

# Harmony

**Robert Carl, composer    Russell Banks, libretto**

## Synopsis

### Characters:

Charles Ives, the composer as a young man  
Mark Twain, the author, age 73  
Rev. Joseph Twichell, age 70, Twain's best friend  
Harmony Twichell, Rev. Twichell's daughter  
Dr. David Twichell, Ives' best friend, Harmony's brother  
Ghost of Lily Clemens (Mrs. Mark Twain)  
Julia Twichell, Rev. Twichell's wife, age 70  
Susan Twichell, age 10, Rev. Twichell's youngest child

### Setting:

Midsummer's Eve, 1908. Keene Valley, New York. The front porch and interior of the Twichell family's Adirondack summer home in the mountains.

## ACT ONE

**Scene 1** – The Twichell family prepares for dinner, proclaiming the bond between the Twichell and Clemens families, by way of the Adirondacks. Harmony and Ives contemplate their love, and when Ives feels ill, we learn Harmony is a nurse. David and Ives recall their long friendship and mutual admiration. As the scene ends, Ives again feels unwell.

**Scene 2** – Rev. Twichell tells Twain of Ives' recent request for Harmony's hand in marriage. Since Ives has artistic ambitions, Twain declares he is best suited to examine Ives' fitness for Harmony – Twichell agrees. In his old age, Twain is embittered with love and conceives the notion to sabotage the marriage, despite the warning voice of Lily in his head.

**Scene 3** – Harmony expresses her worry for Ives' health, but he assures her he is fine. Twain asks to speak with Ives and during his interrogation suggests that if Ives wishes to be an artist worthy of Harmony, he must prove himself in the world as his and Rev. Twichell's own fathers had done. Suggesting he go north to gain wisdom from the Inuit, Twain points out there is a train to Montreal that leaves nightly from nearby Westport. Ives pretends to agree.

**Scene 4** – As dinner is about to begin, Ives enters dressed for the arctic, saying his farewell to all. Harmony, calling his bluff, says he can't leave before dinner. Ives tells David he is just teasing Twain, while David asks some leading questions regarding Ives' health. David diagnoses that Ives is diabetic, which is incurable. A devastated Ives vows to leave to wrap up his affairs and contemplates suicide so as not to burden Harmony. He implores David to keep his secret.

## **ACT TWO**

**Scene 1** - At dinner, Ives announces he must leave in the morning for New York. A stunned Harmony confronts Ives after dinner and Ives tells her he must break off the engagement, quoting Twain's notion that he must confront adversity before being worthy of her. Harmony tells her parents of the broken engagement and places the blame on Twain. Twichell confronts Twain and blames him for Harmony's broken heart. Twain is surprised as he hadn't intended this outcome, but suggests that if a bit of mockery from an old man dissuaded him, perhaps Ives isn't fit for Harmony after all.

**Scene 2** – Harmony has intuited Ives' illness and asks David's opinion. David breaks his vow and concurs. Harmony then confronts Ives with the truth and vows to comfort and care for him in marriage, despite his illness. Ives rebuffs her, arguing that if their positions were reversed, she would not allow the marriage to move forward for his sake. He leaves to pack. Twain has overheard the full conversation and now knows the truth, as Harmony is consoled by her parents.

**Scene 3** – Rev. Twichell and Julia implore Twain to change Ives' mind. Moved by all he has learned of Ives, he agrees. As Twain and Ives are left alone, the elder man retracts his earlier recommendations as a poor attempt at humor, and resumes his interrogation. After Ives alludes to the truth of his illness, Twain advises him no matter the suffering and pain life offers, not to throw away love, and then predicts Ives' future success in life, love and art. Ives' confidence and humor rise as the two men sit at the piano for a harmonious (in an Ivesian way) duet.