

Fanfare, Issue 37:6, July/Aug 2014



SHATIN *Glyph*.¹ *Time to Burn*.² *Grito del Corazón*.³ *Sic Transit*.⁴ *Hoshech Al P'ney HaTehom*.⁵ *Elijah's Chariot*.⁶ • ¹James Dunham (va); ¹Margaret Kampmeier (pn); ²Aaron Hill (ob); ^{2,4}I-Jen Fang, ²Mike Schutz (perc); ³F. Gerard Errante, ³D. Gause (cl); ^{1,6}Cassatt Str Qrt • INNOVA 845 (75:08)

Judith Shatin is a true sound artist. She applies sound to the airwaves in the same way a painter applies colors to canvas. She is not trying for melodies that the listener will walk away singing, but she uses melodic material for dramatic effect. The holder of advanced degrees from Juilliard and Princeton, she is professor of music at the University of Virginia where she founded and now directs the Virginia Center for Computer Music. *Glyph* is a four-movement study in light and shadow with the emphasis on various qualities of light and reflection. Light is represented by close harmonies between the solo viola and the members of the string quartet. There is some correspondence with Debussy and Impressionist music, but its movement is constantly surging forward into the diverse rhythms of the late 20th century. “Luminous” is lyrical, but “Flickering” is spicy and hard to pin down. Her music reminds me of the Norse legendary character Loki. “Ecstatic” brings its own atmosphere along for the memorable ride that culminates in the driving force of “Incandescent.”

Written in 2006, *Time to Burn* speaks of holocausts, not just the one in Germany, but more recent ones that no one has succeeded in stopping. Shatin likens the ethnic and religious hatred of our own time to the Inquisition and the burning of witches. Her piece for oboe and percussion gives a moving description of 21st-century religious persecutions. *Grito del Corazón* (Cry of the Heart) is a 2001 piece inspired by Goya's most disturbing paintings. His “black” paintings are fearsome works he created in old age to exhibit the inhumanity of war. Shatin describes their dark themes with intense music for two clarinets and intriguing electronic sounds.

The score of *Sic Transit* calls for a single percussionist and a Computer Assisted Drumming Instrument that reflects the interaction of time and human beings. To the listener, the sounds seem to occur surrounded by spaces of varying sizes that produce constantly changing rhythms. This is quite a fascinating piece that seems different at each hearing. In *Hoshech Al P'ney HaTehom* (Darkness upon the Face of the Deep) Shatin provides a musical creation myth as she describes the formation of the world out of chaos and infinite darkness. Sounds and matter coalesce. Tones strengthen and ooze out of the abyss. There is lightning, and eventually, life.

Elijah's Chariot is perhaps the easiest of Shatin's works for a neophyte to grasp at first hearing because it tells a story. For this work she uses the sound of the ancient ram's horn, the shofar, usually heard on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. She processes the notes of the horn electronically in order to obtain the bright and rousing sounds that describe the prophet being swept up into the heavens in a glowing chariot drawn by fiery steeds. To finish the story, she adds the melody of a familiar folksong, *Eliahu HaNavi* (Elijah the Prophet) in which the people invite him to return with the Messiah. When you listen to her piece, you feel as though you too are being swept up to Heaven by strong winds. Shatin's music is powerful and most distinctive. As performed here and recorded in Innova's clear sound, it is also most inviting. I think anyone who is interested in the creation of new music should sample her offerings. **Maria Nockin**