

## BAY ARIA

*The life of San Francisco City Supervisor Harvey Milk becomes material for a new opera*

by Jann Gilbert

**H**ouston Grand Opera, New York City Opera and San Francisco Opera have joined forces to commission and produce a ground-breaking new opera. The work, by composer Stewart Wallace and librettist Michael Korie, is titled, simply, *Harvey Milk*; its subject is the life of the murdered San Francisco City Supervisor, the city's first openly gay elected official.

### MUSIC

The opera will have its world premiere Jan. 2, 1995, at Houston Grand Opera's Brown Theater. In April 1995 the opera will travel east for performances at the New York City Opera, and in November 1996 it will open in San Francisco. Performances are also scheduled at the Opera of Bielefeld, Germany, in September 1995.

Harvey Milk grew up in Long Island. He was

African Americans, the Latina/o community, senior citizens, women, and labor unions.

Dan White was the "all-American boy," with a strong belief in patriotism. As a Vietnam veteran, a policeman, a fireman, and eventually a city supervisor, White saw himself as a protector of home, family, church and children. On Nov. 27, 1978, Dan White put a gun in his pocket and crawled into San Francisco City Hall through a basement window. He then murdered fellow Supervisor Harvey Milk and Mayor George Moscone.

"To be involved in the birth of any opera is incredibly exciting," said Lotfi Mansouri, San Francisco Opera's general director. "[F]or San Francisco Opera to be involved in the creation of an opera depicting the life of Harvey Milk is especially so, because Harvey was historically significant in the community that has so loyally supported San Francisco Opera for many years. Like opera itself, Harvey was colorful, passionate and larger than life."

*Milk's background as a Jew and a gay man gave him insight into the complaints of other marginalized communities.*

*As the mayor of Castro Street and as a city supervisor, Milk was successful in building alliances with Asian Americans, African Americans, the Latina/o community, senior citizens, women, and labor unions.*



Stewart Wallace (left) and Michael Korie

a young boy when the Allies liberated the concentration camps at the end of World War II. Like many Jews of his generation, he saw that remaining silent was no longer an option. It was here that his moral outrage and courage began to develop.

For a time, Milk led a conventional life, becoming a closeted Wall Street businessman. He moved in the early '70s to San Francisco's Castro Street, one of a handful of "gay meccas" in the world. It was here that Milk became politicized, developed into a street activist, and earned the unofficial title of "mayor of Castro Street." After seeking office several times, he was elected to the position of city supervisor.

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Stewart Wallace and Michael Korie have collaborated before. They created *Where's Dick?*—an opera inspired by comic strips, detective fiction, film noir and vaudeville—which premiered at Houston Grand Opera in 1989. Later that same year, another collaborative effort, *Kabbalah*, premiered at Dance Theater Workshop in New York. Based on Jewish mysticism, that opera has texts in Aramaic, Hebrew, German and Medieval Spanish.

*Harvey Milk*, an opera in three acts—"The Closet," describing Milk's life prior to his move to San Francisco, "The Castro," which describes his progressively more powerful position in the area's political scene, and "City Hall"—will star Robert Orth as Milk in the Houston and New York performances. Much of the casting is still in progress.

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