



Press Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

F. Murray Abraham to perform

***Elusive Things: A Song Cycle By Eric Shimelonis After Poems By Ilene Starger,*
with the Voice Of The City Ensemble. January 15th, 2010 at 8:00pm,
Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall, 154 West 57th Street, NYC**

Actor F. Murray Abraham holds a special place in the music world. His Academy Award-winning portrayal of Antonio Salieri in the film *Amadeus* is the ultimate personification of a composer's pursuit of divine inspiration, and his character's consequent struggle resonates with musicians everywhere.

Composer Eric Shimelonis has always been deeply moved by this performance of Mr. Abraham's, and was therefore elated to get to work with him last year on *Almost an Evening*, a trio of Ethan Coen plays for the Atlantic Theatre. "We were discussing our mutual love of music one day, and Murray explained that he was studying with a vocal coach to further his aria singing, which he does mainly for his own enjoyment," Shimelonis explains. "Impressed with his passion and personal dedication, I asked if he was planning to give any recitals, and he said that he had not considered it. I offered to compose some original songs for him based around previously unsung texts that would highlight his interpretative gifts. He got very excited about the idea."

Mr. Abraham contacted poet Ilene Starger, a friend, and asked if she would be interested in contributing some of her poems to the project. He has been a fan of her work, and saw this as a great opportunity to bring three passionate artists together. Ms. Starger recalls: "I was honored, and very enthusiastic, to say the least, when Murray first told me about his idea of Eric setting my poems to music. I selected several poems which I thought might lend themselves to music, and sent them to Murray, who chose his favorites."

After roughly a year and a half of work, a total of ten songs have taken shape. They are instrumented for voice and piano quintet, and evoke in words and music themes of love, grief, and mortality. Mr. Shimelonis says that the emotional depth of Ms. Starger's poems have inspired him to some of his most striking work to date. Ms. Starger comments: "When I first heard Eric's music for several of the songs in the cycle, I was greatly moved by its beauty and intelligence. I detect a Bach influence in his music, but with a modern underpinning."

Both creators are excited to behold Mr. Abraham bringing their songs to life. Ms. Starger explains: "Murray's speaking voice, a magnificent instrument unto itself, can be dramatic, bawdy, elegant; therefore, it is no surprise that he can sing beautifully, and, when singing, brings his intuitive actor's gifts to each song. He makes one feel as if he has lived the words; his sensitivity and fierce intellect illuminate everything he does."

"Singing lifts acting to another level," Mr. Abraham says. "The language deepens, it no longer needs translation, and the rigorous discipline of the music becomes an anchor that encourages me to go where I could never go as an actor, even with sweet Shakespeare. What Eric and Ilene have accomplished is a blessing; it's the best 70th birthday present I can imagine."

F. Murray Abraham has narrated and performed with the New York Philharmonic, as well as with the symphony orchestras of Detroit, San Francisco, Chicago, Seattle, and Indianapolis. He has worked with Michael Tilson Thomas, James Levine and Jordi Savall, among others. He continues to study music, and receives vocal instruction from Janet Aycok. In theatre, he has acted in ancient and modern classics by Shakespeare, Molière, Giraudoux, Pirandello, Beckett, Pinter, Miller, Mamet, Kushner, and Coen. He has authored a book on *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, published by Faber and Faber, and is the voice of the PBS Nature series. He has appeared in many films including *The Ritz*, *Scarface*, *Finding Forrester*, and *Amadeus*, for which he received the LA Film Critics' Award, the Golden Globe, and the Academy Award.

Eric Shimelonis grew up in Cleveland, Ohio in a family of music lovers. Primarily self-taught, he learned a number of instruments as a child and began composing in his teens. He moved to New York City in 1998 where he has built a career in theatre and film, and where he has continued to compose and to further his studies in music. His classical compositions have been performed at the Juilliard School and in the Rattlestick New Music Series, where he was a resident composer. He served as assistant director for Stravinsky's *L'histoire du Soldat* with the Philadelphia and Boston Symphony Orchestras, and he has several conducting engagements this coming year. He was the recipient of a 2002-2004 NEA grant, an ASCAP Plus Awards grant, and was nominated for a 2007 Lucille Lortel Award for his work in theatre.

Ilene Starger is presently compiling a full-length collection of poems. Her work has been published in *Bayou*, *Oyez Review*, *Georgetown Review*, *Tributaries*, *Folio*, *Oberon*, *Paper Street*, *Second Wind*, *Tar Wolf Review*, *Erato*, *Grasslimb*, *Manzanita*, *Poesia*, *Ibbetson Street*, *Iodine*, *Phoenix*, *The New Renaissance*, *The Same* and online in the *Tupelo Press Poetry Project*. She received honorable mentions in the 2004 Ann Stanford Prize sponsored by the *Southern California Anthology* (she was a finalist in 2005), in the 2005 *NMW* competition, in the 2006 Oliver Browning competition sponsored by *Poesia*/Indian Bay Press, and in the 2007 Writecorner Press competition. Finishing Line Press published her chapbook *Lethe, Postponed* in September 2008.

Voice Of The City Ensemble is a New York City based chamber group dedicated to the performance of new music. Led by director Christian Hebel, the ensemble maintains a flexible architecture with a core group of talented and versatile musicians. Instrumentalists for this concert include Christian Hebel and Matthew Lehmann (violins), Philip Payton (viola), Mairi Dorman-Phaneuf (cello), and Andy Einhorn (piano).

Tickets range from \$35 to \$55 and are available at the Carnegie Hall Box Office, from CarnegieCharge at (212) 247-7800, or at www.carnegiehall.org.