

# *The Gift of the Magi*

for Narrator and Orchestra

Music

by

*Karen Amrhein*

# *The Gift of the Magi*

Total Timing (with *Overture*): 20 Minutes

Flute

Oboe

Clarinet (B $\flat$ )

Bassoon

Horn (F)

Trumpets (C) 1 & 2

Tenor Trombone

Bass Trombone

Timpani (3)

Percussion (1 Player): Suspended Cymbal, Triangle

Narrator (Note: The voices of Madame Sofronie, Della, and Jim may be performed by members of the orchestra, if desired.)

Violins 1

Violins 2

Violas

Cellos

Double Basses

*Score is at concert pitch*

"There are stories in everything. I've got some of my best yarns from park benches, lampposts, and newspaper stands."

— William S. Porter

While few today may recognize the name of American writer William Sydney Porter (1862-1910), many will know the stories published under his pen name "O. Henry". These 400-some short stories are identified by their wordplay and wit, characterization and cleverness — the latter most notably in the device whose mastery he shares with Roald Dahl: the surprise ending. Literary critics credit him with shaping the short story into an art form.

O. Henry remains best known for his Christmas favorite, "The Gift of the Magi", about a young couple who, though lacking money, remain rich. The story has been copied, re-told, and parodied countless times, so a musical setting is not out of line, especially since William Porter happened to be a fine musician, playing the guitar and mandolin, and, as a member of the "Hill City Quartet", singing at gatherings and serenading the young women in town.

The Susquehanna Symphony has kindly performed my winter music in the past (including my narration work "The Christmas Mirror"), so when Sheldon Bair asked if I have any other narration pieces for the Christmas season, I decided to go ahead with a project I'd contemplated and compose a musical accompaniment for O. Henry's classic.

Music is storytelling, and I consider myself a short story writer, musically speaking, so O. Henry would seem a fine choice as a collaborator. Still, setting a finely crafted story to music remains a delicate business: the music should gently underline the story and support it emotionally where that would be helpful — and without seeking attention for itself, and get out of the way the rest of the time (much like a good film score). This particular score is also designed to compliment the strengths of the Susquehanna Symphony. I hope I've succeeded in adding a little more pleasure to a very pleasurable story.

— Karen Amrhein, May 2008

Score in C  
Gift Timing: 16 Minutes

to Sheldon Bair and the Susquehanna Symphony  
*The Gift of the Magi*

Text: O. Henry  
Music: Karen Amrhein (ASCAP)

*Introduction* ♩ = 56

The score is for the introduction of 'The Gift of the Magi' by Karen Amrhein. It is in 3/4 time and marked with a tempo of ♩ = 56. The score is divided into three systems of staves. The first system includes Flute, Oboe, Clarinet (B♭), and Bassoon. The second system includes Horn (F), Trumpets (C) 1 & 2, Trombone, and Bass Trombone. The third system includes Timpani, Percussion (with a triangle), Narration, Violins 1, Violins 2, Violas, Cellos, and Double Basses. The Flute part begins with a melodic line marked *mp*. The Percussion part features a triangle part marked *pp* and *p*. The string parts (Violins 1, Violins 2, Violas, Cellos, and Double Basses) all begin with a melodic line marked *p*. The score is in 3/4 time and consists of 16 measures.

Flute

Oboe

Clarinet (B $\flat$ )

Bassoon

Horn (F)

Trumpets (C) 1 & 2

Trombone

Bass Trombone

Timpani

Percussion  
to Triangle  
Triangle

Narration

Violins 1

Violins 2

Violas

Cellos

Double Basses

\* Throughout piece: use open strings wherever possible

6 (A) One Dollar and Eighty-Seven Cents ♩ = 56

Fl.

Ob.

Cl.

Bn.

6 (A) One Dollar and Eighty-Seven Cents ♩ = 56

Hn.

Tpts.

Tbn.

B. Tbn.

6 (A) One Dollar and Eighty-Seven Cents ♩ = 56

Timp.

Perc.

to Susp. Cymbal

Narr. One dollar and eighty-seven cents. Pennies saved one and two at a time by bulldozing the grocer and the vegetable man and the butcher until one's cheeks burned

That was all. And sixty cents of it was in pennies.

6 (A) One Dollar and Eighty-Seven Cents ♩ = 56

Vn. 1

Vn. 2

Vla.

Vc.

D.B.

9

Fl. *mp* solo

Ob.

Cl. *mp* solo

Bn. *mp* solo

9

Hn. *mp*

Tpts. *mp*

Tbn. *mf*

B. Tbn.

9

Timp.

Perc. Susp. Cymbal *p* *mf*

Narr. with the silent imputation of parsimony that such close dealing implied. Three times Della counted it. One dollar and eighty-seven cents. And the next day would be Christmas.

9

Vn. 1 *mp*

Vn. 2 *mp*

Vla. *mp*

Vc. *mp*

D.B. *mp*

13 (B) ♩ = 96

Fl. *f* > *pp*

Ob. *f* > *pp*

Cl. *f* > *pp*

Bn. *f* > *pp*

13 (B) ♩ = 96

Hn. *f* > *pp* mute

Tpts. *f* > *pp* mute

Tbn. *f* > *pp* mute

B. Tbn. *f* > *pp* mute

13 (B) ♩ = 96

Timp. *pp*

Perc.

Narr. There was clearly nothing to do but flop down on the shabby little couch and howl. So Della did it. Which instigates the moral reflection that life is made up of sobs, sniffles, and smiles, with sniffles predominating.

13 (B) ♩ = 96

Vn. 1 *f* > *pp*

Vn. 2 *f* > *pp*

Vla. *f* > *pp*

Vc. *f* > *p*

D.B. *f* > *pp*

20 (C)

Fl.

Ob.

Cl.

Bn.

20 (C)

Hn.

Tpts.

Tbn.

B. Tbn.

20 (C)

Timp.

Perc.

Narr. While the mistress of the home is gradually subsiding from the first stage to the second, take a look at the home. A furnished flat at \$8 per week.

20 (C)

Vn. 1

Vn. 2

Vla.

Vc.

D.B.

24

Fl.

Ob.

Cl.

Bn.

24

Hn.

Tpts.

Tbn.

B. Tbn.

con sord.

*mp*

con sord.

*mp*

con sord.

*mp*

con sord.

*mp*

24

Timp.

Perc.

Narr.   It did not exactly beggar description, but it certainly had that word on the lookout for the mendicancy squad.  
 In the vestibule below was a letter-box into which no letter would go,

24 unis.

Vn. 1

Vn. 2

Vla.

Vc.

D.B.

*p*

*p*

*p*

*p*



D

30

Fl.

Ob.

Cl.

Bn.

D

30

Hn.

Tpts.

Tbn.

B. Tbn.

D

30

Timp.

Perc.

Susp. Cymbal

to Triangle

Narr. and an electric button from which no mortal finger could coax a ring. Also appertaining thereunto was a card bearing the name "Mr. James Dillingham Young." The "Dillingham" had been flung to the breeze during a former period of prosperity

D

30

Vn. 1

Vn. 2

Vla.

Vc.

D.B.

p

36

Fl. *mp*

Ob. *mp*

Cl. *mp*

Bn. *mp*

36

Hn. *mp* con sord.

Tpts. *mp* con sord.

Tbn. *mp* con sord.

B. Tbn. *mp* con sord.

36

Timp.

Perc.

Narr. when its possessor was being paid \$30 per week. Now, when the income was shrunk to \$20, though, they were thinking seriously of contracting to a modest and unassuming D.

36

Vn. 1 *mp* tutti *div. solo* *3* *3* *unis.* *p*

Vn. 2 *mp* *3* *p*

Vla. *p*

Vc. *p*

D.B.

42

Fl.

Ob.

Cl.

Bn.

42

Hn.

Tpts.

Tbn.

B. Tbn.

42

Timp.

Perc.

Triangle

Narr. Yet whenever Mr. James Dillingham Young came home and reached his flat above he was called "Jim" and greatly hugged by Mrs. James Dillingham Young, already introduced to you as Della. Which is all very good.

42

Vn. 1

Vn. 2

Vla.

Vc.

D.B.

49 (G.P.) (approx. 1 Minute) E Pier-glass ♩ = 56

Fl. *p* *mp* solo

Ob. *p* *mp* solo

Cl. *p*

Bn. *p* solo *mp*

49 (G.P.) (approx. 1 Minute) E Pier-glass ♩ = 56

Timp. *mp*

Perc. to Susp. Cymbal

Narr. Della finished her cry and attended to her cheeks with the powder rag. She stood by the window and looked out dully at a gray cat walking a gray fence in a gray backyard. Tomorrow would be Christmas Day, and she had only \$1.87 with which to buy Jim a present. She had been saving every penny she could for months, with this result. Twenty dollars a week doesn't go far. Expenses had been greater than she had calculated. They always are. Only \$1.87 to buy a present for Jim. Her Jim. Many a happy hour she had spent planning for something nice for him — something fine and rare and sterling — something just a little bit near to being worthy of the honor of being owned by Jim.

There was a pier-glass between the windows of the room. Perhaps you have seen a pier-glass in an \$8 flat.

54

Fl. *mp*

Ob.

Cl.

Bn.

Narr. A very thin and very agile person may, by observing his reflection in a rapid sequence of longitudinal strips, obtain a fairly accurate conception of his looks. Della, being slender, had mastered the art.

61 (G.P.) (10 Seconds) **F** Della's Hair ♩ = 76 (dancingly) (♩ = 152)

Fl.

Ob.

Cl.

Bn.

61 (G.P.) (10 Seconds) **F** Della's Hair ♩ = 76 (dancingly) (♩ = 152)

Hn.

Tpts.

Tbn.

B. Tbn.

61 (G.P.) (10 Seconds) **F** Della's Hair ♩ = 76 (dancingly) (♩ = 152)

Timp.

Perc.

Narr. Suddenly she whirled from the window and stood before the glass. Her eyes were shining brilliantly,

61 (G.P.) (10 Seconds) **F** Della's Hair ♩ = 76 (dancingly) (♩ = 152)

Vn. 1

Vn. 2

Vla.

Vc.

D.B.

65

Timp. Perc. Susp. Cymbal *pp*

Narr. but her face had lost its color within twenty seconds. Rapidly she pulled down her hair and let it fall to its full length. Now, there were two possessions of the James Dillingham Youngs in which they both took a mighty pride.

65

Vn. 1 *mp* *p* *mp* *mf* *mp* *p*

Vn. 2 *p*

Vla. *p*

Vc. etc.

D.B. *p* *p*

71

(G)

Timp. Perc. 3/4

Narr. One was Jim's gold watch that had been his father's and his grandfather's. The other was Della's hair.

71

(G)

Vn. 1 *mf* *mf* *mp* *div. solo* *mf* *3* *unis.* *mp*

Vn. 2 *mf* *mp* *tutti* *mp* *3* *mp*

Vla. *mp* *mp*

Vc. *mp*

D.B. *mp*

75

Timp.

Perc.

Narr.

Had the queen of Sheba lived in the flat across the airshaft, Della would have let her hair hang out the window some day to dry just to depreciate Her Majesty's jewels and gifts.

div. solo

75

*mf* tutti

*mp*

*p*

3

unis.

*mp*

*p*

*mp*

Vn. 1

Vn. 2

Vla.

Vc.

D.B.

*mp*



(H)

80

Timp.

Perc.

Narr.

Had King Solomon been the janitor, with all his treasures piled up in the basement, Jim would have pulled out his watch every time he passed, just to see him pluck at his beard from envy. So now Della's beautiful hair fell about her rippling and shining

80

*p*

*mp*

*p*

*mp*

*mf*

*mp*

Vn. 1

Vn. 2

Vla.

Vc.

D.B.

*p*

86 *a tiny bit slower*

Timp. 
  
 Perc. 
  
 Narr. like a cascade of brown waters. It reached below her knee and made itself almost a garment for her. And then she did it up again nervously and quickly. Once she faltered for a minute and stood still while a tear or two splashed on the worn red carpet.

86 *a tiny bit slower*

Vn. 1 
  
 Vn. 2 
  
 Vla. 
  
 Vc. 
  
 D.B.



*rall.* ----- *a tempo*

Timp. 
  
 Perc. 
  
 Narr. On went her old brown jacket; on went her old brown hat. With a whirl of skirts and with the brilliant sparkle still in her eyes, she fluttered out the door and down the stairs to the street.

92

Vn. 1 
  
 Vn. 2 
  
 Vla. 
  
 Vc. 
  
 D.B.



98

**(G.P.)**

(approx. ½ Minute)

I

*The Watch Fob Chain (tripping by on rosy wings)* ♩ = 96

Fl.

Ob.

Cl.

Bn.

Narr.

Where she stopped the sign read: "Madame Sofronie. Hair Goods of All Kinds." One flight up Della ran, and collected herself, panting. Madame, large, too white, chilly, hardly looked the "Sofronie."

DELLA: "Will you buy my hair?"

NARR.: asked Della.

MNE.: "I buy hair,"

NARR.: said Madame.

MNE.: "Take yer hat off and let's have a sight at the looks of it."

NARR.: Down rippled the brown cascade.

MNE.: "Twenty dollars,"

NARR.: said Madame, lifting the mass with a practiced hand.

DELLA: "Give it to me quick,"

NARR.: said Della.

Oh, and the next two hours tripped by on rosy wings. Forget the hashed metaphor. She was ransacking the stores for Jim's present.

98

**(G.P.)**

(approx. ½ Minute)

I

*The Watch Fob Chain (tripping by on rosy wings)* ♩ = 96

Vn. 1

Vn. 2

Vla.

Vc.

D.B.

103 *solo*

Fl. *mp*

Ob.

Cl.

Bn. *p*

103

Hn.

Tpts.

Tbn.

B. Tbn.

103

Timp. *p*

Perc.

Narr. She found it at last. It surely had been made for Jim and no one else. There was no other like it in any of the stores, and she had turned all of them inside out. It was a platinum fob chain simple and chaste in design,

103

Vn. 1

Vn. 2

Vla.

Vc.

D.B.

109 (J)

Fl. *solo* *mp*

Ob.

Cl.

Bn. *p*

109 (J)

Hn.

Tpts.

Tbn.

B. Tbn.

109 (J)

Timp. *p*

Perc. Susp. Cymbal *p*

Narr. properly proclaiming its value by substance alone and not by meretricious ornamentation — as all good things should do. It was even worthy of The Watch. As soon as she saw it she knew that it must be Jim's.

109 (J)

Vn. 1

Vn. 2

Vla.

Vc.

D.B.

115 (K)

Fl. *solo* *mp* *p* *f*

Ob. *(ossia G)* *mp* *solo* *p* *f*

Cl. *solo* *mp*

Bn. *p*

115 (K)

Hn. *con sord.* *p* *f*

Tpts. *con sord.* *mp* *f*

Tbn.

B. Tbn.

115 (K)

Timp.

Perc.

Narr. It was like him. Quietness and value — the description applied to both. Twenty-one dollars they took from her for it, and she hurried home with the 87 cents. With that chain on his watch

115 (K)

Vn. 1 *p*

Vn. 2 *p*

Vla. *nat.* *p* *spiccato (battuto)*

Vc. *nat.* *f*

D.B. *mp*