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The Chicago Tour Diary

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Friday, June 29, 2012, 2:36 p.m.: We just landed in Chicago -- we being Sue Holder, my tour manager/background singer/precious friend of 29 years, and myself -- to be a part of the First National Piano Conference at the Raue Center in Crystal Lake, Ill. I am the guest of Tim and Bobbi Paul, the event's creators, and Richard Kuranda, the inventive (and courageous) executive director of the beautiful Raue Center for the Arts. I was asked to invite a guest artist to be a part of the Piano Conference. I chose Kurt Bestor, arranger/writer/pianist/trumpeter/harmonica-ist (?). A new friend, to be sure. He'd asked me to be part of his Christmas show in Salt Lake City this past December. I was enormously impressed by his musicianship and thought he'd be a jolly part of this shindig -- whatever it is going to be. Danny Wright, piano artist/composer/seller of more than 30 million records(!!!), makes up the third part of our piano posse.





Friday, June 29, 2012, 11:02 p.m.: After checking into the hotel, we headed over to the beautiful Raue Center to watch 100 kids (along with their piano teachers) perform, ten at a time. It was quite something. Very sweet to hear the little ones try to catch up with the very tender conductor as they made their way through their rudimentary pieces. The place was packed with families and friends who simply thought it would be a really good idea to make piano playing a part of their education. What a novel concept!!! The pieces became more complex until, at the end of this two-act concert, two young guys (both named Mike) played Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue" -- on two blue lacquered pianos! Seems that five pianos had been ordered to show up in blue for a blues festival, but noted artists kept wanting to buy them, so now there are only two left. They're Baldwins, by the way, so they'd sound swell if they were painted with stars and stripes. Speaking of which, there was bunting all over the theatre since the theme was mildly patriotic, what with the July 4th holiday approaching.



Saturday, June 30, 2012, 4:14 p.m.: Kurt, Danny and I had the opportunity to teach Master Classes this afternoon. Kurt taught about technology and the keyboard -- something I know almost nothing about, but I appreciate those who do. Kurt wrote this astounding piece, called "Prayer Of The Children," which he plays through some keyboard into which he sings through some sort of tube (really??). He suddenly sounds like a choir of Kurts!! Pretty amazing stuff. Gorgeous, really. Danny taught about preparing before you go on stage. Meditation, praying, breathing. I wasn't there but I'm told the students enjoyed it. I taught what I call "the art of conversational singing." Among the many things I talk about, I explain to the students that, to me, what we share with an audience through our songs is really our half of an ongoing conversation. The audience witnesses it only if we concentrate on singing to someone in our imagination, our mind's eye. Kids volunteered to perform. I asked them questions about who they were singing to -- singing their intention, not just words and notes. I think it's interesting because, really, no feat of technology can replace the shared experience of the audience witnessing something created in the moment, with the song as the vessel. Wonderful stuff, I think. Teaching lets me know what I really know.



Saturday, June 30, 2012, 10:48 p.m.: Kurt, Danny and I just finished our evening musical conversation in the form of a round robin. For those who have never been to a Nashville round robin, it means that one person yaks a little bit

and plays a tune, then another person yaks a little bit and plays a piece, then another. We talked about how certain songs came to be written, what history we bring to a performance, our favorite collaborators, our inspiration for certain songs -- while the attendees got an inside glimpse of what we do. Though united in our love for music, we three artists are uniquely different in our approaches. Danny, a perennial favorite at the Raue Center, was dazzling in his mastery of arpeggios and scales, and plays the piano with a stylish flourish. He's obviously lost in the music when he plays. Kurt's joy in his experience of music was delightful for the crowd who got to know him for the first time. His live performance of "Prayer Of The Children" was breathtaking. As for me, it was fun to share stories about some of my friends like Alan and Marilyn Bergman and Kenny Loggins.

Sunday, July 1, 2012, 1:12 p.m.: On and on the weekend went, culminating today in an interfaith service. The teen choir sang. Danny, Kurt and I each played appropriate songs for such a sweet morning. Everyone hugged, took photos. On our way home now. Our hosts and the students were pleased and grateful for how it all turned out. So was I.

