

# Stephen

Stephen—

I have some fragments for you. I say them to you as if you were here among us. And who is to say you are not?

I think I will always be talking to you.

I miss your voice, your springy, almost confiding way of speaking. I think I will always be listening for you.

And your music, everywhere. Rivers and streams of your music, running everywhere, even in winter. We do not see you, but your music is a vast living body.

Driving over to your house four nights ago, listening to the enchanting slow movement of Bartok's third piano concerto, the so-called "night music," thinking of you. Other days, listening to another favorite, "Mother Goose" by Maurice Ravel, a master orchestrator, as you were. Or Sibelius, Shostakovich, Copland, Britten, all magical, and when I hear them, thinking of you.

I always enjoyed coming to the house on Summit, to the side door, to what I called the librettist's entrance. I definitely enjoyed picking up my royalty checks, four times a year, the envelope left on the log pile right by that door.

The other night, watching Greg at the piano, your piano, where I watched and listened to you so many times, and now listening to the notes your son has written for you. Such an honor, such a joy, for me to come up with some words for them, as it was over so many years to write words for you.

And one of the great moments of my life took place *by* that piano, when you called me over, February 1997, to hear something you had just written, a setting of the words from the Russian Orthodox liturgy that ended the second scene of *The Three Hermits*; they began this way: "Now that the day has come to a close, / We ask Thee, O God," and the music was so affecting, I asked you if we could possibly use the same melody at the end of the opera, where we needed a hymn based on Tolstoy's epigraph from the gospel of Matthew. Well no, you said, in opera we can't just repeat a tune, but, finally, you let me try my hand, you played the melody on the piano, I recorded it, and for a week or two went on my walks humming the notes—people looking at me strangely—and gradually the words began to form around them. Such a challenge, such a joy—that word again--and feeling excited, very privileged to be doing that, knowing the music was for the ages.

And after you had accepted the words, had doubled up the voices, *divisi*, eight voices, and moved the key from D flat to F Major, "Pilgrims' Hymn" was born, and our lives were changed forever. And in this sacred place, House of Hope, the world heard it for the first time. Blessed be this place.

Remember, by the way, my friend, how it took you only about ten years since I first suggested to you that we make a church opera out of that splendid story by Tolstoy for you to get to work on it? Remember how, when I said to you that I thought perhaps the

time had come to pass the idea on to another composer, that your mind became wonderfully concentrated on the possibility? And then, just days later, in the music library on campus, there was, there happened to be, Tom Lancaster, of whom we had been speaking, and I made our pitch to him? And so it all began. (Thank you, Tom; thank you, Nancy. Thank you, Molly McMillan, and bless you. Thank you, Gary Gisselman.)

How did I get to be so lucky as to know you for more than half a lifetime? To work with you, over and over, to be able to put my words in the service of what you were somehow, amazingly, able to imagine. For me, not a musician, it has been what I call a different kind of belonging. I mean, of course, to music. And to be such friends, almost like brothers, to have such fun together? *Beshert*, as Fr. Michael or Rabbi Edelmheit would say: meant to be.

When are we driving down to Iowa again to talk with the choirs? So funny you were on one of those trips, *such a funny man*, channeling an imaginary DJ from some rural radio station; you had the voice down just right, you were unstoppable, or, when we were in a quieter mood, listening together to Greg's mix CD as we drove down 35 past the farms, the fields, the light along the horizon. You were so proud of Greg, so proud of Andrew. Your boys.

When are we flying to Europe to hear the choirs from three Minnesota colleges sing the oratorio? When are we taking a 130-euro cab ride from Strasbourg to Colmar? When . . . when . . .? But if I keep at the remembering, I will never be done.

Both our Dads, Harry and Eddie, of blessed memory, organists. Imagine that! And "Lead, Kindly Light"—John Henry Newman's tender hymn--a favorite for both of them. How they must be enjoying Aaron's playing today, and these strong assembled voices, led by Matt. "The playing of the merry organ"—indeed. "Sweet singing in the choir"—indeed. And always remembering how Dryden begins "A Song for Saint Cecilia's Day": "From harmony, from heavenly harmony, / This universal frame began." I believe him. And the saying of A.E. Housman that the poet "harmonizes the sadness of the world." I believe him.

Stephen, such spaciousness in you. And are there now no limits to what you are able to imagine? Are you now beyond music as we are *in* music? Yet I can't imagine you as ever beyond it; wherever you are, you can only have gone, inconceivably deeper inside it, within the Living Mystery and Source of all creation.

And now, in these present days, when we can no longer see you, here we are, feeling raw, feeling bruised, but so relieved your suffering is over. Once, when I was asked what I wanted in life, I said, that we live free from fear. I rejoice that you are now in a realm of light and free from all fear.

"Love is stronger than death": I believe that. And what Iranaeus says: "The glory of God is the human being fully alive;" I believe that.

Help us, friend, as your music does, and always will, to celebrate the miracle of being, to take nothing for granted, to be here as completely as we can, to stay aimed at the tasks of life. To celebrate. To walk the path of heart. To walk to the river, and then to

stoop down to it. One must stoop a little, as Carl Jung tells us, in order to fetch water from the stream.

Stephen, we are walking with you to the river, and together we, and our children and our children's children, will bend to fetch water from the stream.

Give strength, O Lord, to these new generations, in the world we are leaving them. May all be well; may all be very well. God bless you, friend, now and forever. You are in so many hearts. God bless all gathered here to honor you—some who have come from afar—thank you—and at the center of this gathering, your loyal family—Patty, the boys, Terry, your brother, his wife Colleen, Pat, your mother, and more.

I will close by saying the words to “Pilgrims’ Hymn” before we hear them sung.

### Pilgrims’ Hymn

Even before we call on your name  
To ask You, O God,  
When we seek for the words to glorify You.  
You hear our prayer;  
Unceasing love, O unceasing love,  
Surpassing all we know.

Glory to the Father,  
And to the Son,  
And to the Holy Spirit.

Even with darkness sealing us in,  
We breathe Your name,  
And through all the days that follow so fast,  
We trust in You;  
Endless Your grace,  
O endless Your grace,  
Beyond all mortal dream.

Both now and for ever,  
And unto ages and ages,  
Amen.