

Synopsis and bios for *The Face*

BRIEF OPERA SYNOPSIS: The opera is set in Venice, CA in present day and is centered on the making of a film about a poet's life and work. Many of the scenes take place either on a studio set where the film is being shot or in the Venice Beach area. The central character, RAPHAEL (a once famous poet and writer), has suffered a series of personal crises in his life including the loss of his soul mate and muse, MARINA, several years earlier. INFANTA is a talented director/filmmaker who has convinced Raphael to participate in the making of a movie about his life. Infanta is collaborating on the project with her mentor, the well-known producer MEMPHIS. A young and ambitious actress, CYBELE, is cast by Infanta in the role of Marina for the movie. (While Marina is a central figure in the dramatic context of the work, she appears to the audience solely on film, which is rear projected from the stage during the opera).

In the process of making the movie, Raphael becomes increasingly unbalanced as he relives the traumatic loss of Marina. Simultaneously he is both enticed and un-nerved by his developing relationship with the young actress Cybele who plays Marina so convincingly in the movie. Tensions also arise between Infanta and Cybele as a web of intertwining personal relationships evolves between the characters. Always observing and often engineering these complex interactions is the producer - Memphis (a Mephistopheles-like character) who plays a critical role in Raphael's demise. The highly successful release of the film coincides with Raphael's emotional and physical collapse as the grueling process finally takes its toll on him.

DONALD CROCKETT Composer of *The Face* and based in California, Donald Crockett is dedicated to composing music inspired by the musicians who perform it. He has received commissions from the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra (Composer-in-Residence 1991-97), Pasadena Chamber Orchestra (Composer-in-Residence 1984-86), Kronos Quartet, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Hilliard Ensemble, Stanford String Quartet, Pittsburgh New Music Ensemble, Charlotte Symphony, Music from Angel Fire, the Chamber Music Conference and Composers' Forum of the East (Senior Composer-in-Residence 2002 - ongoing), Pacific Serenades and the California EAR Unit, among many others. Recent projects include commissions from the San Francisco-based chamber choir, Volti, Composers Inc. for its 25th anniversary, and a work for viola and six instruments commissioned by the Harvard Musical Association for Firebird Ensemble, and a viola concerto for Boston Modern Orchestra Project.

DAVID ST. JOHN Librettist of *The Face* has been honored, over the course of his career, with many of the most significant prizes for poets, including fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, both the Rome Fellowship and an Award in Literature from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, the O.B. Hardison Prize from The Folger Shakespeare Library, and a grant from the Ingram Merrill Foundation. His work has been published in countless literary magazines, including *The New Yorker*, *The Paris Review*, *Poetry*, *American Poetry Review*, *Harper's*, *Antaeus*, and *The New Republic*, and has been widely anthologized. He has taught creative writing at Oberlin College and The Johns Hopkins University and currently teaches at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles, where he is Professor of English and previously Director of the Ph.D. Program in Literature and Creative Writing. David St. John is

the author of ten volumes of poetry, most recently *The Face: A Novella in Verse*, *The Auroras* (both published by Harper Collins) and also a volume of essays, interviews and reviews entitled *Where the Angels Come Toward Us*.