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Wetterauer Zeitung, Germany

“A Thousand Splendid Suns is more than a story of survival in the face of what seem to be insurmountable odds. It is a story of the unconquerable spirit of a people and individuals seen through the eyes of two indomitable women.”

Contemporary Literature

A THOUSAND SPLENDID SUNS

Music by Sheila Silver

Libretto by Stephen Kitsakos

Based on the novel by Khaled Hosseini

Based on the international best-selling novel by Khaled Hosseini, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is a story of love, passion, sacrifice and spiritual transcendence. It features two Muslim women, heroines of epic proportion, whose lives intersect as the wives of one brutal man in war-torn Afghanistan from the late 1970's to the present era.

Internationally acclaimed composer Sheila Silver has received a Guggenheim as well as a 2014 Opera America Discovery Grant for Female Composers to support her new opera, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. The libretto has been commissioned by American Opera Projects with support from the New York State Council of the Arts. American Opera Projects and dramaturg Cori Ellison are working with Silver and Kitsakos to develop the project further.

4 PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS

MARIAM, illegitimate daughter of Jalil Khan and Nana, born in Herat, age 15-40, mezzo-soprano

LAILA, young, beautiful daughter of Hakim & Fariba, born in Kabul, 14-25, soprano

RASHEED, a Pashtun from Kabul, husband to both Mariam and Laila, age 45-60, bass-baritone

TARIQ, a Pashtun, a young man from Kabul, lover of Laila, he has only one leg, age 16-27, tenor

ENSEMBLE of SECONDARY CHARACTERS

THERE IS NO CHORUS. SECONDARY CHARACTERS DOUBLE SINGING ROLES AND ALSO SERVE AS WOMEN IN THE MARKET, NEIGHBORS, SERVANTS, POLICEMEN, SOLDIERS AND BUS PASSENGERS. A minimum of 7 singers are required: 2 sopranos, 2 mezzos, 1 tenor, 1 baritone, 1 bass. In addition two children -- boy, age 5 (singing role); and girl, age 7 (non-singing role), are required. *The Ensemble thus requires a minimum of 9 performers, including the children.*

The opera, in two acts, takes the audience from Herat in Western Afghanistan into the houses, markets, and prisons of Kabul. It will be scored for an orchestra of 28-40, including *bansuri* (bamboo flute) and *tabla* (Indian drums) and incorporates the use of multi-media including authentic news broadcasts and documentary footage.

For more information visit: www.sheilasilver.com/1000-splendid-suns or contact sheila@sheilasilver.com

A THOUSAND SPLENDID SUNS
Music by Sheila Silver, Libretto by Stephen Kitsakos
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SYNOPSIS

This emotionally gripping story takes place over a forty-year span in war-torn Afghanistan – from before the Communist era through civil war, the Taliban, and the arrival of American troops. A love story, it is also an honest representation of the treatment of women in Afghanistan, especially under the Taliban. The action focuses on two women from very different backgrounds and a generation apart: Mariam -- the rejected and impoverished illegitimate child of a wealthy provincial man, and Laila, the beautiful, lively, and modern daughter of an enlightened middle-class scholar and teacher.

When she is fifteen, Mariam, forced into marriage with forty-year old Rasheed, moves to Kabul to start a life with her husband. Hopeful at first, she is unable to conceive, and lives a loveless existence with a husband who abuses her regularly.

Years later, when bomb explosions kill the parents of fourteen-year-old Laila, Rasheed brings the wounded girl to his home and Mariam nurses her back to health. Laila is a ravishing beauty and Rasheed schemes to get her to marry him by concocting a story that her beloved fiancée, Tariq, has been killed. Hoping to create a safe haven for Tariq's child with whom she is secretly a few weeks pregnant, Laila agrees to marry Rasheed.

At first Mariam is cold to Laila, but gradually the women bond in their care for Laila's baby and their hatred of Rasheed, who continues his "sanctioned" abuses. The two wives attempt a daring escape from Kabul but are caught, escalating Rasheed's psychological and physical abuse.

The turning point comes when Tariq, still alive, returns to Kabul to find Laila. Rasheed learns of Tariq's visit to the house and in an act of extreme rage, begins to strangle Laila. Mariam, after years of abuse, refuses to stand silent any longer, and to save Laila's life, hits him with a shovel, killing him. Mariam convinces Laila and Tariq to flee with Laila's two children so that Mariam alone will bear the responsibility of Rasheed's death, knowing that she will be sentenced to death. As she walks to stand before the Taliban firing squad, her understanding of her life brings her spiritual peace as she discovers, for the first time, her own self worth.

The transformation of Mariam and Laila as they develop a loving mother-daughter relationship, their sacrifices for one another, their perseverance, and their acts of bravery under the harshest of conditions make them powerful Islamic heroines.

The opera is structured in two acts which take the audience from Herat in Western Afghanistan into the houses, markets, and prison of Kabul. It offers opportunities to incorporate multi-media including authentic news broadcasts and documentary footage.

Conceived for 4 principals with several supporting roles which can be double-cast, the opera requires a minimum of 13 singers including two children, one of whom sings. It will be scored for orchestra (30+) which includes bansuri (bamboo flute) and tabla (Indian drums).

For further information please contact: www.sheilasilver.com or sheila@sheilasilver.com

Review Quotes for the opera's source, Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns*

"Hosseini has once again created a heartbreaking masterpiece that connects readers with life in Afghanistan over the past several decades and highlights the common hopes, dreams and struggles that make us human."

http://bestsellers.about.com/od/fictionreviews/gr/thousand_suns.htm

"*A Thousand Splendid Suns* is not so clearly autobiographical as *The Kite Runner*; however, one cannot help but imagine that these two remarkable women are drawn from life, that their revealed lives reflect the lives of thousands of Afghani women who have endured despite the odds.... it is ultimately love that draws characters out of their isolation, that gives them the strength to transcend their own limitations, to expose their vulnerabilities, and to perform devastating acts of self-sacrifice."

About.com Contemporary Literature (part of *New YorkTimes*)

"*Splendid Suns*" starts off programmatically and gains speed and emotional power as it slowly unfurls. ...Despite all the pain and heartbreak, the novel is never depressing; Hosseini barrels through each grim development unflinchingly, seeking illumination. Another artistic triumph, and surefire bestseller, for this fearless writer."

Kirkus Review

"Afghan-American novelist Hosseini follows up his bestselling *The Kite Runner* with another searing epic of Afghanistan in turmoil... Hosseini gives a forceful but nuanced portrait of a patriarchal despotism where women are agonizingly dependent on fathers, husbands and especially sons, the bearing of male children being their sole path to social status. His tale is a powerful, harrowing depiction of Afghanistan, but also a lyrical evocation of the lives and enduring hopes of its resilient characters."

Publishers Weekly

"So now we have Hosseini's second novel. It too is set in Afghanistan, and it too deals with ordinary people whose lives are lastingly altered by the terrible events in that country during the past three decades. It's going to be another bestseller no matter what's said about it in this and other reviews...But just in case you're curious, just in case you're wondering whether in yours truly's judgment it's as good as *The Kite Runner*, here's the answer: No. It's better....a brave, honorable, big-hearted book."

Jonathan Yardley, The Washington Post

"Where Hosseini's novel begins to sing is in depicting the slowly growing friendship of the two wives in the face of the horrific abuse from their shared husband. Laila looks at Mariam, and "For the first time, it was not an adversary's face Laila saw but a face of grievances unspoken, burdens gone unprotested, a destiny submitted to and endured. If she stayed, would this be her own face, Laila wondered?" The women's only hope of affection or solidarity is with one another, and they survive not just physically but also emotionally by putting their faith in each other and in their love for Laila's children..... Hosseini does not challenge the usual western view of Afghanistan, but he does enrich it - he adds greater knowledge and understanding to it, and makes the Afghans come alive as loving, feeling individuals. There is something marvelously hopeful in this process."

The Guardian, UK

Review Quotes for the Music of Sheila Silver

(The Thief of Love) "Standing ovations confirmed that the full-house audience had been thoroughly won over by the opera, which is set in a mythical kingdom in ancient India."

India Abroad, International Weekly Newspaper

"Not only is the story (**The Thief of Love DVD**) entertaining, but so is the score. This is Silver's first opera, but she knows what a good opera needs; melody. And she offers it in abundance. It all sounds quite fresh and appealing."

American Record Guide

(The Thief of Love DVD) "The drama moves along convincingly, never bogging down or getting sidetracked on tangents. And there is genuine good humor in it, a rarity in contemporary opera."

Opera News

"To the Spirit Unconquered" proved to be a stunning modern masterpiece, a work of profound musical and emotional depth.... It is one of those rare compositions that grabs you emotionally and will not let go. Silver's manipulation of her musical material is masterful."

Journal American, Bellevue/Seattle, Washington

"Most important, **"Spirit"** is accessible unlike much modern music. There's a rhyme and a reason to it, a sense of direction. ...To say the least, **"Spirit"** is poignant, to say the most, remarkable."

Virginia Gazette, Williamsburg

(Piano Concerto) "The audience liked what it heard, calling composer, soloist and conductor back for several bows....This is a modern work, but is not extremely dissonant. It is, however, almost savage at times, reminding one of Prokofiev gone wild. Lovely, lyric moments are offset by stormy passages that utilize the entire orchestra....chances are it could enter the standard repertory and stay there for a long time."

Richmond Times Dispatch

(Naxos CD, Piano Concert and Piano Preludes) "There will always be lots of promising careers of young musicians. Many end up, after brilliant educations, in oblivion. Some, with enormous energy, gain acceptance in the ranks of the establishment; but only a few of them in any generation will enliven the art form with their musical language and herald new directions in music. Sheila Silver is such a visionary."

Wetterauer Zeitung, Germany

"Silver is a classic Modernist, with a traditional sense of time... **(The Piano Concerto)** speaks with what I'd call a depth of discourse. Though emotionally rewarding, it bursts with intellectual abundance. Though complex, complexity isn't its main point. At its best, it bespeaks a maturity of mind and culture found in few composers."

Classical Net

"Sheila Silver takes French impressionism as a starting point for her preludes, **(Six Preludes for Piano on Poems of Baudelaire)** especially the first one, which is evocative of the sea. Her horizons expand from there, as the inspiration of nature takes her into the realm of dream-like meditation and more adventuresome harmonies. The clarity of her writing, though, never shuts out the listener, allowing for a relatively easy access to her ample imagination."

Fanfare

"Silver speaks a musical language of her own, one rich in sonority, lyrical intensity and poetic feeling."

John von Rhein, Chicago Tribune

(*Twilight's Last Gleaming* for two pianos and two percussion.) "This poignant, and at times violent, piece is not only a musical representation of war, but a response to it....It's a titan of a piece."

Three Village News, New York

"Sheila Silver's **Canto** matches Pound's text with a music of a comparably audacious directness, simplicity, and specificity and therefore boldly occupies a psycho-spiritual region that few other composers have cared to approach; it is a beautiful work."

Richard Dyer, The Boston Globe

"The message of Sappho in Sheila Silver's **Chariessa** is submerged in an expressionistic atmosphere of struggle and tenderness. ...The incandescent chromaticism of the score by Silver is contained and controlled within highly calculated limits and sustained through a highly expert instrumentation. We would like to hear more of this musician."

La Repubblica, Rome

Sheila Silver offers in **The Song of Sarah** a remarkably evocative score based on the Bible...It really touches both the mind and the heart.

Robert Marsh, Chicago Sun Times

"...it (**Sonata for Cello and Piano**) is certainly one of the most immediately attractive string works I have heard from the second half of this century."

David Denton, The Strad

(**Shirat Sara**) Silver's ability to construct an argument *sui generis* impresses me the most. I've listened to this work a lot in the past month, and I discover something new each time. I don't pretend to have its measure yet, although it's not a matter of understanding the language so much as it is perceiving relationships among movements. I have no idea how to tell a masterpiece with any reliability, but Silver's score at least makes me ask the question: if not, why not. I haven't yet found an answer, a good sign.

Stephen Schwarz, Classical CD Review

Sheila Silver Biography

Sheila Silver, recipient of a 2013 Guggenheim Fellowship to begin work on *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, was recently awarded an Opera America Discovery Grant for Female Composers funded by the Virginia B. Toulmin Foundation, to further support development of this new work. In January of 2014 she returned from India where she studied Hindustani (North Indian) music for 6 months with master singer Kedar Narayan Bodas. Her studies continue via Skype. Hindustani music is at the heart of Afghan music and Silver is incorporating the color of this music into her unique tonal language.

Winner of the 2007 Raymond and Beverly Sackler Prize in Music Composition for Opera for her chamber opera, ***The Wooden Sword***, Sheila Silver has had works commissioned and performed by numerous orchestras, chamber ensembles, and soloists throughout the world including the American Composers Orchestra, the Richmond Symphony, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Tanglewood, the RAI Orchestra of Rome, the Seattle Symphony, and the Lithuanian State Symphony Orchestra. Her honors include: a Bunting Institute Fellowship; the Rome Prize; the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters Composer Award; twice winner of the ISCM National Composers Competition; and awards and commissions from the Rockefeller Foundation, the Camargo Foundation, Bellagio, the MacDowell Colony, New York State Council of the Arts, the Barlow Foundation, the Paul Fromm Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Cary Trust. Her teachers include Erhard Karkoschka, Gyorgi Ligeti and Arthur Berger.

In addition to ***The Wooden Sword***, Silver and librettist Stephen Kitsakos collaborated on another dramatic work -- ***The White Rooster***, *A Tale of Compassion*, Cantata for Women's Vocal Quartet, 6 Tibetan Singing Bowls and Percussion. Commissioned for the vocal ensemble, *Tapestry*, by the Smithsonian's Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, this semi-staged work was premiered in 2010 to celebrate the Freer's exhibit, *In the Realm of the Buddha*, and has toured internationally since then.

In June of 2013 ***Beauty Intolerable***, *A Songbook based on the poetry of Edna St. Vincent Millay*, was premiered. Developed with the support of American Opera Projects and the Millay Society, it includes 15 songs and was premiered by sopranos Lauren Flanigan and Risa Renae Harman, and mezzo-soprano, Deanne Meek with actresses Tyne Daly and Tandy Cronyn reciting the poetry. Dona Vaughn directed performances in the Hudson Valley and at Symphony Space in New York City.

Silver's first opera, ***The Thief of Love***, is available on DVD, released by Hummingbird Films. Other recent recordings include: ***Twilight's Last Gleaming***, for two pianos and percussion on Bridge Records; ***Piano Concerto*** and ***Six Preludes for Piano on Poems of Baudelaire*** on Naxos; ***Shirat Sara*** (Song of Sarah) on Naxos; and ***Six Preludes for Piano on Poems of Baudelaire*** on Albany Records.

Silver is Professor of Music at Stony Brook University in New York. Her music is published by Lauren Keiser Music Publishing, Marimba Productions, and Argenta Music. For more information please visit <http://www.sheilasilver.com/>

Stephen Kitsakos Biography

Stephen Kitsakos wrote the libretti for Sheila Silver's chamber operas: ***The Wooden Sword*** (2007), Winner of the 2007 Raymond and Beverly Sackler Prize in Music Composition for Opera; and ***The White Rooster, A Tale of Compassion***, for Women's Vocal Quartet, 6 Tibetan Singing Bowls and Percussion (2010, commissioned for the vocal ensemble, *Tapestry*, by the Smithsonian's Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery. He recently was awarded funding from the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA) to begin work as the librettist for the opera adaptation of Sheila Silver's ***A Thousand Splendid Suns***. Prior to his collaborations with Ms. Silver, he was a recipient of writing commissions from the Episcopal Diocese of NY, the Catskill Watershed Corporation and the BMI Foundation.

A writer member of ASCAP and a permanent member of the BMI Musical Theatre Workshop, he is a graduate of New York University and received training as a theatre composer and lyricist studying with Maury Yeston, Robert Starer and Richard Engquist. A contributing writer to the quarterly magazine, *The Sondheim Review*, he is the author of a series of chapters on music and theatre in *Music in American Life* (2013) published by ABC-CLIO. Kitsakos was on the Faculty at the School of Fine & Performing Arts at SUNY New Paltz from 2000-2013 and served as the Asst. Chair of the Theatre Arts Department from 2010-13.