

PRELUDE



Y*is—ga-dal v'yis-ka-dash shmayra-bo, b'olmo dee'vro chir'usay—*
May the great Name of God be exalted and sanctified,
throughout the world.

Alone, bareheaded, standing in front of one of the two velvet-covered chairs set out before Pope John Paul II's tomb in the crypt of St. Peter's, I recited the Kaddish, the ancient Aramaic Jewish prayer for the dead. A few paces behind me stood the Prefect of the Pontifical Household, who had, to my astonishment, arranged for me to be brought here alone, after the basilica had been closed to the public for the night, so that I could pay my respects to His Holiness in private. On this late afternoon of December 7, 2006, I had come back to the Vatican for the first time in many months. I had neither seen nor spoken to anyone in the Apostolic Palace since the Papal funeral in April 2005.

*Oseh sholom bimromov, hu ya'aseh sholom olaynu, v'al kol yisroel; vimru Omein—*May there be abundant peace from Heaven, and life upon us and upon all Israel; and we say, Amen.

After I had finished saying Kaddish, I prayed on silently for as long as I thought I could. I stepped back from the tomb, and motioned that I was ready to leave, feeling that the Prefect and the two guards from St. Peter's who had accompanied us might be anxious to get on with their duties. The Prefect stepped forward, put his arm gently on my shoulder, and whispered that I could take as long as I wished.

I sat down heavily in the red velvet chair, letting images of His Holiness over the seventeen years that I had known him pass gently

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through my mind. There were so many memories. So much music I had made for him. So many moving moments created together. From among these many visions three came to my mind most vividly.

First I saw the young and vigorous Pope John Paul II, striding onstage, beaming as he put his arm around me at my first Papal Concert in 1988. I thought of the lyrically lovely “Ave Maria” of Brahms and the unadorned yet beautiful Mass in D of Dvořák, which I had just conducted and which His Holiness had seemed to appreciate so deeply. “Thank you for going to Kraków, and thank you for bringing Kraków to me,” I heard his still-clear voice whisper in my ear at concert’s end.

Next came the painful, sad memories of the music we had made for the Papal Concert to Commemorate the Shoah in 1994. I heard the mournful tones of Bruch’s “Kol Nidre,” and the universality of the Adagio from Beethoven’s Ninth. Bernstein’s “Chichester Psalms” and “Kaddish” had moved Pope John Paul deeply, almost to tears, as he sought to reach out to comfort the survivors of the Holocaust. “These victims: Fathers, mothers, children, brothers, friends. In our memory, they are all present, they are with you, they are with us,” he had told us all, as the six-candle Holocaust menorah burned brightly in the Vatican’s great auditorium, the Aula Paulo VI.

Finally, still lost in painful thought, I felt the presence of the bent, frail, and gnarled, yet still strong-of-spirit Pontiff listening with rapt attention to our music at the audacious Papal Concert of Reconciliation in January 2004. In my mind’s eye, I saw him once again, sitting on his wheeled throne, watching intently, as I led the musical journey of Mahler’s “Resurrection” Symphony in its ascendant quest towards our reunion with God. “Yes! We must find within us the courage for peace. We must implore from on High the gift of peace,” he had said then, his lungs gasping for air, his voice halting, but his words potent nonetheless.

We had done such marvelous work together. Although I could not presume to think so, many who knew us and our work together considered us friends. A special kind of friendship. One whose musical witness had been viewed throughout the world. A friendship that

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transformed my art and my faith in inestimable ways. Our time together was over now. There would be no more encores, no more collaborations in service to his powerful goals of peace and reconciliation through music.

In the deep silence of the crypt, inside a hushed Saint Peter's Basilica, I felt crushed. I missed him terribly. His warmth. His humanness. And his profound concern for the spirit of the world. I walked forward and laid my hand gently on his tomb, as though my hand were the fringes of my tallis, my ritual prayer shawl, as if I were touching the passing Torah as it is carried reverently through the synagogue on Shabbat. I finished the ritual by touching my hand to my lips, my eyes tightly closed, holding back my tears.

I backed away, turned, and walked slowly out of St. Peter's, with the Prefect and the basilica's protectors following silently close behind.

It was not until later, after I had bid the Prefect good-bye at the entrance to the Apostolic Palace, and had walked out past the Swiss Guards into the pink and orange sunset spreading out over the Bernini columns in Saint Peter's Square, that it dawned on me.

I had prayed to my Polish Pope in the spoken language of his Savior Jesus, the Jew, in the great church built on the model of the Second Temple in Jerusalem. It is a prayer as old as my faith—and his. A prayer intoned in celebration as often as it is in mourning. A prayer Jesus would have recited every day of his life. I knew in my heart that Pope John Paul II had heard my prayer and had understood it also, every ancient word. And with that thought, the smallest smile crept back onto my face, as I remembered all we had accomplished, working together, in music and in spirit, over the seventeen most privileged years of my life.