***Chapter 7***

**The City of Philadelphia had done its best to prevent any ugly political confrontations. To guarantee that no demonstrations, however harmless, legal or illegal, would get a foothold that might possibly run interference with the gala event, the city had authorized a series of extraordinary measures. Nothing could have been further from the intentions of the city fathers than that any respect be shown for Philadelphia’s claim to being the “Cradle of Liberty”!**

**With a zeal rarely to be found in their pursuit of criminals, the city police were chasing away anyone, with or without picket sign, who looked like a demonstrator from the vicinity of the Academy of Music. Maintaining the fiction that the basic civil rights of all Americans were being respected, an official ‘demonstration area’ had been set aside for them at Independence Square on 6th street, a mile away. The least sign of resistance courted arrest, with no concern for petty legalities. Offenders were charged under a law hurriedly enacted in the 60’s, stating that a gathering of more than 6 persons standing in one spot could be construed as a riot.**

**Tourists were rare in Philadelphia’s historic district on Christmas Eve; as for the local citizenry, most of them were shopping in the downtown areas , at home, or otherwise seeking shelter from the cold.**

**3 Puerto Rican independence groups, a Spanish pro-Fascist organization, and a contingent from the Socialist Worker’s Party did wander over to Independence Hall. United by nothing more than a common disdain for Pablo Casals, carrying their picket signs they marched in a collective circle, handing out their leaflets with frost-bitten fingers to the small number of indifferent or scornful pedestrians.**

**One by one all the political organizations dropped out, until only one was left: the *Huelga para la Independencia de Puerto Rico***

**( Strike for Puerto Rican Independence, or HIPR ). At 4 in the afternoon they all went to warm up at the nearby White Tower diner, where they made the decision to return to the Academy of Music that evening and risk arrest.**

**Sunset on Christmas Eve in Philadelphia occurs at 4:15 PM, Eastern Standard Time . By 6 a pitch-black night had fallen over most of Broad Street and the downtown shopping area . However the entertainment district, and in particular the block holding the Academy of Music was blazing with lights from stores, theaters and restaurants. Spotlights hanging down from horizontal cross-pieces on willowy vertical posts, cast the shadows of the crowds onto the sherbet pink exterior of the Renaissance façade of the Academy, while rows of upturned spotlights illuminated the upper stories of the building. Between the 7 arches of tall glass inset doors forming the entrance a procession of charming bronze lanterns, like ballerinas dancing in tandem, re-created the charm of 19th century gaslight illumination.**

**Members of the HIPR began slipping into the crowds in front of the Academy at around 6 . Their banners and signs were hidden under their overcoats; in a car parked around the corner a megaphone and stashes of leaflets lay concealed. Unsuprising for this event, an exceptional proportion of the crowd was Hispanic. Thus the HIPR blended easily into the background. For the moment they maintained a disciplined calm.**

**The police had been instructed to refrain from the racial and ethnic profiling that has made Philadelphia notorious and, among other things, had led up to the furor surrounding the case of Abu Jamal.**

**A large crowd had already formed around the entranceway when the first convoy of limousines arrived between 6 and 6:30 . Depositing their holy icons at the front door the chauffeurs drove around the block to a parking ziggurat on Locust Street, the same one where Gilbert Fabre had parked his own car the previous September.**

**Other musicians arrived on foot or, to avoid recognition , in cars or taxis. Some of the more famous refused to step out of their car until the police had cleared a path for them to the door. Peter Serkin tried to arrive incognito. He’d taken an early dinner at a restaurant at 18th and Ludlow, just to the north of Rittenhouse Square. Several friends from his days as a student at the Curtis Institute had been invited to join him. He’d seen to it that they were all given complimentary tickets. In addition to a genuine desire to renew old friendships, Serkin planned to use them as a kind of Praetorian Guard against the mobs of fans and fanatics.**

**Serkin’s views about Pablo Casals were as derogatory to the memory of the legendary cellist as his oft-reiterated views on the political opinions and personal lives of Alexander Schneider, Isaac Stern, Miecezlaw Horzowski, or most of the other members of the reactionary cabal of musicians he’d been surrounded by when growing up. Over dinner he regaled his friends with a store of acid anecdotes about his Marlboro Festival elders.**

**Peter Serkin and his friends began their stroll down Locust Street from Rittenhouse Square at 6:15. Alas, he was recognized by another classmate from his Curtis days! One shouted greeting was enough to bring a hoard of autograph seekers converging on him. Two security guards stepped out from the back entrance and rescued him. As he was being hustled inside, one of the guards remained behind to watch the doorway until the opening of the festivities at 8.**

**At 7 Hernando Guzman, governor of Puerto Rico arrived with his wife and the rest of his entourage, his galleon-sized Lincoln Continental bracketed by the standard black sedans crammed with secret service agents. The directors of the HIPR demonstration waited as the governor of Puerto Rico and his wife descended together from the limousine. They’d walked as far as the lowest of the six ranges of shallow steps leading to the entrance when the signal was given for the attack.**

**Picket signs appeared above the heads of the crowd like a flock of released pigeons, followed immediately by showers of leaflets raining down on them. These came from demonstrators rapidly exiting cars and forcing their way through the melee. Over a megaphone there barked a voice with a thick Puerto Rican accent:**

**“Ladies and gentleman. *Companieros!* Do not be deceived! We are the *Huelga para la Independencia de Puerto Rico*! We want everyone to understand that this is the most dishonoring day in the sad history of our raped and mutilated Puerto Rico! If you are men and women of conscience! If you have any sympathy for oppressed peoples! If you believe in justice! *Do not enter this building!* Do not be deceived! This is not a tribute to a great musician! This is not the hand of friendship to our afflicted nation! *This is a barbarous celebration of Yankee imperialism* ! This event mocks the squalor and misery of our Puerto Rican proletariat! This slap in the face….!”**

**Legions of the Philadelphia police converged from all sides, night-sticks at the ready. The cacophony of erupting police car sirens mingled with the stale whine of Christmas carols blurting like syrup out of the sidewalk loudspeakers ; the gay texture of idle chatter was transformed into a pandemonium of terror and flight. Demonstrators from the HIPR who had hastily imagined they could seek protection by hovering close to the body of a well-known politician or famous musician discovered too late that the cops, unable or too blinkered to distinguish between the offender and the offended, were swinging their battle axes at random. A recognizably Hispanic skin coloration was enough to set them running. The fingers of the right hand of an acclaimed young pianist from Venezuela were unceremoniously smashed, bringing a highly promising career to an end. The same treatment was given to the front teeth of the wife of a Hispanic alderman, and other spectators unable to flee in time.**

**The police had an easier job of it coping with demonstrators foolish or undisciplined enough as to attack the police with their fists and picket signs. Their arms were twisted behind their backs. Wrenched to the ground with one or two cops astraddle, mace was shot directly into their eyes.**

**In a short time the sidewalk from Locust to Walnut Street was carpeted with Christmas wreaths, tinsel, banners and red ribbons, broken glass and trash from over-turned bins. Several bloodied bodies lay on the steps of the Academy.**

**A member of the HIPR wielding a long rod smashed the streetlights, then tried to get at the beautiful glass and bronze enclosures of the gas lights glowing against the walls of the Academy of Music. Such callous insensitivity indicated quite clearly that the HIPR were not in a position to state whether the gala was or was not a tribute to art; it was effectively dealt with by the enforcers of law and order. Handcuffed and battered, the vandal was hustled down the street into the squadron of police vans stationed along Walnut Street.**

**The HIPR had anticipated the police and incorporated it in their plans. Now a dozen militants held in reserve let fly with a cannonade in the direction of Governor Guzman and his wife: garbage, mud, dirt encrusted snowballs, soda bottles and rocks. Guzman’s wife took a stone full in the face; it broke her nose. Blood streamed across her face and down her cheeks. An over-zealous demonstrator grabbed the hem of her fur coat. As she was pulled to the ground to collapse in the snow, her dress was splattered with filth.**

**It was the signal for score of Secret Service agents to emerge from their cars and carve a path through the crowd. Her body was lifted off the steps of the Academy and carried back to the doors of the limousine. The governor was already seated inside. Apart from the stains of refuse that covered the front of his tuxedo, he was unharmed. The limousine sped off into the night. Above the screams of the crowd, the caterwauling of sirens and the moronic music still issuing forth from the loud-speakers came the puttering of a police helicopter high overhead. This drew more crowds of curious spectators from the adjoining streets**

**As the police hurled themselves against the renewed wave of assault from the HIPR, the throngs of terrified on-lookers reared up on the steps of the Academy. Some of them were allowed to enter the safety of the Academy lobby before the doors were locked. Most of the HIPR troop involved in the second wave were able to slip away down adjacent streets and passageways.**

**Not so lucky was a young Puerto Rican medical student enrolled at Temple University. An innocent bystander, he was struck by a car as he ran across Broad Street. His body was quickly surrounded by police and medics. Half an hour passed before an ambulance from nearby Jefferson Hospital was able to come and pick him up. The newspaper accounts of the following days do not say what happened to him. However, police records show that he was interrogated by the FBI as he lay in the hospital before being flown back to his family in San Juan.**

**The entire confrontation had taken no more than half an hour. There being almost an hour remaining before the scheduled concert opening at 8, no thought was given to cancelling it. Tickets were refunded for about 40 attendees. Put on sale again, they were snatched up immediately.**

**Apart from the dozen seriously injured who’d been taken to the hospitals ( which, in conjunction with medical schools, abound in this part of Philadelphia) most of its witnesses were able to patch themselves up in the rest-rooms of neighboring restaurants and bars. Hanging out over soft drinks and snacks they restored their shattered nerves and waited for news.**

**At 8 PM the Academy communicated to the public that the governor of Puerto Rico, Hernando Guzman had returned, without his wife, and the last of the demonstrators arrested or dispersed. Anyone who wished to have his ticket refunded could do so. The concert would begin as scheduled.**

**The festive atmosphere in front of the Academy was quickly restored. With the informal scalping in the street of another 30 tickets or so, the lobby quickly filled to capacity. The historic Pablo Casals gala of Christmas Eve 1981, was underway.**