

2013-2014 Season

La Jolla Symphony & Chorus

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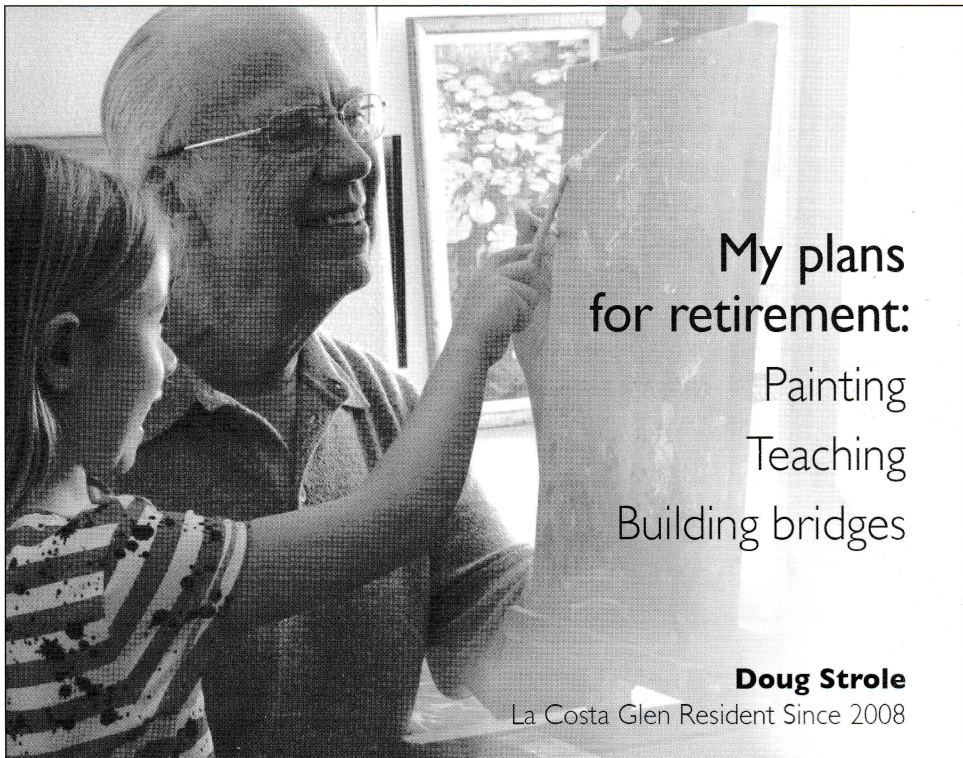


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Sometimes hidden (in plain sight),

Saturday, February 8, 2014, 7:30 pm | Sunday, February 9, 2014, 2:00 pm
Mandeville Auditorium, UCSD

Steven Schick conducting

BERLIOZ **Roman Carnival Overture, Opus 9**

BRAHMS **Symphony No. 4 in E Minor, Opus 98**

Allegro non troppo
Andante moderato
Allegro giocoso
Allegro energico e passionato

INTERMISSION

HARRISON **Piano Concerto**

Allegro
Stampede
Largo
Allegro moderato

Sarah Cahill, piano

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Rooted in San Diego for over 50 years, the La Jolla Symphony and Chorus enriches our lives through affordable concerts of ground-breaking, traditional and contemporary classical music.

From the Conductor



For a while it seemed like every time I was in San Francisco I walked by the Palace Hotel. It was mid-way between Brenda's office at the Trust for Public Land and my new digs with the Contemporary Music Players. I'd pass the front of this venerable art deco building, first built in the 1870s and then rebuilt after it burned in the 1906 earthquake. But when I looked in I didn't think about the 19th-century titans of industry and rail travel who dined there, or, years later, the many diplomats

who hammered out the finishing touches of the United Nations charter in the Palace's opulent meeting rooms. No, when I peered into the grand lobby of the Palace I always thought of Lou Harrison, who as a young and nearly penniless composer worked there as an interior decorator and floral designer. Harrison lived in San Francisco and worked at the Palace in his formative years when he and another Californian, John Cage, were feverishly redesigning the American avant-garde. What golden dreams and grand plans he must have had as he delivered bouquets of cut flowers to tables under Maxfield Parrish's celebrated "Pied Piper" mural. But there he was, one of the great composers of the 20th century, hidden inauspiciously in plain sight.

I take comfort when I think of Harrison at the Palace—that not all of the great music comes from centers of culture. Some of it defies expectations.

But wherever we go in music it seems we run up against expectations. In these concerts, for example, we are embracing the most durable expectation of our genre: that classical concerts shall consist of an overture, a concerto, and a symphony. But, as you might expect with the La Jolla Symphony and Chorus, there is a twist.

To start with we'll present the works out of their usual order by starting with the overture and symphony on the first half and finishing with the concerto. This, I hope, will refresh things a bit. But the true experiment is the combination of two of the most stalwart staples of the repertoire—Hector Berlioz's *Roman Carnival Overture* and Brahms's *4th Symphony*—with Lou Harrison's *Piano Concerto*.

The Berlioz and Brahms works are justly famous. The crooks and slants of the Berlioz, where oblong phrases give his form a whirling uncertainty, combine well with Brahms's asymmetrical phrases and formal patterns. I'll confess here that I devoted perhaps an unhealthy amount of time listening to the Brahms *Fourth Symphony* when I was a student. Coming back to it now many decades later feels a little like opening my childhood bedroom and seeing the Sgt. Pepper's cut-outs just where I had left them. It's both reassuring and alienating as I evaluate just how much I have, and in many ways have not, changed.

The symphony itself is an autumnal essay. But far from rejecting the turbulence and high emotion of his early works, Brahms infuses it within his masterful textures. Beneath the sometimes placid-seeming surface are wicked cross-rhythms and sometimes bewildering metric alignments. Believe me, what you are tapping your foot to is probably not the downbeat! Unexpected shifts in harmony sweep you off your feet with the power of riptides and by extension the traditional forms

derived from these harmonies are stretched to their limits. My very favorite of these vertiginous moments comes with the changing bass harmony just before the end of the second movement. Massive!

But what's really very funny is that Brahms was thought to be the conservative in his own time. It was Liszt and especially Wagner who were the progressives. And with no lack of respect for these great composers, it was Brahms who was the true radical of his day, though this is apparent only when you look beneath the handsome and very agreeable surface of his music. Brahms shows us the yeoman as radical. By the way, the word "yeoman" is related to our modern English "young man." Aside from amusing thoughts about how the history of popular music might have been different had the Village People been linguists, Brahms offers us a heartening example: The older he got the more fearless he became.

Like Brahms, Lou Harrison was also misunderstood. As an American experimentalist in a day when progressive music showed its *bona fides* through thorny rhythms and screeching dissonance, Harrison found another path, influenced by the modal patterning of the *gamelan* and a beautiful melodic sense that was all his own. For Harrison, experimentation lay in the creation of new sounds, by inventing new instruments, and later in his life through the exploration of alternative systems

of tuning. The *Piano Concerto* is composed in a special tuning called Kirnberger 2, named after the 18th century musician (and student of Bach's) Johann Kirnberger. There's no simple way to describe it, but in short this tuning allows a method to close the circle of fifths so that when one arrives at the starting pitch after navigating the circle one is at the exact pitch of the departure. (With normally tempered tuning one overshoots the original pitch by a few cycles.) Whether that makes any sense to you or not, the main point is that the intervals in Kirnberger 2 feel "truer" than they do with standard equal temperament. Harrison himself had his personal piano tuned this way because it gave him joy and a sense of well-being. If you agree we'll hook you up with Joe Garrison, our expert tuner for these concerts.

What I most love about this music is the way that the true voice of each piece is not immediately evident – Brahms' radicalization of form, and Harrison's of tuning. These works don't seem like revolutionary firebrands. But that's just what they are. Placed in the midst of the orchestral repertoire they are truly hidden in plain sight. If we lean in close enough, putting our ears right up against the music, we'll be able to hear the hidden songs of an aging firebrand like Brahms. Or, thinking of Lou Harrison, we'll take heart in seemingly insignificant young men with golden dreams. ■

Steven Schick conductor

For more than 30 years Steven Schick has championed contemporary music as a percussionist and teacher by commissioning and premiering more than 100 new works. Schick is a professor of music at the University of California, San Diego and in 2008 was awarded the title of Distinguished Professor by the UCSD Academic Senate.

Schick was one of the original members and percussionist of the Bang on a Can All-Stars of New York City (1992-2002). He has served as artistic director of the Centre International de Percussion de Genève in Geneva, Switzerland, and as consulting artist in percussion at the Manhattan School of Music. Schick is founder and artistic director of the acclaimed percussion group, red fish blue fish, a UCSD ensemble composed of his graduate percussion students that performs

regularly throughout San Diego and has toured internationally. He also is founding artistic director (June 2009) of "Roots & Rhizomes"—an annual international course for percussionists hosted by the Banff Center for the Arts in Canada.

As a percussion soloist, Schick has appeared in Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, The Royal Albert Hall (London), Centre Pompidou (Paris), The Sydney Opera House and Disney Hall among many other national and international venues.

Schick is a frequent guest conductor with the International Contemporary Ensemble (Chicago and New York City), and in 2011 he was appointed artistic director and conductor of the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players. Schick has been music director and conductor of the La Jolla Symphony & Chorus since 2007.

Program Notes by Eric Bromberger

Roman Carnival Overture, Opus 9

HECTOR BERLIOZ

Born December 11, 1803,
La Côte-St. André, Grenoble

Died March 8, 1869, Paris



Berlioz made a characteristic choice when he decided to write his first opera about Benvenuto Cellini, the sixteenth-century goldsmith, sculptor, adventurer—and author of a self-conscious autobiography. Berlioz, who

would later write his own splendidly self-conscious autobiography, was strongly drawn to the figure of Cellini, but the opera was a complete failure at its premiere in Paris in September 1838. It had only four performances, French audiences sneered at it as “Malvenuto Cellini,” and Berlioz noted (with typical detachment) that after the overture “the rest was hissed with admirable energy and unanimity.” Liszt led a successful revival at Weimar in 1852, but *Benvenuto Cellini* has not held the stage.

Berlioz was stung by the failure of the opera, but he continued to love its music, and years later he would speak of its “variety of ideas, an impetuous verve, and a brilliancy of musical coloring.” In 1843, five years after the failed premiere, he pulled out two of its themes and from them fashioned an overture that he planned to use as an introduction to the second tableau of the opera, set in Rome’s Piazza Colonna during carnival season. Those two themes are the aria “O Teresa, vous que j’aime plus que la vie,” which Benvenuto sings to his seventeen-year-old lover in the first tableau, and the saltarello from the second tableau, which the players from Cassandro’s theater dance to attract crowds during the pre-Lenten festivities. Berlioz may have intended that his new overture would serve as part of the opera, but when he led the overture as a concert piece in Paris on February 3, 1844, it was such a success that it had to be encored, and it has become one of his most popular works on its own, entirely divorced from the opera that gave it life.

The *Roman Carnival Overture*, as this music was eventually named, opens with a great flourish that hints at the saltarello theme to be heard later—Berlioz marks this flourish *Allegro assai* and further specifies that it should be *con fuoco*—“with fire.” The music quickly settles as the English horn sings Benvenuto’s plaintive love-song, and this is extended briefly before the music leaps ahead at the saltarello, originally a dance from the Mediterranean area in a lively 6/8 meter. This is a wonderful moment—the crispness of Berlioz’s rhythmic energy is nicely underlined by his decision to keep the strings muted during the first part of the saltarello. Along its spirited way, Berlioz brings back the love-song theme and turns it into a fugato, and there is some deft combination of the main ideas. Finally, though, it is the dance that triumphs, and Berlioz’s ending explodes with all the sonic fireworks appropriate to a carnival in Rome. ■

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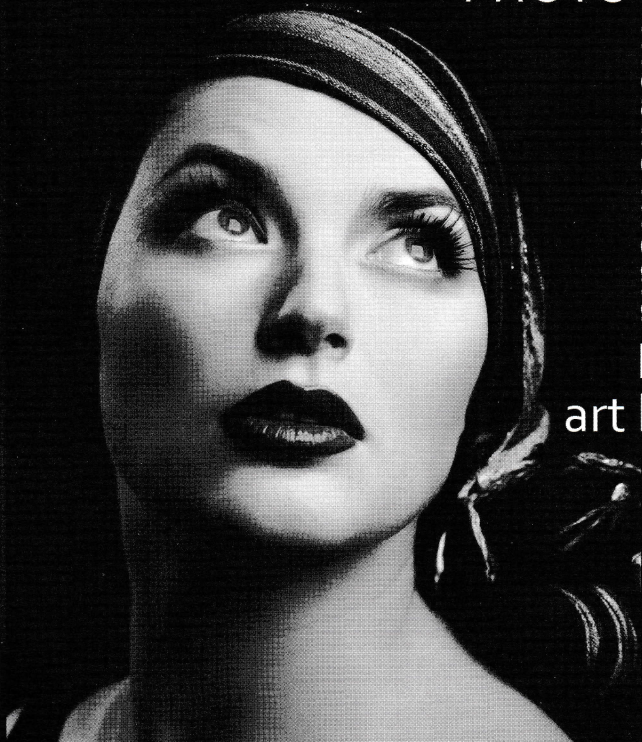
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Symphony No. 4 in E Minor, Opus 98

JOHANNES BRAHMS

Born May 7, 1833, Hamburg

Died April 3, 1897, Vienna



The impact of Brahms' final symphony defies simple description. This music has been called autumnal, tragic, melancholy, sad, serious, and elegiac, and all listeners instinctively feel its gravity and intensity in every bar. Yet from the tentative violin figure that opens the symphony to the mighty cataclysm that ends it forty minutes later, it is also exhilarating, glorious music, one of Brahms' finest achievements and certainly one of the greatest symphonies ever written.

Brahms composed the *Fourth Symphony* in the tiny town of Murzzuschlag high in the Styrian Alps, about fifty miles southwest of Vienna. He wrote the first two movements in the summer of 1884 and the final two when he returned the following summer. Aware of the seriousness of this music, Brahms wrote the conductor Hans von Bülow: "I am pondering whether this symphony will find more of a public. I fear it smacks of the climate of this country; the cherries are not sweet here, and you would certainly not eat them."

It was Brahms' custom to send copies of his new works to friends for their comments; habitually he accompanied the copies with self-disparaging remarks to which his friends would have to protest as they praised the new work. This time, to his dismay, his friends did not like the new symphony. After hearing it played in a two-piano version, critic Eduard Hanslick complained that "All through I felt I was being beaten by two terribly clever men." Elizabeth von Herzogenberg wrote to Brahms: "Your piece affects me curiously, the more penetration I bring to bear on it, the more impenetrable it becomes." The stunned composer was left protesting to Clara Schumann that "the piece does not altogether displease me." It did not altogether displease audiences either—the premiere in Meiningen on October 25, 1885, was a triumph.

The criticism by Brahms' friends may seem strange today, but there *is* something severe about the *Fourth Symphony*. Many have noted the fusion of passion and intellect that marks Brahms' finest music, but the *Fourth Symphony* takes both of these to an extreme, blending an impassioned emotional content with the most inexorable musical logic.

One feels this concentration from the first instant. The *Fourth* is the only one of Brahms' symphonies to open without an introduction: it simply begins with the rising-and-falling main subject in the violins, and much of the thematic material of this sonata-form movement is coiled embryonically within the intervals of this simple theme. A series of fanfares leads to the second subject, a broadly-striding melody for cellos and horns; while there is no exposition repeat, Brahms begins the development with so literal a repetition of the beginning that only gradually does the listener recognize that the music is pressing ahead even as it seems to go back. From the most understated of beginnings, this movement drives to one of the most powerful climaxes in all of Brahms' music.

By contrast, the *Andante moderato* seems calm, flowing, and melodic, yet it too is in sonata form, and once again Brahms spins glorious music out of the simplest material: the opening horn call evolves smoothly into the main clarinet tune, and this in turn takes many shapes across the span of the movement. To the young Richard Strauss, assistant conductor of the Meiningen Orchestra, this movement sounded like "a funeral procession moving in silence across moonlit heights."

When Brahms returned to Murzzuschlag in the summer of 1885 to compose the final two movements, he wrote the finale first, then the third movement. Knowing in advance just how rigorous the finale was, Brahms made the *Allegro giocoso* as rollicking a symphonic movement as he ever wrote. That marking means "lively, playful," and this music is Brahms' closest approach to a symphonic scherzo. Yet with many differences: once again, it is in sonata form (there is only a brief whiff of a trio section), and Brahms sets the movement in 2/4 rather than the standard 3/4 meter of scherzos. The mighty opening theme plunges downward (and is quickly inverted), while relief comes with the lovely second subject, a relaxed violin melody marked *grazioso*. Brahms enlivens the orchestral textures here with instruments he rarely used: piccolo, triangle, contrabassoon, and an extra timpani.

The *Fourth Symphony* concludes with one of the most extraordinary — and powerful — movements in the symphonic literature. It is a passacaglia, a musical form already old when Bach used it a century and a half before. Brahms in fact took this passacaglia theme from the concluding chorale of

Bach's *Cantata No. 150, Nach Dir, Herr, verlanget mich*: he re-barred Bach's original five-measure theme into eight measures and changed one note to heighten chromatic tension. The trombones, silent to this point in the symphony, stamp out this theme, and this ground bass repeats thirty times. Above these thirty strict repetitions, Brahms spins out a set of variations extraordinary for their variety and expressiveness. Even more impressive is how this old baroque form is made to conform to the general shape of sonata form: after the powerful initial statements, the violins have a lyric variation, and this sequence leads a quiet central episode climaxed by a lovely flute solo over the (barely-suggested) ground bass. The "recapitulation" begins with an earth-shaking explosion over the passacaglia theme, there is a brief flirtation with two waltz-like variations, and a coda derived from the passacaglia theme drives majestically (and inexorably) to the close.

Brahms was 52 when he completed the *Fourth Symphony* and still had twelve years to live. Twice in that span he contemplated writing another symphony and in each case made a few sketches, yet he abandoned both projects. However much we may regret the loss of those symphonies, perhaps Brahms was right to let them go — it is difficult to conceive how he might have gone beyond the *Fourth Symphony*. ■

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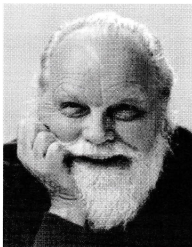
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Piano Concerto

LOU HARRISON

Born May 14, 1917, Portland, Oregon

Died February 2, 2003, Lafayette, Indiana



Lou Harrison thought of himself as a West Coast composer, but he was cosmopolitan in his outlook, open to many kinds of music and sound.

Though he grew up in California and studied with

Cowell and Schoenberg, Harrison was particularly attracted to the music of Asia—its instruments, its sounds, its rhythms, and its entire conception of music—and from an early age he was drawn to percussion instruments and particularly to making his own instruments, often out of such unusual materials as flowerpots, washtubs, pails, and tacks. Harrison held a number of jobs (florist, dancer, poet, percussionist, and critic among them) before moving in 1943 to New York, where he worked as a music critic and championed the music of Ives: it was Harrison who conducted the premiere of Ives' *Third Symphony* in 1947 (35 years after it was written). That performance earned the Pulitzer Prize for Ives, who generously shared the money from that award

with Harrison. Harrison taught briefly at Black Mountain College in North Carolina before deciding that he needed to return to California, and he lived the remaining half-century of his life in Aptos, on Monterey Bay. He taught at a number of California universities—Stanford, Berkeley, San Jose State, Mills, and USC among them—and remained active as a composer until the time of his death at age 85.

Harrison began his *Piano Concerto* in New Zealand in 1983 and completed it at home in Aptos in 1985. He wrote the concerto for Keith Jarrett, himself a musical explorer, and the piece has had unusual success: it has been performed by a number of pianists, it has been widely admired by critics and by audiences, and Jarrett has recorded it. Several things make the *Piano Concerto* distinctive. First, Harrison chooses to reject the equal temperament that has for centuries been the basis of Western music. In *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, Bach had demonstrated that a keyboard instrument tuned to equal temperament could perform comfortably in all twenty-four keys. But equal temperament makes C-sharp and D-flat the same note, which is not precisely true, and in his *Piano Concerto* Harrison goes back to an earlier mode called “Kirnberger 2,” which changes the intervals of the scale somewhat and requires that the piano and some of the instruments of



Sarah Cahill piano

Sarah Cahill, called “fiercely gifted” by the New York Times, has commissioned, premiered, and recorded numerous compositions for solo piano. Composers who

have dedicated works to her include John Adams, Pauline Oliveros, and Evan Ziporyn, and she has premiered pieces by Lou Harrison, Ingram Marshall, George Lewis, Leo Ornstein, and many others. Recent appearances include Spoleto Festival USA, Caramoor Center for Music and the Arts, Portland Piano Festival, and Mendocino Music Festival. Her most recent

project, *A Sweeter Music*, premiered in the Cal Performances series in Berkeley in January 2009, featuring newly-commissioned works on the theme of peace by Terry Riley, Meredith Monk, Yoko Ono, Frederic Rzewski, Phil Kline, and others. Her recordings can be found on the New Albion, CRI, New World, Other Minds, Tzadik, Albany, Cold Blue, and Artifact labels.

Ms. Cahill hosts a weekly radio show on KALW 91.7 FM in San Francisco, is on the faculty of the San Francisco Conservatory, hosts a new music series at the Exploratorium, and curates a monthly series of new music concerts at the Berkeley Art Museum.

the orchestra be re-tuned. This music is by no means dissonant (a casual listener might never sense that the instruments had been re-tuned), but it does have a freshness and a pleasing piquancy. Second, to accommodate these changes Harrison creates an orchestra that can handle such re-tuning easily: his orchestra here consists of three trombones, strings, and a huge percussion battery. Third, Harrison then revels in the sounds those instruments can create: this music has a bright, ringing sonority, often redolent of the sound of the Javanese gamelan and ringing bells.

The concerto opens with an *Allegro* that conforms—in a very general sense—to sonata form. This is sweeping music, and more than one listener has detected a Brahmsian grandeur in Harrison's writing here. The orchestra makes big declarative statements, and the piano offers meditative responses—only rarely do soloist and orchestra play together. The writing for piano in this movement is particularly beautiful—it has a disarming clarity and freshness.

Harrison titles the second movement *Stampede*, and some explanation of that term is necessary. Harrison often titled movements *estampie*, a medieval form that involved words and music. But a performer of one of Harrison's pieces mistook that title for "stampede," a mistake that Harrison particularly liked—he looked the word up and determined that it meant "a general brouhaha." Listeners might keep this in mind while listening to this *Stampede*, which is a jazzy romp for the pianist and percussionists, one that emphasizes struck sounds throughout. Harrison offers a calm (and very brief) interlude at the center of this movement, scored for piano and solo strings, and he also offers the pianist the opportunity for a cadenza in the closing minutes.

The *Largo* opens with a long piano solo, and only gradually is it joined by ethereal strings. The music grows more animated, then fades into silence. The concerto concludes with a very brief *Allegro moderato* that bears some resemblance to a perpetual-motion. The piano leads the way and then plays non-stop throughout, often accompanied only by percussion as this most original concerto drives to an emphatic, cheerful, and very brusque conclusion. ■

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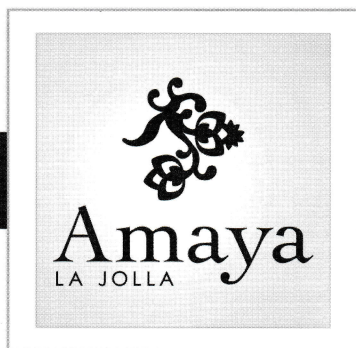
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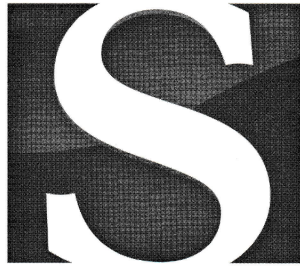
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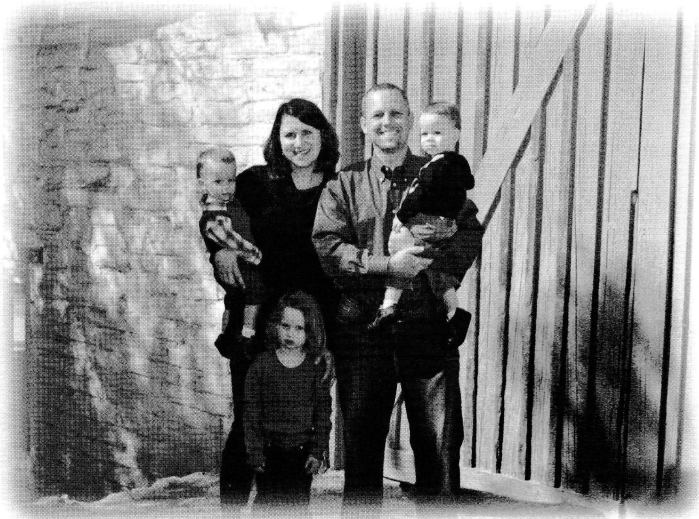
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