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# Journal

of the  
**iaawm**  
international alliance for women in music



Beth Denisch, Director  
IAWM and FT&M15 Conference

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drum and piano pulse, along with evocative and interactive flute/violin melodies. The music wends its way into a truly engaging dance expressing strength and palpable presence, as Mehdizadeh magically incorporates a frame drum within this context, evoking his own kind of mesmerizing ritual dance.

Quite poetically, Christine Donkin's *Finding Arrowheads at Bear Lake* relates to her own childhood when she and her friends found arrowheads near Bear Lake in northwest Alberta where she grew up. Donkin imaginatively brings us in touch with physical reminders of a culture gone by, but still living. The music itself describes her own sense of "awe and curiosity about the people who had left behind so many clues about their lives and their culture." A soaring, expressive violin begins the musical essay, joined by a gently complex, intriguing pianistic texture, creating a thoughtful, questioning, harmonically-rich dialogue. The frame drum accentuates thickening textures with a steady pulse, becoming a rhythm track for a virtuosic violin, reminiscent of Metis fiddling. A pianistic waterfall-effect of cascading, descending arpeggios ends in a sonorous echo of sound, of time, of memory.

Evelyn Stroobach's concise, well-constructed *Fire Dance* for flute, viola, and drum contains excellent counterpoint, which struggles to bring Aboriginal and Western worlds together. She attempts to "depict an [imagined] event where people gather around the warmth of the fire and a dance is performed after dark." She wants listeners to envision both the "movement and purpose of the dance." The viola's percussive, double-stop rhythm in fast 6/8, answered by the drum's basic pulses, is followed by an imitative give-and-take dialogue between flute and viola, borrowing from a Baroque/Classical palette. As the viola and drum continue a straight-ahead, steady-beat texture, the flute essays into a folk-like soliloquy, before returning to imitative dialogue with the viola. Meanwhile, the drum plays mostly unvaried downbeats. At this point, the two worlds do not seem to interconnect; the powwow drum does little to enhance the Western classical palette, as the music tries to break into a dance.

While this album contains several compelling, well-performed compositions, and presents some powerful themes,

one can only imagine the added strength were a Metis fiddler or an Inuit throat singer heard, or if a composer with Indigenous roots could be part of the mix. The question remains as to whether this album bridges Aboriginal/Western worlds.

*Canadian/American composer Carol Ann Weaver's genre-bending music, often tinged with African influences, is heard in North America and beyond. She chairs Association of Canadian Women Composers and is Professor Emerita of University of Waterloo, Canada. Note: all unmarked quoted material is from the CD liner notes. This review appeared in the spring 2019 issue of the Journal in an edited version.*

## Opera Review

### Meira Warshauer: *Elijah's Violin*

DEON NIELSEN PRICE

*Elijah's Violin*, a family opera by Meira Warshauer, libretto by Susan Levi Wallach and Warshauer, was presented as an opera-in-progress in a stunning, semi-staged performance at the historic Presidio Chapel in San Francisco on September 15, 2019. Adapted from the Jewish folktale, "Elijah's Violin" (*Elijah's Violin and other Jewish Fairy Tales*, retold by Howard Schwartz, Harper and Rowe, 1983) adds a lovely gem to Warshauer's significant body of works that she says are inspired by her love for the earth and her personal spiritual journey.

The plot: Playing the game of hide and seek, Princess Shulamit, a teen in search of her identity, is hiding from her brother, Prince Raphael, when she finds an enchanted mirror. Believing that her reflection will reveal her true self, Shula falls prey to a mirror demon that captures her soul and leaves her frozen in stone. With the help of a mysterious mushroom gatherer in the forest, Auntie Malka (a healer), and her niece, Zohara, Prince Rafi sets out to save his sister by finding Elijah's violin, a magical instrument that can release the imprisoned melodies of the heart and free Shula. But Zohara must not only play the violin, an instrument she has never even held, but do so with true intent and a pure heart. Near the end of the opera, surprisingly, the audience helps Zohara overcome this challenge and make the violin sing.

Before the opera began, the composer asked the audience to listen to a fundamental tone deep in the cello and to hum

any pitch over it, which created a resonance that vibrated through the chapel. At the appropriate moment, when Zohara was frustrated and produced awful screeches on the violin, the able conductor, Jonathan Khuner, cued the audience, and *voilà*, the beautiful violin sang through the chapel! We recognized the hauntingly romantic violin theme from "Bracha," the overture that had been played by the excellent violinist Terrie Baune, with Warshauer at the piano.

With her gleeful "Tee-hee-hee," mezzo-soprano Jacqueline Kerns as Shula opened the opera by running to hide in each corner and crevice of the performing area. Remarkable throughout the production were the clever innovations by stage director Yefim Maizel that allowed the actors abundant lively activity in the limited space. Running breathlessly north, south, east and west while pursuing directions on a map, tenor Sergio Gonzalez as Rafi and soprano Alize Roznyai as Zohara created an especially exciting scene.

The two male leads, Gonzalez and bass Chung-Wai Soong, who sang both the mycologist and Elijah, were the most clearly understood in the acoustically live hall. Roznyai, the splendid soprano, was also well understood when not in too high a register. Mariya Kaganskaya was perfectly cast as Auntie Malka, with her rich mezzo-soprano voice and portrayal of mature wisdom. Kerns looked and acted appropriately like a young teenager, although her beautiful, well-developed mezzo-soprano voice belied the youthful role. As the jovial mushroom gatherer who sang, danced, and reminded us of Tevye, Soong was delightful. As Elijah, his extensive experience and command of voice and stage gave power and authority, and also compassion, to the role. The eight girls in the Cantabile Youth Singers, under the direction of Elena Sharkova, sang the various roles of Children of the Forest, Singing Trees, and Demons. They provided levity and brightness in an otherwise fairly dark atmosphere. Even the successful rescue of Shula seemed caught in the web of the enchanted mirror and not quite joyful. My two favorite lines were 1) when Elijah and Rafi encourage Zohara to try to play the violin. Elijah: "It's okay to be afraid." Rafi: "It's not okay to quit!" and 2) when Elijah sings: "Thank you for this life!"

Although care in casting and expert coaching contributed greatly to excellent characterization by everyone in the cast, I felt that the underlying impetus was the effective musical setting by Warshauer. Her music was in turn dynamic, dramatic, romantic, and Jewish folksong in flavor. Tonally, it was both modal and contemporary, and it made colorful use of extended instrumental techniques to mark dramatic moments, such as squawking violin double-stops, a shrieking flute, thumps in a prepared piano, and plucked strings inside the piano. The transcendent violin theme recurred at various enigmatic moments in the story.

The first-rate instrumental ensemble included violinist Baune; Stacey Pelinka, flute; Natalie Raney, cello; Jason Sherbundy, piano; all led by Maestro Khuner. Excellent singers and instrumentalists, thorough preparation, and the strong creative concept by composer, librettist, and music and stage directors were all apparent in this highly successful performance. The general audience reaction seemed to be one of fulfillment and satisfaction. During the finale, they enjoyed singing Auntie Malka's lovely folk lullaby along with the cast and ensemble, and at the end, I heard enthusiastic comments such as: "It was marvelous!" "I loved it!" "Beautiful and exquisite!"

*Deon Nielsen Price (composer, pianist, conductor, author, and veteran educator) was President of IAWM (1996-99). She is currently a board member of the Interfaith Center at the Presidio of San Francisco. Her more than 250 compositions are registered with ASCAP, published by Culver Crest Publications and Southern Music, recorded on Cambria Master Recordings, and catalogued along with her book, Accompanying Skills for Pianists, 2nd edition, online at <http://culvercrest.com>. Her entire output is being archived at Brigham Young University Harold B. Lee Library in Special Collections. Soon to be added are hundreds of digitalized tracks of her recorded piano performances, some going back to the mid-1950s.*

## Recent Releases and Publications

### COMPACT DISCS

#### Edith Alonso: *Khôra*

The Greek word *Khôra*, one of the inspirations for this work, is a philosophical term that refers to a receptacle, a space, or a place, such as "no man's land." Alonso's work depicts travel to another world, to a desolate land, but once there, the traveler can rise up, like Icarus, and try to touch the sun. *Khôra* has a positive ending, and the traveler, unlike Icarus, does not fall. Alonso explores sound in many innovative ways, and she tries to show how sounds

created by analog and digital synthesizers can change our perception of reality. Truth-Table TT006, UK (2019).

#### Adriana Isabel Figueroa Mañas:

##### *Tango Miniatures*

The disc, *The Other Half of Music*, features works for piano and winds by ten contemporary women composers from around the world (Argentina, Australia, Canada, China, France, Greece, Italy, Jordan, Latvia, and Nigeria). The CD illustrates different trends and the wealth of ideas of contemporary women, including Figueroa from Argentina. Chaminade Ensemble. Naxos-Dynamic CDS7837 (2019).

#### Jennifer Fowler: *Lines Spun*

Six chamber works, performed by soprano Raphaela Papadakis, mezzo-soprano Lauren Easton, and the UK ensemble Lontano, directed by Odaline de la Martinez. Metier #MSV28588 (2019). Copies of the CD are available from: [www.tutti.co.uk/cds/lines-spun-fowler-chamber-FLRJY-28588-R1](http://www.tutti.co.uk/cds/lines-spun-fowler-chamber-FLRJY-28588-R1) and [www.divineartrecords.com/label/metier](http://www.divineartrecords.com/label/metier) and other suppliers. Tracks are also available to download.

#### Juliana Hall: *Emergence: Emily Dickinson*

Settings of Emily Dickinson texts by composers Aaron Copland, Luigi Zaninelli, Juliana Hall, Sylvia Glickman, and Ella Jarman-Pinto. *Twelve Poems of Emily Dickinson* (Copland), *Seven Epigrams of Emily Dickinson* (Zaninelli), *To Meet a Flower* (Hall), *A Northeast Storm* (Hall), *In Reverence* (Hall), *Black Cake: A Recipe by Emily Dickinson* (Glickman), and *This Little Rose* (Jarman-Pinto). Nadine Benjamin, soprano; Nicole Panizza, piano. Stone Records, London, UK. Catalogue No. 5060192780864 (2019).

#### Lydia Kakabasde: *Ithaka*

The CD *Ithaka* includes the following works by Lydia Kakabasde: nine songs for mezzo-soprano and piano, performed by Clare McCaldin and Paul Turner, and two commissioned choral works: *Odyssey* (SATB and harp) and *I Remember* (children's choir with piano and violin). *Odyssey*, commissioned by Royal Holloway University of London, symbolizes a musical journey through centuries of Greek history, culture, and literature. The disc includes both sacred and secular compositions, some of which are sung in Greek.

### Compact Disc: *Hommage to Women Composers*

The CD features music by eleven composers: Clara Wieck Schumann, Germaine Tailleferre, Louise Talma, Miriam Gideon, Barbara Pentland, Marga Richter, Thea Musgrave, Jacqueline Fontyn, Marta Ptaszyńska, Shulamit Ran, and Ruth Lomon. Pianists Ruth Lomon and Iris Graffman Wenglin. Navona NV6254 (2019)

In the mid-1970s, Ruth Lomon (1930-2017) and Iris Graffman Wenglin performed regularly as a duo-piano team. Ruth herself was a composer, and the pair became curious about what other music there might be by women. When Ruth traveled to London and searched in the British Library for music composed by women, it was generally difficult to find, and what she did uncover was often in manuscript. So Ruth and Iris began a decades-long quest of searching in archives, and contacting composers themselves, to collect music for piano four-hands or two pianos composed by women, and bring those works to light through performance and broadcast. The best examples of these live performances are heard on this CD that celebrates the pioneering activism and brilliant musicianship of Lomon and Wenglin.

From the grace and rhythmic definition of Schumann's *Five Caprices* (1831) and *Polonaise* (1832), to the array of lyricism, rhythmic momentum, and moments of pointillist texture in Pentland's *Three Piano Duets After Pictures by Paul Klee* (1958), and the brief yet personality-packed movements of Ran's *Children's Scenes* (1970), the diversity of styles, textures, and emotions all within the genre of piano duet offer an exhilarating experience. The impact of female composers on the world of music is known by some, although there is a long way to go in unearthing the full treasure-trove of women's compositions throughout history. With *Hommage to Women Composers*, the impact is unignorable. ...*Liane Curtis and Emily Garcia*