

aMUSEment: Play in the Workshop

Five Songs for SATB Solo Quartet and Violin, Violoncello, String Bass, Percussion and Piano

The authors dedicate these songs to our fellow citizens of Central Pennsylvania who have endured the coronavirus pandemic with courage, dignity, and generosity.

These songs were written for a project that honors a Centre County family and celebrates the spirit of invention and creativity. Vernon Garbrick – and his older brothers Lester and Lewis – all grew up on a family farm in Brush Valley between Linden Hall and Centre Hall during the early twentieth century. They were farm boy tinkerers, welders, and inventors. During the Second World War, their Centre Hall machine shop produced cement mixers and sawbucks for New Holland Corporation. After the war, Vernon began developing carnival rides and Lester built his own airplane. By the end of his life, Vernon held 18 patents for traveling amusements, and Lester maintained and circulated them to regional carnivals through Garbrick Amusements. During the summer months, the family traveled with the equipment to carnivals and festivals throughout central Pennsylvania, with Vernon’s wife Dorothy and daughter Shirley tending popcorn and funnel cake wagons. Shirley, in her nineties, still lives in the family home behind Vernon’s Workshop, and she remains a lively source of stories, which informed these songs. Members of the Garbrick family maintain remnants of the carnival fleet, which still travels from sheds behind Vernon’s Workshop. (For more, see Ralph Gray: *The Wizard of Centre Hall*)

1. Brush Valley Boys

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Background of Garbrick family and brothers, early 20th century enthusiasm for flight, mobility, modernity.

2. Hephaestus of Centre Hall

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Follows Vernon’s life. Introduces him as a mythic figure, his daughter Shirley, WWII.

3. Beauty School

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Expands the idea of invention to include transformation, renovation, etc. and adds Shirley as another kind of maker. Vernon worked in converted garages, and Shirley had a beauty shop in a converted garage in Pleasant Gap.

4. Forty Miler

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Based on an interview with one of the lifelong Garbrick carnies, Donald Tice. (Garbricks considered themselves “Forty Milers,” that is, they only traveled about that far to set up at carnivals, and then returned home that night to sleep.)

5. He Found A Way

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This slogan, inscribed on Vernon Garbrick’s tomb stone with an image of the Ferris wheel he invented, complicates the hero/genius idea. The song begins to name others who made Vernon’s inventions possible, and challenges the audience to go forth in his spirit, and “mend, invent, and change.”