gospel choir performing, led them in a rousing rendition of "Down by the Riverside."

Friday's show also included inspirational pop songs, all with a positive message. "Colors of the Wind" from Disney's Pocahontas and the Louis Armstrong classic "What a Wonderful World" were sung with sensitivity and emotion. And Robinson's soaring interpretation of "Smile," Charlie Chaplin's great reminder to seek the bright side of life, brought many smiles indeed.

Robinson would surely acknowledge that a large part of

the concert's success can be attributed to the exquisite accompaniment of pianist Sam Reeves, who improvised the entire concert without a written note of music. The piano always complemented Robinson's voice, never competing with it or detracting from it. Reeves was given the chance to showcase his talent on the keyboard with three solos, "America the Beautiful," which opened the concert, as well as hauntingly beautiful arrangements of "Danny Boy," and "Ave Maria."

Robert Robinson's concert was more than just two hours of beautiful music. Through his humor, his easy-going rapport and his genuine warmth, he gave the clear impression that here was a singer who believes in and lives out the positive message of which he sings. We need more people like "God's Canary" to remind us of what's important in life.

www.robertrobinsonmusic.com