

# "The Pearl" – Showcase of the Opera In Work

David Avshalomov, lyrics, music, producer

As an idealistic teen I read Steinbeck's novella, "The Pearl." It touched me deeply. It is his artistic elaboration on a local legend of a poor young Indio pearl diver named Kino living near La Paz by the sea of Cortez in Mexico in the 1920s. He finds a great pearl, thinks it will solve all of his family's problems—real or imagined—and instead finds that people try to cheat him, rob him, even kill him for it. And in the end, because of the pearl, he and his young wife Juana lose their most precious possession—their baby, Coyotito.

Writing a tragic opera based on this intense little book has been a dream of mine ever since I first read it. It made a deep impression on me, helped shape my beliefs about social and economic justice, and carried a powerful message about materialism, attachment, and the true values in life that I wanted to echo. I was also intrigued by Steinbeck's inventive descriptions of the different melodies that Kino hears in his head throughout the story. This opera has become the artistic project nearest to my heart. My goal is to illuminate this heart-breaking story with lyrical, tuneful, pungent neo-romantic music. Everything I have done up to now as an artist has prepared me for this creative leap.

In 2002 I decided I was mature enough as a composer to tackle it, and started to create a libretto. Along the way I kept hearing musical ideas in my head that went with the lyrics, capturing them in musical sketches. Now in 2014, I have polished enough of the music to test my concept in a "dramatic concert opera" showcase setting before a discerning live audience. This is a vital first step in the evolution of any stage work, the reaction allowing the composer to further revise and improve the piece as it grows to eventually reach full staged production.

This first performance showcases 6 fully-developed musical numbers from the opera, highlighting the beginning, middle, and end of the arc from the original natural joy of the main Indio characters' simple balanced life, through the nearby Hispanic townspeople's greedy intentions to cheat them, and the couple's fatal turning point, to the final desolated release of the "evil" pearl back into the sea. [Note by the composer 2014]

These are the numbers you will hear:

1. **IN THE TOWN** – Chorus (as the Hispanic Townspeople) – Steinbeck's epigrammatic statement of the legend of the Great Pearl.
2. **SONG OF THE FAMILY** – Kino awakens in his little shack and sings of his bliss in his family; Juana joins him.

*[Brief linking narration]*

3. **KINO HAS FOUND THE PEARL OF THE WORLD** – Chorus. The people of the nearby Hispanic town, individually and as a group, reveal their greed and their resentment of Kino for his great find.

*[Brief linking narration]*

4. **KINO, IT'S EVIL** – After Kino is cheated and attacked, Juana, seeing that it puts them in grave danger, begs him to throw the Pearl back into the sea.
5. **NO! I AM A MAN** – Kino refuses and puffs up with his Indio-warrior manhood, insisting that he will fight this thing and win and save his family with their new wealth; Juana protests one last time; he soothes her a little.

*[Brief linking narration]*

6. **THROW IT BACK** – Kino and Juana return to their fishing village by the sea, she carrying her dead baby, he the rifle. He throws the pearl back, she collapses, and their Indio neighbors lament.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- Lauri Goldenhersh and Ariel Pisturino, *UnSung's entrepreneurs par excellence*, for their courage in putting this series out there and for letting me give my dream project a first outing—and in particular for their kind patience with creative artists possessed by a vision.
- Ron Barnett, Minister of Music/Choirmaster/Organist at St. Mark's
- The folks at AIM Hatchfund, especially my Program Officer Erin Cooper, who shepherded me through the online fundraising campaign that raised the full budget for this showcase
  - The Durfee Foundation for a generous matching grant that enhanced that campaign.
- All my donors (too many to list), in particular Kelyn Roberts, John David Lamb, Brad Tukey, David Rosenstein, Bruce Bush, Margaret Loss, Dr. G. Edward Bruner, and Norbert Kidd
- Stage Manager: Jacqueline Paul
- Vocal coach: Victoria Kirsch
- Acting/Staging consultants: Michael Goldstrom, Cymbaline Inez Olsen
- Choral consultant and backup conductor: Dr. G. Edward Bruner
- Hand percussionists: Shawn Taylor, Kevin Dalbey, Monica Smith, Christina Harrell
- Videographer: Ross Anthony
- ***Special thanks*** to Thomas and Gail Steinbeck for granting me formal permission to use John Steinbeck's novella, "The Pearl" as the basis for my libretto and lyrics for this showcase.



[Painting of Mexican indigenous fishermen 1945 by Edward Deutsch, courtesy of Randi Avshalomov]