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Knoxville: Summer of 1915

"We are talking now of summer evenings in Knoxville, Tennessee, in the time I lived there so successfully disguised to myself as a child..." begins the prose-poem "Knoxville: Summer of 1915" by James Agee, setting the tone for a lyrical description of a summer evening as seen through the eyes of a small, mercifully unknowing boy.

After the author's death, the manuscript for his novel, *A Death In the Family*, was published posthumously with his prose-poem as a kind of preamble to the autobiographical story of how the unexpected death of a father changed the lives of his family forever. Agee's own father died accidentally in 1916, and he and his sister were subsequently sent to boarding school.

The full text of the poem is more contemplative than melancholy, a sleepy description of a quiet southern evening where everyone and everything is where it should be; and a boy may lay on the lawn that is his, watch buggies going by, listen to the locusts and be secure in his foundations.

"People go by; things go by. A horse, drawing a buggy, breaking his hollow iron music on the asphalt; a loud auto; a quiet auto; people in pairs, not in a hurry, scuffling, switching their weight of aestival body, talking casually," he noticed.

Agee writes, "All my people are larger bodies than mine, quiet, with voices gentle and meaningless like the voices of sleeping birds...One is my mother who is good to me. One is my father who is good to me. By some chance, here they

"We are talking now of the summer evenings in Knoxville, Tennessee, in a time I lived there so successfully disguised to myself as a child."

are, all on this earth; and who shall ever tell the sorrow of being on this earth, lying, on quilts, on the grass, in a summer evening, among the sounds of night."

As Agee reminisces about the summer before his life would change drastically, he doesn't tell his young self what's in store but instead allows the boy to relish the ease and joy of childhood, that youthful feeling that nothing will ever change—"here they are, all on this earth"—and as a child thinks, this state of togetherness will always be.

Such a contented description is universally touching, for Southerner and Yankee, child and adult alike. Composer Samuel Barber found that to be true and wrote his version of "Knoxville: Summer of 1915" for orchestra and soloist, using excerpts from Agee's poem.

Our music director, Eric Benjamin, has chosen the piece as one of his favorites, and we'll perform it on November 8 with soprano Laura Schupbach as soloist.



Knoxville, Tennessee early 1900s

ERIC'S BIRTHDAY BASH

November 8 • 7:30 P.M.

with Laura Schupbach, soprano

Kent State Tuscarawas Performing Arts Center



ERIC
BENJAMIN
TALKS
WITH
BETH
VORHEES

Recently, Eric Benjamin sat down for a chat with his sister, Beth Vorhees, who is the Director of News and Public Affairs at West Virginia Public Broadcasting. Let's listen in:

Beth: First of all, happy birthday. How is 60 going to feel?

Eric: I don't feel 60. I'm no specialist on aging because I still feel like I'm about 16.

Beth: I would like your audience to know that everything I know about classical music I learned from you when we were kids and in high school.

Eric: I'm remembering we grew up in a house where there wasn't a lot of classical music. There was a Reader's Digest Collection of Great Music, and it had one classical record on it, along with other stuff that Mom and Dad liked to listen to.

Beth: When did you first show an interest in being a conductor?

Eric: We used to watch devotedly Walt Disney, and they did a biography on Johann Strauss, Jr. We could have only been six or seven years old, and I thought that looked like fun. I remember we used to go into the living room where there was a console stereo, and you and I would occasionally get in fights over that turf because you had your fantasy of being Barbara Streisand, and I liked to play a recording and conduct to it.

I have a specific memory, Beth—everyone else was watching television, and I was in the front room conducting, avoiding what they were watching, because it was the Kennedy funeral. I was in the fourth grade then.

Beth: What were you conducting? Do you remember?

Eric: "Die Fledermaus Overture." It was something quite different from the very sad experience we were all having.

I had forgotten about classical music until I was sitting in Mrs. Chandler's classroom at Fairfield Street school—I was in the sixth grade—and she played "In the Hall of the Mountain King" for us, and that made an impression, so much so that I went down to Woolworths, and there was a Philadelphia Orchestra recording of "In the Hall of the Mountain King," and I bought it.

Beth: You are composing a piece for the

Philharmonic based on Dylan Thomas' "A Child's Christmas in Wales." What do you remember about winters and Christmases in Vermont?

Eric: I remember a couple of really snowy Christmas Eves. Thomas talks about a house full of uncles and aunts and food and people falling asleep in chairs, and of course wasn't that Aunt Ruth's up in Franklin, Vermont?

Beth: That's right, at the old homestead where we spent many a Thanksgiving and many a Christmas, and that house still stands.

Eric: That's right. And we were surrounded by big people who fell asleep after dinner.

Beth: How did growing up in a small town help you as music director for the Tuscarawas Philharmonic? What similarities do you recognize between the two areas?

Eric: In the main town centers, there are buildings and the general layout that would remind us of St. Albans, and the people are very similar. And playing in town bands in St. Albans taught me about town musicians—they're good musicians, people who have day jobs and do lots of things, but still they enjoy the music.

Beth: One last memory I'm going to share with you—you talk about that front room where the stereo was, and it had a woolen carpet that was very well worn, so it was slick. We were listening to "Die Fledermaus Overture," and we tore up little pieces of white paper, and you taught me to slide like I was skating to the music. And then you said, "Now wait, wait, Beth," and then just at the right time we threw up the paper, and it was snowing on us.

Eric: I have no recollection of this at all.

Beth: Eric Benjamin, congratulations again. It's wonderful to talk to you.

Eric: It's a life-long dream, Beth, to be interviewed by you. The Philharmonic and I, it has been love at first downbeat, and I'm delighted that if I have to turn 60, that I can turn 60 in such good company.



Items of Note

FREE!

MUSICAL HALLOWEEN PARTY!

A special kid-sized concert with a costume parade, treats and an instrument petting zoo!

NOVEMBER 1 • 1:30 PM

Kent State Tuscarawas Performing Arts Center

CHILDREN'S CHORUS REHEARSALS

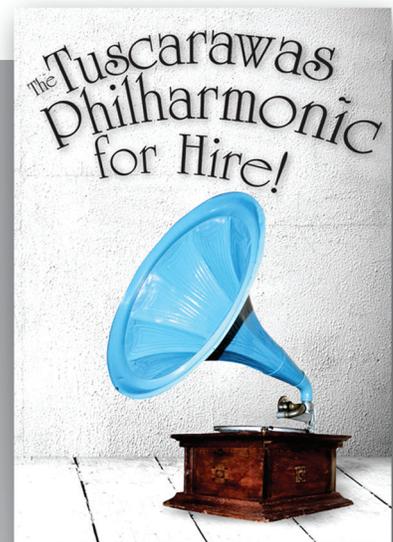
Join us as the chorus rehearses for the Yuletide Celebration concert. For singers ages 7 to 14!

Kent State Tuscarawas
Performing Arts Center

Details at
www.TuscarawasPhilharmonic.org

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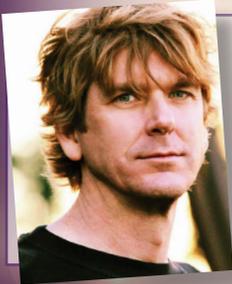
Enhance your special event with a professional string, brass, woodwind or steel drum ensemble performing a variety of music styles.

Contact Barb Moore
Philharmonic Personnel Manager
for details
TuscPhilPersonnel@gmail.com
www.TuscarawasPhilharmonic.org

December 13

YULETIDE CELEBRATION: *Christmas Reverie*

with
The Tuscarawas Philharmonic Children's Chorus
assisted by
The Greater Tuscarawas Children's Chorus
and special feature
The High School Women's Honors Chorus



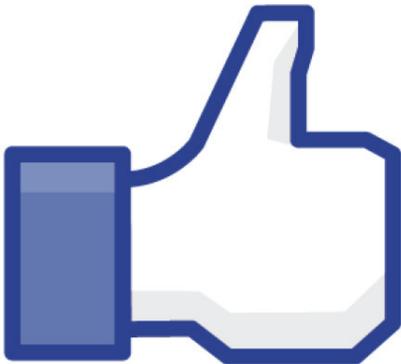
with special guest
Rik Swartzwelder, narrator
for Eric Benjamin's new composition
based on Dylan Thomas'
"A Child's Christmas in Wales"



IN THE NEWS

TO ALL ADULT CHORUS MEMBERS

Please join Eric Benjamin on Saturday, November 15 from 1:00 to 2:30 at Daily Grind in New Philadelphia to discuss the future of the Philharmonic chorus program—how can the program improve, what are you interested in singing, what events beyond the annual choral concert interest you? Bring your singing friends. Coffee is on Eric!



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- Tuscarawas Philharmonic • P.O. Box 406 • New Philadelphia, OH 44663 • 330.364.1843
- www.TuscarawasPhilharmonic.org • *State of the Art* editor: Robyn Martins
- Performing at the Kent State Tuscarawas Performing Arts Center • Box Office—330.308.6400