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# The Mother of Us All, April 14, 1990

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The Boston University School of Music Opera Theatre presents

# The Mother of Us All



Music: Virgil Thomson Text: Gertrude Stein Direction: Sharon Daniels

Music Direction: David Hoose and Stephen Steiner

Saturday, April 14, Monday, April 16, Tuesday, April 17, at 8 p.m.

Boston University Theatre, 264 Huntington Avenue, Boston, Massachusetts

**BOSTON UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF MUSIC**  
**Opera Theatre**  
presents

# **THE MOTHER OF US ALL**

Music by Virgil Thomson  
Text by Gertrude Stein  
Thomson and Stein's unique biography of Susan B. Anthony

In Memoriam, Virgil Thomson, 1896-1989

Music Directors: David Hoose and Stephen Steiner  
Conductors: David Hoose (Monday 16 & Tuesday 17)  
                  Stephen Steiner (Saturday 14 )  
Stage Director: Sharon Daniels  
Assistant Director: Will Graham  
Musical Preparation: Stephen Steiner  
Coach/Accompanist: Lisa Harer  
Coach/Accompanist: Michael Beattie  
Coach/Accompanist: Karen Harvey  
Scene Design: Allen Randall  
Costume Design: Laurie Bramhall  
Lighting Design: Clarke Zampella  
Stage Manager: Andrea Scala  
Assistant Stage Manager: Norah Martone

Saturday, Monday, Tuesday  
April 14, 16, and 17, 1990  
8 p.m.  
Main Stage  
Boston University Theatre

THE MOTHER OF US ALL by Virgil Thomson is used by arrangement with G.Schirmer, Inc., publisher and copyright owner.

## Synopsis

Virgil Thomson's setting of Gertrude Stein's last opera THE MOTHER OF US ALL defies synopsis. It has been described as a "landscape," a "pageant," perhaps even Miss Stein's "valedictory." Commissioned by the Alice M. Ditson Fund of Columbia University in 1945, the libretto was completed in March 1946 and was Gertrude Stein's last completed work. She died of cancer later that year on July 27. Virgil Thomson completed the orchestral score in the spring of 1947 for its premiere on May 7, 1947. The musical score indicates that "the scenery should suggest America in the nineteenth century without too much precision as to decade. The costumes should sharply exemplify regions, decades, and social circumstances. The variety of these against a more generalized historical background should offer a spectacle no more anachronistic than suggested to the mind by the perusal of a volume of old photographs."

THE MOTHER OF US ALL is a tribute to the life of Susan B. Anthony and her crusade for suffrage for blacks and women in America. Alongside the recurring theme of human rights, Gertrude Stein interweaves her playful irreverence for time, with historical figures

such as John Adams, Daniel Webster, and Ulysses S. Grant courting and cavorting with imaginary characters, plus an occasional inclusion of a personal friend or foe. Even the composer and librettist make appearances on stage, and lovely early American hymn-like melodies mingle with the "modernism" of early minimalism.

Virgil Thomson called THE MOTHER OF US ALL: "A memory book of Victorian play-games and passions...with its gospel hymns and cocky marches, its sentimental ballads, waltzes, darned-fool ditties, and intoned sermons...a souvenir of all those sounds and kinds of tunes that were once the music of rural America."

**We offer the following scene guidelines  
as a tour map of tonight's experience.**

## **ACT ONE**

### **Overture**

Scene One (Prologue) Virgil Thomson and Gertrude Stein introduce and inform us about Susan B. Anthony and Anne.

Scene Two (A Political Meeting) Virgil Thomson announces the subject of the meeting. Daniel Webster incants, various people comment, and the scene culminates in a debate between Susan B. Anthony and Daniel Webster.

### **Interlude**

Scene Three (Naughty Men Do Quarrel So) Thaddeus Stevens and Andrew Johnson fight. Constance Fletcher and John Adams flirt. Lillian Russell saves the day.

### **Interlude**

Scene Four (The Dream)

Scene Five (The Marriage of Jo the Loiterer and Indiana Elliot)

## **ACT TWO**

Scene One

(Susan B. Anthony's Drawing Room)

### **Interlude**

Scene Two (After the Meeting)

The word Male has been written into the constitution of the United States.

Scene Three (Epilogue)

Susan B. Anthony died before women realized their right to vote. The characters in the opera gather for the unveiling of a memorial.

**Cast List- THE MOTHER OF US ALL**  
**In order of Appearance:**

Susan B. Anthony - Sandra Horner  
(1820-1906) The right to vote was given to women on August 26, 1920, the Centennial of her birth, but 14 years after her death.

Anne - Barbara Youmans  
(1847-1919) Probably Anna Howard Shaw, Suffrage leader.

Gertrude Stein - Charlene Marcinko  
(1874-1946) U.S. author and celebrated personality. Died before The Mother of Us All was performed.

Virgil Thomson - Paul Warner  
(1896-1989) "Americanist" Pulitzer Prize winning Composer.

Daniel Webster - Dennis Bender  
(1782-1852) U.S. Senator from Massachusetts, consummate politician and eloquent speaker who wavered politically with the times.

Andrew Johnson - Stephen Bomgardner  
(1808-1875) First President to be impeached.

Thaddeus Stevens - Dan Moore  
(1792-1868) Avid Abolitionist. Active in impeachment of Andrew Johnson.

Jo the Loiterer - Jose Alberto Calvo  
Joe Barry, a personal friend of Gertrude S. in Paris, who wanted to be in her opera.

Chris the Citizen - Stephen Salters  
Fictional-Universal Being.

Negro Man - Stephen Salters  
Fictional.

Indiana Elliot - Mary Delli Colli  
Fictional-Probably refers to George Elliot.

Angel More - Kimberly McCullough  
Fictional.

Henrietta M. - Heidi Menzenberg  
Fictional.

Henry B. - Ling Ning Xu  
Fictional.

Anthony Comstock - Timothy Ostendorf  
(1844-1915) Father of American Censorship; spent his life "harrassing those who presumed to differ from orthodox religious thought."

John Adams - James Ruff  
(1767-1848) Politically groomed son of John  
and Abigail - 6th President of the  
United States

Constance Fletcher - Mary A. Bozzuti  
(1858-1938) Known by her pen name,  
George Fleming; was a personal friend of  
Gertrude S. and Alice B. Toklas.

Gloster Heming - Ling Ning Xu  
Fictional.

Isabel Wentworth - Jeanne Okrasinski  
Fictional.

Gloster and Isabel's children -  
Megan Sullivan, Tessa Cedar  
Fictional.

Anna Hope - Laurie Anne McGowan  
Fictional, possibly another reference to Anna  
Howard Shaw.

Lillian Russell - Donna Ames  
(1861-1922) Famed actress. Her mother was  
a follower of Susan B. Anthony.

Jenny Reefer - Pamela Dillard  
Fictional. feminist.

Negro Woman - Pamela Dillard  
Fictional.

Ulysses S. Grant - Mark Anderson  
(1822-1885) eighteenth President, Union  
General; both assignments marred with  
scandal.

Herman Atlan - Sanghoon Oak  
Jean Atlan - Surrealist painter; an out of  
favor acquaintance of Gertrude S.

Donald Gallup - Edward Whalen  
Personal friend of Gertrude S., handled her  
estate at her death.

A.A. - Martha Sullivan  
Fictional.

T.T. - Mary MacDermott  
Fictional.

Indiana Elliot's Brother - Sanghoon Oak  
Fictional.

Pre-show Victorian Songbirds - Manhua Gao,  
Julie Hanson, Miho Sato Martha Sullivan,  
Mary MacDermott

Tourists - Yang Jie, Lo Wei, Manhua Gao,  
Timothy Ostendorf

**Boston University Chamber Orchestra - THE MOTHER OF US ALL**

Violin I

Yoon-mi Im  
Timothy Tan  
Chung Mei Chang  
John Hubbard  
Lisa Chippendale

Violin II

Amy Tobin  
Elizabeth Carillo  
Joan Wasser  
Joshua Mazow

Viola

Sonya White  
Abigail Kubert  
Keith Freer

Cello

Gordon Cleland  
Amy Leung  
Kevin Freer

Bass

Zhong-bing Pan

Piano

Lisa Harer

Flute

Leslie Pressel

Oboe

Su Jaizheng

Clarinet

Song Tu  
Sheryl Hicks

Bassoon

Janet Underhill

Horn

Andrew Brusletten  
Sarah Kashin

Trumpet

Marc Reese  
Sean Walsh

Trombone

Mark Hetzler

Percussion

Jonathon Fox  
Joseph DeMarco

Harp

Melissa Bloemker

**David Hoose** joined the Boston University School of Music faculty in 1987 where he is a Professor of Music and Conductor of the Boston University Symphony and Chamber Orchestras, as well as Chairman of Musical Organizations. Currently Music Director of the Cantata Singers and Cantiones Sacrae, Mr. Hoose has appeared as guest conductor with the Saint. Louis Symphony Orchestra, Boston Symphony Chamber Players, Pro Arte Chamber Orchestra, Handel and Haydn Society, Orchestra Regionale Toscana (Italy) and at the Berkshire Music Center. Highly respected for his performances of twentieth-century music, Mr. Hoose has given over 200 premieres, including the first American performance of Sir Peter Maxwell Davies' opera "The Lighthouse," and the world premieres of Gheorghe Costinescu's "The Musical Seminar," Seymour Shifrin's "Cantata to the Text of Sophoclean Chorus," and John Harbison's Pulitzer-Prize-winning "Flight into Egypt." He was also a founding member of the Naumburg Award-winning Emmanuel Wind Quintet. Mr Hoose conducts the performances of THE MOTHER OF US ALL on Monday and Tuesday, April 16 and 17.

**Sharon Daniels** makes her Boston directing debut with THE MOTHER OF US ALL. She has conducted masterclasses and taught acting and voice in New York since the mid-1980's and is currently an Assistant Professor at the Boston University School of Music and Associate Director of the Opera Program. She made her professional operatic debut with the San Francisco Opera in 1974, and in 1977 made her debut with the New York City Opera in the title role in "La Belle Hélène."

She has had leading roles with various major opera companies, including: Kansas City, Houston, Fort Worth, Michigan, Arizona, Minnesota, Virginia, and the Opera Theatre of St. Louis. Her reputation as a singing actress brought her a Broadway debut opposite Giorgio Tozzi in The "Most Happy Fella," which was subsequently broadcast nationally on PBS as part of the Great Performances series. New York City audiences have also heard her Rose Maurrant in "Street Scene," Mimi and Musetta in "La Bohème," Micaela in "Carmen," Concepcion in "L'heure Espanol," the title roles in "Susannah" and "The Merry Widow," and, most recently, the role of Pat Nixon in the Sellars-Adams-Goodman opera "Nixon in China."

**Stephen Steiner** has been on the staff of the Boston University Opera Department since 1987. He has been responsible for the musical preparation for the productions of "Transformations," "Die Fledermaus," "Don Giovanni," and "The Turn of the Screw." He last conducted for Boston University's 1988 production of "Guys and Dolls."

In addition to his work at Boston University, he is very active as a coach and recital accompanist and has worked for many operatic organizations in the Boston area, serving in the capacities of coach/accompanist, chorus master, or music director. He has also been engaged for the past two seasons by the Michigan Opera Theater in Detroit, working on their spring productions. Mr. Steiner conducts the performance on Saturday, April 14.

## Production Staff

Production Manager  
Stage Manager  
Assistant Stage Manager  
Technical Director  
Master Carpenter  
Scene Design  
Assistant Scene Design  
Costume Design  
Costumer  
Lighting Design  
Assistant Lighting Design  
Master Electrician  
Board Operator  
School of Music Stage Crew Head  
Scenic Artist  
Properties Master  
Stage Carpenter  
Carpenters  
  
Assistant Costumer  
Costume Design Assistant  
Crafts/Dyer  
Head Draper  
First Hands  
  
Stitcher  
Wardrobe Coordinator  
Sound Engineer  
Lighting Advisor

Roger Meeker  
Andrea Scala  
Norah Martone  
Geoff Friedlander  
Steve Borgstrom  
Allen Randall  
Meg Landry  
Laurie Bramhall  
Deb Shippee  
Clark Zampella  
Michael Yocum  
Jim Insley  
Tom Lok  
Dwight Lambirth  
Cyntia Sweetland  
David Maslow  
Mark Turik  
Paul Coggins  
Julie Dunavan  
Denise Wallace  
Kathleen Brown  
Teri McConnel  
Therese Beck  
Anita Canzian  
Viridinia Aldous  
Ken Dukeshire  
Amy Nevitt  
Ed McDermid  
Sid Bennet

## From the Stage Director

"I will have nothing to do with opera, except as poetic theater."

—Virgil Thomson

It never occurred to me to stand still and sing vowels and consonants on pitch. Vocal music to me has always been about text and the context of the text and the subtext of the text and the pretext of the text and the texture of the text. My questions were always about text: Why did the composer choose a legato or a declamatory or a staccato expression of the text? What did the librettist or lyricist intend in this moment of the text? Why did the composer even choose to set this text? What can we do as performers to color, translate, free, express and implement the meaning of the text within these musical guidelines? What was music? Text text text text laughing text longing text sighing.

And so it was with this passion and terror that I tackled this Stein-Thomson event, with its confusing syntax and unclear meanings, where relationships and time and characters are not defined in "traditional" stage patterns and transitions, where no real "story" or "narrative" is given to be told. It was a strange experience, like walking around hearing a foreign language, but the words were distinctly English and the music peculiarly American, accessible and beautiful, and clearly supportive of textual expression. Dramatically, it was strange—like a deep flowing river, with moments of "here and now" floating to the surface somehow. I felt

it through, read volumes, talked and continued to talk to people with some history with the opera, and ultimately came back to somewhat of a rest in the courage to have my own experience—all sources seemed to be unable to define exactly what was going on, but all found it to be profound music theatre.

My solution has been to set this piece (with its American cross-stitch quilt of historical and imaginary time frames) in a museum, with each character in his or her own period dress, to let the fun of their relationships to others on stage be visual as well as implied. The Randall-Bramhall-Zampella team took this idea and created a production that is Larry Rivers-like in its attention to historical detail within a modern frame. I want to thank them for their enthusiasm, their calm professionalism in dealing with me, and to acknowledge them and the rest of the design-production staff and gifted cast for their willingness to "go" for it.

I also want to thank Will Graham, Robert Sirota, Phyllis Curtin and Charles Fussell for their encouragement, and especially David Hoose and Stephen Steiner for truly making this process a collaboration in the finest sense of the (dare I say) word.

—Sharon Daniels

**Will Graham**  
**Assistant Director for**  
**MOTHER OF US ALL**

**Will Graham** is currently the Director of the opera program at Boston University, and was the associate director of the program from 1986 to 1988. He was formerly director of opera at the University of Missouri at Kansas City. He has served as production supervisor for the Western Opera Theatre, assistant director for the San Francisco Spring Opera, and director of workshops at the Canadian Opera. He has performed and directed for the Guthrie Theatre's *Other Place*, and directed for the Minnesota Opera, the Kansas City Lyric Opera, Opera South, and the Western Opera Theatre. He has conducted acting workshops at the University of California, the University of Washington, Arizona State University, the University of Oregon, and San Quentin prison. Mr. Graham recently directed *The Marriage of Figaro* and *Don Pasquale* for the National Opera Company and this spring returns to Kansas City Lyric Opera to direct *The Yeomen of the Guard*.

**Allen Randall**  
**(Set Design)**

**Allen Randall's** credits include film, theatre and television. Allen Randall was the assistant art director for *Leader of the Band*, *Where are the Children* and American Playhouse's *Three Sovereigns for Sarah*. Theatre credits include *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *The Water Table* & Boston University Opera's *Transformations* in 1989. He was assistant to John Falabella for the 1989 Tony Awards.

**Laurie Bramhall**  
**(Costume Design)**

**Laurie Bramhall** is a 1987 graduate of Boston University where she designed costumes for "Die Fledermaus," "Major Barbara," "The Miser," and "The Miracle Worker." Her other design credits include Inner City Music for Boston Youth Theater and work with Merrimack Repertory Theatre, American Stage Festival, Boston Ballet, Dartmouth College, San Francisco State University, Boston Concert Opera and I Costumi di Festi. Upon graduation she was awarded the Esther B. and Albert S. Kahn Career Entry Scholarship, part of which she used for a two-month costume-textile study trip to Bali and Central Java.

**Clark Zampella**  
**(Lighting Design)**

**Clark Zampella** has previously designed the lighting for The Impulse Dance Company as well as a solo concert for Adrienne Hawkins at Boston University. He designed the recent "Celebrating Shakespeare" as well as repertory workshop productions of "The Tempest" and "The Merchant of Venice," "Fiddler on the Roof," "The Music Man," and "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat" He designed the scenery for a network Cahn Television Talkathon. He has previously worked for the Berkshire Theater Festival, The Huntington Theatre Company, New Jersey's Papermill Playhouse, and the Williamstown Theater Festival and assisted such designers as Jeff Davis and Gene Lenaham. He will earn his B.F.A. degree in Lighting Design this May from Boston University.

## Letter From Charles Fussell

THE MOTHER OF US ALL, Virgil Thomson's second opera, continues a long history of performances. Those six or seven performances that I have seen, many, to a large degree, have been successful. The opera's charm, wit, and tender nostalgia never fail to move singers, directors, and designers firmly into its orbit. And audiences respond gratefully.

How to describe this Stein-Thomson world, so all-American and at the same time a perfect depiction of Virgil's and Gertrude's social circles? There are artists, Lillian Russell, Virgil T. and Gertrude S., full of chatter, graceful airs, visionary, slightly dotty; grave politicians, John Adams, Ulysses S. Grant, Daniel Webster and the V.I.P.'s; a noble heroine, Susan B., who works to change our society and ease its burden of wicked oppression; a young couple in love, Jo the Loiterer and Indiana Elliot, and a supporting cast of every variety.

I believe the text and music for Jo and Indiana Elliot, their wedding waltz so beautifully framed by Susan B.'s meditation on her (their) life of struggle, reveal the deep affection both authors felt for these characters.

Virgil often remarked that Stein had indeed written her own funeral oration in the epilogue, and that he paused at this point in composing the opera in order to get the ending just right.

*Where is where. In my long life of effort and strife, dear life, life is strife, in my long life, it will not come and go, I tell you so....*

*But do we want what we have got, has it not gone, what made it live, has it not gone because now it is had....*

*Do you know because I tell you so, or do you know.*

*My long life, my long life.*

Reading these words I cannot help but think of Virgil himself, his very long life of effort, strife, and accomplishment; the generous ways by which he enlarged so many people's lives in giving his vast knowledge, experience, and doses of good common sense.

He held what was perhaps New York's last great literary-artistic salon. Who does not treasure their visits to the Chelsea Hotel

apartment on 23rd Street: everywhere those refreshing pictures of Maurice Grosser, delicious food elegantly served, good conversation (not always on high toned subjects), and Virgil's avid curiosity about the latest musical sensation or controversy. It was very important for him to keep up!

His journey began in 1896 from Kansas City eastward to Harvard, New York, Paris, back to New York, and finally to rest beside his relatives in Rehoboth Cemetery, Slater, Missouri. His life spanned almost the entire frame of the 20th century. And Virgil had definite opinions about this century's explosive trends in music, painting, and literature. He made it his business to meet any and everyone interesting. His writing tries to put everything firmly in a place, and his evaluations, for the most part, stand the test of time. He was not above reconsiderations.

At 92 Virgil completed a long cherished project, the book *Words With Music*, his final statement not only on text setting in English, but by extension on how vocal music, especially opera, should be approached. It should be required reading for every young composer. I might also mention an important article which appeared in the New York Review of Books, December 17, 1981, *Music Does Not Flow*. These seem to me two of the richest expressions of his musical experience.

All who knew Virgil will never fail to be touched and renewed by his wit, intellectual energy, zest for good food and conversation, and—most of all— by a look of childish wonder that showed in his face and eyes until the very end. Sadly impaired by deaf-

ness in later years (and yes, he knew how to listen as well as talk), Virgil felt that every minute of life was a treasured gift to be thoroughly lived and enjoyed. No regrets!

I believe it was to Allan Stinson, his secretary, that he said, when Allan was hired: "If you come in some morning and find me dead, don't bother to call a doctor, it's too late! Change the locks and call the Times, AP, and UPI."

All of us feel his death in the early hours of a Saturday morning last September was somehow timed to the the Sunday edition! The Times obit was just fine and a memorial service at Saint John the Divine on his birthday in November even finer.

Virgil would have been thrilled that Boston University Opera is producing his most popular score. A decade earlier we might have all been subjected to his fortissimo stage-whisper criticisms *during* the performance, for he certainly relished any opportunity to return to Boston, and was never short of critical comment.

He achieved a place of musical and literary distinction in the history of our century and we treasure his continued presence through the work.

-Charles Fussell

March, 1990