

A Love Story and a Choral Commission

Some couples celebrate their 25th wedding anniversary with silver, but Providence Singers member David Keller and his wife Julie Meyers chose music instead

Shakespeare's *Sonnet 116* may be the perfect wedding verse: universal in its appeal, stunningly beautiful in its language and imagery, profound in its ideas, elusive in its meaning.

David Keller and Julie Meyers discovered the sonnet for themselves in 1985 as they searched for a text for their wedding. They needed something that would not admit impediments when two families met to celebrate this marriage of true minds.

Twenty years later, *Sonnet 116* was still in the picture. Love had indeed remained an ever-fixed mark. But something new had arrived: choral music. David and Julie's son, Josh, had taken the first plunge, singing with the inaugural class of the Providence Singers' high school ensemble. David and Julie enjoyed the performances so much it wasn't long before David joined the Providence Singers and Julie got involved as an usher.

Inspired by the Singers' 2007 American Masterpieces choral festival, featuring the premiere of Nancy Galbraith's *Two Emily Dickinson Songs*, David and Julie decided they wanted to commission a new piece to celebrate their 25th wedding anniversary in 2010.

"Those two Dickinson poems really struck me," David said. "I liked Nancy's arrangements. We thought she'd be a good one to ask to write a piece to commemorate our anniversary."

Josh went on to study at Carnegie Mellon University. As fate would have it, at his first choral performance, David spotted Nancy Galbraith sitting in the audience. "I went up to her at intermission and asked whether she'd be interested in writing a setting of *Sonnet 116*, and she said something like, 'Sure, have your people call my people.'"

"Her 'people' turned out to be her husband," Julie said, "so we arranged to meet them the next time we went out to Carnegie Mellon." The four of them had dinner. Galbraith was very interested in setting a Shakespearean sonnet. She asked David and Julie about their lives, their wedding, their work as physicians, their family, why *Sonnet 116* was important to them, and what sort of music they liked.

Bit by bit the piece took shape. It was like receiving a present and having to unwrap it very slowly. The score arrived from Pittsburgh in November 2009 accompanied by a MIDI file from the composer. David and Julie listened to it and loved what they heard even in the uninflected world of MIDI. But experiencing the magical combination of Shakespearean text and a nuanced rendering of four- and eight-part choral writing would have to wait.

In the meantime, David was sent to work in Washington, DC, for a year. On the couple's actual anniversary—September 1, 2010—David and Julie had a wonderful dinner in DC, but no world premiere.

It was January 2011 before the Singers were able to begin rehearsing the piece, and finally in April the song debuted. "Sonnet 116" was conducted by Providence Singers' former artistic director Andrew Clark for an audience of 300 people, including David and Julie's friends and family from all over the country. "It felt much more like a celebration than just a premiere," said Julie. "We were so pleased with the final piece. There's no better way to mark this special occasion than with song."



(Left to right) Nancy Galbraith, David Keller, Julie Meyers, Andrew Clark

Sonnet 116 | William Shakespeare

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
 Admit impediments. Love is not love
 Which alters when it alteration finds,
 Or bends with the remover to remove:
 O no! it is an ever-fixed mark
 That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
 It is the star to every wandering bark,
 Whose worth's unknown, although his height be
 taken.
 Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and
 cheeks
 Within his bending sickle's compass come:
 Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
 But bears it out even to the edge of doom.
 If this be error and upon me proved,
 I never writ, nor no man ever loved.