CHAPTER

THIRTY-TWO

The Church of Saints Peter and Paul, in Kraków, a Baroque church dating back to the seventeenth century, was lovingly lit like an architectural jewel by Polish television. Special lights highlighted statues of saints and frescos. Even the organ works in the back of the church were lit to wonderful effect. A single chandelier hung in the middle of the Baroque-era sanctuary, a lone survivor, perhaps, of the Communist era. It looked almost out of place. The plain gray stone walls of the church itself were left unadorned, with just a few icons and paintings dotting the walls. Its very simplicity was perhaps the reason John Paul had wanted that particular church.

As our rehearsal began, I could hear the very special sound of the Staatskapelle come alive before my ears. The sound was ancient, unique, and infinitely refined. It was as if these living Staatskapelle musicians were adding their own artistry to the long line of musicians who had gone before them. There was an incredibly rich warm glow to the strings. The Staatskapelle woodwinds seemed to be made from dark, aged limbs, and the brass sounded burnished, polished into a deep, ancient gold. They all played as if they were performing chamber music, ears perked up, listening to every nuance of the music they were making.

At first I just listened also, wanting to hear the complex combination of the hundreds of performances of the Brahms Requiem that this orchestra had presented—not these particular players, but all the Staatskapelle musicians who had passed down their insights and tradi-

tions from teacher to student in an unbroken line for more than four hundred years. They had a history that predated Brahms by hundreds of years. Their Music Directors included none other than Weber and Wagner. Bach had sought, without success, to be made their musical leader. He had written his greatest work, the B Minor Mass, as his unsuccessful audition piece! I listened, and I began to see where my ideas about a piece I had conducted many times could meld with theirs.

At the intermission of the first rehearsal, Ulrike Hessler, who had flown to Kraków especially to be with us, asked me when I would begin rehearsing. "There is so little time, Gilbert. You have so few rehearsals. Shouldn't you be stopping to rehearse with them?" she asked, with evident concern. I nodded, knowing that she was right, of course; there was work to be done, but only now that I had heard what these remarkable musicians had to offer could my ideas be put into play to create a performance that was greater than the sum of its parts.

And so we began our work together. I would gesture wordlessly. They would respond, reflect my musical wish, and add something extra of their own. A word was exchanged here and there. But only very rarely. Few words were needed. Brahms' musical lines shaped by the Staatskapelle's ancient sounds were liberated and clarified and created anew. Accents were honed and the broad-boned lines of Brahms' exquisite phrases were drawn out like lines of taffy, taut but never broken, from the beginning of a movement to its end. And that tension of the musical line, the *Spannung*, as they call it in German, was never broken, from the first repeated quarter notes in the cello and bass to the final radiant chord, more than an hour and ten minutes later, at the work's serene conclusion. All of this was in seamless ensemble with the beautifully prepared Munich Bach Choir and our two esteemed international soloists.

After the first rehearsal, a member of the orchestra came up to greet me. "Thank you, Maestro," he said. "Thank you for not conducting us."

I looked at him quizzically, as he went on. "No, Maestro, it is a compliment. So many of your colleagues don't understand. The key to

working with the Staatskapelle is that we don't need conductors. We don't need time-beaters. We need musicians who will make music together with us. Inspire us. Phrase the music with us. Together we will make wonderful music, you will see. I think you will be very pleased with the way the evening will go."

The German word he used was *Zusammenmusizieren*. It is a long word for a precious concept: making music together. His words encapsulated perfectly what it was that I was feeling too. The glow that I had heard coming from all of these fine musicians now coursed through me, and it continued to inspire me as I went off to dine, and then rest, in a city where I had made so much music.

On the afternoon of the performance, just after my normal nap, there was a knock on my hotel room door. Our soprano, Christiane Oelze, stood there and almost hesitantly asked to come in. "Just for a moment, please, Maestro," she said in her accented but excellent English. "I don't want to disturb you."

"Yes, yes, of course. By all means. Is there a place in the score of the Brahms that we can go over together? I really adored what you did in the rehearsal this morning. Is my tempo in your movement too slow? Should we perhaps move it along a bit?"

"No, no, it is nothing like that. I really am enjoying the music-making. I just wanted to say that I read about your mother-in-law, that she had survived Auschwitz. I know we are doing this concert for the victims of 9/11, but in my mind, also, I will be singing for your mother-in-law, for the victims and the survivors of the Holocaust as well. In my family, we had members of the German Army during the Second World War.

"I feel somehow that this Brahms Requiem—you and I making music together here in Kraków, so close to the camps—that there is a deeper meaning to this. I just wanted to tell you how much this means to me to be here with you making this music together."

Her eyes were glistening. If our conversation had gone on any longer, I think she would have begun to cry.

"Fräulein Oelze," I said, "—Christiane, if I may—I am pleased and really honored that you chose to do this concert. I know how busy

you are. And I have to tell you, I feel the weight of what you just told me in the incredible emotion you bring to the music. Your Brahms will tell this story to the world, without any words at all. I am looking forward so much to our music-making this evening."

I wanted to give her a hug. I wanted to reach out and comfort her, as the words of her movement in the Brahms Requiem said I should. But I was also so respectful of just how deep were her emotions at this moment. I looked her in the eyes, thanked her from the bottom of my heart for having come to Poland to be here with us, and wished her "*Toi, Toi, Toi*"—the German version of "break a leg."

The evening of the performance came, and I walked the few steps from the aptly named Hotel Copernicus (the great scientist had been a graduate of Kraków's famed Jagiellonian University) out into a small square where a large-screen projector had been set up so that the overflow crowd could watch the concert outdoors on that cool Polish night. I crossed the Ulica Grodzka, passing between the line of beautiful statues of the Twelve Apostles that guard the entry to the Church of Saints Peter and Paul on either side, and walked into the sanctuary itself.

I arrived early, as is my custom, and went into the vestry, where I hoped to find a sliver of space to use as my private "dressing room." Some members of the orchestra had arrived early also. They were donning their formal concert clothes amidst their instrument cases, laid out here and there and blocking every conceivable straight line to the altar, where our concert would take place. Musicians in various states of undress, oblivious to the preconcert chaos, chatted amongst one another. As constantly touring international orchestral superstars, they had seen every manner of backstage accoutrement. There was nothing here to faze them. The music was what they had come for, not the backstage amenities.

The Munich Bach Choir, which would begin the program with our performances of the Barber Agnus Dei and Górecki Totus Tuus, were already in the process of dressing in another building alongside the church. Fräulein Oelze and Herr Holzmair would find yet another corner somewhere, if they could, when they arrived a bit later, having

sensibly warmed up their voices in the quiet of their respective hotel rooms.

The television people were swarming all over. Their production trucks parked outside were buzzing with noisy activity. This was not a recording studio after all, but there were cables and microphones, cameras and lighting fixtures lying, blocking, and flying all around.

Barbara Pietkewicz, the Executive Producer of the broadcast for Polish Television, came up to me, thanked me for the idea of this concert, and assured me that everything was "under control." Dr. Lothar Mattner from WDR, West German Television, who was in charge of the international broadcast via Eurovision to the rest of the world, smiled at me in a way that I should have known was much too broad.

"Gilbert," Lothar declared, "it will be a wonderful performance. Everyone says so. I think so too. So, *Toi, Toi, Toi*." Although he said nothing more, I had the feeling that he was clearly worried about something as he turned and left by the side door of the church, moving towards the production truck almost at a gallop. I was determined not to take his apparent nervousness to heart.

After the live broadcast announcements, which I did not hear, a production assistant wearing earphones nudged me out in the direction of the podium. This concert was live, and my normal few moments of quiet contemplation before I start a concert would have to be curtailed.

As I walked out, I saw the Staatskapelle arrayed before me to my left. They would be quietly sitting through the a cappella performances of the Barber and the Górecki. Behind them was the Munich Bach Choir, standing tall on their choral risers so that their perfectly pitched vocal tones would project out over the orchestra.

As I looked to my right, I saw a sanctuary filled to capacity. Diplomats and dignitaries sat up front, with as many citizens of Kraków as could find a place in this free-of-charge event sitting in the rows behind them. Among the crowd, I noticed several familiar faces. In the third row stage right, sat Henryk Górecki, the composer himself.

It is, for me, a rare privilege to have the creator of a work sitting in the audience. It makes for very special communication, as if there is a line between him and me that will be maintained throughout the performance of his work. For that reason alone, this was going to be a very special evening.

Just as I was about to turn towards the orchestra, I saw the tall, thin figure of Cardinal Macharski, dressed in simple black priestly attire, sitting near the front. His Eminence gestured to me, with a slight lifting of his hand and nod of his head. Welcome to Kraków, he seemed to be saying, just as he had some fourteen years before when we had first met in his office. I felt the warmth of his greeting, returned it with a small faint smile of my own, and turned to begin our musical tribute to the victims of man's inhumanity to man.

Barber's Adagio for Strings, the original form of our opening work, his choral setting of the Agnus Dei, is performed almost too often. In the days and months following 9/11, it was played countless times at many memorial ceremonies. But when the words of the Latin sacred text of the Agnus Dei ("Lamb of God") are sung to its plaintive, stirring strains, it comes alive anew. The music is literally transformed into prayer, and in this sacred setting, its shattering climax, followed by the most peaceful of all musical resolutions, was heartbreaking. The work ends with a setting of the words *Dona nobis pacem*—Grant us peace. It could not have been a more appropriate opening prayer to our evening of remembrance.

When we came to the Górecki Totus Tuus, I could feel the work's creator supporting me in every phrase. His setting of this Marian text is incantational. At the end, it repeats and repeats the name of Mary, over and over and over. The power of the faith behind the setting of this name is almost overwhelming. I felt John Paul, whose Marian devotion was itself the stuff of spiritual legend, also carrying me along through each line. Standing here in this church chosen by the Pope, conducting a work dedicated to His Holiness, celebrating Mary, the patron saint of the Polish Church, with the composer "by my side" was almost more than I could bear. The work carried me along almost as much as I conducted it.

With the opening of the Brahms, the Staatskapelle, which had now sat silently listening to their colleagues in the choir make their music for almost twenty minutes, could begin to spin their own musical tale. With their storied history they were near sovereign in their realm. And on this occasion, for this concert, they gave their collective all. They played their hearts out—and their souls, too. I have rarely been as invigorated by the sheer joy of music-making as I was that night.

We began the opening movement, with its slowly rising ebb and flow, setting the text of the New Testament Gospel of Saint Mathew, "Blessed are those that suffer, for they shall be comforted," leading seamlessly into the words of the Psalmist, "They that sow with tears, shall harvest in Joy." With those first phrases, the rich sounds of the Staatskapelle melded with the pure voiced tones of the Munich Bach Choir, I knew we had selected well. This would indeed be a most appropriate musical commemoration of 9/11.

When we came to the third movement, the great voice of Wolfgang Holzmair commanded that sacred space, filling the church to the rafters. "Lord teach me, that I may know that my life has an end."

The fourth movement, "How lovely is thy dwelling place," perhaps the most famous portion of the Brahms Requiem, had a lilt and a flow, a sweetness both in the orchestra and the choir, that I had never been able to achieve before.

Then Christiane Oelze, having waited patiently for four whole movements, stood and cast her spell on the entire audience, opening her voice and her soul both to the sanctuary and to the watching world: "You have only sadness, but I will see you again, and your heart will fill with joy." Now I knew exactly what she had been trying to say in words to me that afternoon. She brought such plaintive, gentle joy to these words that I thought I would burst as I accompanied her. The limpid, lush strings and soft winds, the hushed responsorials of the male choir, all came together in an unforgettable musical moment.

Once before I had experienced this work in this way, then not as a conductor but as a listener. I had sat in Carnegie Hall and heard the Berlin Philharmonic and Herbert von Karajan accompany the incomparable, fiercely compelling Leontyne Price. I had thought nothing would ever come close to that command of musical space, but now Christiane Oelze was doing it for all the world to hear.

We ended the performances with more strong contributions from Herr Holzmair, and a peroration in the last choral movement that left the church in hushed attentiveness, and left me fully at peace, as Brahms had so rightfully intended. For his is a requiem for us all, the living and the dead, sharing in our common, all too fragile, and fleeting humanity.

The silence that pervaded the church after the last chord died away was long and profound and so completely appropriate. It took a full fifteen seconds for the first tremulous applause to begin. We were all contemplating what it was we were commemorating that night. Barber, Górecki, and now Brahms, had all cast their spiritual spell. The applause that roared was as welcome for the release of tension as it was for the appreciation we as performers so willingly soaked up after our labor of love.

After the concert, as I was dressing amongst the orchestra, Eberhard Steindorf, the artistic head of the Staatskapelle, came to me and said how honored they were to have been asked to perform such a meaningful concert.

"No, it is I who am honored, Herr Steindorf," I said. "Honored that you and your colleagues would join me and us here tonight. You have given so much of yourselves artistically, at great sacrifice, and at a time of such travail for all of you back home. We are so deeply grateful to you. Please tell all your members just how touched I am by their performance."

Conductors don't often get a chance to express themselves in words. That's mostly for the good. We are about the music-making, after all. Our art should speak for us. But these words of gratitude, which I had wished could be spoken to the whole orchestra, I trusted

would be taken back to the Staatskapelle Dresden, with all the sincerity and humility with which they were meant.

Finally, after almost everyone had left the church, I encountered my new friend, Lothar Mattner, of German Television.

"Lothar, what was that about before the concert? Something was going on, no?"

"Gilbert, now I can tell you. Something was wrong with the technical relay of our signal through Warsaw to Germany and out to all of Europe. I thought we wouldn't get it right in time. I smiled at you beforehand because I didn't want you to worry. We had some terrible moments, but somehow we managed. It worked. That is the most important thing."

The next morning, at precisely 10:00, I called the Vatican to report to Bishop Dziwisz on our great event in Kraków. I was patched through by the friendly sisterly voice of a Vatican operator to Castel Gandolfo, where Bishop Dziwisz and the Pope had retreated for a well-earned rest and respite from the infamous summer heat of Rome.

"Maestro, we have already heard about your event. Cardinal Macharski telephoned this morning. He was very pleased. I am told the message of your music was heard in many different countries. We are wondering, would you have the time to come to Castel Gandolfo, perhaps even tomorrow? I will look forward to your visit. And please, I am sorry to say, the Holy Father was not able to watch your concert. Would it be possible for you to bring us a video? I would be most appreciative. Please call me when you arrive in Italy, and we will set up a time for us to get together."

"Yes, Excellency, yes, of course. I will come, and I would be honored to bring a tape of the concert. *A domani*."

I packed, and rushed off to the airport. If I hurried, I could still catch the Munich Bach Choir's charter flight back home to Munich, and from there catch a flight that evening to Rome. The Staatskapelle had returned to Dresden early that morning, so this would be my best way to travel south.

I greeted the members of the Bach Choir in the departure lounge and sat myself down next to Helmut Pauli for the hour-and-a-half

flight to the Bavarian capital. Helmut took the opportunity to regale me in his melodious German about the sheer scope of the success we had achieved the evening before.

"Maestro," he intoned in his deep voice, "we reached far and wide with this concert. Just in Germany, the concert was broadcast on ARD, our most important national network, as well as on 3SAT and on Dr. Mattner's WDR in Köln. It was also seen on France 2, and TVE in Spain. Really, all over Europe. Even in Muslim areas such as Bosnia-Herzegovina and Turkey. The coverage in the press was also unbelievable. We had the cooperation of all the major newspapers in Europe: the *Times* in London, *Le Figaro* in Paris, *De Morgan* in Brussels, and of course the *Frankfurter Allgemeine* in Germany and *Gazeta Wyborcza* in Warsaw. There was even an announcement in the *Nepszabadszag* in Budapest. So you see, our event was covered by everyone."

I couldn't believe my ears. Helmut had accomplished so much in such a short period of time. And now he was telling this to me with such evident pride. We beamed at each other in shared satisfaction.

"And, Maestro, you should see the website we created for this concert. It has everything. A webcast of the concert, of course, will be online shortly. Interviews with you and the other artists, letters from the many statesmen who wrote in solidarity to our cause, and very importantly, the statement from His Holiness on the anniversary of 9/11. Everyone will know about the need for tolerance and mutual respect that this concert represented. That is the most important thing. People all over the world who didn't happen to see it on television, can now log on, hear the concert in its entirety, and hear from those involved about this dream for peace."

It took almost the whole flight for Helmut to tell me everything that had been done. He is more than an impresario. He is a European Musical Ambassador par excellence. And I was so proud to have worked on this project with him. We would have toasted with a glass of *sekt*, but it was much too early in the day.

That evening in Rome, I shared a meal with Dame Marjorie Weeke. Marjorie was one of most hardworking officials I had ever met in the Vatican. By now, in 2002, she had helped me with every one of

my Vatican concerts, and with many other events around the world. She was a unique font of knowledge who could always be counted on to discreetly warn me off any flighty thought I had before it became an unfortunate, unrealistic plan. I told Marjorie all about the concert in Kraków.

"Oh, Gilbert, we know about that already. The Vatican is a very small village, you know. They say it went very well! You should be very pleased."

"But Marjorie, it was only last night."

"Yes, yes, but news travels fast here. Gilbert, you know that by now."

"Did I tell you I have been invited out to Castel Gandolfo tomorrow? Bishop Dziwisz wants me to bring him a tape of the performance for His Holiness."

"Now, Gilbert. Think about it. Do you really think Bishop Dziwisz would have had you fly all the way down from Kraków to deliver a tape? No, trust me, the Pope wants to see you. I know it's very rare these days, with his health situation and all, but that's what I would bet will happen. So dress accordingly. If I'm wrong, you tell me, but give me a call after and let me know."

The next morning, I called Bishop Dziwisz and made arrangements to get myself out to Castel Gandolfo for what I still thought would be a brief meeting with His Excellency, Marjorie's admonition notwithstanding.

I rode out to Castel Gandolfo by taxi, winding my way south the twenty-three or so kilometers to the area of Lake Albano. As I sat in the back of the cab, I dared to imagine a meeting with His Holiness. If I were to have an audience with the Pope, what would it be like? What changes might there have been in the two years since I had last seen him alone? Then, during the long way up the hill above the lake to the Papal Castle in the square, I put that out of my mind. I would be seeing my friend Bishop Dziwisz. That in itself would be a great pleasure. I could tell him all about our concert, give him the tape for His Holiness, and be on my way, back to New York.

When I approached the castle, I was immediately checked and rechecked by the Swiss Guards. After the formalities were dispensed with, I was greeted with a warm-hearted "Maestro, *Benvenuto,*" and was ushered into the small elevator that would lead me to Bishop Dziwisz's sitting room on the floor above, the same one in fact where I had met him twelve years before.

His Excellency, waiting right outside the elevator door, greeted me with a broad smile and an outstretched hand, with which he led me into a small sitting room. But before I could hand him the videotape and begin to tell him about the concert in Kraków, he said, "Maestro, the Holy Father wishes to see you. He would like you to tell him personally all about the event in Saints Peter and Paul two nights ago. Would you kindly follow me?"

Marjorie's words flashed through my mind as I followed Bishop Dziwisz down the hallway towards the Pope's private study. Luckily, I had taken her advice and dressed in my most elegant suit and tie. It was hard for me to imagine what was about to occur.

The study was dark, even though it was five in the afternoon on this late summer's day. Lace curtains covered the windows, blocking out the bright light and the view of the lake far below. His Holiness rose from his seat behind his desk. His back was bent, his head tilting forward so that he saw me, and met my eyes, as he looked up from his clearly pain-filled posture. His handshake was less firm but no less warm-hearted than it had always been. But this was definitely not the athletic man I had met in 1988. The years had finally taken their toll. My father had had scoliosis, a disease that manifests itself with a pronounced curvature of the spine. I am no physician, but at first glance, up close, this was how the Pope looked to me on this day.

Bishop Dziwisz accompanied me into the study and looked on proudly as I presented His Holiness with the videotape of our concert. The Pope was still standing. Politeness, hospitality, and infinite graciousness had always been his hallmark. Finally, His Holiness sat down heavily in his chair, and indicated to me to sit beside him, next to his narrow desk. He got right to the point.

"Maestro," His Holiness said, addressing me as usual in his elegant native Polish. "I have heard such wonderful reports of your concert in Kraków. I am told it was broadcast widely. I have heard there were many important dignitaries there with you in Kraków. It seems it was a very significant occasion. I am only sorry that I could not view it on television myself. Thank you for this video. I will watch it with great interest. Tell me about the event and who was there."

"Your Holiness, first may I say, the choice of Kraków and of the Church of Saints Peter and Paul was perfect. Kraków embodies your spirit; your will for peace is so strongly felt there. You are a constant presence, as if you had never left for Rome. I believe and I hope that our music captured your spirit well. The Brahms Requiem, of course, was most effective, played by the great Staatskapelle Dresden and sung by a wonderful choir from Munich. But also the Totus Tuus of Maestro Górecki. I know how meaningful that prayer is to you. His work sets it so very beautifully. He is so devoted to Your Holiness. And we also performed a work by Barber, an American composer whose work I performed for Your Holiness in Denver."

"It sounds very fine. All of it. And yes, Professor Górecki. His music is very beautiful. Please go on."

"Your Holiness, I was told yesterday on the way here that our concert was seen in countries all across Europe. It will be seen also in the United States. It will even be on the Internet. The message of peace has been broadcast throughout the world once again. Yes, I think, Your Holiness, your message has been heard. And to answer your question, there were dignitaries from many different countries. From America, Germany, and of course from Poland. His Eminence Cardinal Macharski was a most important presence at the event. In all, many, many important personages were in attendance to hear this message of peace along with thousands both inside and outside the Church, and many millions, we hope, who saw it on TV."

My Polish must have been OK, because the Pope seemed to understand my words, although I am sure my awful grammar and my difficulty with Polish declensions were at their usual none-too-stellar

level. In this too, though, His Holiness showed infinite patience and never let on if my linguistic foibles offended his ear.

"Maestro, this means so much to me," His Holiness replied, gesturing towards me with his right arm outstretched. "I believe that peace is the only answer. We must never stop trying to reach this goal. I pray for this every day. You know well that I believe that music can play a strong role in building bridges between peoples. We have shown this at your concerts here. I thank you so very much for all the work you do. What is next on your busy agenda?"

"Your Holiness, I am just recuperating from this concert in Kraków. I hope with all my heart it has had some good effect. With your permission, I will come to you soon with some ideas of what might come next. I hope they will meet with Your Holiness' approval."

And with that, His Holiness began his good-bye. He thanked me again for coming. He asked about my family, which he had never once failed to do. He expressed his sorrow at the passing of my mother-in-law, Margit, now almost four years ago. But he ended on a more uplifting note, inquiring smilingly after Vera and, of course, wanting to know about David and Gabriel.

"They are wonderful, Your Holiness," I replied. I was touched, as always, with his generous thoughtfulness. "We are happy and, thank God, all in good health."

He smiled and rose, helped to his feet by an aide, whose assistance the Pope seemed to wish to elude. He wanted to rise himself. He had been so physically strong and was still so strong of mind. He seemed to want me, his visitor, to see him the way he clearly still saw himself—vibrant and filled with a powerful, life-affirming force. It was also clear that he saw the future more clearly through his eighty-two-year-old eyes than did we who were so much younger.

I loved him powerfully for this. For not allowing his evident physical infirmities to hinder his life any more than was absolutely necessary. If anyone struggling with serious illness could see him in those years, they would have gained immense strength for their own lives, from His Holiness' remarkable example. "Be not afraid," he always said. He was showing us all how to age and how to deal with

infirmity. How to celebrate the human spirit every day that we are blessed with the gift of life, even in the face of such challenging adversity as he was clearly facing now.

I was proud he had wanted me to see him. Proud I could share the success of our concert personally with him. Proud that he felt close enough to me to have received me at all. I would have flown all the way from anywhere just to have spent these precious minutes in his presence.

Bishop Dziwisz walked me back out to the elevator. He patted me on the back as I was about to leave. I turned to him and said, "Thank you for this, Excellency. You have no idea what this has meant to me."

Bishop Dziwisz smiled and said, "No, thank *you*, Maestro, for all you do. You must know how much joy you bring to the Holy Father."

I gave him an *abbracio* and bid him a very fond good-bye. This was yet another amazing day in a series I hoped would never end. But of course, I knew they would.

And I hoped and prayed this would not be the last time I would see the Pope.