

CONDUCTOR'S NOTE

Richard Powers' recent book, *Ofeo: A Novel*, includes a scene set in a Midwestern music school around 1970. It resonates with me because the protagonist is a young composer of the day:

In the sixth week of his twentieth century formal analysis class, he arrived breathless over the previous night's performance of Barber's *Hermit Songs*. The class hooted. [He] appealed to the professor.

It's a great piece, don't you think?

The man stifled his amusement and looked around for the hidden camera. *Sure, if you still dig beauty.*

. . . When [the student] checked out a recording of *Hermit Songs* from the music library the following week, he found them banal and predictable.

Such were the politics of musical aesthetics in my university years. We "young Turks" attacked the music of conservative composers the way kids today turn sarcastic about the pop stars they loved six months earlier. Of course, such wholesale rejection "threw the baby out with the bathwater" and we missed a lot of beautiful music.

Now, in my last concert with the musicians of La Jolla Symphony and Chorus, I hope to investigate some of that beauty – Barber, "the American Romanticist," Schoenberg, a latter-day Wagnerian in his youth, and a bit of Berlioz, the exuberant romantic. And, in the process, I hope to address a concert theme that we almost never really consider: *Love* -- romantic, sensual, and erotic.

Love and loving appear often in song and in opera, but seldom in the repertory for chorus and orchestra. Barber brings us face-to-face with it by setting the poetry of the lustful Chilean poet, Pablo Neruda. The composer brought together disparate poems to create the dramatic arc of a love affair, from its first excitement to its desultory dissolution.

It's especially unusual to find an orchestra piece that references this kind of human condition. "Transfigured Night" is a tone poem for string orchestra expressing the graphic text by Richard Dehmel. This, too, has a dramatic arc: a woman confesses to her lover that the child she bears is not his and, in the magic of the night, their love conquers all.

The Berlioz overture is quite another angle on love, in that it refers to Shakespeare's characters from "Much Ado About Nothing," a fun and sexy take on love in a very different kind of "transfiguring" night. God bless Shakespeare!

Ah! There is an epilogue today, as well – two of our favorite *a cappella* Barber settings based on Irish stories told by a blind, itinerant poet named Raftery. Both, in different ways, are about the ecstasy of young love.

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So, this is it - my last concert. There are so many people for me to thank that I'm afraid to begin. So I will say just these three thank-you's:

To Steve Schick, Music Director, who rejuvenated an organization that I have loved for over four decades. His *cultural* brilliance is the touchstone of all our success.

To Diane Salisbury, Executive Director, whose finesse in running our business has been the backbone of our artistic development.

And to Mea Daum, Chorus Manager, who has been a partner in everything but the music-making itself, and has kept me organized so as to make me seem like a successful leader.

Finally, I want to **dedicate my final concert to Tom Nee**, whose legacy is the torch that still leads this unique organization. Tom came to UCSD in 1967 to help make all of the composers in this new school successful - which he did, selflessly. In the process, he picked up a local community orchestra, combined it with UCSD students and instituted an *attitude* about programming (and performing) that still drives us and serves our audience. Tom's magnanimity toward a clumsy young choral conductor made a musician out of me and gave me a home to make music for 43 years.

-- *David Chase*