

In Memoriam - Jerry Hadley

By Composer and friend Daniel Steven Crafts (July 19, 2007)



[Jerry Hadley](#), [Barbara Hedlund](#), [Daniel Steven Crafts](#)

June 19, 1999 Urbana, IL (Ronald Hedlund Photo)

Occasion: First read through of the music to [The Song and the Slogan](#)

For the past week, I have been far too distraught to even attempt to write anything. But, as events have finally settled, I think I owe it to the memory of Jerry Hadley to tell my story.

Some 15 years ago, I was living in the San Francisco Bay Area and supporting myself as a substitute teacher. As a composer, I enjoyed a few successes in small venues, but good performances remained hard to come by. I was also doing a weekly radio program on KPFA-FM.

RCA Victor contacted me and asked if I would like to do an interview with Jerry Hadley. I jumped at the chance, having heard him only recently at the San Francisco Opera. "Oh," but they said, "it will only be a telephone interview, and you'll have to do it at 6am Sunday California time." "That's fine," I replied. It was Jerry Hadley.

The interview turned out to be the best I had ever done by far, due to him entirely. We talked well beyond the allotted interview time (as he well knew). At length he asked me if I were a singer, as he said I seemed to know a good deal about singing. I told him in fact I was a composer. He replied that he had recently put out a call for new scores, but though he had received hundreds of works he had been greatly disappointed with what he had received, too much of what he thought either "arbitrary" or what he loved to call "fart and squeak" (unrelieved dissonance). He encouraged me to send him some of my music. I took this to be a gracious gesture on his part more than anything, but I duly put some of my latest pieces into an envelope and mailed them to him.

Several months later, I came home from work one day to find a message on my answering machine which literally changed my life. Jerry had called to say that he was impressed with my work, ("You write MELODY, I didn't know anybody did that anymore!" he had said) and would I be interested in writing a song-cycle for him. Would I?? Here was a world-renowned opera star at the height of his career petitioning an unknown composer. **THAT was Jerry Hadley!**

It took us nearly a year to settle on a project, but the next time Jerry came to San Francisco, he handed me a book of poems by Carl Sandburg. He had gone through the volume underscoring passages he thought might readily set to music. While so much of Sandburg is based in speech rather than verse rhythms, the passages Jerry had chosen were those that actually had a kind of musical flow.

The result was an extended vocal work called [*The Song & the Slogan*](#) (from a line in the text). The work did not get recorded and performed until a few years later (through the diligence and hard work of [Barbara Hedlund!](#)), but was eventually made into a TV program and was awarded a Midwest Emmy for Best Music. While I could hear Jerry's voice as I wrote the work, what I could not anticipate was the intensity of feeling he would put into singing it. With every word, he seems to animate the text with an intimacy that could only come from one who had lived it.

One further note: Upon completion of the work, he asked me if I had been able to incorporate a short poem "Illinois Farmer." I replied that unfortunately, I really couldn't find a place for it. He then suggested that I set it as a separate song and we use it as an encore. Clearly, there was something special about the text for him. On the occasion of the premiere, he confided to me that "[*The Illinois Farmer*](#)" that you so lovingly depict is my father—he IS that Illinois farmer."

There are several more projects which we had in the works that, alas, I will never hear him sing. But, even more than an invaluable collaborator, I have lost a very dear friend.