

## *The Dream Lives On: A Portrait of the Kennedy Brothers* Composer's Note

In the fall of last year, I received the kind of phone call composers dream about. Keith Lockhart, with whom I'd never spoken, called me to discuss his conception of a new work for the Boston Pops, in tribute to John, Robert, and Edward Kennedy, and to offer me the commission to compose the music for this project. Of course, I immediately accepted. I have had a longstanding deep admiration for the Kennedy brothers, and in fact for years had been contemplating a composition about JFK. A work celebrating these three great men was even more richly appealing.

In early 2010, I began research for this project, including consulting many books and archival recordings of speeches of the Kennedy brothers. I also traveled to Arlington National Cemetery to visit their graves. For me, this was a profoundly moving experience, which gave me an even greater sense of reverence for their places in American history. At the gravesites of John and Robert Kennedy, some of their most famous words are carved into stone. Many of these words memorialized at Arlington are also included in this new work, so I felt a sense of great responsibility for the task.

For my text collaborator on this project, Keith suggested Lynn Ahrens, who shared my deep admiration for the Kennedys. Lynn's theatrical instincts and experience were invaluable in shaping the text. It was her conviction that no factual exposition was necessary, but simply brief context provided by a few poetic lines, with most of the words being those of the Kennedy brothers themselves.

Both John and Robert Kennedy died before I was born (in 1970), so I am too young to have memories of them during their lifetimes. Yet I have had a profound awareness of their lives, achievements, and tragic losses for as long as I can remember. This work does not dwell on how they died. Rather, it celebrates how they lived. Ted Kennedy joined the Senate eight years before my birth, so throughout most of my life, until his death last year, I'd been aware of his work as a tireless champion of countless important causes. Yet it was not until I began to research his life for this project that I became more fully aware of the remarkable scope of his legislative achievements, over more than four decades.

For me, the most inspiring aspects of the Kennedy brothers' legacy are a commitment to idealism, and a sense of enduring optimism for our nation and for mankind. Thus the title of the work, *The Dream Lives On*, is taken from one of Ted Kennedy's last public speeches, at the Democratic National Convention in 2008. Although valiantly struggling with brain cancer, and overcoming great odds just to deliver that address, the optimism of his speech was remarkable; and that optimism, typical of the Kennedys, has set the tone for this work.

I would like to acknowledge how personally meaningful these performances are to me. As a composer, the superb recordings of the Boston Pops have influenced me over many years. Also, as a Rhode Island native, I grew up with a deep admiration for the musicians of this great orchestra. Performances I attended here at Symphony Hall some 20 years ago, as a college student and fledgling composer, were among my most formative musical experiences. Since then, it has been a dream of mine to have my music performed in this historic hall by these extraordinary musicians, and the fulfillment of this dream through these performances is something I shall always treasure. That the work being premiered is in tribute to these men for whom I have such reverence, with their words being read by three of the most acclaimed actors of our time, makes this more than merely a memorable occasion. It is, quite simply, as profound an honor as I can imagine for a composer, and words cannot express my gratitude at having been given this opportunity.

I would like to thank Lynn Ahrens, Susan Dangel, Dennis Alves, the Pops staff, all the members of the Boston Pops Orchestra and Tanglewood Festival Chorus, narrators Robert De Niro, Morgan Freeman, Ed Harris, and Cherry Jones, and especially Keith Lockhart. It has been my privilege to work with all of you on this special project.

The musical score bears the following inscription: "dedicated with profound respect to the memory of John F., Robert F., and Edward M. Kennedy."

—Peter Boyer, May 2010