



**For Immediate Release**

press contact:

Dorothea Skaff

[dorotheaskaff@gmail.com](mailto:dorotheaskaff@gmail.com)

415.595.6428

**Composers, Inc.** proudly presents  
***MIDDLEMARCH IN SPRING***

World Premiere of a New Opera

Composed by Allen Shearer, libretto by Claudia Stevens

Based on George Eliot's novel *Middlemarch*

Four performances March 19-22, 2015:

Thursday, Friday, and Saturday Evenings at 8:00 pm,

Sunday Matinee at 2:00 pm

**Z Space**, 450 Florida Street, San Francisco.

Run time: 2 hours, plus one intermission

General Admission \$30;

students, seniors, disabled persons, and groups of 8 or more, \$25.

Advance ticket purchase recommended! Buy tickets online at

<https://web.ovationtix.com/trs/pr/939808>

or at the Z Space box office beginning one hour before the show.

Photos and additional information available at [www.middlemarchinspring.com](http://www.middlemarchinspring.com)

Oakland, CA, Oct. 1, 2014 – Composers, Inc. proudly announces the world premiere of a major new chamber opera ***MIDDLEMARCH IN SPRING*** by composer Allen Shearer and librettist Claudia Stevens, based on George Eliot's great romantic novel *Middlemarch*. The production will be featured as a part of the New Work series at Z Space in San Francisco, for four performances only, March 19-22, 2015.

In this stirring yet often lighthearted opera, Shearer and Stevens bring George Eliot's towering literary work to the operatic stage for the first time. With powerful imagery and compelling music, the opera evokes an unforgettable spring in the town of Middlemarch—one of passionate love and political upheaval. Audiences will meet Dorothea Brooke, an idealistic woman who hopes to improve the world. Naively, she marries the scholar Casaubon for his "great mind" and is devastated when he turns out to be cold, shallow and not very bright. But in spring, anything can happen. Could Dorothea have a second chance at happiness with the dashing, eminently unsuitable Will Ladislaw? The odds are stacked against her.

In two acts with a running time of two hours, ***MIDDLEMARCH IN SPRING*** features six of the novel's most colorful characters, portrayed by leading singers Sara Duchovnay, Daniel Curran, Philip Skinner, Eugene Brancoveanu, Tonia D'Amelio, and Michael Mendelsohn. The cast is accompanied by a chamber orchestra that surprisingly joins the action in one outrageous scene.

Jonathan Khuner will conduct and Philip Lowery will direct, with scenic design by Matthew Antaky and costume design by Christine Crook.

A pre-show discussion with celebrity guests is scheduled for opening night, March 19. Watch for details.

*Middlemarch: A Study of Provincial Life* is considered one of the greatest works in English literature. Author George Eliot (the pen name of Mary Anne Evans) describes a fictitious town in 1830s England, against a backdrop of social unrest and political upheaval. Stevens' opera libretto selects the central narrative from several plot lines to tell the story of Dorothea Brooke, a beautiful, high-spirited and idealistic woman who wants to change the world, and enters a disastrous marriage with someone she mistakes for a great man. Her bitter disappointment turns to hope in the form of the dashing Will Ladislaw, even though he is considered an outsider by those in her privileged circle.

With *MIDDLEMARCH IN SPRING*, Composers, Inc., the venerable Bay Area new music organization, once again presents the work of the East Bay-based creative team of Allen Shearer, composer, and Claudia Stevens, librettist. Shearer and Stevens' previous work, *THE DAWN MAKERS*, received its world premiere production by Composers, Inc. in 2009 to a sold-out house at Herbst Theatre, SF, and has been honored as a finalist in the National Opera Association's *Dominick Argento Chamber Opera Competition* 2014-16.

The cast features a blend of emerging artists and veteran performers. **Soprano Sara Duchovnay** appears as the opera's heroine, Dorothea. Ms. Duchovnay is a fresh new talent whose recent performance in West Edge Opera's *Hydrogen Jukebox* was praised as "impressive throughout" (*San Francisco Classical Voice*) and part of "a superb cast" (*San Francisco Chronicle*). Another rising star, **Tenor Daniel Curran**, portrays Dorothea's tempestuous admirer Will Ladislaw. Mr. Curran appeared at the Glimmerglass Festival (NY) this summer, and is an alumnus of the 2011 Merola Opera Program, where he performed the role of Count Almaviva in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*. Will's nemesis, Dorothea's disappointing first husband, is sung by the renowned **Bass-baritone Phillip Skinner**, who has taken leading roles in European as well as North American opera houses, including over 35 roles with the San Francisco Opera, where he made his debut in 1985.

**Composer Allen Shearer** is internationally recognized for his work in many media but especially vocal music and opera. His choral works have been performed throughout the United States as well as in many cities in Europe, the former Soviet Union, and South Africa. The recipient of the Prix de Rome (American Academy in Rome), the Aaron Copland Award, and many grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, including support for his first opera, *The Goddess*, Shearer has also been commissioned three times by the San Francisco-based vocal ensemble Chanticleer. *MIDDLEMARCH IN SPRING* is his fifth opera.

**Librettist Claudia Stevens'** background as pianist, monologue artist and playwright has garnered her grants from the National Endowment for the Arts—and twelve consecutive grants from the Virginia Commission for the Arts—to create and tour with her original performance works. Her numerous artist residencies include the MacDowell Colony in New Hampshire, RS9 Studio in Budapest, the Baltimore Theater Project, and many universities. Two of her solo plays,

and her libretto for Allen Shearer's chamber opera, *A Very Large Mole*, appear in André Codrescu's avant-garde poetry journal *Exquisite Corpse*.

**Jonathan Khuner** writes about *MIDDLEMARCH IN SPRING*, "For me as a conductor, the most fascinating aspect of this powerful chamber drama is the economy of means, where a small vocal phrase, or solo instrument response to a remark can speak volumes, much as a film close-up moment. The grand novel by George Eliot has been condensed in scope, but in their miniature operatic setting Stevens and Shearer have retained its depth and power." Maestro Khuner's resumé includes service as the Musical Director of Berkeley's West Edge Opera (since 1985) and as Assistant Conductor and prompter for San Francisco Opera (since 1981), the Metropolitan Opera (since 1997), and the Lyric Opera of Chicago (since 1995), in addition to frequent appearance as guest conductor with various California opera companies.

**Director Philip Lowery** will bring to the Z Space stage all the richness, pathos, and social significance of this new opera. With directing credits at Pocket Opera, Berkeley Opera, North Bay Opera, Lamplighters Music Theatre, and Berkeley Contemporary Opera (of which he was a co-founder), he also acts (most recently for SF Shakespeare Festival) as well as directs for many local theatre companies, including Central Works, Altarena Playhouse, Berkeley Playhouse, Willows Theatre, and Shotgun Players.

Scenic and lighting designer **Matthew Antaky's** airy, elegant set conveys the sense of a glass-walled hothouse. The design approach comments on the captive nature of the women in the story, who are nurtured to be colorful and have no opinions. Costume designer **Christine Crook** further conveys the fantasy of the writer's and director's conception with a unique Romantic look.

Librettist **Claudia Stevens** writes, "To bring this great novel to life as an opera for a modern audience is to relive it totally, rediscover its power and timeless eloquence," and Composers, Inc. is proud to present its world premiere in the Bay Area. Audiences are invited for a behind-the-scenes look at the rehearsal and production process for a new opera on social media, with opportunities to meet the performers both online and at the performance.

Composer **Allen Shearer** writes, "It is a terrible irony that opera companies are struggling to survive at a time when people are so hungry for opera, and composers are so eager to provide new work. The challenge of creating an opera is huge, but so is the gratification: constructing out of mere notes and rhythms a carrier wave for the inner workings of great literary characters. Writing songs, setting poems to music, is always a joy; but this goes much further." Audiences will be transported to *MIDDLEMARCH IN SPRING* for four performances at **Z Space**, a hub for artists and audiences to revel in the creation, development and production of outstanding new work, which has operated since 2009 in a unique 13,000 square foot, 229-seat performing arts venue and gallery in the heart of San Francisco's Mission District.

**Composers, Inc.** has presented new music by living American composers for over thirty years. Now centered in the East Bay, their main concert venue is First Congregational Church of Berkeley. Their annual competition, the Lee and Suzanne Ettelson Composer's Award, attracts several hundred submissions nationwide. Premieres in Composers, Inc.'s series have been harbingers of high-profile careers for many American composers.

In the online review San Francisco Classical Voice, critic Thomas Busse praised Composers, Inc.'s production of Shearer and Stevens' *The Dawn Makers* as “**a chamber opera production superior to any work I have seen from the Bay Area's smaller companies.**”

Composers Inc.'s production of *MIDDLEMARCH IN SPRING* is supported by generous funding from **New Music USA**, the **Zellerbach Family Foundation**, and many private and corporate sponsors. This stunning world premiere will be a colorful feature of the Bay Area's spring 2015 opera season. Don't miss it!

###

**ZSPACE**

Press contact: Dorothea Skaff  
[dorotheaskaff\[at\]gmail.com](mailto:dorotheaskaff[at]gmail.com)  
414.595.6428

**COMPOSERS**Inc.