

Musical Treasure Chest #25

I have been thinking lately about all the marvelous and unusual sites we get to play in and how much they factor in to the repertory that we perform and in subconscious ways to how we perform that music. There are so many subtle stimulations occurring as you absorb and react to your surroundings, and that goes for both the performer and the listener. It's a continuum of reflex and thought, difficult to put into words. In many ways, Musicians of Ma'alwyck is fortunate to play in settings that are not traditional concert sites, because it allows associations to occur with the music that might not happen in a theater.

This was impressed on me most recently when Norman Thibodeau and I taped a short video in the crypt at Hyde Hall. Built into the side of a hill, with just a small barred door for an opening, the crypt houses the remains of George Hyde Clarke and his wife Ann Cary Cooper Clarke. Shaped as a half-cylinder, the crypt is made entirely of brick and stone, and has surprisingly resonant acoustics. During the filming the tomb seemed comfortable (well I guess that would be a relative term, we had at least one mouse who, startled by our music, made several appearances), but as soon as we finished I think both Norm and I became aware of just how cold and damp and dark it was in there. I guess our minds had sort of blocked that out while we played, but now that we were no longer occupied with the music, the space didn't feel quite so benign.

While playing in the crypt is one of the more unusual spots we have performed in, it demonstrates just how much our senses inform our experiences and how susceptible we are to our environment. Every time I play at Schuyler Mansion I have this ineffable feeling of connection and even a desire to somehow find myself transported back in time and be "be a fly on the wall," perhaps watching the Schuylers discuss the Revolutionary War or dining with one of their legendary guests.

Even my own home, Ma'alwyck, has a special history dating back to the early 1700s. And, my interest in music in early America, and particularly this region, is

why I selected the name I did for the ensemble. Ma'alwyck, built around 1712, was originally a sizable broomcorn farm with much acreage in western Schenectady County. The Tolls were actually Norwegian, not Dutch, and the original immigrant Karel Hansen Toll had an adventurous, if not colorful, life (to say the least!). The Toll family became quite affluent and influential: one of them, John Calvin Toll, was in the first graduating class of Union College (1799) and to this day is remembered there by a special day of volunteerism in the fall.

I want to believe that music has always been a part of Ma'alwyck and not just a new facet that I have brought in. We played a virtual concert in the living room back in April, and it felt just right. This house has survived the American Revolution (perhaps they could even hear the cannons from the battlefields), all the turmoil of the industrial revolution, the Great Depression and the gradual shrinking of its farm as Scotia developed around it. One can only imagine what Ma'alwyck has "seen."

So today in honor of all these special historic sites, I thought I would give you one of my favorite **Beethoven** pieces *Die Weihe des Hauses* or better known as ***The Consecration of the House Overture***. While written to celebrate a new theater opening in Vienna in 1822, this less frequently performed work is so majestic and energetic, there is a quality that harks back to Handel, with great contrapuntal writing, and the overture seemed the appropriate piece to pair with all of these wonderful places. I love it.

I hope you enjoy it, and who better to play it than the Vienna Philharmonic with Claudio Abbado: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NEvgnoaqO9I>