

“A River Runs Through It”

A few thoughts for Conclave
July 16, 2005

Good evening Brothers. I hope that everyone is having a great time here at Conclave. Seeing to the resurrection of Conclave this year, after its decline and demise last year, has been a steadfast dream of James Mann, your National Collegiate Representative, and I want to thank him for his commitment to making this marvelous event happen so that you could enjoy it and benefit from it. And the National Staff has been working tirelessly preparing for this event, just as they do with every other event and program offered by the fraternity. The volunteer leaders like me and the NEC would not be able to offer so many outstanding programs to the Brotherhood without them, so I thank them for their dedication and hard work. I think all of you would agree with me that we are indeed lucky to have the greatest National Staff any fraternity could ever have!

It is good to be here with you during this special event. I always find it renewing to spend time with the Brotherhood, and I know it re-charges your batteries too. This is a weekend of very intense Brotherhood, the likes of which many of you will not experience again unless you come to our National Convention. I would encourage you to do so. We are committed to doing our best not only to make it a great fraternal event, but to make sure that it will be a great musical event for you as well. The National Staff and the NEC and I will be pulling out all the stops to make it a Convention to remember.

As I was thinking of what I might say during my few minutes at the rostrum, my mind kept returning over and over to the Great Object of this fraternity. I have already spoken on this topic in depth at the Northeast Regional, when I gave a speech I called, “The Mystic Ideals of the Sinfonia,” so I will not recount that here, particularly since there are some colony members among us who might be somewhat stunned by the imagery I’d use. I’ve already publicly thanked Brothers Mongiovi and Lichtenberg for their singular efforts to restore the Object at the 2003 convention, but I wish to do so again, now, from the bottom of my heart. I hope you all understand that without their unswerving dedication, the restoration of the Object would not have happened.

That being said, I wondered what I might say that I had not said before, but which would be appropriate to share with you tonight. As I pondered the Object during some moments of quiet contemplation it struck me that I should look for a common element that underpins the various parts of the Object. Even those of you who are not yet initiated know the words, which speak of the development of the best and truest fraternal spirit; the mutual welfare and brotherhood of musical students; the advancement of music in America; and a loyalty to the Alma Mater. We think of these as separate things, quite naturally. But I wanted to point out to you that there may be more common ground than you had imagined, a thread which runs through the entire tapestry. That is what prompted me to entitle this little fireside conference, “A River Runs Through It.” Many of you may have seen the outstanding movie of that name, starring Brad Pitt and Tom Skerritt. In this movie the river is perhaps *the* central character, running constantly in

spite of the human comings and goings, and providing a unity to the atmosphere of the movie. I hope at the conclusion of my thoughts tonight, my choice of a title will make sense to you.

As we look at our Object, reflect with me for a moment on the deeper meaning of “Brotherhood,” among those of us who share the bond as initiated brothers, with others involved in music who stand outside of our sacred fellowship, and indeed extending the concept to the brotherhood of all mankind. Do you see any connection? And think for a moment of the advancement of music in America, not only regarding our sense of deep pride in advancing our own artistic culture but in the way music touches the lives of others through our Mills Music Missions, just as our beloved Founder did more than a century ago with his flower missions. And what of loyalty to our Alma Mater? Who among you will not return to your school from this event dedicated anew to making your chapter stronger and your sheltering institution a better place for all involved?

What feeling is at the root of all these things, Brothers? Brotherhood...uplifting mankind through the beauty and power of music...the feeling of wanting to do generous things with our energy and talents, in a spirit of gratitude, to benefit our music departments and reaching out to our communities...

The answer came to me quietly--The unifying principle beneath the various parts of our Object is love, Brothers. Pure and simple. It's love. Think about it. Perhaps you may think that this is a stretch, but I don't think so. You may not be used to thinking of love in these ways, so let's consider for a moment...

Think about the feeling you have for each other, both established Brothers and those just initiated, at the conclusion of our magnificent initiation Ritual; of when you support a Brother who has just lost a family member, or if you are that Brother, of how you feel towards those supporting you; of when you comfort a brother who is hurting from the end of a relationship; of when you help a Brother celebrate a birthday, a wedding, the birth of a child; the feeling you have this weekend, spending so much time engaged in activities and discussion designed to bring you together...

Think about the feeling you get when you as a chapter give a scholarship to a deserving, needy student in your department; when you help one of the other fraternities with a project that will benefit them, even if it doesn't benefit your chapter; when you offer to do some generous act for one of your fellow students who is not even a member of our fraternity, and who may not even understand why you would care enough to help them; when you take on a fundraiser for some humanitarian effort...

Think about the feeling you get when you do a Mills Music Mission, in spite of the challenge of being in an environment of pain and suffering, and you see the gratitude in the eyes of a sick person, and perhaps their family, upon hearing your music; when you help a Brother and participate in his recital; when you play a great piece of music and it's obvious that it not only touches you but your audience; when your chapter commissions a new work and understands that this will be something of benefit to the larger human

community and not just yourselves; when you do an American Music recital and ponder the art created by our fellow Americans, inspired and made possible by the values and ideals of our society...

Think about the feeling you get when you do something to benefit your department, with all its flaws and frustrations, but you know down deep that this is your “home,” the place that makes it possible for you to have a chapter and the benefits of being a part of this Brotherhood; and think of the Fraternity as your Alma Mater too—an organization which has changed your lives for the better and allowed you to grow together as men and Brothers, that thought that is in the back of your mind when you seek new members, knowing what an impact it will have on THEIR lives...

Do you see my point?

Whether explicit or implicit, I think that love must (and does) inform everything we do as Sinfonians. Even when we disagree with each other, it must be in the context of our spirit of Brotherhood. The alternative is to allow our disagreements to become personal and destructive. The Fraternity has already had to navigate some rough waters over the last several decades for that very reason. But that era is behind us, hopefully forever, and we must move forward in a spirit of Brotherly love in order to achieve and to appreciate the full scope of the vision set forth by our Revered Founders. Without love we can achieve nothing. With love, we can live up to the ideals of our Object and our deeper values known only to initiated Brothers. If we live The Object, and the vows we make to our values and to each other, the world will be a better place, and we will be better men. It is not necessary for the world at large to know our deeper secrets, but it is my hope that the world at large will know us, when they meet us, by our character. And I hope that, beneath the surface, our love for each other, for our fellowmen, for our art and for our Alma Mater will be a radiance that will be felt by all who encounter us.

A river does indeed run through it, and that river is love. The way lies before us, Brothers. Let us proceed, with love.

Thank you.