

A THOUSAND SPLENDID SUNS
Music by Sheila Silver, Libretto by Stephen Kitsakos
Based on the international best-selling novel by Khaled Hosseini

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).

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