

## Note for *After Life*

*A question conjured us. A question hangs in the dark...*

So Gertrude Stein remarks in David Mason's libretto, and so the music goes on to insist. *After Life* is an opera more concerned with raising questions than answering them. The topics are weighty and ambitious; the role of art in a troubled world, the duty of artists in confronting inhumanity. I confess my own thinking on these issues evolved as I worked on the score. When recent events brought forth the images of black-garbed madmen executing innocents on the desert floor of the Levant, I initially thought that art was useless in such circumstances. Later, I began to reconsider, forming the opinion that the real value of art comes after such horrific moments, helping us, as individuals and as a culture, make sense of the incomprehensible. Only recently, I realized that it is often art that makes the moments themselves bearable at all. But still, how ironic that the art we revere can be such an ennobling force for so many, and at other times an inspiration to those who have abandoned their own humanity. As Picasso exclaims in one of the most dramatic outbursts of *After Life*, "The Germans were lovers of art!"

The composing of *After Life* presented a number of challenges. David has called his elegant libretto a *tragicomedy*, and the delicate balance of these two sides was prominent in my mind as I worked. I allowed myself a bit of fun in incorporating quotes from Menotti's *The Medium* when Gertrude Stein attempts to conjure Alice Toklas. In creating music for the fascinating, larger-than-life characters, I tried to capture Stein's outsize ego and Picasso's virility. Surprisingly, the character of the young orphan girl presented the greatest range of emotions. In her barely fifteen minutes on stage, she demonstrates calm, patience, sorrow, rage, resignation, wisdom, and grace.

The composer would like to express his deepest appreciation to Music of Remembrance and Mina Miller for commissioning *After Life*, and to James and Sherry Raisbeck for the generous support that made the work possible. Thanks also to David Mason for crafting a libretto that is both eloquent and inspiring. *After Life* is dedicated to my colleague and dear friend, the brilliant composer Lori Laitman, and also to the memory of Lori's mother, Mrs. Josephine Propp Laitman.

Tom Cipullo  
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