When I was an undergraduate student at the Mannes College of Music in the early 1980s, I began entering certain of my compositions in various competitions for young composers. Compared to the present multitude of such opportunities, there were fewer of these at that time, but one of those I annually entered from 1983 to 1985 was sponsored by the National Federation of Music Clubs.

I retained the flyers announcing the results of those NFMC competitions, and it is interesting to look at the names of some of the young winners. Certain of these composers have gone on to achieve major success, while others have had more modest careers or have disappeared entirely from the scene.

For example, in 1983, the second-place winner of a Victor Herbert/ASCAP Award was a 21-year-old Michael Torke. In the 1984 competition, Torke then won First Place in that category. Interestingly, Aaron Kernis and I both won Special Recognition Awards that year for our respective pieces.
In the final year I entered, 1985, James Legg placed first in the Victor Herbert/ASCAP Award category. Like Michael Torke’s ascent in the competition from 1983 to 1984, Legg had placed second in this category in 1984 before earning the top prize in this, the following year.

I knew Jim a little bit because we had both gone to Duke for our masters degrees, although at different times. He was doing quite well in New York following his graduation, often collaborating with his partner, stage director Jack O’Brien. Jim tragically died in New York City in 2000. Had his life not been cut short, one wonders if Jim’s career trajectory also would have followed that of Mr. Torke.