

Words Cannot Speak: “The Song of the Heart”

Clyn D. Barrus was chair of the Department of Music at Brigham Young University from 1993 until 1996, when he became director of BYU’s newly organized School of Music. This article combines two talks—one to his department on November 5, 1991, and the other to the Church Music Workshop on August 2, 1994. Professor Barrus died on February 27, 1998.

Clyn D. Barrus†

I feel nervous about the responsibility I have in speaking to you this morning. You have come deserving to hear something of value, and I am aware of my need for the Spirit to communicate the deepest feelings I have in my heart.

Music and the Spirit

Let me first express my gratitude for being at this institution where things of the Spirit can be openly discussed and accepted. I know of no other music school on earth where what I am discussing with you today would be accepted with anything more than scorn or ridicule. I can’t possibly tell you how much joy I feel in beginning orchestra rehearsals with a sincere prayer from one of the orchestra members, seeking the Spirit of the Lord to inspire our efforts of the day. What a contrast this is to the thousands of rehearsals I have participated in over the twenty years I performed professionally.

I love my colleagues here. They are not only marvelous musicians and scholars, but more importantly are deeply spiritual people with a vision of eternal life. I look to them for both musical and spiritual inspiration and appreciate the help, encouragement, and example they offer.

I must also express my feelings about the music students that come here to study. Nowhere have I observed a more gifted group. They have been touched with the most precious gifts our Father in Heaven can give his children, and their desires to learn and grow are inspirational. Our challenge at this school of music is to offer these students a program worthy of their abilities, and sometimes I fear we fall short of those needs.

It is not an easy challenge they give us, but I can say without any hesitation that what BYU offers its music students cannot be gained anywhere else in the world. I don't speak of only musical training, for this can be received in equal or in some cases better measure at other institutions I could name. Rather, I speak of the spirit of music and its relationship to our Creator, our Father in Heaven. Here we are unique. Through both example and experience, one can understand the words of Paul when he said, "We have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God" (1 Cor. 2:12). All of the faculty hope to be a source of artistic and spiritual inspiration as we unitedly strive to serve the Lord through the great art of music.

I know of nothing quite like the musicians of the Church today. As important as all areas of learning are to the Lord and the Church, I am not aware of a Church chemistry workshop, or a Church literary workshop, or even a Church football workshop, as important as that sport is to many of the members of our congregations. Does music serve spiritual needs in distinctive ways? Why do we have a Church Music Workshop?

Certainly there are many possible answers to this question, the most obvious being that as a part of our sacrament meetings, music plays a vital role in our worship services. All of our General Authorities as well as Church leaders and musicians throughout the world are concerned that the volatile—and at times misused—gift of music be presented appropriately. Music must enhance the worship of God and not detract from the gentle and simple message of the gospel. Learning ways this may be done is one of the purposes of our workshop this week. However, I feel that there are also other reasons why music answers our spiritual needs.



On Tour, British Isles, 1992. Courtesy Marilyn Barrus.

“No Tongue Can Speak”

Several years ago, I had a lengthy discussion with an LDS friend about the value of music in a spiritual context. My friend contended that while music may provide an aesthetical experience—that is, an appreciation for form, beauty, and nature—it cannot provide a spiritual experience unless it uses an inspired religious text as its basis. Even in this case, he contended, the spirituality comes not from the music, but rather from the scripture that the music uses as its basis—you see, the scripture comes from God; music comes from man. I felt strongly the falseness of his claim at the time of our discussion. I have contemplated his words for many years and have come to the conclusion that great music itself can express the deepest spiritual feelings we possess, if we are prepared both physically and spiritually to present them.

A great philosopher wrote, “Where words end, music begins.” In my mind, this in no way diminishes the “words” of the scriptures as they express the message of God, or the “words” of a testimony, or the “words” of a great sonnet as the writer attempts

to react to God's inspiration. Words, however, can be limiting as we try to express our sincere human reactions to the Lord's influence. As the Book of Mormon records:

No tongue can speak, neither can there be written by any man, neither can the hearts of men conceive so great and marvelous things as we both saw and heard Jesus speak; and no one can conceive of the joy which filled our souls at the time we heard him pray for us unto the Father. (3 Ne. 17:17)

"No tongue can speak, neither can there be written." What then can express our feelings? "Where words end, music begins." Consider the following example.

While living for several years in Vienna, Austria, Marilyn and I became closely acquainted with the branch president of the first Vienna branch. President Mieka was an unusual person. He not only served diligently in his ecclesiastical responsibilities, but also recognized the power of music.

One would expect the great musical capital of Vienna to produce outstanding musicians, but our little branch was only sparsely talented when it came to musical performance. We did have a small branch choir of fifteen to twenty members, with no tenors and two altos. After long, diligent, and at times discouraging rehearsals, we would perform periodically in sacrament meeting and felt grateful when our performance was not outright embarrassing. You can imagine how we felt when President Mieka came to us in September and expressed his desire to have us perform all three sections of Handel's *Messiah* at Christmastime, two and a half months later. The few musicians in the group, myself included, thought that President Mieka must be delirious for suggesting such an impossible task. We realized his resolve, however, when he showed us the choir music he had already purchased and indicated that he had budgeted 800 schillings (32 dollars) from the branch budget to hire a small orchestra and soloists where they were not available in the branch. We were lucky to have a soprano who could carry a tune, let alone sing a solo that would be recognizable. There was, however, no way we could convince President Mieka that his request was impossible, and we began the grueling task of trying to fulfill his wishes.

Through the preparation process some significant blessings came to us. Dr. Alma Dittmer, who taught music at Ricks College and Utah State University for many years, came to Vienna on a semester sabbatical. He generously helped in the preparation of our struggling choir (now increased to fifty members) and offered to sing the bass solos. We were able to convince an inactive member who was a well-known alto soloist in Vienna to sing with us, and a fine soprano who was a member of the Church came to Vienna to study music at the Vienna Academy. One of the members knew a well-trained tenor soloist and convinced him to complete our solo quartet.

By December 1, I had lined up a string quartet from the Vienna Academy to join with the organ to create our tiny orchestra, and our final rehearsals began. The state of our preparation was best described when a close friend, a member of the string quartet, came to me during our final rehearsal and whispered in my ear, "We're not going to make it, are we?" I put my arm around him and said, "Of course we will," but then I realized he might be right. We worked hard and long trying to prepare this gigantic masterpiece. People who had only sung simple hymn melodies were now struggling with the complex melismatic phrases that are so prevalent in the *Messiah*. Others simply could not read music and were singing totally by ear. They had given every ounce of their dedication and large amounts of their time to prepare for this performance.

The Sunday before Christmas is an important part of the religious worship in Austria. Most Austrians attended a midnight mass, even if they never visited another church service during the year. President Mieka scheduled our performance of the *Messiah* on that Sunday at 7:00 P.M. so that it would be completed in time for nonmembers to attend later services. He then asked the entire elders quorum of the branch to distribute flyers throughout the area of Vienna surrounding the church building.

Handel's *Messiah* is not sung with regularity in German-speaking countries, even though Handel was German by birth. Translating scripture from one language to another with musical cohesiveness is very difficult, and the German translation of the *Messiah* is at times awkward. One Jewish convert to the Church who was singing in the choir was distressed about the translation

in "For unto Us a Child Is Born" where the choir sings "goodwill" several times. The German translation used the words "heil, heil" as a replacement, and our Jewish member felt it recalled too closely the salutation given to Adolf Hitler just twenty years earlier. He sang in spite of his concern.

The unfamiliarity but strong reputation of the *Messiah* brought an enormous crowd of music-loving Viennese to our concert. As the crowd grew in size, the hearts of our poor choir shriveled, and some seriously considered heading for the nearest exit. Our trembling was climaxed when two full rows of priests and nuns from the neighboring Catholic church entered our chapel. Clergy of the Catholic Church do not normally enter buildings of other denominations, and as we looked at them we imagined written on their faces, "This had better be good."

The concert began with a warm welcome and assurance of the quality of the performance by President Mieka. This, in spite of the fact that he sang bass in the choir and knew well the status of our ability. He then offered a prayer, most of which I still remember in detail. He asked the Lord to touch the hearts of the choir and other performers. He said we do not do this for ourselves but desire to testify to all present of the life and mission of Jesus Christ, our Savior. He then prayed, "O Lord, we are inadequate to express our testimony through this masterwork without thy presence. We ask thee to send angels from heaven to stand at our side and sing this message with us, that we may hear, not only in spirit, but in actuality the heavenly choirs of which the scriptures speak." The sincerity of his prayer was so powerful that, though we may not have seen the angels, we felt and heard their presence at our side as we sang praises to our Lord. At the conclusion of the performance, the audience sat in solemn silence. They had been deeply moved as the Spirit of our Father in Heaven touched their hearts. "No tongue can speak, neither can there be written by any man, neither can the hearts of men conceive so great and marvelous things as we both saw and heard." It was one of the most significant musical and spiritual experiences of my life.

The vision of music and the gospel that President Mieka held was considerably more mature than my own at that time. He helped me realize that experiences of that nature never just happen but

are created through vision, hard work, discernment, and inspiration. Maintaining and nurturing the great art of music will never happen by itself. If there are not champions of those things that are beautiful and uplifting, they quickly give way to those that display passing fancies and frivolity. We often forget that even the most inexperienced people can be deeply moved by the art of music if it is well presented in a spirit of love and humility. If Church musicians and others do not accept from the deep wellsprings of their hearts the responsibility of being the champions of beautiful music in the Church, this unique and valuable means of communication will quickly die away.

“The Song of the Heart”

The Lord revealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith in the Doctrine and Covenants the following statement: “For my soul delighteth in the song of the heart; yea, the song of the righteous is a prayer unto me” (D&C 25:12). This scripture poses an interesting concept. What is the Lord speaking about when he says, “the song of the heart”? Is he speaking about that marvelous instrument in our chest that pumps life-giving blood to every portion of our body? Without its energy, physical life immediately ends, and cells and tissues that make up our body begin to decay until they become once again the “dust of the earth.”

Of course we know that in addition to a physical body there is an eternal spirit in this frame of ours, but I believe there is deep significance that the Lord used a physical entity, the heart, to describe the “song” that delighteth him. While we can understand the role of this magnificent organ and observe its physical properties and functions, it is still a mystery how that pulsing process begins. Only in the scriptures do we gain insight into the beginning of our physical life: “And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul” (Gen. 2:7). The heart seems to be the link between physical and spiritual life. Without it our body dies, but without the touch of God, the life-giving heartbeats never would begin. Music is both of the earth and of the heavens when it originates from the heart. The Lord said, “Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart” (1 Sam. 16:7).



Directing the Chamber Orchestra, ca. 1995. Courtesy Office of Performance Scheduling, BYU.

Music is one of the greatest expressions of our heartfelt human and spiritual emotions. I am sure we all feel that individuals who have a testimony of the gospel of Jesus Christ possess more potential for the expression of heavenly beauty than others. I have learned so much about music from students who have strong testimonies of a loving and caring Father in Heaven. Because of their testimonies, they should and do perform these masterpieces with more feeling and emotion than most other musicians.

My first experience with this “song of the heart” came when I was only six years old. A woman who had been a friend of our family for many years was dying a slow, torturous death with cancer. Her once vital and energetic body had now shriveled up, her hair was gone, and in every sense she looked as if death had already taken her away. The day before she died, my parents took me to visit her in her home. I was afraid to enter the bedroom where she lay because of the pitiful sight she presented, so I just stood in the doorway. After some brief and, for her, painful conversation, my parents gave indication that they must leave in order to let her rest, but she insisted on singing us a song before we departed. She had loved to sing all of her life and this parting gesture seemed appropriate though the physical pain involved for her to sing must have been excruciating. She sang all verses of “Oh, How Lovely Was the Morning,” and though her voice was no longer as eloquent as it used to be, the communication she flooded us with was of both heaven and earth. I felt her gratitude for life as she sang. She was not afraid to die, and her communication to us could not have been more noble and penetrating than it was as she sang her “song of the heart.” I will never forget the impact she left me with as a young boy. For her, the veil had already opened, and she saw into eternity. Only the beating of her heart kept her in mortality, and we were able to participate in a sacred event—the passing from mortal life into eternal life.

Spiritual Communication through Music

As performers of great music or as composers of new music, we can open our hearts to the inspiration of our Father in Heaven and express our spiritual feelings as deeply or perhaps more deeply

than we can in our most sincere spoken testimony. There are, however, significant preparations we must make in order to do this and devastating pitfalls that we must guard against. "Songs of the heart" do not happen without deep concern, humility, preparation, and commitment.

One of the greatest challenges we face in championing beautiful music is the sometime justified feeling that no one really cares, so why bother. Even in an institution of higher learning such as BYU, it is easy for people generally to become overpowered by this feeling. As memorable as their music is, the chamber orchestra is difficult to sell to an inexperienced sponsor or audience.

A recent poll of radio stations in this country estimated that only 5 percent of the music listened to is of the type normally referred to as "classical." Included in this "classical" description is the music we would usually anticipate hearing in our sacrament meetings, including Church hymns, whether of a historic or recent vintage. Is this music an antiquated and archaic form that is no longer valid? As long as beauty, sincerity, and depth of expression are still important, the answer is a resounding NO.

How then do we show this beauty to a seemingly disinterested public? Certainly one way is by providing opportunities for them to absorb this beauty. In the twenty-plus years that I performed professionally before coming to BYU, the orchestras in which I performed played to audiences who were well educated in music and paid high ticket prices to listen to works of the great masters. With the chamber orchestra, however, we usually play to audiences that have had very little, if any, experience with classical music. Here are a few comments from some of the many letters we have received over the past nine years. Writing how they felt *before* the performance, audience members wrote:

The term "chamber orchestra" always makes me think of a few old guys poured into too-tight tuxedos sitting in a circle and playing dusty, cold classical music.

A second stated:

I must admit that I came to your concert only because my wife made me come. She came only because her sister, the Relief Society president, said she should. The Relief Society president came because she



As principal violist for the Minnesota Orchestra, ca. 1983. Courtesy Marilyn Barrus.

was in charge of the pre-concert dinner. None of us knew what to expect when we sat to listen to your performance, except that we were nervous about being there and prepared for a boring evening.

And a third remarked:

I have always considered accordions, bagpipes, operas, and orchestras to belong to the same family, BORING.

Expressing their feelings *after* the performance, the same people said the following:

Now I see forty-seven young people playing energetic, passionate, finely crafted pieces that were not just notes on a page, but music as it is intended to be. There was a joy in their eyes that I can't explain—a youth, a commitment, a spirit.

And then:

This was one of those rare moments where I was penetrated to the very core. There was a sense of urgency, commitment, and intensity that stood out in both the interpretation and performance.

Finally:

If someone were to ask me why the performance meant so much, I don't know what I would tell them. At first, I was enthralled by the energy and commitment of the young people, then by the true beauty of a music that I had never heard before. Finally, however, I felt that this performance was trying to tell me something—that these young people were united in expressing a much greater message than just beauty through their music. There was a spiritual communication in what I heard and saw, and I feel that most of the people in attendance had that same experience. Somehow we were different at the conclusion of the performance.

I truly feel that the success of the young performers in this orchestra deals directly with their desire to communicate a spiritual message through the art of music. That message has nothing to do with personal pride, showmanship, or arrogance, but is communicated through humility and love. This message will be received by all who listen, whether educated or not, if it is presented in the proper way.

I was deeply moved by a young student who performed a clarinet solo in a sacrament meeting some time ago. She was asked to speak before she performed, and at the conclusion of her remarks

she spoke briefly about the number she was going to play. She chose to perform a work of Johann Sebastian Bach entitled “Come Sweet Death.” She explained that this number was part of a great religious cantata of Bach describing the death and resurrection of the Savior. As the Savior hangs dying on the cross, the choir sings this haunting hymn, “Come Sweet Death.” She then expressed how this title had two meanings for her. The first was a recognition of the agony of the dying Savior and a realization that with his death the pain of crucifixion would finally end. The second meaning had much more significance, however, as she expressed that with the Savior’s death, life is given to all people. In his death, she said, life becomes eternal. Therefore, come sweet death. Her expression was so sincere and filled with the Spirit of God that when she then performed, everyone listening was touched beyond words by what they heard. It was a moment of deep spiritual communication coming from a student of very tender age.

“Learn in Thy Youth”

As my brother, my sister, and I grew up in our home, we were constantly instructed in music. The other arts (literature, painting, sculpture, theater, and so on) were also present. I never remember, however, receiving an overt lesson in art appreciation from my mother and father. Still, our house was filled with inexpensive but beautiful reproductions of some of the greatest art in the world. Above my bed was a small eight-by-twelve-inch reproduction of a work by Rembrandt. I took the picture for granted, only glancing at it sporadically as I passed through the room during the seventeen years I lived in that home. Later, on a gloomy day while serving a mission in Vienna, my companion and I decided to visit the Art History Museum in that magnificent city. It was our preparation day, and we were both homesick. Because of our downtrodden spirits, we walked without meaning through the museum, only briefly glancing at the thousands of paintings that are housed there. Upon entering one large room, however, I saw a painting that filled a huge wall almost eight feet wide. It was the same painting that hung in miniature above my bed. As I looked at it, a flood of emotions coursed through me. I felt like I was home again in the

warmth of my small room in the comfort and care of my loving parents. Strong wonderful memories of my childhood came to my remembrance, and I sat for two hours in front of that masterpiece absorbing every color and emotion. That painting was, and is, a part of my childhood and life.

How can we expect children to love beautiful art and great music if they never experience it in their homes? How can we hope for appreciation of sacred and artistic music in our worship services if we fail to present it? It is impossible for inexperienced and uneducated people to educate themselves. We must be the champions of sacred beauty. We who have felt and who love beauty must help others in their learning process.

Paying the Price of Training

I was moved recently to reread the story of my grandmother. She and my grandfather, as a newly married couple, moved to Marysville, Idaho, in 1901. As a wedding present, she had been given a piano by her family, and with great difficulty she transported the instrument, first by train, and then by wagon to the wilderness south of Yellowstone Park. The population consisted of small farm settlements. The schoolhouse where my grandfather taught and the small church were the only public buildings. The church had a small pedal organ, but grandmother had the only piano in the settlement for several years. Nevertheless, she was determined to give lessons to the children in the area who would consent to study. She loaded the piano in the back of a wagon and pulled it with horses from home to home giving lessons. Because she had the only piano, it was an ideal situation for the students; they only took lessons and were never able to practice.

Several years later, the family moved to Blackfoot, Idaho, where she was tragically left alone to raise nine children. During a four-year period, three of her children died of various illnesses, and sorrow filled her heart. This was a time when neither Church nor state welfare was available, so the family survived by making paper flowers and temple aprons and of course by my grandmother teaching piano lessons. All of her children studied piano and were required to practice diligently. After several years, however, a gifted woman who had studied at the Boston Conservatory came

to Blackfoot with her husband, and my grandmother told her most gifted students and her older children that they must now study with this new teacher. "I am just a pioneer teacher," she told them. "She will take you far beyond my ability to teach."

My grandmother was faced with a difficult dilemma, however, as she had no money to pay for her own children to study. One morning she showed up on the steps of the woman from Boston and said, "I have four children who must study with you. I have no money to pay for lessons, but I will come to your home every morning for two hours and clean house and do your laundry if you will teach them." The woman gladly accepted.

Today, we are fortunate to have superb, sensitive music teachers in most communities for our children. And as these well-trained students come to us at BYU, they enter a unique atmosphere at the School of Music. In a recent discussion my wife and I had with close friends and world-famous French performers Nell Gotkovsky and her brother Ivar, they expressed their joy in being able to relate music to spirituality and their pleasure in having students who were not only musically sensitive, but spiritually alive. "This is a special place," they said, "one that is different than any other music school in the world."

President John Taylor foresaw this atmosphere. Discussing the Sunday Schools in October 1877, the First Presidency made the following statement:

The "Mormon" Church will have a music of its own, of the Hebraic order, and inspired with prophetic themes, and hence, like as in the Catholic Church, it will be universally cultivated as the highest branch of art, and in this in time will give birth among our people to great singers and great composers.¹

This vision of John Taylor is now being fulfilled, but there are many things we must do and guard against. First, we must train ourselves to be outstanding musicians and artists. There is no substitute for hard work and labor. We must train our technical facilities to be competitive with musicians everywhere in the world. There are teachers who will help and guide you in your endeavor, but the most significant preparation you will ever do will be in the privacy of your own practice room and study.

There are no free gifts when it comes to preparation. We can only become true artists when we are prepared in every way to create great works. Singing the “song of the heart” without the ability to be artistic, creates work that is sentimental, trite, and trivial. Such works are around us all the time, and they will fall back into the same obscurity in which they were created. Mediocre art is insignificant and will never last. Great art is born out of keen preparation and hard work. In the scriptures it says, “Be not idle but labor with your might” (D&C 75:3) that ye may have “great joy in the fruit of [your] labors” (Alma 36:25).

Secondly, we must live close to our Father in Heaven, keep his commandments, and serve him with our heart and soul. I feel that the fourth section of the Doctrine and Covenants applies not only to missionary work, but also to us who are striving to become musicians. Listen to these words and compare them to the vision of President John Taylor:

For behold the field is white already to harvest; and lo, he that thrusteth in his sickle with his might, the same layeth up in store



Directing the Chamber Orchestra, ca. 1990, BYU. Courtesy Office of Performance Scheduling, BYU.

that he perisheth not, but bringeth salvation to his soul; And faith, hope, charity and love, with an eye single to the glory of God, qualify him for the work. Remember faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, brotherly kindness, godliness, charity, humility, diligence. Ask, and ye shall receive; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. (D&C 4:4-7)

Finally, we must learn the great “songs” that have gone before us and those that are now being created. We must have known and experienced great art from many sources in order to be able to define, understand, and create art ourselves. We create from a lifetime of experience in which we cherish every avenue of inspiration we can explore. We must know the great composers and interpreters well and learn from them, for great art never was created from a void. We must learn and grow with every step we take and have a fertile mind in which new concepts can be realized out of the vast knowledge we gain throughout our lives.

Learning Together

Several years ago there was a program on educational TV that was part of the Nova series. This program was entitled “Why Do Birds Sing?” It introduced us into a kind of Garden of Eden, and everywhere were the songs of birds—an ecstasy of melody piled on melody. Species of birds of every color and variety were melodists in their own dialect in their particular guarded area, each singing his own song of life and joy. The narrator, a famous ornithologist, whose special study was to try to learn what makes birds sing, talked about the results of his study. He took many nestlings (just emerging from their shell) of the same species and put each of them in an isolated chamber which was perfectly soundproofed. Into some chambers, he piped a recording of the song of the parent or adult bird of that species, varying, however, the period of time it was introduced—some nestlings heard the song for a brief period at two weeks of age; others when four weeks of age; still other were six weeks of age before they heard the adult song; and some heard the adult song much later than that. Then there were the nestlings that grew in absolute silence except for that sound which each made in his own isolation. Of this last group, each nestling did finally sing the song of his species, but it was a dull, flattened version,

without sparkle, embellishment or joy. A later reunion with the adult family of his species did not change his song—it ever remained a dull, mediocre song of life. On the other hand, experimentation with the first-mentioned groups, who were introduced to the adult song at different periods of their isolation, revealed an ability to imitate the high and low tessituras and joyful embellishments of the parent birds. In this same spirit, we cannot learn our “song” in isolation, but must hear the singing of others to create beauty within ourselves.

Through our testimonies of the gospel of Jesus Christ, we, too, have learned together the “songs” of our Father in Heaven. Through music we have been given an avenue of expressing these songs that can penetrate the souls of those who will listen. This is why you are unique! Those who know the Father and who bear witness of his love for his children have a different song to sing than anyone else on this earth. We must not be afraid to sing it with all the love, humility, and courage that we possess. This is what President Taylor saw in his vision. Young people, hundreds of them, singing together unto the Lord “a new song” (Psalms 98:1). The Lord said to Job: “Where wast thou . . . when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?” (Job 38:4, 7). This is our calling, to sing the songs of the morning stars and shout for joy, embracing and clinging to life.

Moved by Experience

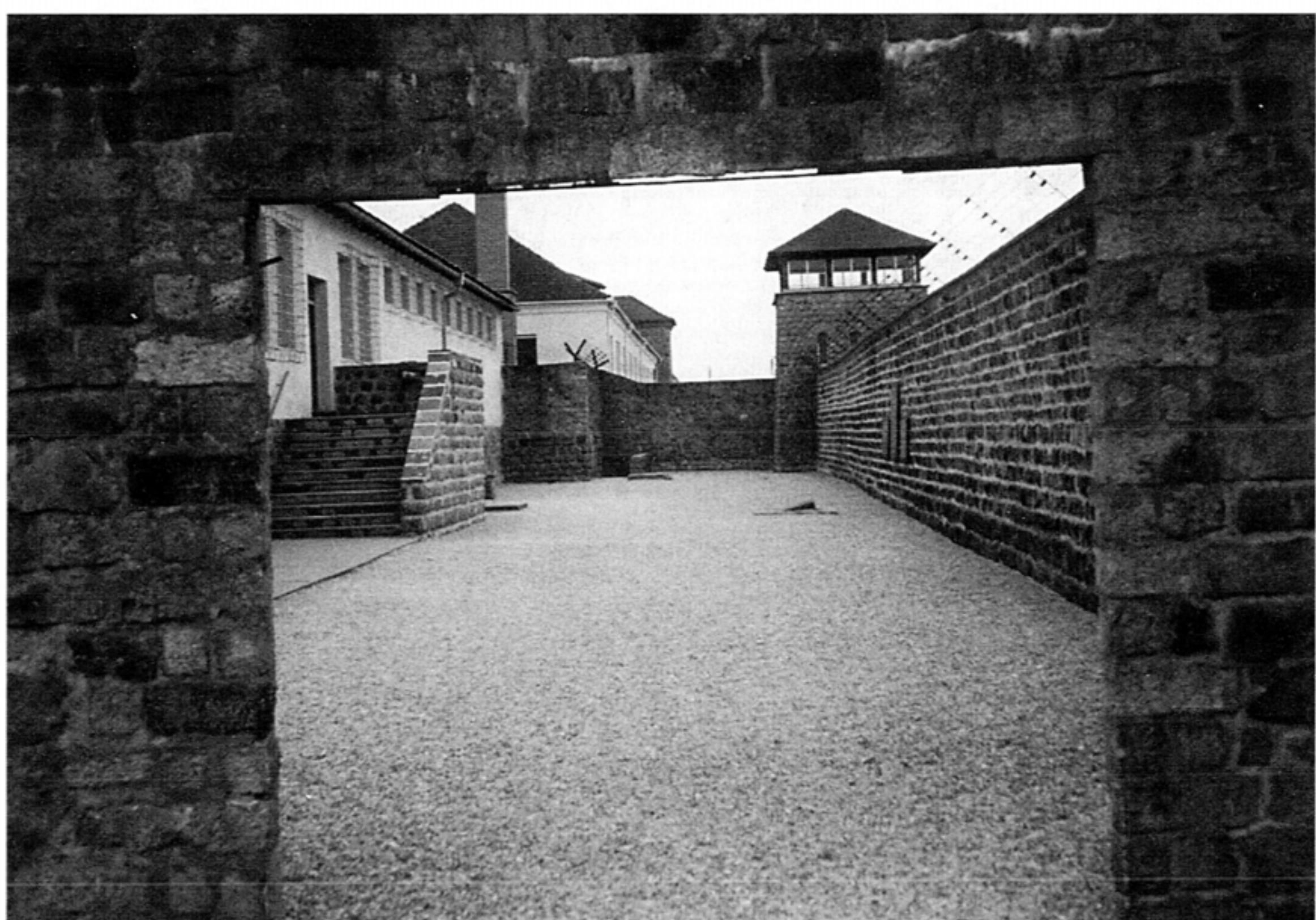
Music is an expression of what we are and have experienced. The more significant our experiences and the greater our understanding of life, death, and eternal life, the deeper our ability will be to speak from the heart. If you will permit me, I would like to parallel three deeply personal experiences with the masterpiece *Death and Transfiguration*, by Richard Strauss. This great piece of music expresses so dramatically the gamut of human feelings.

“Ringing Silence and Death.” The first part of Strauss’s masterpiece begins with the sorrow and pain of death. It approaches death with fear and trembling and views it as the end of life. “There is nothing more for us,” it seems to say, “just ringing silence and death.” Suddenly the music explodes in what can only be

described as a gigantic scream. "No," it seems to cry. "No, this cannot be the end!"

One of the significant blessings we have on our campus at BYU is a Performing Arts Management that helps our performing groups arrange concerts in all parts of the world. The group that I have the privilege of working with is the BYU Chamber Orchestra. In 1990, this orchestra had the privilege of touring Central Europe, where we performed twenty-eight concerts in thirty-two days. We had many memorable experiences while touring and felt the love of many people as we performed great music for them. One particular event, however, brought us close to the pain and sorrow that life can bring.

During the last week of our tour, we visited the small Austrian town of Mauthausen on the Danube River. During the Second World War, the countryside surrounding the river served as a concentration camp for the Nazi regime, and most of the buildings and walls of this "place of death" are still standing. The camp was



The Nazi concentration camp at Mauthausen, Germany. Clyn Barrus and the BYU Chamber Orchestra members were deeply moved by their visit to this site on their 1990 European tour. Courtesy Marilyn Barrus.



Cliff near Mauthausen. This is the cliff at which many Jews and other prisoners met their deaths. Courtesy Marilyn Barrus.

situated above a large open granite mine, and the survival of the prisoners depended on their ability to work in the mine. Access into the open quarry was only possible by using a long and very steep open staircase that had been constructed out of granite stones. The stones had been purposely placed unevenly so that the process of walking up the narrow stairs was difficult and painful, especially when prisoners were forced to carry large stones out of the mine on their shoulders. The stairs became known as the "stairs of death" when, at specific times each day as it was crowded with prisoners carrying heavy stones, two guards would push the top prisoners backward, creating a domino effect of bodies and stones that would crush and kill as the heavy stones plummeted downward. Those that were not killed by the stones and long fall were shot, and all were buried in mass graves.

Many Jews from Holland were sent to Mauthausen. When they arrived, they were chained to a wall just inside the camp to await "processing." Often they were left here without warmth, food, or sanitary facilities for days, and many of them died of exposure with their hands chained to the walls. Rather than unchain them from the walls, their captors often just severed their hands, and they were thrown in mass graves for burial, some of them still alive.

During the last few years of the war, a quicker method of bringing death was found. As the prisoners arrived at the camp, they were lined up at the top of the huge cliff that overlooked the granite quarry. Below the cliff was a large pond of water five or six feet deep that had been created from falling rain. As the prisoners approached the cliff in single file, they were forced to push the person in front of them off the cliff to his or her death below. Death was certain, because if the brutal fall did not kill them, they would drown in the water below, being unable to swim out with mutilated and broken bodies. Hundreds were killed each day in this fashion, and their dead bodies were dragged out of the mine by other prisoners and then buried in mass graves or burned in the newly created ovens.

We saw one area of the camp where so-called high priority prisoners were held. If the Nazis did not get from them the answers they wanted, they were taken from their barracks, stripped naked, and chained standing between two posts. Most died from exposure to the bitter Austrian winters.

The effect of learning of these atrocities and standing in the place where they occurred was overwhelming to all members of the chamber orchestra. I remember seeing three girls of the orchestra standing with their arms around each other in a desolate corner of the camp with tears of sorrow streaming down their faces. I will never forget one of the young men in the orchestra walking solemnly at the bottom of the granite pit, now covered with grass, bushes, and wild flowers. In his face, I saw the agony of the thousands who had been brutally murdered in that place. My heart agonized with him and for all those who had died. I thought of the words of Isaiah when he said, “In that day shall his strong cities be as a forsaken bough . . . and there shall be desolation” (Isa. 17:9). The words recorded in 3 Nephi following the crucifixion of the Savior rang in my mind, “Wo, wo, wo unto this people; wo unto the inhabitants of the whole earth except they shall repent; for the devil laugheth, and his angels rejoice, because of the slain of the fair sons and daughters of my people” (3 Ne. 9:2).

Life is not intended to be without pain and sorrow. Lehi, in the blessing to his son Jacob, said, “For it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things. If not so, . . . righteousness could not be brought to pass, neither wickedness, neither holiness nor misery, neither good nor bad” (2 Ne. 2:11). As does the first part of Strauss’s tone poem, the “song of the heart” must be able to express pain and sorrow.

That evening before our concert, we met in a testimony meeting to express our overwhelming feelings of the day. Several attempted to put their thoughts into words, but they couldn’t possibly express the power of what they felt. At the concert, we performed the *Adagio for Strings* of the American composer Samuel Barber. This is a masterpiece for string orchestra with a slow-moving melody gradually building to a dramatic, powerful climax. We had performed the work many times and it was deeply loved by the musicians. That night, however, after our experience in Mauthausen, the piece became a means for all of the young people to express their feelings. Truly “where words ended music began,” as the composition was performed as I had never heard it before. The combined desire of these young people to express their sorrow, compassion, and love for the people who died at that

camp created a performance that none who were present will ever forget. "No tongue can speak, neither can there be written" what was expressed that night.

"Let Me Live." The second section of *Death and Transfiguration* dramatically expresses the desire to live. It is a passionate portrayal of life and a desperate grasp to hold on to it. "Let me live," it appears to cry. "Let me live, for life is too beautiful to be lost."

Almost twenty years ago, my dear wife and I and our two oldest children, then one and two years old, were involved in a terrible car crash. The two children and myself survived with only minor injuries, but my wife was severely injured in the accident. She had many internal injuries and broken bones, including many fractures of the pelvic bone. Though she was not pronounced dead upon arriving at the hospital, the doctors gave her little hope of survival. She was immediately taken into surgery for many hours and then put in an intensive care unit where I was told, "We have done all that we can do; we don't know if she will recover."

It was Christmas day when the accident occurred, and the night was long, painful, and filled with deep emotions and fears. There were many severely injured people in this unit of the hospital, and when one of them would reach a crisis stage, a soft but penetrating alarm would go off, and doctors and nurses would rush in the room to try to revive the individual. No one knew who the doctors were working with until sometime later, usually when a dead body draped with a white cloth was wheeled from the room. "Who is it?" would pound in the hearts of the waiting loved ones in the next room. "Is it mine? Is it mine?"

This happened several times through the night, and each time was filled with the terror, beyond description, of having lost someone you love. I can't possibly express my feelings through that long and painful night. I found myself pleading before the feet of my Father in Heaven for the life of my dear Marilyn. "Don't take her away, don't take her away," I would say over and over in my prayers. At one moment, I felt falsely impressed that she had just died, and a cry came up from my heart that seemed to say, "How could you let this happen?"

Early in the morning as my emotions seemed to reach a crisis, my heart broke and gave a silent long scream, "Father, where are



At the Salt Lake Temple. Clyn and his wife, Marilyn Barrus, in 1997. Courtesy Marilyn Barrus.

you, why have you left me so alone?" At that moment I heard a voice say to me so clearly, "I am with you, my son—I am here with you." I walked out of the waiting room into the cold morning just as the sunlight began to break over the horizon, and I was given a firm promise that she would live. At that moment, I understood the feelings of Nephi when the Savior spoke to him after his long night of trial and prayer for the survival of his people. He was told, "Lift up your head and be of good cheer; for behold, the time is at

hand, and on this night shall the sign be given, and on the morrow come I into the world" (3 Ne. 1:13).

Only through such experiences do I understand what it is to love life and almost lose it. Only in this way do I understand the passion for life that Strauss describes in his wordless poem. Life is beautiful and something to grasp hold of and cherish and love.

Death and Transfiguration. The last third of Strauss's *Death and Transfiguration* is described in its title. The music once again returns to the silence of death which seems to hang heavily around us. Then, after one final scream of fear, the darkness suddenly disappears and a veil opens, showing a pathway that leads us beyond death. At first we are hesitant to walk forward, but step by step we penetrate this sacred sanctuary. With each moment our confidence gains and our heart swells until we can hold our joy no longer. "Life is eternal," we sing, "Life is eternal." We fall on our knees to express our gratitude and feel the warmth of Him who brought us beyond death into life.

A little over ten years ago, my own mother, who was a great musician and example to me, died from cancer. I express to you the great influence this dedicated woman had on my life until her passing and the sincere gift she gave to music in the Church throughout her life. Many of the thoughts in this address are a continuation of her philosophy—love, and dedication to music and the gospel of Jesus Christ. The doctors had given up any hope of her living, and it was just a matter of time before death overtook her. I had the privilege of spending three days with her shortly before her death, and during this time she would pass back and forth between consciousness and unconsciousness many times. During her wakeful moments, she would speak as if she had seen a vision and would try to express her thoughts. I tried to write them down, though it was difficult to do under the emotions I felt. These are three of her last statements to me and to her Creator:

I know that my Redeemer lives. I know from a lifetime of communication with him. I have heard him in so many ways. Some in manifestations of grandeur and some in sacred silence, but always in reverence and humility. At times I have felt him with such depths that words fail to express the sacredness of the moment. Such moments can only be felt, dear child. They can only be communicated through

the spirit. Listen, do you hear? Can you feel it burn in your soul? I know that my Redeemer liveth because the heavens have been opened to me and I have felt his presence.

Pain, you have been a familiar companion. I have known you well. You have been a constant reminder of the frailty of my body, of mortality in which we live here upon the earth. Through you I have felt the reality of death and have tried to prepare for it. Now that it is close, I wonder if I am ready. But what more can I do, I must have courage.

Dear Lord, in reverence I come before thee. I fall to my knees in silence and present myself to thee. I have felt thy kindness, I know thy love. I beg thy forgiveness and seek thy grace. Thou has created me and sent me forth, now I return to report my mission. I come to thee as one who has been richly blest in mortality. My blessings overwhelm me as I kneel before thee and express appreciation too deep for words. I thank thee for the privilege of knowing the gospel of thy beloved son Jesus Christ. It has guided my life since infancy and has permitted me to feel thy spirit continually. It has given me hope and knowledge so few have been privileged to have. I thank thee that I have been able to serve in this great gospel and express my feelings to others. I have tried to express from the heart and I pray that it is received by those who have listened. My mission on earth is completed. I now present myself for my new calling. I pray that my life has been worthy for that which thou hast promised the righteous. I present myself to thee as thy servant.

Sleep, everything must sleep. Dear body, you too must rest for a time. You have served me well, and I thank you. My spirit aches for the time when you will be called forth again to blossom like new buds in the spring, in beauty and in perfection. I pray that it will not be long, but for now you must rest, dear body. You must sleep.

The experiences I have related to you are some of the most sacred and holy that I have had. I have told them to you to help you see that when we in the orchestra perform this great work, *Death and Transfiguration*, we see it as more than an aesthetic experience. It is the outpouring of our soul, as we unitedly express our testimony through our individual experiences of eternal life and of the mission of Jesus Christ, our Savior. It will be our "song of the heart" as we seek to communicate the bridge between mortality and immortality. Hopefully, it will not just be well-constructed notes, harmonies, and phrases, but an interpretation of a masterpiece of music by children of God who have been touched by his spirit and who bear testimony of his reality.



With mother, Ruth H. Barrus, ca. 1959. Courtesy Marilyn Barrus.

Our Birthright and Calling

My mother expressed a thought as she gave her talk in the first Church Music Workshop held at Brigham Young University in 1979. She said:

Our birthright tells us that the "precious and chief things of heaven and earth shall be our inheritance." Our modern prophets tell us that all that is true, good and beautiful "must be gathered home to Zion." Isaiah, looking at us in our time, tells us we can do this because of

our faith in God and “stoutness of heart.” We will not build our musical architecture of mud bricks that are fallen as the world is now doing, nor of sycamore that quickly becomes worm eaten and are cut down, but we will build with the cedars of Lebanon and of hewn stone. We will go to the mountain of the Lord for our stone, and through inspiration we will shape it with our own hands, and we will build a musical temple which resounds with the songs of eternal fulfillment, making a joyful sound unto the Lord! This the Lord expects us to do, and this we can do.²

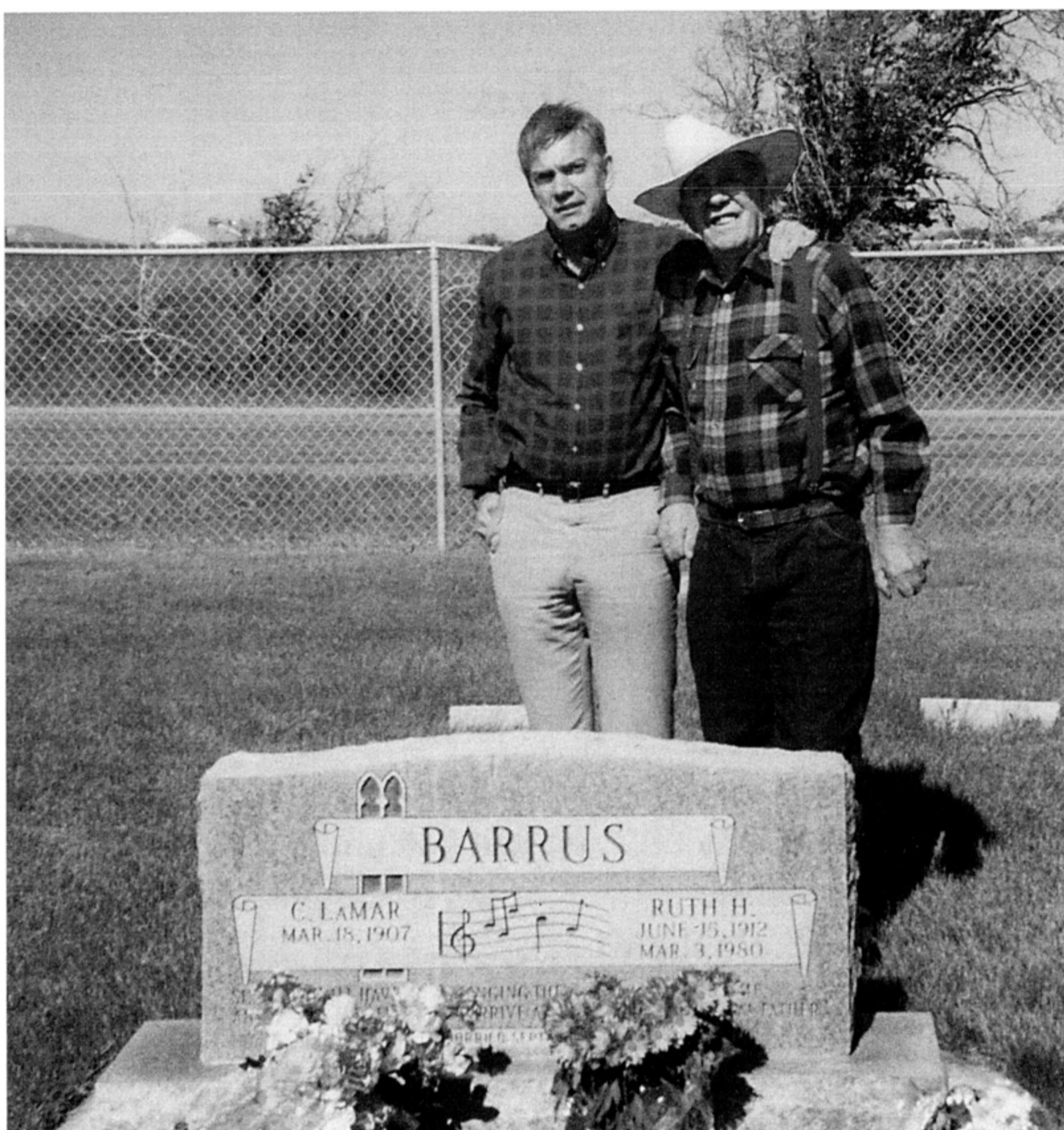
I bear you my witness that this challenge is more real today than it was in 1979. We are the builders of beauty in the gospel of Jesus Christ and the champions of sacred expression in music. If we do not strengthen our resolve, the efforts of President Mieka, of my grandmother, of the young clarinetist, and of so many hundreds of others will fade away. I pray that we may preserve the beauties of the past and strengthen our resolve to continue singing new and joyful and righteous songs unto the Lord.

In conclusion, let me read a poem by the Argentine writer José Hernández. It communicates beautifully what I have been trying to say to you today—that music is both of heaven and earth, and that our song, the song of all of you here today and others who are not here, can be both inspired and accepted of the Lord. This is our calling and charge:

Cantando me he de morir,
Cantando me han de enterrar,
y cantando he de llegar
al pie del Eterno Padre;
dende el vientre de mi madre
vine a esta mundo a cantar.³

Singing I will have to die,
Singing they will have to bury me,
and singing I will have to arrive
at the feet of the Eternal Father;
from the womb of my mother
I came to this world to sing.⁴

May we all be a part of that great song—the “song of the heart,” the song of the Lord, in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.



With his father, LaMar Barrus, ca. 1986. The men stand at the grave of Ruth H. Barrus, wife and mother. Courtesy Marilyn Barrus.

NOTES

¹"The First Presidency on Music," *Utah Musical Times* 2 (October 1, 1877): 105.

²Ruth H. Barrus, "Make a Joyful Sound" (address given at the Church Music Workshop, Brigham Young University, August 13, 1979), 14.

³José Hernández, *Los Tesoros del "Martín Fierro"* (Buenos Aires: Librería del Colegio, 1946), 55.

⁴Ruth H. Barrus credits Brian Stanton for the English translation of Hernández's poem. Ruth H. Barrus, "Why Do Birds Sing?" (honors lecture given to Ricks College faculty, Rexburg, Idaho, March 19, 1976).