

## MICHAEL MENENDIAN

Mr. Menendian was born in Chicago in 1953. Shortly after his birth his father, Alex, passed away causing his mother, Anahid, to move with Michael and his two older sisters back to Beirut, Lebanon, where Anahid had been born and raised, to live with her parents. When the first of many civil wars broke out in 1958 it was decided that it would be unsafe for Michael's family to remain in Lebanon. Thus, they moved back to the United States and settled in the Armenian community of Watertown, Massachusetts. Mr. Menendian attended Tufts University and studied theatre both at Tufts and later at the Acting School of Boston. He began his directing career in Boston, initially working with teen agers in a high school program as well as after school programs and summer camps.

In 1979 M. Menendian moved to Chicago to further pursue his theatre career, recognizing the city for its cultural vibrancy, especially in theatre. Here he studied with Del Close and Paul Sills at Second City and honed his directing skills under Dennis Zacek, Artistic Director of Victory Gardens Theatre. In 1982 he met his future wife and co-founder of Raven Theatre, JoAnn Montemurro, when casting her in a very successful production at New Haven Playhouse, situated in the Lakeview community of Chicago. The production went on to garner five Joseph Jefferson awards, including outstanding production, direction, performances and ensemble.

In 1983 Mr. Menendian and Ms. Montemurro founded Raven Theatre. In 1985 they settled into a converted Post Office Station in Rogers Park, where they successfully steered the company over the next 15 years, producing shows that focus on the American Experience, including many American masterpieces, including plays by Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller, David Mamet and Edward Albee, just to name a few. In 2000 Raven Theatre purchased the old Granville Certified Grocery Store in the Edgewater community of Chicago and over a span of two years, converted it into a state of the art two-theatre complex. Raven Theatre continues to produce outstanding productions of American and sometimes, European theatre, while developing one of the most aggressive theatre education programs in the city, teaching in five Chicago Public Schools and offering classes and camps for young actors year round.

To date the company has earned nearly 30 Joseph Jefferson Awards for productions, direction, acting and design. In 2008 Mr. Menendian and Ms. Montemurro received a Joseph Jefferson Award for Outstanding Contribution to Chicago Theatre.

