

Developing the story of the birth and death of a major new NYC symphony orchestra, this novel contrasts wealthy music patrons against journey-men-and-women musicians.

Music Mads Me

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MUSIC MADS ME

A Novel by

Robert Emmett Mueller

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For
My loving wife, Diana

FOREWORD

Major symphony orchestras are delicate in origin and disastrous in demise. I know this to be true because I was intimately involved in the birth and death a major new symphony orchestra in New York City. I was there at the orchestra's birth, *ab Ovo*, until its death pangs, *mortem obir*, as it were. I am an important critic (reviews in *Musical America*, the *New York Times*, even in the *London Review*); I consult for music publishers (who publish outré music); I have published three books on music and aesthetics (*Music as Matrix*, *Ethnomusic*, *Oozing Oboes*); I am also a renown oboe player (thus my book on the oboe); and I have honorary doctorate degrees from Oxford and Harvard. My name is Boris Martz -- don't be surprised that I am still alive! I am the proverbial legend in my lifetime! These are the facts.

I think that the symphony orchestra represents pure music at its preeminence (sans adulterants, as in opera). My first impulse was to transform the mundane facts about this new orchestra into a scholarly non-fiction book. Not an easy task! Writing about a new-born orchestra is tricky, especially when you were part midwife and part mortician! This is a tale, not as tragic as soldiers at war, but with many heartbreaking consequences. I wanted to write the story of this orchestra on the score of human sensitivities. I recklessly presumed that I could knock off something in a few months. But writing this book has taken more time than I imagined (two years and counting). I realize now that my participation in this orchestra was a mistake: Gods should remain on high; if they descend into the everyday arena they risk immortality -- and their morality? How can I avoid being the philosopher in that ancient mystery play: *adventavit asinus/pulcher et fortissimus?* (Ass entered, beautiful but brave, but an ass nonetheless.)

Musicians are not automatons; they do not reel off the music like music boxes (as some conductors presume). They entertain noble reason and project complex philosophies. Only the most talented survive; the common slough through life blindly; only the obsessive reach perfection. My protagonists are professionals working more or less at a high level of professionalism. I discovered, as I wrote about them, how wide-ranging and mind-numbing are their lives, and how varied their talents. Economic problems were endemic, only a few degrees more troubling than love problems. Telling their story was not easy. But a keeper of the flame must take chances; I will risk fiction to fan the fine blue fame of my music fetishes. It is difficult

-- if possible -- to transcend my inveterate writing habits. This does not make for fun fiction, and fiction is not my genre – so excuse me, dear reader; my scholastic habit is to dig deep and to overwrite. (I dreamed of a juicy book about musicians that would hit the best seller list and make me rich!) And since I am a character in my own book (played by Joe Zimmer), I will be generous to myself (asking my bright daughter Jennifer to critique my self-effacement). And allow me to wield wide wisdom with wonderful aplomb! Although, *Eigenlob stink!*

The musicians in my novel are what most people would characterize as eccentrics, idiosyncratic -- but not freaks. I derive them more or less from people I know (they may or may not recognize themselves). Although my protagonists lived during periods of political and national unrest (some served in various roles during contemporary wars), the noise of war was enfeebled by their musical endeavors, forcing them to remain by and large above society and hermetically sealed in the world of pure music. For most of my protagonists music is an awesome monster who holds sway overall, shielding them from the problems of the social contract and the world. Music has always been above the ugliness of life, and may in fact be (along with all other sensitive cultural creations) an evolutionary necessity for human sanity. I may be mistaken. Perhaps the actual people I represent fictionally *are* engaged more deeply in the reality of today than I know. But it is beyond me to attempt to explore that reality, and include here the blooming, buzzing, messy, confusing world of today. As a writer this gives me a two-fold advantage: first, by barring social-political facts I can concentrate on music making (a cop out?); and secondly, it makes my book timeless (albeit tendentious – but I will have to live with that). Struggling to live by means of music dominates my protagonists' lives. Male and female instrumentalists face different problems (though feminists may object). I know that venturing into the female mind and heart is like entering *terra incognita*, but my outlook has been honed -- and perhaps ameliorated -- by two wives, and Jennifer, my bright daughter. (She - - to whom I dedicate this book – edited and improved my female ruminations.) Perhaps, like 'my Uncle Toby,' I have been sufficiently inured in the female psyche by women in my life to be well infused with their workings (Jennifer changed few of my female portrayals). Be wary, however, of my male characters: one knows least what he thinks he knows best! I am an important character in this story, but to be credible I have tried to remain as invisible as possible (Jennifer editing). As the font of this literature (if I may be so bold as to call it that) I switch voices at will, sometimes inside the heads of my protagonists, sometimes passing into the rarified area of philosophical reflections. (I could not resist this opportunity to explicate some of my theories – bear with me, my music philosophy is profound!)

I will lever the hopes and concerns of my protagonists on worrisome facts. Like a philosophical dentist at literary work, I will reveal cavities and root disturbances that engage (and enrage) the musicians; as in a fictional symphony with many themes I will follow the musicians (and their friends), baking rich meat into this half-baked pie (you see I am wary of my literary skills). From a motley of musical absurdities and *disjecta membra* I will try to construct a pattern, a human design. I will draw my characters with great love, provide them with powerful passions, present them with great energy, trying as best I can to turn them into vital human beings living intensity at the forefront of contemporary cultural life. There will be no *Sturm und Drang*; no terror, no calamities, little corruption – but inevitably ingenious and delusional qualities will creep in on pianissimo feet.

Boris Martz, *New York City, 2009*

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FOR MY DAUGHTER
JENNIFER CHRYSANTHEMUM

Music do I hear? Music.
Ha, ha! Keep time. How sour sweet music is
When time is broke and no proportions kept!
So it is in the music of men's lives
And here have I the daintiness of ear
To check time broke in the disorder'd string;
But for the concord of my state and time
Had not the ear to hear my true time broke.
This music mads me, let it sound no more;
For though it have hop madmen to their wits,
To me, it seems, it will make wise men mad.
-----*Shakespeare, King Richard II, v. 5*

PART ONE

1

One day late in September Joe Zimmer sat in the midst of clutter in his cold-water flat in New York City practicing his cherished French Tabard oboe. His cheeks were ruddy and they bulged slightly from captured breath (in case a long note needed circular breathing); his lips, gathered around the straw-like oboe reed, were smile like. Though apparently concentrating on the music his mind was working on many levels. High points of great past performances rushed through his head bespeaking his virtuosity. Fragrant fall combustions flowed into his lungs with every music-forming breath and made him acutely aware that fall had begun to sweep the city. Annoying browns and yellows and red leaf-flicks seen through a back window scratched the corners of his eyes. Usually oblivious to the outside world when practicing, today everything began to annoy: these flickering colors, roaring city traffic rushing along Second Avenue, airplanes zooming overhead right out of LaGuardia airport across Flushing Bay. Why was today different? Yes! September marked the beginning of the concert season; that time of year when he emerged as a beautiful butterfly from his chrysalis flat to pour colorful music over the world. Reclusive by nature, wedded to the intellectual aspects of music requiring intense reflection, he reluctantly accepted the economic necessity of performing. Music, after all, meant music alive; music was more than cognition vivified; music was his meat and bread. It was his task as music maker to bring the scratches on paper to life; to use them as sound seeds and give birth to magnificent music. He was a stalwart oak tree exuding music leaves that fluttered earthward – into the ears and consciousness of all listeners. Performing allowed him to tap his extensive reservoir of music intelligence, which the dreary world sorely needed!

A diminutive man with a Vandyke beard on his slim chin he was neither frail nor infirmed despite his eighty years. He took pride in his health, bragging, "I don't take one single pill!"

And when playing long hours of chamber music he outlasted even the youngest. Now he was working up the difficult oboe part for Elliott Carter's *Sonata for Flute, Oboe, Cello and Harpsichord*, to be played with friends and preformed omewhere. He began to search for a venue to perform Carter's glorious piece of music. Joe paused briefly, pulled the reed from his oboe, licked it wet, and tooted it once. That pause gave him a window of hearing outside his music-captured thinking. Vaguely he thought he perceived a faint tinkling somewhere under the mess of effluvia in his disordered flat – Ah, yes: my cellphone!

He jumped up and began rooting under old scores and manuscripts strewed over his desk. Every call could mean a job, and all jobs were critical to his dollar-deprived existence. He caught the call just in time (on the fourth ring). His ear was blasted with an awful noise: “*God dam it, old man!* Pick up your p-p-phone! I haven't g-got all d-day!” The voice was familiar. He dug deeply into his mind's reservoir to ferret out who it was; he attempted to match the timeslot of an old voice refrain with a person. Oh, yes, that summer on Cape Cod, long ago -- *too* long ago! When I played the oboe with -- sure enough – the great Howard Simpson!

The brassy telephone voice continued *allegro con brio*: “Are you s-still alive, you old d-devil?” Then a stream of stuttering came, garbled and indistinct, suggesting advanced age – or illness? “Hey, old timer...is that you? Joe Zimmer, you old J-Jew?” and faded in and out. Joe wondered: bad telephone connection? No. He recalled a similar behavior years ago. The brassy voice continued: “Well, I ...that is...let me see...” and crudely rambled over long-forgotten times. Joe remembered, hurtfully, that Simpson used to call him, affectionately (?), ‘my Yiddissha’ friend.”

Thinking these thoughts let flow an avalanche of recollections: how Howard Simpson's very Anglo-Saxon mother Maxine -- ne Warburton -- reacted when years ago he walked into her living room on Cape Cod: “Why, he's a dirty little Jew!” without shame; continuing: “Well, I guess I'll spend the summer in California.” Yes, she did indeed leave – the Simpson's had an equivalent mansion complex near Malibu on the Pacific Ocean. But Maxine returned after a month “It was too insufferably hot! How could I abandon my flowers?!” Joe remembered that his Howard Simpson had lived in New York City long enough to overcome his inveterate anti-Semitism (alive and kicking in the rest of his family). Howard was a bright young man who strove to be liberal and broad-minded; the two of them had teased each other with musical arcane. Joe had a vague recollection of Howard Simpson: neat, smartly dressed, long faced, sad eyed, a no-nonsense person -- though he aspired to be a bohemian. Now, after so many years, Joe realized that he must revise his memory-picture of Howard Simpson: clothes still smart but now certainly more elegant, face the same, but heavily wrinkled -- like his. Even as a young man Howard sported the incipient trappings of a businessman. But back then Joe felt that he was too reckless to become a businessman. He would never have dreamed that he could enter into his family business and become an important captain of industry -- but it turned out that he was wrong.

Over the phone Joe joked that he thought Howard was dead, and a chuckle came through the air, as if from deep within his throat, or out of a churning well. “Ah-h! Well, no...still on the devil's list!” His voice gurgled musically, toning as a fish under water. “Ah-h, the d-doctors...they insist on keeping me...alive! Ho-ha! Modern medical science!” His gruff voice became modulated with a high pitched chuckle. “Yes, I'm very much alive. But I molder away...up here on Cape Cod. Semi retired! In the family's...interment camp -- for the lame and

the halt!” An *ostinato* trace of sadness seethed beneath the surface of his scratchy semi-humorous but still basically robust voice.

“What are you up to these days?” Joe asked with gentle trepidation.

“You mean...besides hanging onto...life?” The voice gave a hyena laugh. “Well...I’m deep into photography. Milly thinks the word begins ‘p-o-r-n’!” he continued his hyena mock. Then his voice lowered, as if someone could hear him. “Ha-ho, I do...sometimes...get pretty models. Down from Boston...and into my studio, eh! Nude, of course! Ha-ha-ho!” His voice was metallic and it sniggered and he began to choke. “Er-r-r,” he righted himself. “But, thanks to...my grandson Biff, I now...have access...to the Internet! It is amazing how much fucking is going on...all over the world! Free fucking images in endless varieties on the Internet!” His voice gave a self-conscious cough. “Well, that’s not...ah-h...what I wanted to -- talk about.”

It was clear to Joe that the man was not ageing well, and sounded very sickly. Since Howard Simpson had spent the intervening years in the beleaguered business world (worse than his music world!) it did not surprise Joe that his life was teetering on its last legs. Howard Simpson was at least ten years his senior, and had reached a more infirmed stage in life.

After more coughing Howard continued: “Surprised to get you...lost your number...surprised that it was the same! But I found you, you...little devil! Ho-ah! I figured you’d still be...kicking up dust in the city. Or,” he added slyly, snickering, “should I say *kicking ass*? Read your latest acerbic review...in *Musical America*!”

Howard continued talking quickly, but with a jerking rhythm, and with a few rambling sentences summarized their relationship years ago...in the thirties? Joe Zimmer was then in his twenties and Howard was about thirty. These recollections brought to mind many pleasant days on Cape Cod playing beautiful music with lulling ocean waves as accompaniment. Howard Simpson, the scion of a wealthy lumber magnet, had aspired to be a concert pianist (that old story). Brought up in Manhattan he was exposed to music as a boy (his mother a culture-vulture), and began playing the piano at six. Joe got to know Howard when he was studying at Julliard, piano with Siloti (piano being obligatory even for an oboist). Joe had just married his first wife Lila Wetherson, a pianist who also studied at Julliard with Siloti. They invite Howard over for meals (Lila was a good cook, tending toward the skimpy). Howard was present at many of their stupid fights, fights that that began from the get-go. They argued about food (Joe insisted on steak for Howard, Lila ignored and gave chicken); they argued about music (she was a perfectionist, Joe careless but imaginative); they argued about sex (Joe considered himself lustful, Lila was rather frigid). But mostly they fought about money, the lack thereof. Howard suffered through some of their most vehement financial altercations. He suggested a summer hiatus away from quarrelling, with a very generous monetary offering, and Joe jumped at the occasion (Lila was glad to stay in the city alone). Joe dreamed of sex with a pretty Cape Cod maid (never happened!). Returning to the city with several thousand dollars in his pocket the young couple survived their marriage another few years.

But one day when Joe accepted a very pretty and talented oboe student named Pat Dyson and he foolishly got her pregnant – well, not so foolishly, because Joe knew that she is – or rather *was* – a gem! With Pat as correspondent Joe got a divorce from Lila, married Pat, had their beautiful little daughter Jennifer Chrysanthemum (Pat’s favorite flower), and remained joyously happy for fifty or so years -- until, alas, two years ago, when tragically Pat had a fatal bout with cancer and died!

Between the interstices of Joe Zimmer's mental digressions bits of jagged phone remarks by Howard Simpson seeped in. Together they lurched through golden reminiscences agreeing that that summer long ago on Cape Cod was their most glorious time ever. Howard was a surprisingly good pianist, and Joe was happy to help hone his budding oboe talents playing through the entire oboe-and-piano repertory. Their social life was also notorious, playing at parties or other Simpson occasions. Howard seduced about every pretty debutante who walked into their Mansion, and tried to fix Joe up with many pretty, sexy and rich beauties (and one or two maids). Joe conscientiously resisted due to his sense that this was too *déclassé*, plus his loyalty to Lila.

Howard's mother Maxine eventually changed her mind about Joe Zimmer after being exposed to his beautiful oboe sounds (she had a good musical ear), and tolerated him, though remaining reserved and aloof (almost Olympian) – anti-Semitism is a deep-boring snake! Contrariwise the father Howard Senior was a grand old man, liberal, open and magnanimous to Joe Zimmer. He had a bag full of humorous anecdotes from his long business associations, sometimes mixed sarcastically with gentle anti-Semitism – if that can ever be gentle! But Howard Senior did not approve of his son's venture into music, and to that extent never gave Joe an ear. He tried to encourage his son to do photography by converting a small house behind the garage originally built as a play-house for girls (who were never born, to Milly Simpson's disappointment – Howard was their only son), into a well-equipped photo studio. Howard Senior even hired nude models for Howard Junior to experiment (peeking inside with salacious eyes blazing). Nevertheless papa expected his son's music infatuation to fade, finally thrusting the youngster into the family business (lumber, inherited from a Great-Great-Great Simpson Lumber Baron, who had raped thousands of acres of woods somewhere in the Midwest to build America's housing industry).

Although Howard Senior considered piano playing a sissy thing, mother Maxine loved having our piano-and-oboe sounds ringing throughout her spacious mansion all day long -- a fitting aristocratic delight. Maxine Simpson had friends from Boston and New York City come to the Cape for several of concerts, and was overjoyed with their adulation. Joe flattered himself that his musical talents had eased Maxine's aversion for Jews, yet he realized the stupidity of the thought -- else Israel would be the touchstone for racial amity in the world!

Over the years Joe Zimmer had followed Howard Simpson's career (one US recital, some concertizing in England, a show of nude color photographs at a prestigious gallery on 57th Street – which he failed to attend). In the meantime Joe struggled through the years making a meager living. Thanks to his lovely Pat who (under his superior tutelage) became a fantastic oboist and did her share of concertizing across America. She supported them through many difficult years, living cheaply in their run-down cold-water flat. Pat bore them a beautiful baby girl Jennifer, and because Pat was frequently out-of-town Joe became the proverbial house husband, rearing Jennifer from the spewing infant age to the gawky teens (now she's a talented children's book artist). Quite unexpectedly Joe caught note of Howard Simpson's marriage announcement in the New York Times: *Lumber Magnet marries Fashion Queen* (Janet, of the wealthy Boston Davenport family; Howard stood in the Times photograph with a smart looking young woman on his arm.) He learned to his satisfaction that Janet Davenport was a bright woman who had travelled wildly in Europe, spoke French and Italian; she was clearly clever, original, and self-confident – as the Times article assayed. He was glad that his old intelligent friend had married

such a cultured and intelligent young woman – of course, no longer young today. There was a tale here and Joe Zimmer was curious about the gruesome details and happy now to have a chance to learn the entire Howard Simpson story.

After a lengthy exchange of broken and random telephone reminiscences about good times, and bad times (not having to pay for the telephone call Joe reveled in its length), Howard's voice suddenly turned officious: "Ha-ah! Now...let me get...down to business!" The forceful tone of these words refreshed forgotten images of the man: tall and dignified, his lanky figure bent over the piano, pounding it into submission – which was his failure, Joe thought: a piano must be caressed, treated with endearment, given gentle motivation. "Here is...ha-ha-ho...what I have -- in mind," Simpson continued, turning from incoherence to a semblance of clarity. "You remember my wife, Janet? Oh, no," he stopped and continued with a lofty lilt to his shaky voice. "I guess you -- never met her. She is deep...into social...ha-a-a...activities. Poverty, health food...and all of that kind-a stuff. Know what I mean? Ha-ha-ho!" His voice expressed firm disdain. "But she's also...deep into the arts," then his voice cheerfully clarified. "On the board of the Met. Lincoln Center. And also Julliard -- I think...ho-ha-a..." His voice trailed into vagueness again. But suddenly made a word-dash, rocket like: "She got herself entangled...in a little babble!" Wild laughter. "She's more of a...culture vulture than Maxine...my mother! If you can believe that! Ha-a-a!" Now his voice assumed mocking hilarity, rocking wildly; then it steadied abruptly, a mark of palpable mental gyrations. "Met a man who...well she latched onto...a little Baroque orchestra. Got deeply entangled! I forget where...she met the man. Perhaps at a Met opening. She meets lots...of silly fools there!" His pause suggested a frustrated mind in search of stability. "Anyway, the man...cornered Janet -- and convinced her...to support him...on one of his -- p-pet p-projects." Joe detected exasperation in Howard's frequently-halting voice, and his timbre began to break up incoherently, punctuated with coughs. "This man...whose name is Rolf something...A professor-type. A Holocaust survivor."

"Zweig? Yes. I know him." (But he's not a Holocaust survivor – never mind!) "A good man." (Be generous!) "Yes, Professor Rolf Zweig."

"That's the one! He told her...that he wanted to start -- a small Baroque orchestra. He had met someone...in Italy. Dug up some...rare music." Again he paused, as if something disagreeable had crossed his mind – Joe wondered if Howard was truly unwell? "The man," Howard continued, "must have realized...that Janet is a sucker...for any pathetic cause. She wears her weaknesses...on her sleeves! Ho-o-o, ho!" He gulped audibly, followed by a throaty cough and two clicks, like tiny cymbal strikes (his dentures?). "She has money...you know. Of her own. I don't approve...of many of her ventures. She spends wantonly. But it's her funeral!" Two more clicks of indistinguishable nature, and a hearty cough. Yes, Joe reasoned, the man must be sick, his voice was extremely rusty, very phlegmy. "The long and short...was that Janet insisted...that I go down...to the final concert. I had Swain...our chauffer...take me down...to our New York Town House...on Fifth Avenue. So you see...I went to the concert! What a...well, I was not...happy! Ho, ho...er-r-r..."

"I was at that concert," Joe said. "Didn't notice you. I sort-a hung in the back. Wanted to keep out of the way..."

"Member some of...the music. Schutz. Tell-man. And his...rare speciality. One Salamone Rossi. Rare indeed!" Howard Simpson laughed. "A raw steak couldn't...be more rare!" The laughter abruptly choked, as if someone had suddenly gagged the old man.

“Hello, hello,” Joe struggled into the phone. “You there, Howard?” Had he succumbed to his own gagging?

“No, ho...heh-heh. All’s well. I get...a bit emotional.” A pause and heavy breathing. “So what’s the story? Tell me about...that professor. Eh? Will he...do right...to Janet?”

“Well, Rolf is an old friend of mine. I know him well.” Joe exaggerated with ‘old friend,’ his relationship with Professor Rolf Zweig has always been tenuous. Joe said that he knew him, but did he really *know* him? Joe Zimmer always suspected that Professor Zweig’s cunning manners covered some suspicious machinations. How could he understand what fuelled the man? He vaguely recalled Zweig telling him that his Jewish ancestors escaped the Holocaust, having left Russian in the days of early Pogrom devastations. He knew that he was a feared teacher at the Manhattan School of Music (and rumored as a roué). “That’s your Janet? Simpson? Of course! I never made the connection. Janet ne Davenport, of Boston --”

“Yep-ha-ho! You got it right. Where did you...read that? Oh, yes...*New York Times*.” Pause, clearing of throat; quick start: “Well, it got me to...thinking...”

The fading voice made Joe think his phone connection was acting up. Or was Simpson on the edge of senility? No. Joe recalled that even as a young man Howard Simpson would begin something, shift to another thought, and follow many wild tracks, almost as if he had a mild attention disorder. These thoughts brought back Howard Simpson appearance: tall and lanky, very stern but wry face, intense black eyes, hair down to his shoulders, lugubrious pursed lips. No, not today. To bring his mental picture up to date he gave him a neat haircut, overloaded his face heavy with wrinkles (just a few folds past his own), maintained the same lumbering body as of old, and kept him still dressed to the hilt.

“Well... Ah-h-ho,” Simpson continued, gave a loud cough, his rough, throaty telephone voice rattling in the ear. “Here’s the story. I was bored sitting there...at the concert...listening to that Baroque music. I hate the Baroque...especially when played on...‘original instruments’! Whatever that means!” He gave another cough (Joe could not remember if Howard was a heavy smoker). The phone voice added, haughtily: “I prefer the classics. The Romantics...of course, as you know. So as I sat...there bored as all hell...my mind wandered. Went...back to when -- you were there -- you know. At the...beginning of my...love for music...my aspirations! Glories deferred! You know...?”

“Yes, I recall,” Joe said, beginning to worry about Howard’s health. He repeated his earlier confirmation: “We had a great summer.” He spoke cautiously, lest he stir unpleasant memories. “You gave everything up. Musical, I mean. Didn’t you? Went into the family business?”

“Yes, yes,” his voice turned gruff with consternation. “But that’s -- neither here nor there... Thanks to Horowitz’s...shattering critique...he brought down -- my entire pack of cards!”

“He was wrong, you know,” Joe Zimmer differed, encouragingly. “You were a real musician. A truly sensitive and important pianist.” He continued dissembling fatuously. “I was disappointed when you stopped playing --”

“Well. Ho-ho! Yes! That’s...ancient history.” His voice now was nervous but clear; there was no suggestion of regret. Joe realized that contrition about his lost music career must have faded over the years; adventures in the family business must have transcended personal penitence. “My idea is this --” he stopped abruptly. Another long and wearisome pause. “Well...I will reserve the details. I want to talk to you...face to face. Hate telephone conferences. The bane of my existence...” Another pause; he was clearly ruminating. “I sit here

on Cape Cod...hold telcons with Chicago boards. Yep...ho-ho...still on the board. Though Biff has...total...responsibility. But needs me...long-distance...talk, talk, talk!” His voice now became compelling. “Come up this weekend. Take the Acela – to Provincetown. I will send Swain...with the limo – to pick you up.”

“Sorry. I have a concert this weekend.” Not true; just an informal get together. “Tell me what you have in mind.”

“No! I want...face to face! Come up any time. Call me! My private number’s,” he reeled off his number, nearly unintelligible. “I can wait. Gosh, it has...waited all of these years!”

“What has waited?”

“Music! I mean a way...to put music...back into my life! A way...to reach notoriety. To become...famous! Through music!” He coughed suddenly, sounds near to choking – Joe wondered if Howard Simpson had descended into senility and was now overwhelmed with a foolish idea. “That ass...Vladimir Horowitz! You know! He put a squelch -- on my musical life!” Joe thought he heard what Proust would have called: ‘the hoarse sound of a strangled sob...in his tightened throat’ “Just a few...stupid words! Told dad...I was ‘competent’ but not...genius material! My naïve father...believed him! Not...*genius* material!’ Imagine that! They expected *genius*! I would have...given them... devotion, *dedication*! What more could they want...expect? I was at the door... ready to walk over...*the threshold of greatness!*” He voice faded after a try at emphasizing this unrealistic aspiration. Clearly, Joe reasoned, Howard was falling into an overwhelming lake of nostalgia, and was swamped by his own arrogance. “Well, now I am...ready,” Howard continued after a deep sigh that travelled across the telephone line in a soulful timber. “Yes! I am set...ready...for *greatness*! I will tell you...when you come up here. About...my grand idea! It will...show the world! I will...bring music...back! And with a vengeance! Ha-a...ho-o-o!”

“Can’t you give me a hint?” Joe asked, extremely annoyed. Whatever he wants, he cautioned himself, I should not let myself get caught in one of his exuberant enterprises!

“Well, the long...and short of it is -- ” Howard abruptly stopped. He seemed to be holding his breath. Then, suddenly, the telephone voice sputtered and continued: “I want you to.... Ho ha! Contact...Mrs. Pettingil...our New York secretary...I will give her cart blanc! Janet will help...she has connections. She’s in the...phone book. I want to...strike the New York world...establish a great...new orchestra! Most cities have two...maybe three...great orchestras. New York needs...another! We’ll call it...give it a new...special name. The *Ultra Philharmonic*...or something? Will you assemble a full orchestra? *You can do it!*” His voice took on an irresistible commanding tone. “Strike up with... something big...perhaps a...Mahler symphony? The one with...a thousand, you know. I think it is...his Eighth. Get us Carnegie Hall! Yes! Ho-ho! Do it, Joe! Money no object! *It is in your...lap!*”

2

The musicians sat on the stage of Carnegie Hall restless and ready with instruments in their nervous hands, a music army set for a battle – but where is the conductor? They were prepared for a first rehearsal, anxious to get to work. Minutes previously a dulcet A had been dealt out by the first oboist Molly O’Reilly; passed to Jeremy Allen, the first violin; then shuffled throughout the orchestra, echoing cacophonous in the hall’s cavern-like interior; each instrument vent sound in a sonic sky showering sparkles of stars in slivers of silence that merged into an inharmonious

Developing the story of the birth and death of a major new NYC symphony orchestra, this novel contrasts wealthy music patrons against journey-men-and-women musicians.

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