

Querida Tootsita,

I'm sorry I can't be there in La Jolla to celebrate this occasion with you. But I'm sitting in NYC thinking of you and the decades we made music together, and I have to reach out and applaud you, with everyone else. Oh, the music we've done! The places we've gone. The excruciating hours we've worked! All enhanced by your musicianship, dedication and personality. Together we built this chorus, from a rag-tag bunch in the seventies to seasoned ensemble in the 2000's.

I must be the luckiest conductor in the business. You were simply assigned to the chorus by the Department, back in 1974; no one asked me and probably no one asked you! Who could have known that we would turn out to be a perfect pair? I, with my high regard for myself (with no proof) and you with your preacher's-kid forbearance. I had learned (only) one method for dealing with musical problems: when the rehearsal gets hard, work harder and faster. Somehow, you always matched me, however hard and fast (whether the chorus did or not!).

Of course, there were times (many times!) when it seemed as though there would never be a breakthrough – times when another partner might take the opportunity to lecture me about my lack of foresight or intransigence. But that's when you would turn on the "Pollyanna act," assuring me that "it'll all work out." "Pollyanna" became a codeword, along with "Toots," and your signature sign-off, "Mwah!" - not to mention the between-rehearsal notes with fractured syntax that barely concealed the meaningful philosophical message.

Yes, we were growing up together (Three of us, including the Chorus). Sometimes, I think that it made it too easy on me: I always had you to lean on.

Well, let's see if I can evoke some highpoints. *"In goes my hand into that wool-white bell-tongued ball of holidays [choral activities] resting at the rim of the carol-singing sea, and out come ..."* Vicki and Boojum! Another of those multi-headed beasts ... chorus and soloists, all needing hours of extra rehearsal, and a score that relied massively on the pianist (with percussion). Martin Wesley-Smith was not a pianist (he composed at the computer), so a lot of the score required a Lisztian reach. As well as jazz/rock hammering. I didn't even realize how much you were hurting until Stew told me when it was all finally over.

But Cary Ratcliff *was* a pianist. His piano-reduction of "Ode to Common Things" reflected every bit of the complexity of the orchestra part. (*Btw*, he had provided me with a hand-scrawled score that required a color-coding for me just to keep my place. He assumed that all I had to do was to know it *as well as he did*.) When I suggested that he turn the accompaniment into a four-hand part with percussion, the bastard made both parts as hard as the original. (But what a great piece that was!)

Jazz and pop music also presented no problem. As long as there were notes to play you were "on it." You didn't have much confidence when it came to improvising, but even that could be done if needed.

No score was too hard for you to read. Calligraphy of all levels; open score of many parts and many clefs. You even took a good crack at transposing instrument lines. I don't think you ever had been trained in these things; I think it just seemed part of the job in your mind, so you did whatever was necessary.

Tours were another challenge. Rehearsals at home were regular enough, but no one could know what would happen on the road. You were always the only one I could count on to give pitches, which you did with a flawless sense of timing and subtlety of tone and volume. A Virtuoso of the Pitch Pipe. (That instrument should be donated to the La Jolla Museum.)

While we're on the subject of dependability... How many rehearsals did you miss in all those decades? Maybe five or six? I can remember some nights when you used tissue after tissue during the evening without ever missing a beat or a cue. (You were, of course, separated from the singers – and even me – by the piano.) More heroism.

Finally, you were always a real friend, chorus or no chorus. You were there to keep me company in the waiting room when my first child, Darren, was born. And the wait was spectacular! The doctor had paused the birth procedure to attend to a gun-trauma victim but didn't bother to send word to the pacing father upstairs!

Later came the most beautiful hand-knit baby blanket - an heirloom if ever there was one. And it now has another life to live ... in Iraq. Darren's partner, Omar, will be going back to Iraq next month to attend the birth of his sister's baby. And he'll take that gorgeous blanket to her.

So, querida, your years of donkey-hard work are over, and you've been clearly reminded of how important they've been to me, personally. (I found an old email in which I had said, "Your eyes, ears and fingers are still my super-hero powers!" That sounds like an understatement now!) I want you to take to heart all the praise that's being heaped on you; roll it into a ball; put it under your head to sleep on at night; and believe everything that's been said. We love you dearly, Toots.           The only thing left to say is

*M'waaaah!*

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