

Ned Rorem

OUR TOWN



Our Town (2005)

Libretto by J.D. McClatchy
based on Thornton Wilder's play

World Premiere

24 February 2006

Musical Arts Center,
Bloomington, Indiana

Vincent Liotta, director

C. David Higgins, designer

Conductor: David Effron

Company: Indiana University
Opera Theater

Scoring

2S,2M,3T,Bar,B,SATB chorus

2.1.2.1-2.1.0.0-pft-strings

Duration: 120'

Synopsis

ACT I

Grover's Corners, New Hampshire, May 7, 1901; a funeral procession is crossing the stage. We meet two families, Doc Gibbs and his wife, and Editor Webb and his wife, both couples upstanding pillars of the community. The families have two dissimilar children—George Gibbs, star of the high school baseball team, and Emily Webb, the best student in class. Though drawn to one another, their differences chafe. Choir practice has started, and the church organist is drunk and unhappy again. Meanwhile, at their opposite bedroom windows, Emily and George discuss homework. After choir practice, Mrs. Gibbs and her husband reminisce on the porch in the moonlit night, as George and Emily, back at their windows, stare at the moon, and at each other.

ACT II

Three years have gone by; Emily and George are about to get married. Doc and Mrs. Gibbs think back on their own marriage, while George impetuously dashes over to see his bride. The Stage Manager interrupts to show how the young couple fell in love. We're suddenly back two years in time, while George and Emily are frankly discussing feelings that upset each other. A turn into Mr. Morgan's drugstore for a soda seems the best way to prevent tears, and while sitting at the counter they both discover what is most important in their lives. We now jump three years into the future, to the church on the wedding day. The bride and bridegroom sing separately of their fears until their parents push them towards the altar.

ACT III

The summer of 1913, town cemetery. The dead are gathered in chairs to one side, and a funeral procession is approaching. Emily has died giving birth to her second child, and we see her appear among the dead. She misses George and their life, so she is taken back to the day of her thirteenth birthday. George enters, and gifts are given to the birthday girl, but no one seems to realize the importance of each moment, or how fleeting are joy and life. In tears, Emily begs the Stage Manager to take her back to the dead. The dead welcome her back, and together they sing, "they don't understand, do they?"

BOOSEY & HAWKES

Ned Rorem

Words and music are inextricably linked for Ned Rorem. *Time Magazine* has called him "the world's best composer of art songs," yet his musical and literary ventures extend far beyond this specialized field. Rorem has composed three symphonies, four piano concertos and an array of other orchestral works, music for numerous combinations of chamber forces, nine operas, choral works of every description, ballets and other music for the theater, and hundreds of songs and cycles. He is the author of

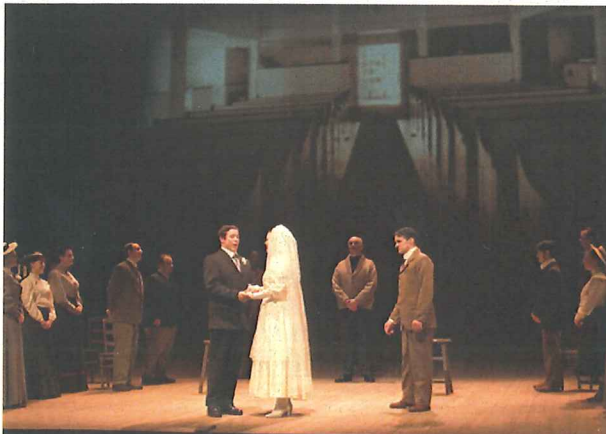
sixteen books, including five volumes of diaries and collections of lectures and criticism. Ned Rorem has been the recipient of a Fulbright Fellowship (1951), a Guggenheim Fellowship (1957), and an award from the National Institute of Arts and Letters (1968). He received the ASCAP-Deems Taylor Award in 1971 for his book *Critical Affairs, A Composer's Journal*, in 1975 for *The Final Diary*, and in 1992 for an article on American opera in *Opera News*. In 1998 he was chosen Composer of the Year by Musical America. Among his many commissions for new works are those from the Ford Foundation (for *Poems of Love and the Rain*, 1962); the Lincoln Center Foundation (for *Sun*, 1965); the Koussevitzky Foundation (for *Letters from Paris*, 1966); the Atlanta Symphony (for the *String Symphony*, 1985); the Chicago Symphony (for *Goodbye My Fancy*, 1990); and from Carnegie Hall (for *Spring Music*, 1991). Among the distinguished conductors who have performed his music are Bernstein, Masur, Mehta, Mitropoulos, Ormandy, Previn, Reiner, Slatkin, Steinberg, and Stokowski. His suite *Air Music* won the 1976 Pulitzer Prize in music. The Atlanta Symphony recording of the *String Symphony*, *Sunday Morning*, and *Eagles* received a Grammy Award for Outstanding Orchestral Recording in 1989. In January 2000 he was elected President of the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

J.D. (Sandy) McClatchy

J. D. McClatchy is the author of five collections of poems, and literary essays collected in two volumes, one of which was given the Melville Cane Award by the Poetry Society of America. He has also edited several other books and the acclaimed series *The Voice of the Poet* for Random House AudioBooks (currently, fifteen titles). His work appears regularly in *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times Book Review*, *The Paris Review*, *The New Republic*, and many other magazines.

Mr. McClatchy has taught at Princeton, Columbia, UCLA, Johns Hopkins, and other universities, and is currently Professor of English at Yale. Since

1991, he has served as editor of *The Yale Review*. In addition, he has an increasingly prominent role in the opera house as a librettist. He has written four libretti - for William Schuman's *A Question of Taste*, for Francis Thorne's *Mario and the Magician*, for Bruce Saylor's *Orpheus Descending*, and Tobias Picker's *Emmeline*. He has recently completed (with Thomas Meehan) a libretto of 1984 (music by Lorin Maazel), and is



at work on other new projects with composers Elliot Goldenthal and Lowell Liebermann. In 1996 he was named a Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets, in 1998 he was elected a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and the following year was elected to membership in the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Among his other honors, Mr. McClatchy has been awarded the Fellowship of the Academy of American Poets and grants from both the Guggenheim Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts. A 1991 award citation states, "Formally a master, with enormous technical skills, McClatchy writes with an authentic blend of cognitive force and a savage emotional intensity, brilliantly restrained by his care for firm rhetorical control. His increasingly complex sense of our historical overdeterminations is complemented by his concern for adjusting the balance between his own poems and tradition. It may be that no more eloquent poet will emerge in his American generation."

"Languorous melodic lines or fragments, often with an unmistakable Americana flavour, interact in the orchestra, and the vocal parts engagingly follow suit. If Wilder's play is to have music, Rorem's is credible and often exquisite."

- Financial Times



All photos from IU Opera Theater, Jacobs School of Music

"An intimate chamber opera to match the play's spareness... Rorem's music is accessible, singable, and full of integrity."

- New York Times

Performance materials for *Our Town* are available on rental from Boosey & Hawkes. Please contact the Promotion Department for perusal copies of the vocal score.

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