

# **Jim Curry performs his John Denver Tribute Show with The Cincinnati Pops**

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### **John Denver tribute aptly mellow**

Of all of the 1970s singer-songwriters whose music is best suited for the strings-and-all treatment of the Cincinnati Pops Orchestra, John Denver is the safe choice.

Denver died in 1997, so the Pops turned to Jim Curry, a tribute act who possesses the voice, the wholesome personality, the eyeglasses and the feathery hairdo to stand confidently in front of a near-capacity Music Hall on Sunday night and deliver a convincing two-hour set of Denver's music for a program called "The Music of John Denver."

Curry and his five-piece band were backed by the Pops orchestra, with Steven Reineke conducting. Reineke told the audience at the beginning of the show that hearing Denver's songs are among his first musical memories. When Reineke was a child, his father would play an acoustic guitar at the edge of his bed and sing the boy to sleep with John Denver songs.

Reineke liked the show. Throughout the night he could be seen singing along to Curry, as if he were an audience member. On occasions when Curry's band played without the orchestra's accompaniment, as was the case during "Grandma's Feather Bed," Reineke would slap his leg to the beat with one hand and snap his fingers with the other.

Curry's band included his wife, Anne, and Richie Gajate-Garcia, a drummer who played for a few years in Denver's touring band. Another alum of Denver's band who also plays with Curry, guitarist Pete Huttlinger, did not appear due to illness, according to Curry.

Curry's extended band, the Pops, were there mainly to add string flourishes to Curry's, or Denver's, simple folk-rock arrangements. The musical mood was pleasant and mellow. The slow songs could have put a young Reineke to a restful sleep.

The first few bars of just about every song elicited a knowing response from the audience. The first set included such Denver hits as "Rocky Mountain High," "Thank God I'm a Country Boy" and "Sunshine on My Shoulders," as well as "Leaving on a Jet Plane," written by Denver and made famous by Peter, Paul and Mary.

Curry did "Annie's Song," a composition Denver made for his then-wife, who happens to have the same name as Curry's wife. Curry told the crowd he sang it to Anne on the couple's wedding day.

An eerie coincidence? No more so than how much Curry looked like Denver, at least when looking at him from the first balcony, with his tan vest, acoustic guitar, and hairdo. Anne took him by the hair and shook his head around, to prove it was real.

Second-set selections included "Take Me Home, Country Roads" and "Calypso." Songs were accompanied by video imagery on two screens behind the orchestra. Every song contained at least one shot of a mountain, a stream, a rock, an eagle, a wolf, or in the case of "Calypso," a boat. The performance of "Matthew" used the same video footage that Denver himself would use when he did the song in concert, Curry said.

The most poignant use of video came during the encore performance of "Poems, Prayers & Promises." Still images of Denver graced the screen as Curry delivered the sentimental ballad.