

TO KEEP THE DARK AWAY • Gayle Martin (pn) • RAVELLO 7927
(64:38)

SCHUMANN/LISZT *Widmung*. **SHATIN** *To Keep the Dark Away*.
Fantasy on St. Cecilia. **PROKOFIEV** *Romeo and Juliet: The Street
Awakens; Arrival of the Guests; The Young Juliet; The Montagues and the
Capulets; Mercutio*. **WAGNER/LISZT** *Ballade of the Flying Dutchman*.
Isoldes Liebestod

There is a refreshing trend in new music to create work that is theatrical, even visceral, without resorting to clichés or purely programmatic devices. American composer Judith Shatin falls into this category for me. In previous reviews of her music, I noted an “earthy, even primeval energy,” and remarked that “she seems to be, at heart, a story teller.” The music on this recital bears out that early impression. The title piece, *To Keep the Dark Away*, is a suite of five short works with titles borrowed from Emily Dickinson that convey a range of emotions and sensibilities, from dark to light with subtle shades in between. Shatin seems most at home in material that is introspective and has intricate layers, but she can also express a smart playfulness, including in the final piece, *Whose Spokes a Dizzy Music Makes*, which might also be a nod of respect to a famous jazz trumpeter.

Fantasy on St. Cecilia is more ambitious and complex, both in the actual language of the music and the dramatic intent (concepts that are two sides of the same coin). This is a solo piano reduction of a concerto, also recorded by Gayle Martin. It is in three movements, titled “Her Struggle,” “Her Passion,” and “Her Martyrdom.” This is bold and richly expressive music, delivered with smoldering power by Martin.

The balance of the program is also largely inspired by drama, including opera and Shakespeare. Martin delivers the piano version of Robert Schumann’s love song for Clara with ideal pacing and rhythmic flexibility. The Prokofiev is rendered with a good sense for the color and energy of the narrative of the story, but Martin falls short of the virtuosity of some others, including a version I reviewed recently by the fine young Russian pianist Daria Rabotkina. Similarly, the Liszt arrangements of Wagner’s music do not convey the lushness and dynamic range they require to really take flight, such as is the case in the *Liebestod* performance by another young Slav, Anna Shelest. These selections hardly sink the ship, however, and the main reason to hear this CD is for the fascinating music of Shatin, which Martin champions with gusto. —**Peter Burwasser**