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Underworld Productions Opera
Gina Crusco, Artistic Director

Apollo & Dafne + Clarence & Anita
(Handel 1710; Ben Yarmolinsky 2010)

Underworld Productions Opera presents **Apollo & Dafne + Clarence & Anita**, a double bill of Handel's 1710 cantata and the stage premiere of Ben Yarmolinsky's 2010 opera based on the Clarence Thomas-Anita Hill story. **Apollo & Dafne + Clarence & Anita** comprises a pair of operas separated by 300 years, contrasting yet thematically related. The archetypal story of Apollo's aggression toward Dafne, her escape via metamorphosis, and the laurel wreath woven from her limbs, is revisited as American mythology. This performance is semi-staged with piano accompaniment.

Date: Sunday, May 22, 2011

Time: 2:00 pm
Pre-concert Q&A with Mr. Yarmolinsky at 1:30 pm

Location: **The YM & YWHA of Washington Heights & Inwood**
54 Nagle Avenue (near 190th St.)
Manhattan

By Bus #7 or #100 bus to Broadway and Nagle Avenue; walk ½ block down Nagle Avenue.

By Train "A" train to 190th Street Stop. Through tunnel; left on Bennett Avenue; cross Broadway onto Nagle.

Note: The Northbound #1 train platform at Dyckman St is closed for rehabilitation until August 2011.

Tickets: FREE. Reserve by sending an email to underworldprod@gmail.com.

Apollo & Dafne + Clarence & Anita will be performed by Underworld Productions Opera with Clarissa Lecce, soprano, as Dafne; David Mimran, baritone, as Apollo; Yolanda F. Johnson, soprano as Anita Hill, and Isaac Grier, bass-baritone, as Clarence Thomas. The program also features Sarah Hop, soprano and Brian Long, tenor, and is accompanied by Elizabeth Rodgers at the piano. Gina Crusco directs.

Handel began work on *Apollo e Dafne* in Venice in 1709 and completed it in Hanover in 1710. While conceived as a secular cantata, the drama and pathos of the score presage his success as a composer of Italian operas. The many clear references in the libretto to specific actions render it appropriate for a staged performance. The work opens with the god Apollo proclaiming his victory over the Python. No sooner has he declared his invincibility, even to assaults from Cupid, than he is stricken with an infatuation for the mortal Dafne. Apollo tests every method to win over this follower of the chaste goddess Diana, from lofty speeches to flattery to seduction, finally resorting to force. At the moment of crisis, Dafne is transformed into a laurel tree. The god, despairing of ever carrying her in his bosom, consoles himself with carrying her on his brow in the form of the hero's wreath.

Ben Yarmolinsky's one-act opera *Clarence & Anita* takes its libretto verbatim from the transcripts of the 1991 U.S. Senate confirmation hearings of Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court during which Anita Hill accused the nominee of sexual harassment. These events, unfolding within the static confines of a congressional chamber and couched in the dry language of legal protocol, generated high drama and devolved into a media circus.

Mr. Yarmolinsky's music, with its emphasis on clear and natural English text-setting, is sly, subversive, and transcendent, lifting these familiar events into a new realm. Composed in a style that embraces everything from nursery rhymes to North African rhythms, from Rhythm & Blues to Renaissance & Baroque, the music reflects a constantly shifting emotional terrain that is richly operatic.

Underworld Productions Opera has been recognized for innovation and excellence by *Musical America's* "Year in Music 2009," *Opera News*, *The New York Times*, and in the blogosphere. UP's distinguished Advisory Board includes international tenor Marcello Giordani. In the 2009-2010 season, the company created an "interesting twist" and "inventive solution" to Rameau's *Pygmalion* that made "a social point or two about the war of the sexes" (Allan Kozinn, *The New York Times*). The *Times* review praised "Ms. Crusco's elegantly simple staging," the cast of singers, and in particular lead singer Nils Neubert's "attractive tenor, beautifully controlled vibrato and amusing, flexible portrayal."

The 2008-2009 season brought *Così fan Tutte: Defining Women*, an updating of Mozart's opera with text-messaging interactivity recognized as a landmark event in *Musical America's* "Year in Music 2009." This event brought the group inclusion in a *New York Times* first arts-page article and wide discussion in the blogosphere (Madison Opera blog: "This is genius!"). Past performances include the 2007 world premiere of Henry Papale's *JULIA: An Operatic Monodrama*, based on the letters of Julia Ward Howe. Gina Crusco has been on the voice faculty of New School University; was for two seasons the Maestro del Coro of Teatro Lirico Sperimentale di Spoleto (Italy); and is a recipient of awards from Fractured Atlas and Northern Manhattan Arts Alliance.

Ben Yarmolinsky has written chamber music, choral music, musical theater works, orchestral music, film scores, and six operas. He is also a classical guitarist, a lyricist and a singer of his own songs. Before graduating from Harvard in 1977, Yarmolinsky had two years of private study with Nadia Boulanger in Paris. From 1978 through 1982, he lived in Morocco where he taught music at the

American School of Tangier, immersed himself in the local music, and was friendly with Paul Bowles. On returning to New York, he studied composition with David Del Tredici, Robert Starer, and Ned Rorem. In 1991, he received the Ph.D. in music from the City University of New York. He is president of Friends and Enemies of New Music, a new music presenting organization founded in 1989, and he is a tenured full professor of music at the Bronx Community College.

Yolanda F. Johnson, soprano (Anita Hill) made her New York operatic debut as Zerlina in Mozart's Don Giovanni, and has performed internationally, including the Elysium Music Festival in Germany. She has performed in several musical venues including opera, concert, oratorio, sacred music and as a guest soloist with various orchestras. Ms. Johnson is an active lecture-recitalist, most notably in "A Spirituals Experience," her program on African-American spirituals.

Bass-baritone **Isaac Grier** (Clarence Thomas), a native of Flint, Michigan, has sung with Opera North (New Hampshire), New Orleans Opera, The Martina Arroyo Foundation, dell'Arte Opera Ensemble (NYC) and recently with Regina Opera. In 2010, Grier was the featured soloist with the Flint Symphony Orchestra. He also appeared as Rochefort in Donizetti's Anna Bolena, in Lucia di Lammermoor with dell'Arte Opera Ensemble and Angelotti in Tosca with Regina Opera. Grier received his Bachelor of Music from Xavier University in New Orleans and his Master of Music at the Manhattan School of Music.

This program is supported, in part, by public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council. This program is also made possible in part with public funds from the Fund for Creative Communities, supported by the New York State Council on the Arts and administered by the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council. Additional funding has been provided by the Gladys Kriebel Delmas Foundation, Venable Foundation and Joyce Dutka Arts Foundation. Funded in part through Meet the Composer's MetLife Creative Connections program. Underworld Productions Opera thanks Northern Manhattan Arts Alliance, JP Morgan Chase, the Upper Manhattan Empowerment Zone, Google Grants, Dwyer Cultural Center and Gotham Early Music Scene for their support.

For further information or to set up an interview, call (212) 304-1472 or Email underworldprod@gmail.com.

Further information available at website: www.underworldprod.com.

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