

Program Notes:

In a series of eight songs, SUMMER: 2 AM charts the dizzying, stupefying, awful and wonderful transformation of a person to a parent. In approaching the writing of the piece, we discussed all sorts of ways to complement Barber's KNOXVILLE: SUMMER 1915...and some musical and lyrical ideas kept surfacing, such as the image of a rocking chair on a summer night, and the inevitability of change coupled with a yearning for constancy. Our soprano, the wonderful Laurie Heimes, is a new mother herself, and when we met her at her home to discuss ideas for the piece on a hot, summer day, she hurried in and out of the room, gracefully and with great humor juggling the demands of a newborn with our free-wheeling discussion, all on very little sleep. There was the hot summer day and the rocking chair of the Barber piece, but the point of view was not of a child but of this very new parent. It seemed a natural, logical pursuit for us: write about this very personal, idiosyncratic and yet almost universal experience. How does a person realize, not just with the mind but with every part of their exhausted being, that everything, the whole world, has changed?

—Mary Liz McNamara and Robert Maggio

Some notes on the music:

Samuel Barber's KNOXVILLE: SUMMER OF 1915 was one of the first classical albums I purchased when I got to college, recommended to me by one of my first composition teachers who thought I'd relate to it, sensing in my own "young" music a spirit kindred to Barber's. Of course, he was right: Barber's music (and Copland's, Bernstein's and Ives') became a beacon of light for me amidst the often overwhelming variety of 20th Century music I was exposed to as an undergraduate. Thus it was something of a dream to have been commissioned many years later by Orchestra 2001 to create a companion piece to KNOXVILLE to celebrate the Barber Centennial. My very first call was to enlist Mary Liz McNamara to write the words for this new "song cycle". Mary Liz is a talented singer-songwriter, and a good friend whom I had met through the BMI musical theater workshop in New York. We'd collaborated on three other concert music projects over the past four years. She's brilliantly funny and soulful, and I knew that collaborating with her would push me into new territory musically and dramatically. The second call was to Laura Heimes, who would be singing the world premiere, to ask her to meet with us to discuss what this new piece should be about. (see note above) And yes, the opening of SUMMER is a paraphrase of KNOXVILLE, an attempt for the "singer" to use Barber's music as a lullaby for her restless child.