



woodstock fringe
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Wallace Norman, Producing Artistic Director

IN ASSOCIATION WITH **JUDSON ARTS** PRESENTS
THE WORLD PREMIERE

Oh Virgil! A Theatrical Portrait

A new play about the life and music of

Virgil Thomson

Virgil Thomson's Art Songs and Piano Portraits are woven into a portrait of one of the most remarkable, influential and controversial artists in the history of contemporary American Music

featuring

Victoria Devany*, Watson Heintz*, Troy Valjean Rucker*, Victor Truro* (as Virgil Thomson), Dan Via*

* appearing courtesy of Actor's Equity

TWO WEEKS ONLY!

MAY 1 THRU MAY 10

FRIDAY & SATURDAY AT 8PM, SUNDAY AT 3PM

JUDSON MEMORIAL CHURCH

55 WASHINGTON SQUARE SOUTH

CORNER OF WEST 4TH STREET AND THOMSON STREET

written by Wallace Norman
in collaboration with Larry Alan Smith
musical direction Michael Conley
stage direction Nicola Sheara
costume design Raul Aktanov
scene design Craig Napoliello
lighting design Jake Platt
production stage manager Jillian Zeman

made possible by the generous support of THE VIRGIL THOMSON FOUNDATION

OH VIRGIL! A THEATRICAL PORTRAIT written by Wallace Norman in collaboration with Larry Alan Smith



Virgil Thomson

Spend a day with **Virgil Thomson**—one of the most remarkable, influential and controversial artists in the history of contemporary American music. From his bed at the Chelsea Hotel in New York City, Thomson ran the world of music as chief music critic for the *Herald Tribune*. The Father of American Music, Thomson paved the way for his contemporaries who included **Aaron Copland, Paul Bowles, Igor Stravinsky, Mark Blitzstein, Ned Rorem** and **Leonard Bernstein**, among many others. He was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for his score of the film *Louisiana Story*. His collaborations with **Gertrude Stein** on two opera masterworks, *Four Saints In Three Acts* and *The Mother of Us All*, were the most celebrated events of their time. His collaborations with **John Houseman, Orson Wells** and **Frederick Ashton** are legendary. *Oh Virgil!* is a kaleidoscopic portrait of a man and a time when the world of modern art and music exploded. Eight of Thomson's songs and several of his piano portraits are interwoven with the text of the play. This play was made possible by the generous support of **The Virgil Thomson Foundation**.

Virgil Thomson was a many faceted American composer of great originality and a music critic of singular brilliance. Born in Kansas City, Missouri on November 25, 1896, Thomson studied at Harvard. After a prolonged period in Paris where he studied with **Nadia Boulanger** and met **Cocteau, Stravinsky, Satie**, and the artists of **Les Six**, he returned to the United States where he was chief music critic for the **New York Herald Tribune** from 1937 to 1951. **Thomson** composed in almost every genre of music. Utilizing a musical style marked by sharp wit and overt playfulness, Thomson produced a highly original body of work rooted in American speech rhythms and hymnbook harmony. His music was most influenced by Satie's ideals of clarity, simplicity, irony, and humor. He was the author of eight books, including an autobiography. Included in his many honors and awards are the Pulitzer Prize, a Brandeis Award, the gold medal for music from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, the National Book Circle Award, the Kennedy Center Honors, and 20 honorary doctorates. For more information about Virgil Thomson, see www.virgilthomson.org.

ABOUT WOODSTOCK FRINGE

Woodstock Fringe is a professional performing arts organization that develops and presents new and experimental theatrical and musical works. We believe the act of creation is an act of courage. The Fringe serves as a home to emerging and established artists. Acting as a safe harbor we seek to provide a collaboration between the artists and the audience pursuing the highest standard of live performance.

Founded in 2003, the Fringe is in its 7th season. The Fringe produces an annual month-long **Woodstock Fringe Festival of Theatre & Song** at the beautiful and historic **Byrdcliffe Theatre** in Woodstock, NY.

"FRINGE BRISTLES WITH EXCELLENCE" KINGSTON FREEMAN

"POWERFUL - MULTI-DIMENSIONAL - FASCINATING" WOODSTOCK TIMES

Woodstock Fringe

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845-810-0123



WOODSTOCK FRINGE FESTIVAL OF THEATRE & SONG IS MADE POSSIBLE WITH PUBLIC FUNDS FROM THE NEW YORK STATE COUNCIL ON THE ARTS, A STATE AGENCY.

TICKETS & INFORMATION

WWW.WOODSTOCKFRINGE.ORG

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\$18 GEN ADMISSION

The idea for *Oh Virgil! A Theatrical Portrait* began sometime early in 2006 when a colleague, Larry Alan Smith, came to me with his idea of a play about the life and music of Virgil Thomson. Thomson had a big personality, was very influential and was on the scene at a time when the music and art world exploded. His operas and friendship with Gertrude Stein are legendary. We knew from the start that we wanted to incorporate some of Thomson's songs and music into our presentation. So, a workshop of this a new play with music was a perfect fit for our annual Woodstock Fringe Festival of Theatre & Song. We asked the Virgil Thomson Foundation for support. We were delighted when the Foundation responded enthusiastically and generously supported the development of this play and a workshop production. We were off.

Research started and I read every bit of material about Virgil Thomson I could find. Thomson's life and work is well documented and there was much to learn about. I set out to collect and surround myself with information about the man and the world he lived in. Larry and I traveled to the archives at Yale University to listen to audio tapes and video tapes on Thomson. Thomson had written an autobiography. Invaluable was Anthony Tommasini's extraordinary biography, *Virgil Thomson Composer on the Aisle*. Another great resource was Steven Watson's *Prepare For Saints* which encyclopedically documents the production of Thomson and Steins *Four Saints In Three Acts*. Individuals who knew and worked with Thomson were kind enough to speak to me about Thomson, including Richard Flender, Charles Fussell, Ned Rorem, Tim Page, Craig Rutenberg, Anthony Tommasini, and Scott Wheeler. I loved immersing myself in this material.

Virgil Thomson was coming into focus. He was a complex man who lead a "big" life. A great raconteur and host, his dinner parties at the Chelsea Hotel were famous for their excellent food, conversation and impressive guests. Those interviewed spoke of Thomson's fierce intelligence, great wit and the many pleasures they experienced knowing him. Life with and around Thomson was at times hugely entertaining and at other times very difficult. Thomson expressed pleasure and disappointment extravagantly. Everyone I spoke to felt that their lives were much richer for having known him and that having known him was a very important part of their life.

After some time and learning how much information is available and how rich was Thomson's artistic and social life, I began to feel overwhelmed and daunted by the task of writing a play about this man. Tommasini and Watson had spent years researching and writing their books. (Tommasini's great book is more than 600 pages.) We had to produce *Oh Virgil!* in just a little more than a year's time. Larry and I met several times to kick around ideas for scenes, select what part of Thomson's "story" we want to tell. I struggled to find a structure for the play. The deadline was looming. I had no play yet.

Finally the idea "write a portrait" came to me. Thomson wrote hundreds of what he called "musical portraits." Thomson's idea for this came from Gertrude Stein who wrote what she called "word portraits." Individuals would sit for Thomson and he would write a musical piece using musical ideas to "paint" his subjects. So, I would set out to compose a theatrical and music portrait of Thomson. The name of our play was changed to *Oh Virgil! A Theatrical Portrait*. We use a pianist, two singers and three actors to create our portrait of Virgil Thomson.

I am grateful to Michael Conley, Artistic Director of Judson Arts, for inviting Woodstock Fringe to present the world premier of our play at the Judson Memorial Church. I am very excited to have this work come to life.