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Jim Curry expertly channels John Denver

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COURTESY OF FORT WORTH SYMPHONY

Jim Curry had just the right read on Denver's music.

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FORT WORTH -- Jim Curry's Sunday night tribute to the everlasting music of John Denver, as part of the Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra's Concerts in the Garden series, was delivered with enormous felicity to the sound and spirit of Denver's evergreen music.

Thankfully missing from Curry's presentation was any cheesily superficial impersonation of Denver's grinning folksiness or his unique stage manner and patter, which helped elevate his country-bluegrass music into mammoth crossover pop success.

Curry wasted little time in channeling the late singer (Denver died in a plane crash in 1997) by kicking off with one of Denver's biggest signature tunes, *Rocky Mountain High*, and easily hit all the distinctive falsettos that many of Denver's songs require. Then Curry offered the audience the first of many rather fascinating historical nuggets about Denver -- this one about how *Leaving on a Jet Plane* was written by Denver and made into an enormous hit by Peter, Paul and Mary. The heartstrings-tugging *Annie's Song* was preceded by an affecting dedication to Curry's wife, who was by his side the entire evening playing guitar and mandolin.

Curry, who happens to possess Denver's sandy blond locks and thin wire-rim glasses, smartly pays more attention to reproducing just the right amount of reediness in Denver's pliant high baritone-low tenor voice.

Though the Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra was absent for this particular Garden affair, it was not sorely missed: Curry's five-piece backing band filled the June air with a rich braid of harmony and included two players who added just the right amount of piano and flute filigrees to Denver's prototypical folk rhythms.

Curry injected a bit of time-traveling authenticity to the evening as he invited to join him onstage two of Denver's original instrumentalists and writers. Steve Weisberg on acoustic and electric slide guitar and John Sommers on mandolin and fiddle packed a trunkload of yarns about their time with Denver before launching into such slightly more obscure B-sides as *It's Up to You* and *River of Love*.

And just when the show might have gotten bogged down in a musty anecdote about Denver hosting the *Tonight Show*, Curry threw in a rollicking tune like *Thank God I'm a Country Boy*.