

Press Reviews

CD Review

SHATIN Werther. Gazebo Music. Secret Ground. Dreamtigers.1 Akhmatova Songs.2 View from Mt. Nebo • Da Capo C Players; William Zito (gtr);1 Lucy Shelton (sop)2 • INNOVA 613 (71:31)

SHATIN Piping the Earth.1 Stringing the Bow.2 Ruah.3 The Passion of St. Cecilia4 • Joel Eric Suben, cond;1,2,4 Moravian PO;1,2,4 Robert Black, cond;3 Prisma CO;3 Renée Siebert (fl);3 Gayle Martin Henry (pn)4 • CAPSTONE CPS-8727 (68:41)

Fanfare, Nov-Dec 2004

Here is a wide-ranging survey of the music of **Judith Shatin, an American born and trained composer possessed of a strong and original voice.** The Innova release includes chamber music, while the Capstone CD features larger, symphonically scaled works. At the risk of sounding pejorative, which is not my intention, this is the music of an academic musician, by virtue of the **precision, sense of architecture, and especially, a freedom of stylistic expression.** That last attribute carries some irony, because such freedom would have discredited Shatin in previous times, when strict adherence to specific schools was expected. Yet it is Shatin's curiosity and sense of adventure that gives this material life.

Shatin seems to be most engaged and stimulated by the big gestures that are allowed by bigger ensembles. **There is an earthy, even primeval energy in such pieces as *Stringing the Bow* and *The Passion of St. Cecilia* that breaks from the shackles of formality. This music has both a savage roar and, as appropriate, a gentle purr.** But even in the chamber music, Shatin sounds a distinctly narrative tone. **She seems to be at heart a storyteller,** or at least intent on expressing some extra-musical, dramatic concept. *Werther*, scored for flute, clarinet, violin, cello, and piano, is, at first blush, a thorny, polychromatic work with an imposingly abstract facade, but it is directly inspired by Goethe's purple 1774 novel *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, which was a major portal to the world of Romanticism. Some of the storytelling, while compellingly related, is bit long-winded. Does the composer have a touch of the Irish poet in her? But then, the *Akhmatova Songs*, which are at the emotional center of the chamber-music disc, are a pure distillation of the theatrical impulse. **Shatin sets the words of the great Russian poet in the original language with care, and matches their beauty, tragedy, and mystery with special insight and concision.**

Shatin's music is honored by bright, alert playing from all concerned. Soprano Lucy Shelton can be singled out for her luminous rendition of the *Akhmatova Songs*