

Kevin James was one of only four American composers to receive a three-year residency in Meet The Composer's innovative *New Residencies* program in 2001. The program placed him as composer-in-residence with The Kitchen, The Police Athletic League, the Quintet of the Americas and the Sirius String Quartet. During the three-year period he focused on a project that provided New York City's homeless population with a musical means of easing and expressing their feelings of isolation, fear, and depression. In an effort to connect New York City's homeless population to the greater community, Mr. James composed a nine-movement work entitled "Portraits." The composition consists of taped material the composer gathered from interviews with more than 700 homeless people throughout Manhattan, as well as video projections. "Portraits" has had several successful runs at The Kitchen and The Public Theater in New York City.

Kevin James, born in Michigan and raised in Philadelphia, has a Bachelor of Music and Bachelor of Philosophy from DePauw University in Indiana and a Masters of Music from Brooklyn College. He has studied with a number of distinguished composers including David Del Tredici, John Harbison, Leroy Jenkins, Bernard Rands, and Augusta Read Thomas. Mr. James has received grants from the NEA, The American Composer's Forum, the Jerome Foundation and many others. He receives regular commissions from Americas finest performing ensembles. His works have been performed on series, including the *Second Helpings Series* of the St. Luke's Chamber Ensemble and *Music Off the Walls* of the Brooklyn Philharmonic. Before coming to New York to finish his education and pursue his composing career, Mr. James worked with geriatric and mentally infirm patients and as a family counselor working with youth. He has found that his early experiences of service to people on the edges of society have deeply colored his approach to composing and the creative process.

*"Kevin James is in the forefront of a new breed of classically trained but socially concerned composers... His compositions are in consort with the exploratory but accessible crest of the new wave".*

-The New Music Connoisseur-

### **Composer's Statement - The Portraits Project**

I began the Portraits Project with the objective of creating a large scale work that would literally give a voice to the homeless. I have always felt that art cannot help but be a barometer of the time and the society from which it arises and I wanted to use this opportunity to create a "painterly" work to illuminate the condition of this specific community at this specific time. I also wanted to give a variety of types of chamber ensembles the opportunity to perform quality music with some social significance and to create works that might find a lasting place in the repertoire.

As I went forward with the interview process, though, I was struck by the healing that was possible simply by talking to people who often went days or weeks without conversing with another human being or for whom their living condition was an unspeakable secret and an unbearable embarrassment. I saw that having the opportunity simply to express their condition provided a degree of empowerment in and of itself. The majority of people I spoke to thanked me just for taking the time to sit and listen. I was able to see their sense of self and esteem rejuvenate in the course of just a few minutes of storytelling.

It is my ambition through this piece to allow the breadth and diversity of the homeless community to express itself, to provide an artistic platform by which these people can be understood for their humanity, and to offer a glimpse at the power that this experience has held for me personally.

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## **Kevin James**



**1825 Riverside Dr. #6D  
New York, NY 10034  
(212)304-8214  
dangerjames@earthlink.net**