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Michael Maglaras takes his Dover roots to the world

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Michael Maglaras may have traveled the world following his artistic muse, but Dover always remained his touchstone.

"I can't think of a better place to have grown up than Dover," said this most creative of native sons, whose film "Visible Silence: Marsden Hartley, Painter and Poet" — currently touring New England — pays tribute to one of the fathers of American modernism, as well as a respected writer, poet, critic and essayist from Maine.

Maglaras said he received a superb education in the Dover school system before graduating from the University of New Hampshire then doing graduate work at the University of Vienna and at Yale University.

"I can't say enough about the positive influence that growing up in Dover had on my life," he added.

He has taken that influence in many directions. Trained as an opera singer in the United States and Europe, he has performed widely as a singer and opera director. He also has founded a well-respected international business-consulting firm headquartered in Stamford, Conn., one of several businesses he has formed.



Michael Maglaras is back with "Visible Silence: Marsden Hartley, Painter and Poet," a documentary described as an "essay in film." It will be screened for free at the Coolidge Corner Theatre, 290 Harvard St., Brookline, Mass., at 7 p.m. on Oct. 30. It is written, directed and narrated by Maglaras.

He has directed and acted in two films, produced three albums of rock and alternative jazz, lectured in art museums across the country, and, he said with pride, "convinced the most beautiful woman in the world to marry me"- musician Terri Templeton.

In 2000, he created 217 Records, a new label devoted to making alternative rock, jazz and spoken word recordings celebrating the American artistic experience. The label has released two CDs of John Greenleaf Whittier's poetry and, most recently, a five-CD volume of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's "The Song of Hiawatha." All poems are read by Maglaras.

In 2003, he formed 217 Films for the purpose of making a film of Hartley's epic narrative of love and loss in "Cleophas and His Own," in which he directed and starred.

It has been hailed as "a superb piece of devotional art" with Maglaras demonstrating his love for Hartley on film just as Hartley memorialized his love for a family of Nova Scotian fishermen, with whom he lived, in painting and poetry.

Despite his many interests — which include gardening and cooking — Maglaras does not consider himself a Renaissance man.

"I would love to flatter myself, but I'm merely suggesting to you that I have a bad case of ants-in-the-pants. I'm driven and motivated by not being able to sit still," he said.

He didn't use a chair very often in his formative years in Dover either. "As a teenager I was very active in the Garrison Players and I understand they are still very active in the Dover area," he said.

The 1967 graduate of Dover High School learned his craft well.

Maglaras' portrayal of Hartley in "Cleophas and His Own," shot entirely in Maine, was described as "authentic and moving" and drew favorable comparisons to such one-person homage's as those made by actor Hal Holbrook playing Mark Twain.

Like Holbrook with Twain, the Maglaras family has a long association with Dover. His late father, George Maglaras, opened George's Marina in the late 1950s. "He helped establish the great recreation area along the Cocheco River that has survived to this day," he said.

Michael has three younger brothers. One, George Maglaras, is the current proprietor of George's Marina, as well as Strafford County commissioner, and has been active in state and national Democratic politics. Brothers Chuck and Tim Maglaras live in the Dover area.

His Uncle John was mayor of Dover for many years and served in the state legislature. His Uncle Arthur was also briefly in politics. "I believe many years ago he was a city council member," Maglaras recalled.

"Our roots go deep into Dover political and cultural life," Michael said. "I am most proud, however, of my father's efforts to save the Cocheco River and to return it to active use as a landmark recreational facility, efforts that my brother George has continued to carry out and support for the benefit of all citizens of Dover."

When he is not returning for visits to Dover, Michael Maglaras now divides his time between homes he and his wife share in Greenwich, Conn., and on an island in the middle of Lake Winnepesaukee.

It is from those abodes that he studied the life and times of Marsden Hartley. "My modest gifts, such as they are, are as an interpreter. I thought Hartley could use one," Maglaras said.

"His talent was immense, his perseverance an example, his impact profound," said Maglaras, explaining why the life and creativity of Hartley so powerfully resonates with him.

In May of this year, a Hartley painting sold for \$6.31 million, setting an auction record at Christie's in New York for an American modernist work, overtaking a record previously held by a work of Georgia O'Keeffe.

Within a relatively short time, Maglaras made an audio recording of Hartley's 13-part poem, "Cleophas and His Own," and began work on the film of the same name.

In the film, Maglaras, as Marsden, tells the story of Francis and Martha Mason and their family. In 1935, the artist and poet began boarding with them and was struck by their simple way of life, which he found decidedly appealing.

In 1936, the two sons, with whom he had become friends, drowned when their boat capsized in a storm. Hartley seemed to feel the pain as if it was his own family, and he began immortalizing them in writing and pictures.

Now Maglaras is back with "Visible Silence: Marsden Hartley, Painter and Poet," a documentary described as an "essay in film." It will be screened for free at the Coolidge Corner Theatre, 290 Harvard St., Brookline, Mass., at 7 p.m. on Oct. 30. It is written, directed and narrated by Maglaras.

Screenings of this, the first documentary ever made about the influential painter, follow Nov. 7 at the Abromson Community Education Center, University of Southern Maine, Portland; and Nov. 13 at New Britain Museum of Art, New Britain, Conn. (For details, log on to: www.two17films.com. A Seacoast showing is being arranged and is expected to be announced soon).

"Visible Silence" features 43 Hartley paintings and sketches, drawing extensively from his poetic works, as Maglaras chronicles the life of this self-taught genius from his humbling beginnings in Lewiston to his prominence on the world stage of art and ideas as "Maine's Painter."

The soundtrack presents the music of Amy Beach, Igor Stravinsky and Morton Feldman.

Maglaras believes there is much to be learned from Hartley, including perseverance, the importance of inner awareness and "the importance of not giving a damn about what people think."

He is confident his two films can be useful to anyone interested in American art, culture and the American artistic experience.

"I hope people take a renewed sense of Hartley's greatness, a renewed appreciation of the early American Modernist movement, a renewed commitment to maintain the great and profound cultural legacy of our magnificent country," he said.

(A clip of the "Visible Silence" film can be viewed at:
www.two17films.com/PressPageVS.htm*)*