

Project Description for A Thousand Splendid Suns, The Opera

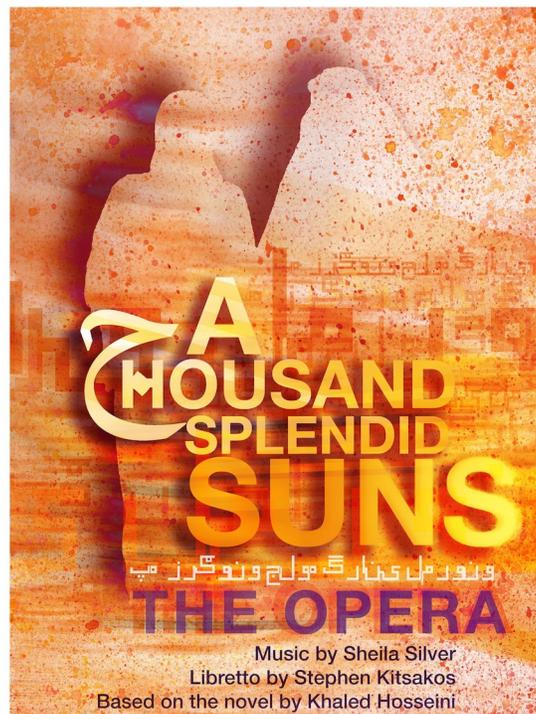
Music by Sheila Silver, Libretto by Stephen Kitsakos

Based on the novel by Khaled Hosseini

(June 2015 update)

“Only a few composers 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

“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



Set in Afghanistan in the later half of the 20th century, “A Thousand Splendid Suns” is a universal story of love and the triumph of the female spirit. Through different circumstances and twenty years apart, two 15 year old girls are each forced into marriage with the same brutal man. The older is the neglected bastard child of a rich man. The younger is the educated daughter of an enlightened school teacher and in love with her childhood sweetheart. Enemies at first, they grow to love each other like mother and daughter. This bond gives them the strength to survive and and ultimately risk their lives for one another and for a chance to be free.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Hosseini's first book, *The Kite Runner*, published in 2003 became an international bestseller and beloved classic, sold in over 70 countries and spending more than a hundred weeks on the *New York Times* bestseller list. In May 2007, his second novel, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, debuted at #1 on the *New York Times* bestseller list, remaining in that spot for fifteen weeks and nearly an entire year on the bestseller list. Together, the two books have sold more than 10 million copies in the United States and more than 38 million copies worldwide. Hosseini's third novel, *And the Mountains Echoed*, was published to acclaim in 2013.

ABOUT THE COMPOSER: Internationally acclaimed composer Sheila Silver was awarded the exclusive rights by Khaled Hosseini to develop *A Thousand Splendid Suns* into a work for the opera stage. She received a Guggenheim Fellowship to study Hindustani music in India and to begin work on this opera as well as a 2014 Opera America Discovery Grant for Female Composers (funded by the Virginia B. Toulmin Foundation) to support development of the opera. Silver's other operas include, *The Wooden Sword* (2007) winner of the Beverly & Raymond Sackler Prize for Composition and *The Thief of Love* (1995). Her most recent compositions include "Nocturne, Based on Raga Jog" premiered by pianist Gilbert Kalish and commissioned by the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center (2015), and *Beauty Intolerable: A Songbook of Poems by Edna St. Vincent Millay*" (2013) a group of 15 songs developed in conjunction with American Opera Projects and The Millay Foundation and premiered at Symphony Space in New York City with singers Lauren Flanigan, Deanne Meek and Risa Renae Harmon, with narration by the actresses Tyne Daly and Tandy Cronyn. A group of three new songs will be premiered by Dawn Upshaw at Merkin Hall in September, 2015.

ABOUT THE LIBRETTIST: The libretto for *A Thousand Splendid Suns* received partial funding through a commission by American Opera Projects with support from the New York State Council of the Arts. Kitsakos wrote the libretto for Silver's *The Wooden Sword* (2007) as well as for Sheila Silver's theatrical cantata *The White Rooster: A Tale of Compassion* (2010) commissioned for Tapestry by the Smithsonian Institution and scored for 4 women's voices, 5 Tibetan singing bowls and hand drums. Kitsakos is a music theater director as well as a theatre and performing arts journalist. He is the author of the novel *The Accidental Pilgrim* (ASD Publishing).

LENGTH AND ORCHESTRATION OF OPERA: The opera is in two acts: the first will be approximately 1hr. 20 min; the second will be approximately 1 hour. With doubling (and triple-ing) of parts, it could be performed with 11 singers plus 2 children (only one of which has a minor singing role). It could be scored for either a full orchestra (28-40) or an ensemble of 13.

Whether full orchestra or ensemble, two non-Western instruments will be included: bansuri (bamboo flute) and tabla (drums) -- both are native to Afghanistan and Hindustani music. Silver has studied Hindustani music in preparation for composing this opera and her Western lyrical voice is infused with the colors and rhythms of Hindustani music – the music of Afghanistan.

SETTING: The opera takes the audience from Herat in Western Afghanistan and moves into the houses, markets, bus terminal and prisons of Kabul. It begins in mid-summer in 1972 and ends at the end of 2002 after American troops have entered Kabul.

CAST:

PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS: 4

MARIAM, illegitimate daughter of Jalil & 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, husband to both Mariam and Laila, age 45-60, baritone

TARIQ, a young man, true love of Laila, age 16-27, tenor

ENSEMBLE OF SECONDARY CHARACTERS: minimum 7

- **There is no Chorus.** Secondary characters may double (or triple) in singing roles if necessary and serve as the men and women of Kabul including Soldiers, Police, Market Women, Neighbors and Bus Passengers. A minimum of 7 singers is required with the following vocal ranges:
 - 3 sopranos, 1 mezzo-soprano, 1 tenor, 1 baritone, 1 bass.
- In addition
 - a boy, age 5 (minor singing role); a girl age 4-7 (non-singing role)

PROGRESS TO DATE:

- Sheila Silver has received a 2013 Guggenheim and a 2014 Opera America Discovery Grant for Female Composers (funded by the Virginia B. Toulmin Foundation) for preliminary support of this opera. The libretto has been commissioned by American Opera Projects with support from the New York State Council of the Arts.
- The 1st workshop took place May 26-June 1, 2015. A live stream and DVD of that workshop presentation is now available: 60 minutes of music were presented -- Act I, Scenes 1,2,3, and part of Scene 5.
- **A Thousand Splendid Suns**, under the auspices of American Opera Projects, received a 2015 NEA grant for an upcoming workshop which will take place in Key West, Florida, January 12-15, 2016. Silver hopes to complete the entire first act for this workshop.
- **A Thousand Splendid Suns** has been selected to be featured at Opera America's New Works Forum, January 18, 2016. Thirty minutes of music will be presented, with full orchestra.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

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Or visit: <http://www.sheilasilver.com/1000-splendid-suns/>