

## Collaborating with Thomas

Maia Aprahamian

Maia Aprahamian was born in New York City, attended the Manhattan School of Music, Juilliard and Sarah Lawrence College. She is a composer of opera, ballet, choral and instrumental works, and was Composer-in-Residence for the San Francisco Choral Artists in 2005. A large work, *Emergence*, was presented for the 50th anniversary of the United Nations in San Francisco. She has recently finished an opera based on the Tolstoy story, *The Three Holy Hermits*, as well as *The Treatment Room*, an opera for six singers based on two days in a chemo ward. She has done a great deal of work with children as composers, and also music for the Russian Orthodox Church which has been published and recorded. She is also an author and is working on her second novel at the moment, *Shades of Grace*.



I first met Thomas in 1973 as part of a conference of world religions hosted by Juliet Hollister and the Temple of Understanding. We hit it off immediately, and I went back to see him at his house in Riverside many times. Conversations under the big red oak were an important part of my life.

Thomas was a compassionate and humorous person, somewhat dry and droll at times. Yet when I went through a difficult time in my life, he was one of the few people who stood by me. “Go West” he would say; “it has the expansiveness you need.” So I went West, but returned many times to sit under the old oak.

He kept telling me about his friend and physicist, Brian Swimme, and a book they were working on together—*The Universe Story*. I finally met Brian in San Francisco, and as I read through the manuscript, I began to see a musical, dance, theater piece emerging. Both Tom and Brian were enthusiastic about it, and so *From the Beginning* was launched, with excerpts performed in New York City with Thomas narrating, and a large section, *Emergence*, performed in San Francisco for the 50th anniversary of the founding of the United Nations, with Brian narrating.

Both Thomas and I were part of a group from St. Thomas University in Miami that went to Assisi, Italy, in the summers. Thomas would hold forth with his ideas, and I would teach a musical composition class based loosely on his ideas. But the best part of those summers was spent sitting in the Piazza with a glass of red wine and letting our thoughts run wild!

Thomas would periodically send me some of his “propaganda” as he liked to call his papers, and it was wonderful to see some of them in published form in *Dream of the Earth* and other volumes. I also worked on a tape/CD production of his poetry in which he was the reader. We used a recording of Bach’s organ works, as recorded by my friend Jonathan Dimmock, as the musical interludes. Thomas was really pleased when the D minor Toccata was used in connection with his poem about St. John’s Cathedral in New York.

I have never gotten to see him in Greensboro, although invited many times by him and his sister, Margaret. Perhaps some day—soon, I hope. They were both enthusiastic about my work with children based on *The Universe Story*. This resulted in a production by 3rd, 4th and 5th graders entitled, “The Magic Space and Time Machine.”

There is so much more, but I’m sure others will have spoken of the immense influence he has had on this age, and on its peoples. So, here’s to you, Thomas; one of the few truly humble persons in these times, but also one of the sharpest! I remember when the word, “ecozoic” was born! My thoughts are with you always and ever will be.