

Lenny and Benny, by Herman Servatius

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Directorial Team: Cecilia Servatius & Viktoria Karadeniz

Characters: Lenny – Symphony Conductor, World Famous, Charming
 Benny – Lenny’s son, young and struggling, competent but uncertain
 Martinique – Lenny’s wife, an artist, professor, and sculptor
 Sylvia – Benny’s wife - a research chemist.
 Pancho Bosphorus – Orchestra CEO - Benny’s Boss
 Wendy Wiesel – Head of marketing for the Orchestra
 I. M. K. Notting – Music Critic

Scene I.

[Scene opens in Benny’s dressing room. It is after his first concert as conductor. The room is crowded with chatting people. Champagne and flowers. Martinique on Lenny’s arm while he chats. Sylvia on Benny’s. Lenny is wearing a black tuxedo with white tie undone. Lenny is dressed casually, but with such impeccable taste that he should look demonstrably better dressed than Benny in his formal attire.]

Wiesel: With a work like that, a big work, a modern intimidating work, one always worries that the audience will become fatigued. But standing in the wings I could hardly believe the tension, the dynamism, the raw excitement. Benny beat all expectations, and they were already very high. It must have been electric in the crowd.

Notting: There certainly was an energy in the hall. You know, your Orchestra is taking a big risk to give the baton to a 22 year old, and the son of the most famous conductor in America. Before the curtain went up, everyone was whispering the same thing: “will he be as good as Lenny”.

Wiesel: Tell me about it! That has been what everybody has been saying ever since his first audition. And of course there are always negative people. Here is a man who finished the conservatory at 17, and had his Doctor of Music from Yale University 21, who has taught conducting at master classes on four continents. A genuine prodigy. And people still try to whine and find fault. But, after tonight’s performance, they’ll change their tune and, you know, Lenny better look sharp, because the new kid on the block is now nipping at his heels.

Bosphorus: Everybody please, your attention please, your attention. *(There is a dinging of glasses.)* Twenty-five years ago, American music was transformed forever when a brilliant young conductor took the baton of an old and, one must say, stodgy orchestra, and transformed it into one of our fiercest competitors. *(Laughter and applause. Lenny is clapped on the back.)* As some of you know, once, many years ago, we almost stole Lenny away, but he did not want to uproot his young son and move out here in the wild west. But now, with this concert, we can say whole-heartedly that it was worth the wait, and, I think, we may have even got the better end of the deal. To Benny!

All: To Benny!

Benny: Thank you everybody. I'm not going to make a speech about how great the players were tonight, and how hard they worked, and start thanking people. But I have to thank Pancho Bosphorus who has given me this chance, and all the people here like Wendy Wietzel, who had so many kind words. Now since, as my father always warned me, conducting is such a sweaty job, please let me get changed and we'll all meet over at the "Tantric Sprout" for drinks and snacks. (*Applause, laughter. The room empties quite quickly, and at the last moment Lenny lets go of Martinique, who leaves with Sylvia. Lenny and Benny remain alone.*) What – a – disaster.

Lenny: Who said it was a disaster?

Benny: A complete disaster. Good champagne, though. (*He tosses off his glass and tosses some flowers in the trash.*)

Lenny: What makes you say it was a disaster?

Benny: You are not saying it wasn't a disaster.

Lenny: Oh, ok. Benny – as your father and a conductor. It wasn't a disaster.

Benny: A complete disaster.

Lenny: Stop saying that. That is just nonsense. Your tempos were perfect. Your cuing was on the mark. The performance was lively, energetic, sensitive, and smart. Overall a great job. There is no critic in this town who is going to find anything to fault in your performance tonight.

Benny: So a great job?

Lenny: An excellent job. A terrific job. A flawless job.

Benny: So why don't you write some copy for that weasel Weitzel – I mean that creep Weitzel. Did you hear her dishing it out to that critic? I could wring her little neck. She is the one who is going to start the whispering campaign when Bosphorus decides to get rid of me.

Lenny: A terrific job. A flawless job.

Benny: Dad, why are you here?

Lenny: Why, your mother and I flew out to show our support. Is that what is bothering you? We are not trying to steal your limelight.

Benny: No Dad, I mean why are you here right now in my dressing room. Why aren't you waiting at the Tantric Sprout like all the others?

Lenny: It is a vegan restaurant. There is nothing to do there.

Benny: Say that in front of Sylvia and I'll be impressed. Why are you here?

Lenny: If you want me to go . . . (*Lenny moves to go but Benny rather emphatically blocks him.*)

Benny: No Dad, answer the question. The truth.

Lenny: To cheer you up.

Benny: Exactly. And why do I need cheering up if I have just done such a flawless job?

Lenny: You're right. You don't need cheering up. I should just get going.

Benny: You can't leave now, Dad. I'm miserable. Why is that? I've just done a flawless job.

Lenny: I'm sorry Benny. You're right. I'm acting like a dad, and not a professional. You're miserable for the same reason that I am – because in our profession, at our level, a flawless perfect job is, well, just not good enough.

Benny: Precisely. There are a thousand guys who can come in here and deliver a flawless performance. For this orchestra every performance has to be – “Earth-shattering!”

Lenny: “Cataclysmic!”

Benny: “An energy high that will plumb your depths”

Lenny: What?

Benny: I am quoting Weitzel.

Lenny: So this is the west coast.

Benny: So, Dad, what do I do now?

Lenny: Now? Right now? Now we forget all about it, go to Tantric Spurt, chew our cud and drown our sorrows in a mug of organic bio-beer. You have two years to find your way, Benny, and you can't say that you have made a bad start. So, cheer up.

Benny: I'll only have two years if I pass the probation point, which is the first concert in November.

Lenny: What? They get all the free publicity of hiring my son, and then they can dump you after two months with no penalty? No recourse? No buy-out? Is your agent crazy?

Benny: There was no way out. Bosphorus said the board suggested a probation period, but he was sure he could get them to waive it in light of the fact that you are so famous.

Lenny: Uh huh, and he pulled that when someone was listening, so you would be too humiliated to accept.

Benny: Yeah, Sylvia was there.

Lenny: Bosphorus! Benny, I warned you. (*Benny knows what's coming. He has heard the story a hundred times. As Lenny gets started Benny grabs his baton and conducts his father to a stop.*)

Bó-sphorus, [1 Rossini – Storm Break](#) (starting ~ 0:54)¹
 Whát a snéaky lýing násty chéating gréedy sélfish
 Bó-sphorus,
 Lét me smásh his smíling úgly léering dírtý téeth in
 Bó-sphorus,
 Júst becáuse I wóuldn't jóin his créw of sécond ráters
 Bó-sphorus,. . .

Benny: We know the story. Let's skip ahead to measure 66. I have two more concerts. What do I do? If you can't advise me, nobody can.

Lenny: Ok. The most important thing to remember is rhythm and timing. (*Benny still has the baton, he speeds up Lenny very fast that then stops him abruptly.*)

Tíming Tíming Tíming Tíming [Khachaturian - Sabre Dance](#)
 Néver Wáste your wórry ór your éffort if the pích is slíghtly óff.
 Pérfect pích is not esséntial
 Ánd it is too láte to fíx the Dépth of sóund
 Tíming Tíming
 Kéep atténction fócused, shárpely fócused ón the rh'ythm, tíming
 – hey! (*Lenny grabs the baton.*)

Benny: Sorry Dad, but I don't want a conducting lesson. I know all that stuff. I've taught all that stuff. My performance was perfect, remember? If that's the best you do we can just quit and go eat our crabgrass.

Yes, let's go listen to Bosphorus gas about how great we both are, and imagine what he'll be saying in November. (*As Benny gets started off on his self-pitying rant in Bosphorus's voice, Lenny conducts him into a state of emotional super-melancholia.*)

My déar fr'iends it is with great sádness that I have to sáy [Barber - Adagio](#)
 to annóunce that our déar and belóved music director
 Who has dazzled us with his brilliance,
 Wíll no longer be áble to contínue to be with ús.
 As he móves ón, he carries áwáy with him our fóndest wishes.
 Benny néeds to devóte his full energies to other prójects.
 Yés, dear friends, other prójects.
 Préssing prójects. Néedful prójects. Námeless Prójects.
 Such as washing his cár,
 Getting a róot canal.
 Or láying himself out néatly and drúnkenly
 In a filthy gutter to wáste áwáy and díe.

¹ The links to the musical excerpts are not necessarily meant to be played, but to give both actors a guide or a base point to help them realize the passages.

Lenny: I think we should work on a different movement.

Benny: That's the movement we will be hearing if you can't help me. I have done everything I know how.

Lenny: But Benny, last year you were conducting that student orchestra in Bremen, and some of those performances weren't just perfect, they really were actually truly – great.

Benny: Yes I know, and that gave me the confidence to take this job. But I had time to think at intermission. Do you know why those concerts were great? It was the students. They were great.

Lenny: No, Benny, they were just ordinary conservatory students. It was you.

Benny: Maybe partly me, but mostly it was the students. They were so excited to be playing under the direction of your son, that they . . . I don't know . . .

Lenny: . . . had the strength of ten because their hearts were pure.

Benny: Close enough. I could have been drunk, asleep or whatever, and they would still have been great.

Lenny: All right then. You have to inspire these players here the same way.

Benny: That won't work. Surely you can see that. These guys are professionals, each at the top of their game. They are not awed by me. They are all ready, willing, and able to work and they completely accept me as their leader. They can be great with the right conducting, but I can't just will them into a frenzy of ecstatic hero worship. Even you don't do that.

Lenny: That's true. If they are just your fans, you won't get any of the benefit of their expertise. You'd just have yes-men. Eventually it would sound terrible.

Benny: Ok, so we know what doesn't work. What do I do? (*Picks up the baton in anticipation.*)

Lenny: I . . . I . . . don't know.

Benny: Of course not. Sorry, Dad. What was I thinking? I am an idiot, thinking you could just smile down on me with fatherly wisdom and whisper to me the secret of your greatness. (*Benny notices that Lenny is not meeting his eyes anymore.*) Dad? What do you do that makes your orchestra sound like that, sound like the voice of God. How do you do that? Do you even know? What is going through your mind. Dad, what do you think about when you are conducting?

Lenny: That is rather personal.

Benny: It's personal?

Lenny: It is hard to put into words.

Benny: Harder than listening to Bosphorus's news conference giving me the air?

Lenny: I'll think about, well, ok, ok, I'll tell you. But, it is strictly, and I mean strictly, confidential.

Benny: Yeah, fine. What is it.

Lenny: I am . . . I think about a woman.

Benny: That's it? You think about women? Gee, dad, I won't tell a soul.

Lenny: No, I mean, I think about a particular woman. (*Benny takes the baton and helps Lenny unburden himself.*)

Long ago, before I met your mother, [Tchaikovsky - Swan Lake](#)
 I met a girl one summer at the beach on Cape Cod.
 I fell deeply in love. I was 19, and she was 17.
 Her name was Anna.
 Her father was a foreign diplomat, and she was already engaged.
 She was beautiful. Beautiful in every way.
 Her body was beautiful. Her voice was beautiful.
 Her movements were beautiful. Her ideas were beautiful.
 Her soul was beautiful.
 When their vacation was over, they went away for ever.

Benny: So you are saying that, sometimes, when you are conducting, the loves you have had for your old girlfriends, like this Anna, become part of your music.

Lenny: No, Benny, I am saying that every time I conduct these feelings for Anna become the inspiration of my music. Maybe I shouldn't have told you the source, but the point is that, in my opinion, one of the things that separates . . .

Benny: You always think of the same girl? This Anna?

Lenny: Yes. As I was saying, one of the things that separates mere perfection from greatness is passion. Great music, like great art, like a great life, requires great passion. Passion is . . .

Benny: So you never think of Mom?

Lenny: We are really getting off topic here.

Benny: But this is really a shock. You have the reputation of being the squarest square. No scandals around my dad. Of course, I always thought you must have had lots of love affairs before you met Mom, like me before Sylvia, but you are obviously still in love, still infatuated with this Anna. I don't know how to think about this.

Lenny: It is not any of your business, but I never had any love affairs before your mother. I really am the biggest square in the world.

Benny: So Anna is some fantasy?

Lenny: No, she was very real, but it was not what you mean by a love affair. We never even held hands.

Benny: So you were so afraid that you couldn't touch her hand?

Lenny: I wasn't the slightest bit afraid of her, we had an instantaneous and deep rapport. And anyway, we are supposed to be talking about music.

Benny: Sorry. I really mean it, I am sorry, we won't talk about it. But I can't help it. If you weren't afraid of her, why did you just let her go off and marry somebody else.

Lenny: As I said, I loved everything about her, and that included that fact that she was engaged, and was in love with someone else, and that she was determined to return with him to a third world country, facing a life of difficulty, uncertainty, probably danger. But it was obvious that she was also in love with me, and that I could have stolen her away, offered her a rich easy life in America, but then she would have been altered, you see. I guess I was just a silly kid, or the story sounds unbelievable.

Benny: It does, but true or not, it certainly doesn't help me at all.

Lenny: Benny, there must have been a great passion in your life. You don't have to tell me about it, but just think – there must have been. Just recall your great passion, the passion that has touched your heart. Let it flow through you, through your soul and let it out in front of the orchestra, let that passion be revealed in the music.

Benny: You mean my great passion like between you and Anna. I don't think so.

Lenny: Say, your feeling for Sylvia.

Benny: Come on, Dad, she's a chemist.

Lenny: Ok, she's your wife. But you just have to think hard.

Benny: There is no problem with my memory, dad. I think the reason for your obsession with . . .

Lenny: I am not obsessed! I only think of her when I am in front of the orchestra.

Benny: Yeah, dad, you're not obsessed. You just feel your passion for Anna when you are in front of an orchestra. That's three performances every two weeks for twenty-five years. And what about Mom? Why doesn't she count? When I was in middle school, my mom made it on that list of the 25 sexiest women in New York City. That was fun for me, let me tell you. She is an internationally recognized sculptor. She gives lectures all over. And her best-known works are those three statues, right, those three huge porphyry statues of nude men, each of which looks exactly like you.

Lenny: There is a slight facial resemblance.

Benny: There is one in Central Park. The kids liked to tape pictures of it to my locker at school. Dad, you are obviously her artistic inspiration. I just can't get over the fact that your inspiration is this other woman.

Lenny: Benny, you don't quite understand. I didn't plan it. It was a long time ago. If I could go back in time and observe everything again, objectively, probably the real Anna was not as beautiful as I remember, or as noble, or as enchanting, or as wise, or as graceful, or anything. Maybe she was just rather ordinary, and I was just another dumb kid. You should think of the Anna of my inspiration as an abstract ideal which is very real for me because the ideal arose from my personal experience.

Benny: So you have never met this abstract ideal again? You are not, like, Facebook friends or anything?

Lenny: Absolutely not. I would dread actually meeting her. Isn't that obvious? My whole career is . . .

Benny: I see your point. Anyway, as I was saying, none of this helps me at all. I think the reason that your deep feelings for Anna have stayed with you all these years is that your love for her was unrequited, or maybe not unrequited, but unresolved.

Lenny: That could be.

Benny: I think so. Well, I've never had that experience.

Lenny: Never had what experience?

Benny: You know. I am pretty good looking, I have an outgoing personality, I have a good sense of humor, we've always had plenty of money, and I have famous parents. Girls have never been a problem for me.

Lenny: I didn't say I had problems with girls.

Benny: That's not the point, but I am just saying that all of my loves have been . . . requited.

Lenny: That sounds a little arrogant, Benny. There must have been some unattainable women in your life.

Benny: None that I can recall. I mean, I am not Casanova or anything like that, but, whenever and whatever I have tried, I have always succeeded.

Lenny: Benny, you must have been attracted to, say, some older woman when you were very young.

Benny: Oh, yeah, but it was never a problem.

Lenny: You mean . . . ?

Benny: Never a problem.

Lenny: Or a married woman.

Benny: Never a problem.

Lenny: A sexy college professor when you were a student?

Benny: Not a problem, dad.

Lenny: So, you are really telling me that you have no well-spring of passion in your past, not at all? Benny, without passion, how do you expect to be able to make great music?

Benny: I don't know. Nobody told me great disappointment was supposed to be a line item on my resume. There were no workshops on that at the conservatory. Are you suggesting I need to hunt up a Lolita of my own? Now? Or at least before the next concert?

Lenny: A Lolita? What do you mean by that, a Lolita? Anna? A Lolita? (*Lenny advances on Benny. Benny retreats and takes up the baton. Lenny is in full great conductor mode, and if possible he should be above Benny. Benny tries to calm his father with the baton, but Lenny overrules him, conducting also with only his hands, pointing right at the shrinking Benny, speaking to the unmistakable rhythm of the opening of Beethoven's 5th Symphony.*)

That's á L  !

[Beethoven's 5th](#)

That's á L  !

Benny: I take it back. I take it back. I take it back. You told me in confidence. You are trying to help. I won't make fun of it again. Never. Never again. Ever. I take it back. (*pause.*) You've done a great job cheering me up, Dad. When you came in here, my worst problems were that, first, I was merely a perfect conductor with a beautiful wife, lots of money and plenty of smart friends, just not a "great" conductor, and, second, I would only be able to conduct the greatest orchestra in America . . .

Lenny: Second greatest.

Benny: . . . for just a few months, when most musicians would be happy just to have a pair of free tickets. And then you reveal your secret, and I find that I am not a perfect conductor at all, because my music is passionless, and, even worse, it will stay passionless because there has been no passion at all in my whole life. So instead of falling just a little bit short of the ultimate career success, I find that I must be a total life failure.

Lenny: It's not that bad, Benny, we're both under stress. I'm going over to the restaurant and let you finish changing. And remember -

Benny: Confidential. I'll be right over. This conversation makes even that restaurant seem attractive. And on the way over I'll keep an eye out for an unobtainable goddess.
(Exit Lenny)

Scene II.

(Sylvia is in the dressing room alone. She is sitting in a corner tapping into her phone. Enter Lenny.)

Lenny: Hello Sylvia. Waiting for Benny? *(He kisses her forehead. She doesn't look up. All the while talking Sylvia is texting.)*

Sylvia: Oh, hello Lenny. Benny didn't tell me you were in town.

Lenny: He doesn't know. I just came to show support.

Sylvia: You shouldn't have done that. I hope you're not disappointed - there's no party tonight, he has to rush out afterwards for a big date with a donor lady. It was really sweet that you came out for the first concert, and he was a little nervous at first, but he has them playing really well now.

Lenny: Do you think so?

Sylvia: Oh yes. They sounded great – didn't they? – oh no, did something happen? – Actually, I have no idea. I have been playing hooky. I have all these texts to read – there is so much drama at this lab. I wish I was back in Zurich.

(Enter Benny.)

Benny: Sylvia are you – oh, hi dad. Did you just fly out to listen?

Lenny: Yes. Actually I'm taking the night flight back.

Benny: Wow. Well?

Lenny: Well?

Benny: Well, what did you think?

Lenny: What did you think?

Benny: Come on. Don't play games. You'll have to be in the airport in less than an hour. You tell me.

Lenny: Two weeks ago you were sure it was a disaster. Tonight, Benny, you are not sure.

Benny: That's right, I'm not sure. So, come on, tell me what you think.

Lenny: Before I tell you what I think, I'll tell you what Pancho Bosphorus thinks. He handed me this at intermission. *(Hands Benny a piece of paper.)*

Benny: Sylvia! Pancho has signed off on the probation. I have my two years! *(kisses her cheek, she doesn't look up.)* He gave it to you at intermission?

Lenny: That's right.

Benny: Right after the "Peer Gynt".

Lenny: Immediately afterwards.

Benny: The "Peer Gynt" was really great.

Lenny: Bosphorus thought so, the audience thought so, and I know so.

Benny: This just changes everything.

Lenny: That's right. You can't pass it off onto excited students this time. It is the same orchestra as the first concert. It was really you that did it.

Benny: It was really me. I can't believe it. And the other two pieces.

Lenny: The other two pieces were perfect.

Benny: Yeah, that is what I thought – two more disasters. But in the middle – HA! I am so relieved. Nothing bad can happen to me now. If I make it, they renew my contract, and if not, well, it won't be an embarrassment, and I just go back to teaching. I am so relieved.

Lenny: Congratulations, Benny. I knew you could do it.

Benny: Thanks, dad.

Lenny: So?

Benny: So?

Lenny: So, what happened. What changed for "Peer Gynt".

Benny: Oh, you mean the. . . (*he glances over at Sylvia*) . . . the passion thing.

Lenny: Yes, yes, what changed?

Benny: Well, it's like this. I thought about our discussion last week, and decided that, in the absence of the other kind of, you know, I would tap into my passion for music.

Lenny: Really.

Benny: Absolutely. I've been studying music all my life and I have very strong ideas on how it should be played, proper rhythms and tempos and everything. I mean, it is all well and good that you have your, let us say, emotionally based methods, but there is no reason why I can't get the same effect by being totally committed to precisely and exactly rendering the score as the composer intended, making by intellectual

honesty and musical purity my, as you say, my passion. My driving passion is a passion for music itself.

Lenny: You know, Benny, I flew all the way out here because I thought you might need me.

Benny: And I really appreciate it, dad.

Lenny: Oh you do, do you? How do you show it. I handed you a piece of paper on which was written two years piece of mind for you, and in return you start shoveling the *merda taurorum*.

Benny: It is the truth.

Lenny: The Truth? What you have described is the approach of a rigid snob, a blinkered pendant, a tunnel-visioned automaton who has no outlook, and no judgment, only pat theories and pet peeves. You expect me to believe that your “Peer Gynt” was conducted using such an approach? That is impossible. Not even a music critic would believe that.

Benny: Dad . . .

Lenny: Look, the day Da Vinci died and they said, ‘oh we need new painter’, do you think they went out and found a guy who had studied all about painting and who had amassed a set of rules and proper methods about how painting really ought to be done? Or did they go out and find a guy named Michelangelo who, for whatever reason, just had to paint.

Benny: Dad . . .

Lenny: The universities are filled with experts on acting, PhD’s in Drama. If you were directing a film, would you cast a single one of them? Or would you cast the guy who waits tables during the day so that he has his nights free to act for nothing in a stock company?

Benny: Dad . . .

Lenny: Forget art. Even the sciences. Sylvia, if the big professor in your lab dropped dead, would you replace him with an established expert who is passionate about doing things according to the book and following established scientific protocol, or would you take a young inexperienced chemist full of curiosity and a fire in the gut?

Sylvia: (*Without looking up.*) You wouldn’t have a fire in your gut if you stopped eating all those animal products.

Benny: Sylvia, before you reply you really ought to listen to more than just the last four words.

Sylvia: (*Patiently, without looking up.*) “all – those – animal – products”.

Lenny: So?

Benny: So you're right. It is true that tonight I was trying to channel my passion for music, but . . .

Lenny: . . . but that's what produced the two perfect disasters, right, not the "Peer Gynt".

Benny: Yeah.

Lenny: So?

Benny: So?

Lenny: So?

Benny: So, I really don't want to talk about it in front of Sylvia.

Lenny: Ah, Sylvia, I'll order a pizza covered in raw hamburger as soon as you tell me the time.

Sylvia: (*Without looking up.*) It's 9:32.

Lenny: So, Benny, I take it, you have encountered an Anna.

Benny: Well, ok, you're right.

Lenny: An unobtainable goddess?

Benny: Yes, an absolutely stunning, marvelous and unobtainable goddess. So you're right. Ok? You're right. And I really don't think I should talk about it.

Lenny: Of course not, Mr. No-Problem. Love looks a little different, now, that you have met an Anna. (*Lenny is decidedly uptempo, and dancing around. Benny conducts, and Sylvia who has finished texting comes over to watch, capturing the action with her phone.*)

No problem. No Problem

The girls are no problem

But watch it

You'll catch it.

You'll catch it.

Like That

No problem. No Problem

The girls are no problem

But watch it

You'll catch it.

You'll catch it.

Like That

[Strauss – Chit Chat Polka](#)

Benny: I hope you enjoyed yourself.

Lenny: I did. Immensely.

Sylvia: I have no idea what you guys are doing, just don't tell me. I have enough drama. Hope you don't mind, Lenny, I just sent a video of your little victory dance to Martinique. She was worried about you, Lenny. You didn't tell her you were flying out here.

Lenny: I forgot.

Sylvia: Artists. She thought you were upset about some bad press or something. Well, I gotta go. Great concert, Benny.

Benny: Bye Sweetheart.

Lenny: Bye Sylvia.

Benny: Bad press, what's that about.

Lenny: Nothing. Well, actually, really embarrassing. I got a bad review.

Benny: Bad? Really bad?

Lenny: You know, for a review, really bad is usually good. This was worse than bad. The critic used the L word.

Benny: Lackluster? Wow, Dad, that is a first for you. What happened? Actually, I think I know. I was worried after our conversation last week that our chat might have affected your inspiration – like if you discuss your golf swing too much, you can ruin it.

Lenny: It was awful, Benny. The curtain went up for the Thursday night performance, the house went dark, everything was as it usually is, except for one thing.

Benny: No Anna.

Lenny: No Anna. Like you say, our conversation about her was an insuperable barrier. I felt no natural passion, nothing. I had no idea how to call the feelings forth, they had always just come before. And when I tried to force it, the result was artificial, false, intellectualized, abstract. Instead of feeling the music, I was distracted by judging whether the feeling was natural or not, so of course it wasn't. I just stood there feeling dead and foolish. The performance was worse than lackluster. It was a disaster.

Benny: So what are you going to do?

Lenny: Oh, everything is fine now. I was pretty depressed afterwards, and the review was just as bad as I expected. But I just decided, like you did tonight, to go on without Anna's inspiration, to just rely on my experience and my smarts, what else is there to do? So then Friday night, when I started the concert without worrying or trying to think

about Anna at all, she was just there. And everything was fine. So, for all anyone knows I just had some bad oysters on Thursday.

Benny: Are there any other kind?

Lenny: Now, I've got to get going to the airport, and Sylvia told me you've got some donor waiting, so tell me about your Anna.

Benny: Dad, trust me, I really shouldn't.

Lenny: That's just not fair, Benny. I confided in you about my Anna, and now, you should confide in me about your Anna, now that the shoe is on the other foot.

Benny: Actually, Dad, the shoe is on the same foot. Dad, I haven't met my Anna. I have met your Anna. Anna. Your cape cod girl, Anna Anna.

Lenny: That's impossible. How could you meet Anna? When? Where?

Benny: Right here. Two weeks ago, after the concert.

Lenny: She was here?

Benny: Right here. She flowed past security like she owned the place.

Lenny: She was here?

Benny: Right here, in my dressing room. She came in right after you left.

Lenny: And you talked with her?

Benny: Well, sure.

Lenny: That's ridiculous. Even if it was her, how could you possibly know it was her? I didn't even tell you her whole name.

Benny: She told me she met you at Cape Cod and that you were the most enchanting young man she has ever met.

Lenny: So what, Benny? I was an enchanting young man. Lots of girls thought so.

Benny: Dad, I talked with her for almost an hour, it was obviously her. But I don't want to prove it to you. I don't think we should talk about it at all. The golf-swing, Dad. Remember?

Lenny: I know. This is like playing with dynamite. But, look, don't want to start out next concert with the only thing in my mind being whether the real Anna is just a nice little old lady.

Benny: Ok. You want to know? You want to know how I was really sure it was her? That concert was totally sold out, so there were 2,522 people in the audience, not

counting the ushers, roughly half of them women, and if you were to ask anyone which, of those 1,261 women, had been the continuing source of creative inspiration of a major American artist for 25 years, I swear they would pick her out.

Lenny: Really?

Benny: Really. She's fantastic, beautiful, elegant, smart, timeless. She takes nice little old lady to a whole new level.

Lenny: Really?

Benny: Really. You were not only an enchanting young man, you had really good taste. Anna is also married, has grandchildren, and is very happy. And, while she has never been to any of your concerts, she has all your recordings, and she always has had the feeling that you are conducting the orchestra just for her.

Lenny: Really?

Benny: Really. And what happened to me tonight was that, when I was conducting the "Peer Gynt", the whole enormity of your story, and her story, how you live your separate lives joined only through music, the poetic grandeur of it just washed over me, and the music was great.

Lenny: So my Anna will now also be your Anna, very Freudian, almost Oedipal, but I guess if we don't talk about it, it will work out.

Benny: Not exactly. Ok, I was moved, and it came out in the music. I think it was a one shot deal. For me, it is just a love story. I am not directly involved, just a spectator. The inspiration is not going to persist piece after piece, concert after concert, year after year. Look, it didn't even last through intermission. The violin concerto was a disaster.

Lenny: So you haven't solved your passion problem.

Benny: No, I haven't. And maybe I don't want to. After all, you met Anna long before you met Mom. I'm already married. . .

Lenny: You know, great art does not reduce to unrequited love. There are other kinds of passion.

Benny: Such as?

Lenny: Well, there's my teacher, Papakiriakopolis. We often talked about inspiration, but we didn't see eye to eye. He was very old school, always drawing metaphors to Christ on the Cross, or the Israelites forsaken in the desert, or the suffering faith of the poor. He once told me that you could never conduct "Carmina Burana" with the proper depth of feeling if you focus on the profane text of the actual work, and should instead treat it as if it was a sacred requiem.

Benny: Oh, great, I don't have to work myself into a sexual fixation, I can just be a religious nut. Sorry.

Lenny: He wasn't exactly a nut. And his teacher, Sergei Sobalevsky, couldn't have been more different. He drew his inspiration from the struggles of the working class toward world socialism.

Benny: Seriously?

Lenny: Seriously. He was always finding the class struggle in everything. They say that when he conducted Brahms you could hear the massed marching feet of the proletariat crushing the necks of the capitalists. He was such a true believer Stalin had him shot in the 30's.

Benny: Also very encouraging.

Lenny: It should be. To find your passion you probably only have to open your mind to new possibilities.

Benny: Yeah, new possibilities. Ok, Dad, that's a plan. I have two years. I'll devote it to trying to "find myself".

Lenny: I really have to get going if I am going to get my plane.

Benny: And you're OK with the Anna situation? You're not going to hunt her up or try to get her phone number out of me?

Lenny: You have her phone number?

Benny: Well, yeah, she said she wants to make a gift to the orchestra, anonymously.

Lenny: No, Benny, I don't want her number. That's one donor I'll pass on. Let's say the Anna discussion is closed.

Benny: I agree, closed. And thanks for everything. Have a good flight.

Lenny: Bye, Benny.

Scene III.

[Scene opens in Lenny's dressing room. It should be smaller, more spartan than Benny's. Martinique is in evening attire looking at a computer. Enter Benny.]

Benny: Hi Mom. Skipped the concert to surf the web? I'll tell Dad.

Marty: Benny, what a lovely surprise. I left at intermission. Your father knows I have a low tolerance for Wagner. I'm looking at his latest draft for next year's schedule. What do you think?

Benny: I don't know if I should. I'm working for the competition now. (*Looks over her shoulder.*) Very ambitious.

Marty: Ambitious? Yes, of course, he is always ambitious. I think it is vulgar.

Benny: It is a bit heavy.

Marty: In the same month he's scheduled the "War Requiem", and the "Death March from Gotterdammerung", and "Carmina Burana". It is like Batman versus Godzilla in 3D. I think you should talk with him. He has been very disturbed ever since his mysterious visit to you last October.

Benny: Not very mysterious. He gave me some very valuable professional advice. And I took it. But you are right, he is acting rather distant. He didn't tell you I was coming? I emailed him my itinerary.

Marty: Not a word. Are you staying with us? You're lucky. Last week there was no room. The house was stuffed with guests. You two didn't have a huge row?

Benny: No, quite the opposite. We had a very productive discussion. Philosophical even.

Marty: Judging from what I saw on that Instagram that Syliva sent, you two have a novel approach to philosophy. And when he came home he was in a perfect rage.

Benny: I don't think it has anything to do with me, Mom. Probably he got a call on the plane.

(*Enter Lenny in concert attire. He is out of breath and looks like he has run a marathon.*)

Benny: Hi Dad.

Lenny: Benny. What are you doing here?

Benny: I'm a judge for the spring competition at the conservatory. I wrote you all about it in my email. I guess you didn't read it.

Lenny: Sorry, Benny. I've been very busy.

Benny: Yeah, I saw your schedule, very big.

Lenny: That's proprietary. (*he blanks the screen*)

Marty: I'm sorry, dear. I showed it to him. I am going to go now. I think you two should talk alone.

Lenny: Please stay. I'm sorry I snapped at you. But, you know, I don't look over your shoulder at your sketches.

Marty: And you better not. But if you did, you would find them original and inspirational, not obvious and bombastic. See you at the house. And Benny, please try to persuade your father to squeeze in the “March of the Gladiators”, it would go perfectly. (*Exit Martinique*)

Lenny: I don’t know what’s got into her. Criticizing my schedule behind my back.

Benny: Well, let me tell you about mine. I can’t wait to hear what you think, I am so excited about it. Next year, everything will be French.

Lenny: French?

Benny: Yes. I find myself suddenly drawn to French music, everything from court composers at Versailles to the impressionists of the Belle Epoch, to the jazzy modernists of the 20’s. A year-long celebration of pure decadence. I bet it will be super popular. Wendy is ecstatic. She wants to contract out a specialty label of champagne to publicize it. Now, no poaching. It’s my idea.

Lenny: Why stop at champagne. Why not a line of lingerie? You could hand out lacy bras in the box office.

Benny: You’re the master, Dad. Why not, indeed. (*taps a text into his phone.*)

Lenny: Benny, I don’t like direction you’re taking.

Benny: What are you talking about? It was your idea.

Lenny: Benny, I know what is going on. I am not a fool. I have read your reviews.

Benny: What’s the matter with my reviews? I think they are marvelous.

Lenny: Yes, they’re marvelous, now that your conducting is “lush”, “delicious”, “succulent” and “erotic”.

Benny: What’s wrong with that?

Lenny: In February they said your cello concerto was like a “hashish filled orgy in a harem”.

Benny: I know. And I have you to thank for everything. It is only through you that I have found my passion. I couldn’t give a perfect performance now if I tried. Everything I do is inspired and fantastic.

Lenny: And what about Sylvia? And what about me? It is so obvious you might as well put up billboards announcing that you are having an affair.

Benny: Is that what is bothering you?

Lenny: I put two and two together in the plane on the way home in October. Your meeting with the “Donor”, your infatuated description of Anna, letting it slip that you had her phone number. I’m sure that for you she was “not a problem”.

Benny: So you figured it all out.

Lenny: Yes, so you can stop pretending.

Benny: Ok, I’ll stop. But you know, Dad, I’ve been reading your reviews, too.

Lenny: There’s nothing wrong with my reviews.

Benny: No, nothing wrong. Nothing wrong with your new approach, “masculine”, “aggressive” and “violent”. They said your Shostakovich 5th was so terrifying that if Putin heard it, he’d run home and hide under his bed.

Lenny: It is supposed to be a violent piece.

Benny: So now I know where your new aggression is directed. It is directed at me, your own son. So how many times have you murdered me with your baton since November? I bet you’ve boiled me oil, crushed me under the wheels of your chariot, roasted me over a pit of flames all to live orchestral accompaniment. Dad, the passion I’ve found has nothing to do with Anna.

Lenny: I don’t believe you.

Benny: Yes, you do. You are just indulging in a juvenile fantasy. Anna is older than Mom. I didn’t meet her that night. I’ve never seen her since. I didn’t even bother to call her because I was too busy. So, the Anna discussions are closed.

Lenny: Ok, then what is your passion? . . . See? You don’t want to talk about it.

Benny: I really shouldn’t. You should trust me. Look what happened last time.

Lenny: There is no way out. (*Takes out his baton and taps it.*)

Benny: If I must, but, you’re not going to like it. At one of the Thanksgiving concerts, I was conducting an ordinary Mozart Symphony. Suddenly I thought of an evening in Paris.

I was in Paris.

[Shostakovich - 2nd Waltz](#)

You and Mom were away at a party.

I was only fifteen.

So Monica was only 12.

We decided to dress up as adults.

To go on a pretend date.

I got my hair cut in the hotel barbershop. I put on your tux.

Monica spent hours trying on Mom’s clothes,

Makeup, stockings, jewelry, perfume.

I never thought of my sister as a beautiful woman before.

She looked so elegant sitting across from me.

I ordered the *rognons de veau à la moutarde*

She had the *galantine de volaille pistaché*
 We shared a bottle of burgundy,
 It was Paris.
 We both got a little drunk.
 Then I saw him. A waiter.
 Moving effortlessly through the crowd.
 Balancing on one hand a tray with a covered dish.
 It was like he was dancing with it.
 He also wore a Tux, but his fit him perfectly.
 He bent over the table next to ours and he raised the cover.
Voila – Filet Mignon.
 Cooked to perfection.
 It changed my life.

Lenny: So you found your passion, and it is a steak dinner?

Benny: My passion is fine food. Ever since I realized that, my conducting has been great. I just did Schubert's Great C Major Symphony, and it was inspired by a fantastic *Brouchette d'Anneau a la Greque* I had in Montreal when I was an intern.

Lenny: A dinner you had seven years ago?

Benny: It was just as you advised. I just release my innermost desires and let them flow through me, adding color and depth to the music. That's what gave me the idea for the French season. It is my favorite type of food, and gives me the scope to perfect the technique.

Lenny: Benny, the Schubert is a great symphony, at times tender and sublime, others aggressive and heroic, it somehow offends me that you are trying to base your interpretation on a meal in a restaurant. I don't think that is possible.

Benny: You couldn't do it, of course. It isn't your passion. But for me, it comes so naturally. You see why I didn't want to tell you. You don't approve and it is going to make you look down on my music.

Lenny: I don't approve at all, and, I don't think . . .

Benny: It doesn't matter what you think. It works. The method is perfect. I love food. I love Sylvia. Sylvia insists, for perfectly justifiable reasons of health and morality, on us eating a diet of absolute rubbish, so I am sacrificing my love for food for her. Fine. So last night when I ordered tofu lasagna, my longing for *Entrecôte Grillée Sauce Marchand de Vin* was quite unrequited. But I didn't have to be annoyed about my crushed desire. There was no stress on my marriage. I've saved my anguish in the emotional bank and will use it in next weeks concert.

Lenny: And what about the real meaning of music?

Benny: And even better, now that I am here for a couple days, I can spend every night in the best restaurants gorging myself, and I don't have to feel like I am a gluttonous pig, or have guilt because I am breaking my diet. It will just be research. I know I'll

be back home next week suffering under the demands of Sylvia's regime, with all my inner desires oppressed and suppressed, just waiting to burst out in gorgeous sound at the next concert, which will be another triumph.

Lenny: And what about the real meaning of music?

Benny: I admit, that is a problem. But when I was addressing the real meaning of the music, all I got was perfect disasters. You predicted that. And anyway, you have no right to criticize me on that score. The "Eroica Symphony" was about, what? Heroism? The fight against oppression? The destruction of the nobility? The glorious life of Napoleon? We can debate it, but your Anna was certainly not on Beethoven's palette.

Lenny: But love, in some form, was on his palette. And love for a woman is a profound emotion. Love of your food just isn't. It is low and completely selfish. It is solipsistic. It stinks of Narcissism.

Benny: *Tant pis*. The audience can't tell.

Lenny: You're telling me you can conduct Bach's B minor mass drawing your inspiration from a hot ruben with cheese?

Benny: No, but with six courses and aperitifs, the audience can't tell.

Lenny: But Benny, it just cannot be true that it doesn't matter what you are passionate about. There is a huge difference between being passionate about freedom, justice, or truth, and being passionate about model trains, comic books or Lego.

Benny: Maybe, but the audience can't tell. Look, you are probably right. You are inspired by the love of a woman, and I am inspired by fine food, so maybe that makes you a better human being than me.

Lenny: I didn't say that, Benny.

Benny: I know you didn't, Dad, but maybe it is true just the same. Maybe I am a shallow self-indulgent cretin. But, did you ever wonder what your teacher, Papakiriakopolis, with his passion for God, or Sobalevsky with his passion for creating a just world, would have thought of your passion for one woman, not the woman you built a life and raised a family with, but a mere passing acquaintance. Don't you think, opposites as they were, that they would have found more in common with one another than with either of us? Probably they would both regard us as a pair of shallow self-indulgent cretins.

Lenny: I guess maybe we are.

Benny: So, ok, maybe our souls need a lot of work, but, as far as conducting goes, we are all set.

Lenny: Because the audience can't tell.

Benny: Because the audience can't tell.

Lenny: Benny, I have a lot to do tomorrow. I am going to have to redo all of next year's program.

Benny: Please, please do. But nothing French. No poaching.

Lenny: And, you know, Benny, you are right. I think I really should start working on my soul, too. My passion needs updating.

Benny: We can work together, Dad. Let's start tonight with something divine. I know just the place. We can start with *moules marinières ou à la crème*.

Lenny: Why not, but first some *escargots Bourguignon*

Benny: And a chilled bottle of *Clos du Gaimont Vouvray*.

Benny & Lenny: Voilà!