



1 he inspiration for a symphonic tribute to dogs took root shortly after Lola died. World-famous conductor and composer Steven Mercurio and his wife were heartbroken when their 15-year-old poodle succumbed to old age. A sympathetic friend sent them a copy of Eugene O'Neill's The Last Will and Testament of Silverdene Emblem O'Neill, in which O'Neill's dalmatian, "Blemie," encourages his owners not to grieve his death but to rejoice in the happy life they provided him.

"I knew immediately that I was going to set it to music," says Mercurio. "I knew that for Lola—and [for] me and my wife."

A Grateful Tail is a four-movement symphony premiering this summer at outdoor venues across the U.S. and in Europe. The program's first half takes listeners on a journey



through time and musical genres, accompanied by a pictorial tribute to famous and heroic pooches. The second half culminates in Mercurio's ode to man's best friend, with Oscar-winning actor F. Murray Abraham singing the part of Blemie.

In this edited interview with staff writer Ruthanne Johnson, Mercurio and Abraham discuss the symphony written for the love of dogs.

Was it difficult to put O'Neill's text to music?

MERCURIO: Impossibly difficult. I studied the text for a long time. When I finished, I realized it shouldn't stand by itself and wrote a movement to be played before it called "Let Sleeping Dogs Lie." I performed it on a tour. I got a bazillion emails from people saying, "Oh, I love my dog too." I realized that the love of dogs is cross-cultural. It has nothing to do with how much money you make. It has nothing to do with race, creed, or color.

Why did you want to be part of this project?

ABRAHAM: It's a fabulous role, and I happen to love dogs. When you play an animal, there are no limits to what you can do. I've played vicious sharks of people and snakes in the grass. But never a dog, such a lovable animal.

So O'Neill's text resonates with you?

ABRAHAM: I have to work at not weeping when I am singing this—because it's hard to cry and sing at the same time.

What are your hopes for A Grateful Tail?

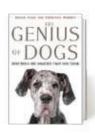
MERCURIO: Music is not seen but felt. How it gets into the soul and spirit is one of the great questions. I hope the symphony will become something synonymous with dogs, the way the Lincoln portrait is synonymous with Presidents Day or "Appalachian Spring" is representative of Americana. I want the concert to be a destination where people can love and celebrate their dogs.

▶ WATCH A VIDEO interview with Mercurio and Abraham at humanesociety.org/allanimals. Get concert details and tickets to A Grateful Tail at agratefultail.com.

BOOK SHELF As a college student, Brian

Hare assisted with research into chimpanzees' cognitive abilities. The apes were failing to follow signals such as pointing, which led one of

Hare's professors to suggest that only humans can understand such gestures. Hare suspected otherwise, at one point blurting out, "I think my dog can do it."



Now director of a canine cognition center at Duke University, Hare (with his co-author and wife, Vanessa Woods) delves into the subsequent research in The Genius of Dogs: How Dogs Are Smarter Than You Think. Researchers have learned more about the way dogs think in the past decade than they did in the previous century, Hare and Woods write, and "the cognitive world of every dog is far more complex and interesting than we thought possible."

BOX OFFICE

When a young orca is orphaned near Vancouver Island, some people want to capture him, while others are willing to risk their lives to

keep him free. At the center of the controversy is Luna, a charismatic cetacean who refuses to be ignored. In the documentary The Whale, directors



Michael Parfit and Suzanne Chisholm capture Luna's story and find their own lives transformed. And in a recently published book—The Lost Whale: The True Story of an Orca Named Luna—Parfit and Chisholm tell the story behind the story of their poignant film.

ON THE iPAD: Read excerpts from The Genius of Dogs and The Lost Whale, and view The Whale film trailer.