

Program Notes

Mark Twain's World - A Symphonic Journey with Genuine Thespians

Two years ago I had the pleasure of working with the Stockton Symphony and struck up a wonderful friendship with Peter Jaffe and Philip West. I was honored that they thought of me as the artist to partner with in a Meet the Composer-Music Alive grant. Peter was fascinated with the idea of actors working with orchestra, and Philip was interested in trying to pursue an American theme. My quick response was to suggest my composing a multi-textured piece based on the writings of Mark Twain.

Like many of you in this audience, I read Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn as a kid and thought I understood something about the author. However, I discovered that what I knew about Mark Twain was just the tip of a very complicated iceberg. In my opinion (and that of many scholars), he revolutionized the art of writing and gave the literary world its first uniquely American voice and style. The moral themes that he wove through his books deeply impacted the outlook of American Society. There are several Mark Twains: an optimistic weaver of tales; an inventor and failed captain of industry; a publisher; family man and later in his career, a hardened social critic who wrote cynically about the follies of the human race.

There is so much written by him and about him, it would be impossible to reflect all the facets of his creativity in the length of a concert piece. My hope was to give you an illuminating glimpse of Twain and the biggest themes that criss-crossed his remarkable life. As much as possible, I have tried to use Mark Twain's own words from his autobiography. When necessary I contributed the other dialogue used in this script. I am a veteran of several symphonic projects that sought to create an appropriate musical setting for poems. These same sensibilities and creative impulses were readily applied to Twain's magnificent prose. When reading his works, some of the language just leapt off the page "begging" to be surrounded with music. Other passages were so outright funny that I thought they had to be included. Some recollections are deeply sorrowful, for ironically the comic Mark Twain suffered a life dogged by tragedy. I believe Sam Clemens, the man behind the Mark Twain persona, probably could not have continued to endure the hardships of this earth. He found refuge and salvation in his work and in his alter-ego Mark Twain.

As he outlived the members of his family, he put on a brave show of wit and wisdom through countless performances, articles, speeches and banquets. Where did Sam

end and Mark begin? It is fortunate for us that there is a brilliant legacy of writing to fuel the question.

I also am a transplanted Connecticut Yankee. Twain's last home where he died is only about 3 miles by country road from my house. His influence in this community is still felt as the Library that bears his name in Redding, Connecticut was literally started by him by forced donations from anyone that visited him.

I have experienced a great deal of joy in creating this piece. My deepest thanks to Maestro Jaffe, Philip West, Director Al Muller and the gifted actors and musicians involved in this performance. We hope that this concert experience will stimulate your curiosity to read more of this American genius. I guarantee you will be as richly rewarded as I have been while researching and composing this work.

Chris Brubeck
April 2, 2005
Wilton, Connecticut