

# Actor's Theatre Premiere of "Thumbs" Features Cynthia Farbman

The Tony/Emmy award winning writer/composer Rupert Holmes of "The Mystery of Edwin Drood" fame has chosen the Queen City to be the premiere location for his upcoming comedy thriller, *Thumbs*. And a member of our own community has been chosen in a starring role.

*Thumbs* is a murderous, hilarious duel of wits as two women from different walks of life confront a killer whose methods and motives are as twisted as a roller coaster ride from hell. This devilishly devious comedy thriller makes its exclusive 2001 Preview in Charlotte (and nowhere else) prior to its 2002 New York premiere.

Among the local cast members is Cynthia Farbman, an attorney and member of Temple Beth El who moved from Villanova, PA with her parents to Charlotte in 1978. She attended high school at Charlotte Country Day School where she was given the Artistic Achievement Award for her participation in dance, theatre, choir and visual arts. Cynthia went on to earn a Bachelor's of Fine Arts, cum laude from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Cynthia spent several years in Los Angeles where she performed small roles in television and movies while continuing her acting training. In 1994 Cynthia went on to earn a Doctorate of Law from Tulane University in New Orleans. After graduation from law school, Cynthia moved back to Charlotte and established her law practice in uptown Charlotte.

In addition to being an actress,

Cynthia is an opera singer who has performed the roles of Queen of the Night in *The Magic Flute* and Countess Almaviva in *The*



Cynthia Farbman

*Marriage of Figaro* with CPCC Opera Theatre. She recently performed in the summer collaboration between Opera Carolina and CPCC Opera Theatre. Cynthia is presently studying voice with Dr. John Blizzard of Wingate College. Cynthia has been taking acting classes for several years at the Film Actors Studio with Lon Bumgarner and she appeared as Blanche in Theatre Charlotte's production *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

The Actor's Theatre production of *Thumbs* will be directed by Lon Bumgarner, who Farbman has said is "the best acting teacher I've ever had. He is the reason I wanted to act in 'Thumbs.'"

It seems a strange combination, to be an actor and an attorney, but

it was a natural transition for Farbman. "I was disillusioned with Los Angeles," she says. "Another actor I knew was making good money as a paralegal and I wanted to do that, too, but I wasn't sure I could pull it off. 'You're an actor,' he said to me, 'act like you belong.'" And she got the job which eventually led to her law degree and current practice.

But how can one person fit it all in?

"I never considered that I couldn't do it," she says. Every aspect of her life is important to her: her law practice, her acting, her opera singing, and her Judaism.

"Being Jewish is very important to me," Farbman insists. "I always completely identify as a Jew."

"I believe that we all have our God-given gifts. Mine is my singing and my acting. It's our responsibility to recognize our gifts and make the world a better place. I've come to an understanding that doing these things is not about promoting myself. It's about giving a gift to the world."

"There's no greater joy than when people say about a performance, 'You've touched me.' That's what I think my purpose is."

"I'm getting more in touch with Judaism," she continues. "I'm studying Kabbalah. God has a path for each of us. You can either listen to the voice or you can fight it. Things have gone badly when I didn't listen to that voice. My life has turned into something wonderful when I started to listen to that voice. The more I've taken the power out of my own hands and turned it over to God, the

more powerful I feel. And more at ease and at peace."

Of the opening of "Thumbs" here in Charlotte, Executive Artistic Director, Dan Shoemaker says of this incredible opportunity, "It is an honor for a small theatre to be given this kind of exposure to a new play by a recognized playwright, Rupert Holmes. It says a lot for our theatre and our community."

Holmes is best known to the general public for his Top 40 hit, *Escape (The Pina Colada Song)* and has written many popular songs that have been recorded by

artists from Barbra Streisand to Britney Spears. His songs have been featured in such films as *Shrek*, *How Stella Got Her Groove Back*, *Love Walked In* and *The General's Daughter*.

The show will run October 3-21 at the Duke Power Theatre at Spirit Square. Wed/Thurs at 7:30 PM, Fri/Sat at 8 PM and Sun, Oct. 21 at 2 PM only. Tickets \$14-\$18. Opening night Oct. 3 all seats \$9. Tuesday Oct. 9 at 7:30 is "Pay What You Can Night." Details and Reservations 704-372-1000. Corporate reservations are also available. ☆

## Spielberg's Shoah Foundation Shifts to a New Focus: Education

By Tom Tugend

Los Angeles (JTA) — After videotaping the testimony of more than 50,000 Holocaust survivors, filmmaker Steven Spielberg's foundation is shifting to an even more daunting task, a worldwide educational campaign against bigotry and intolerance.

Spielberg launched the Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation in 1994 after filming "Schindler's List." Completing an archive containing testimony from 51,661 eyewitnesses was "a dream that became a remarkable reality," he said.

Each of the survivors interviewed has become "a teacher, putting a real face, a real voice, a real experience in front of this and future generations," Spielberg said. "The archive is their perpetu-

al link to our expanded long-range objectives of remembrance and education."

Using state-of-the-art media technology, the educational effort will be aimed particularly at a new generation of students, said Douglas Greenberg, president and CEO of the Shoah Foundation.

"We will pursue this effort with the same urgency as our original mission of interviewing aging survivors," Greenberg said in a phone interview. "We hope to change not only how people think, but how they behave."

To oversee the outreach program, the Shoah Foundation is establishing an education department with an annual budget of \$2 million. An international search for a director to head the depart-

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## Domestic Violence

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rest choose this behavior. Hidden more in upper class families, abusers exist in all groups. Some use as excuses for violence their excessive drug and alcohol use. Husbands and boyfriends are the killers of thirty percent of all female homicide victims.

How often does it happen? Every 15 seconds a woman is beaten and every month 50,000 women seek protective orders.

Why does it happen? Violence is chosen and accepted as a proper response to stress. Violence is learned in families as a way to resolve conflict. Children learn from their parents that violence is effective for solving problems. Violence in the home has been historically tolerated by society and religion. The same religious tradition which created the concept of

*Eishet Chayil*, a woman of valor, also created the climate which made the abuse of women possible. Condescending attitudes toward women are legitimized in traditional prayer books and in *halakic* literature (page 17, 106, 107, Resource Guide for Rabbis). Violence is pervasive in the media and on the streets; a routine response to aggravations.

What can we do? We can educate ourselves. We can hear truths we have avoided. We can listen to the voices of Jewish battered women. We can use partnership, not power, in our relationships.

We can support battered Jewish women through the National Hotline for Survivors 800-799-SAFE, the N.C. Coalition Against Domestic Violence 919-956-9124, and the Mecklenburg County Domestic Violence Advocacy Council. In Charlotte, the Shelter for Battered Women provides counseling and emergency residence for women and their children. Many services designed to end abuse are available at the

Shelter including daytime childcare, support groups for adults, teens and children. The director is Nancy Nicholson, 704-332-2513, who reports that 900 women per year are served by the Shelter.

We can recognize signs of abuse and take measures to deal with them: speak out in our families, community groups and congregations; raise funds for shelters, financial and legal aid, and advocate for more professional training among police and courts. Even kosher meals for Jewish women in the local shelter can be provided.

How can domestic abuse be prevented? Restoring the dignity of women, Rabbi Twerski argues, is in the hands of the community. He believes a strong sense of personal dignity will enhance self-esteem and independence and deter abuse. He cautions parents to raise their daughter to never accept abuse; to learn to support themselves, to give them strong identity which does not seek fulfillment through relationships. Barbara Engel of Chicago, activist and con-

sultant, insists that men and not just women publicly join the battle against domestic violence. Unless men are part of the solution, she says, it is very hard not to be part of the problem (JUF News, April 1997).

Jewish men must pass on to their children, especially their sons, the importance of respect: Respect for women, equality of women, and the importance of never using superior strength or physical power over someone.

Domestic abuse is everyone's responsibility. That means taking a stand that violence is never O.K. Violence is a choice that we must stop people from making. Whether an abuser can change depends on his desire to change, his recognition of the need to change, and by his own effort. No one else can change him.

We must expose the secret of domestic violence and explode the myths of Jewish uniqueness. Failing to do so only heightens the danger and alienation felt by Jewish victims. It is not true that there is something wrong with a woman that is causing the problem, but rather there is something wrong with a woman due to what happened to her. The "shanda" is not hers to assume.

Society as a whole and the Jewish community in particular

must condemn spouse abuse and indicate in every possible way that it will not be tolerated. *Shalom Bayit* is the responsibility of both partners.

A four-year-old Domestic Violence Unit in Charlotte, with a staff of seven, is responsible for the homicide rate dropping 52%. Arrests are made at the scene when police are called and three judges are assigned to hear these cases. A 26-week program for offenders, New Options for Violent Actions, teaches anger management and non-violent behaviors. HEROES is a program developed to help children in abusive situations cope with their stress.

Jewish Family Service agencies are treating those women who reach out for assistance. There is a high number of cases reported among refugees according to Saul Cohen and Ben Greenspan in their article, *Do Jews Abuse Their Wives?* The local Jewish Family Service offers confidential counseling and referral services to families who are experiencing violence: 704-364-6594.

Let us make our homes havens where partners and children feel safe and protected. Let us do our part to help restore respect. Let us behave as though the world depends on our humanity and our decency. It does. ☆

## Hadassah

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Israel and supporting our brothers and sister who clearly feel abandoned by their American co-religionists.

Then, suddenly, everything changed. A suicide bomber quietly walked into a Sbarro's a few blocks away from all of our self-congratulating. Any one of us

could have chosen to be there. All of us had walked by on shopping forays. It was random act of hatred that woke us up to the stark reality that Israelis live with everyday.

It is always spectacular to be in Jerusalem. The convention was an outstanding experience. We all need to support the Israeli economy and the Israeli people. I would go again tomorrow if I could afford it and had a good excuse, but things are definitely different now. ☆

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