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Ode to the New Year

I’m writing this column in rainy Sicily, lying in bed with my laptop computer. Sitting nearby with his back to me is my husband, known here as Maestro Ansbacher. He is leaning over a thick book -- his score -- lost in a world I can only imagine. Holding a pencil as a bow, his hand moves back and forth across silent strings. Now he hums the familiar “Ode to Joy”, and the pencil becomes a baton.

A few days later, Charles stands before the crowds in the roman-esque Basilica San Francesca. There, an orchestra comprised of players from throughout the former Yugoslavia welcomes the New Year. Millions worldwide watch the televised concert, sponsored by the EU and City of Palermo.

This is the first time since the war broke out that musicians from Sarajevo, Ljubljana, Skopje, and Dubrovnik have played alongside those of Belgrade. The players traveled by bus, ferry, bus again, and ferry again: 40 relatively easy hours given what they have endured over the past five years.

The program is distinctly appropriate for the occasion; Beethoven included a Turkish March in his Ninth Symphony to make clear to his Viennese contemporaries that “all” meant all. What better way to begin 1997 than to vow that “alle Menschen werden Brüder” (and sisters, I presume).