

The Voice of  
Coro Allegro

# Con Voce!

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Spring 2003

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Interview with Charles Fussell	1-2
The Librettist Will Graham	1-3
Next Concert	4

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chorus for members and  
friends of the  
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communities

Coro Allegro thanks its donors for their generosity. Please consider joining them. Support from our friends helps us to offer our audiences performances of wonderful, but rarely-heard works, premieres of new commissions such as *Infinite Fraternity*, and refreshing interpretations of familiar works such as the Brahms *Requiem*. You may send your donation to Coro Allegro, 29 Stanhope St. Boston 02116 or with our secure server at [www.coroallegro.org](http://www.coroallegro.org).

## Infinite Fraternity

Friday May 16 at 8 PM,

At Harvard University's Sanders Theatre.

**Pre-concert discussion** at 7 PM featuring composer Charles

Fussell, librettist Will Graham and Melville/Hawthorne experts.

And don't miss our annual **silent auction!**

**Please join us for Coro Allegro's spring concert, *Infinite Fraternity*, which includes Franz Joseph Haydn's majestic *Lord Nelson Mass* and Ernst Bloch's meditative *Suite Modale* for flute and orchestra. Opening the concert is Coro Allegro's newest commissioned work, *Infinite Fraternity*, by eminent Boston composer Charles Fussell, with text by Will Graham. *Infinite Fraternity* explores the personal relationship between renowned 19<sup>th</sup> century authors Nathaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville. Featured soloists for our spring performance include internationally acclaimed baritone Sanford Sylvan and BSO flutist Fenwick Smith.**

## Infinite Fraternity's Artistic Collaboration

Composer Charles Fussell

Librettist Will Graham

*Charles Fussell is Associate Professor of Theory/Composition at Boston University's School of Music. His works include five symphonies; Specimen Days (based on the writings of Walt Whitman, libretto by Will Graham) for baritone solo, chorus and orchestra; and Wilde, a symphony for baritone and orchestra (libretto also by Will Graham) that was runner-up for the 1991 Pulitzer Prize. In 1992, he received a citation and award from the American Academy and Arts and Letters. We spoke to Mr. Fussell in March 2003.*



Charles Fussell

*Prolific opera director and former Coro board member Will Graham talks about his role in shaping Coro Allegro's latest commission.*

Will Graham was appointed artistic director of the National Opera Company at the North Carolina School of the Arts in July 1997. For 10 years previously, he served as chairman of the Opera Department and director of the Opera Institute at Boston University School for the Arts. Mr. Graham has directed *The Marriage of Figaro*, *Don Pasquale*, *La Dame blanche*, *Così fan tutte*, *The Elixir of Love*, *Beatrice and Benedict*, *El Capitan*, *La Cenerentola*, *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* and *Kitty Hawk* for the National Opera Company. In addition to *Infinite Fraternity*, Mr. Graham has written two other libretti for composer

(Continued on page 2)

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## Charles Fussell continued

**Q: How did *Infinite Fraternity* come to be written, and how did you make decisions in constructing the new work?**

**A:** [Librettist] Will Graham and I had talked about a work having to do with Melville/Hawthorne for some time. When David (Hodgkins) proposed a commission to me, I thought of this with Will right away. And Will was able to fashion this short, but I think very beautiful, text out of the correspondence between the two.

The unusual thing about this piece is the way it's divided up—in a way it's a correspondence between the two men—but the role for one is taken by the chorus and the role for the other is taken with the baritone. So it's sort of an odd division of labor.

Then the idea of an accompaniment—I didn't want to use anything very extensive. And David first proposed the idea of just flute. I know that [Coro Allegro has] a long association with Fenwick [Smith, of the BSO]. I know Fenwick very well and liked the idea of writing something for him very much. But I really decided to try to use a viola as well, because of the possibility of writing more extended interludes. Plus giving a little more body of sound and support for the chorus. The interludes in this piece divide the text quite decisively, and change the mood from one section to the other, and they also provide the occasion for some instrumental virtuosity.

**Q: Do you have an opinion concerning the actual nature of the friendship of Hawthorne and Melville?**

**A:** Oh, I think something happened when Hawthorne visited Melville on one occasion. There's a letter which refers directly to the event. They took a walk, and I think it frightened Hawthorne. He more or less withdrew from that point. What I think probably happened was not much more than a verbal profession. Hawthorne was a beauty, a very attractive man. And he was famous for that. And he was also famous for being slightly aloof in character. There's nothing more intriguing to women or men than that. I'm sure that Melville being the much rougher sort and much more experienced on the sea, probably had more direct kind of freedom in terms of anything sexual, much less emotional, and that probably scared the hell out of Hawthorne. Being the New Englander that he was, he thought all of that should be kept under wraps. Look, but

don't touch! I don't expect Melville tried to touch.

**Q: Can you say what sort of reaction you're looking for from this piece?**

**A:** The piece has an arc to it; it begins in a very bright and sustained way. The chorus sings a very long passage at the beginning, almost all in four parts and almost all very strong and brilliant. And I think in the course of the work you go through a kind of compressed version of Melville and Hawthorne's relationship and how it went through their lifetime and trans-

formed itself into something less direct and ended of course as a kind of elegy. That's an arc. It takes you from a very bright beginning to a very quiet and very contemplative ending in which the flute has the last thing to say. I hope people would respond to that change from the beginning to the end.

**(From *Infinite Fraternity*)  
Melville:**

Whence come you, Hawthorne? By what right do you drink from my flagon of life: And when I put it to my lips—lo, there are yours and not mine. I feel that the Godhead is broken up like the bread at the supper, and that we are the pieces. Hence this infinite fraternity of feeling.

**Hawthorne:**

I strive to make my life a quiet pool, but you have set the water churning. We can commune only where quill tip touches paper, turning our affections into industry, tracing each his own path through our severed solitude.

## Will Graham continued

Charles Fussell: *Specimen Days*, a cantata based on the works of Walt Whitman and *Wilde*, a symphony for baritone and orchestra. Mr. Graham talks about his history with Coro Allegro, his collaborations with Charles Fussell and his methods for constructing texts.

**On joining the Coro board:**

"In the early 90s, (Coro co-founder and former board president) David Cutler

called me about being on the board. I really liked him and we talked for awhile. I enjoyed being on the board. It was just that it was so hard for me to always be free when they needed me. I thought that maybe I could serve better in other capacities...[laughter]"

**How he teamed up with Charles Fussell:**

"Charles and I met when I came to Bos-

ton University to be on the faculty. It became quite clear that I appreciated Charles' music, because right after I came there, they did *Cymbeline*, his opera/cantata, at Sanders Theatre. That was one of the



Sanford Sylvan

*Continued on page 3*

## Will Graham continued

first new music pieces I heard in Boston. And I thought, this man is a major composer – why do we not know about him? In the course of getting to know Charles I think I suggested, oh I would like to make a text for you. And then he got a commission from the Newton Symphony, and asked me if I would like to do a text for that. We sat down, and probably within 5 or 10 minutes came up with the idea of doing something about Oscar Wilde, whom we both admire tremendously. So our first commission (entitled *Wilde*) was presented in November of 1990. It was performed and was quite successful, and it turned out to be a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize that year. So Charles and I decided, well maybe we've got something here."

### **How a libretto is constructed:**

"First of all, you talk with the composer and you talk about the commission and you find out, OK, what are the given circumstances of this? In this instance, we knew we wanted something that would feature the chorus, and Sanford Sylvan as soloist. We knew approximately the length

of the piece that David Hodgkins wanted. When you begin to factor all those things together—I don't know—through some percolation in your brain, something begins to take shape. So Charles and I talked about it, and I said we've always talked about Melville and Hawthorne, let me sit down and see what I can come up with. And I love for the most part to use original sources, to use quotes and so

forth. And arrange them so that it tells a bit of story that people might not otherwise connect."

### **Passages taken from original sources, versus inventions:**

"I've taken whole chunks [from Melville's and Hawthorne's writings]. There's only one fabrication in the libretto. And that is what Charles and I call 'the missing piece of the puzzle.' Because at no point can we find anything where Hawthorne acknowledges the same kind of affection for Melville

that Melville acknowledges for him, although we feel very strongly that it was there. He was very cagy about never writing it down. But we know from the experiences they had together when they both lived in Lenox and they were visiting one another a lot... So I said to Charles, 'I'm going to channel Hawthorne here, and I'm going to try on the basis of everything I can read about him and what he has said, to put together some kind of response that will be true to what actually happened historically.' What I decided to do was to make a response to this idea of the infinite fraternity of feeling. So I created a letter in as much Hawthorne style as I could, by really studying his style... In libretto writing this is something that happens all the time. We sometimes have to create something that helps us tell the story. But I've tried to be as true to the spirit of the situation and the characters as I possibly could."

## Help Support Our New Music Commissions

We invite you to attend a special evening with *Infinite Fraternity* composer Charles Fussell on Thursday, May 8, from 7 to 9:30 PM. This benefit to sponsor Coro's new music commissions will include wine and cheese; conversation with the composer and Coro Allegro's artistic director David Hodgkins; and dessert and coffee. A special highlight will be a performance of excerpts from *Infinite Fraternity* by internationally acclaimed baritone Sanford Sylvan and violist David Feltner. The festivities will take place at the home of Jil Clark and Kathleen Sands, 36 Greenough Street, Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts. To RSVP, call 617-236-4011, e-mail to [fussell@coroallegro.org](mailto:fussell@coroallegro.org) or visit us at [www.coroallegro.org](http://www.coroallegro.org).



**Con Voce!**

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## Please Join Us for Our Next Concert

**Friday May 16, 2003, 8 PM, Sanders Theatre, Cambridge**

**Charles Fussell, *Infinite Fraternity (World Premiere)***

Text by Will Graham

Sanford Sylvan, baritone; Fenwick Smith, flute; David Feltner, viola

**Ernst Bloch, *Suite Modale***

Fenwick Smith, flute

**Franz Joseph Haydn, *Lord Nelson Mass***

Kelly Kaduce, soprano; Pamela Dellal, alto; Gerald Gray, tenor;  
Sanford Sylvan, bass

Tickets are \$35, \$30, \$25 and \$15

AA, A, B or C seating, respectively

Call the office at 617-236-4011 to order or Ticketmaster, 617-931-2000,  
Bostix Outlet or order on line at [www.coroallegro.org](http://www.coroallegro.org).

