

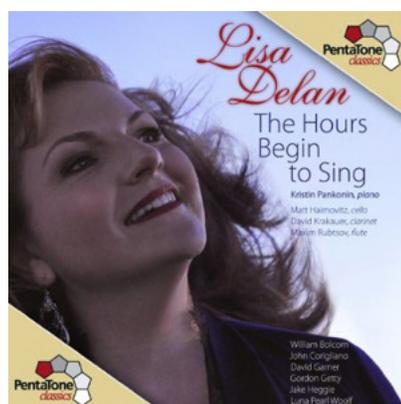
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# OPERA NEWS

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## Lisa Delan: "The Hours Begin to Sing"

□ *Songs by Bolcom, Corigliano, Garner, Getty, Heggie and Woolf. Pankonin, piano; Haimovitz, cello; Krakauer, clarinet; Rubtsov, flute. Texts and translations. PentaTone Classics PTC 5186 459*



Lisa Delan has established herself as a passionate advocate of contemporary art song, commissioning and singing the premieres of new works, as well as extending the life span of repertoire that might otherwise slip into oblivion. This recording revisits the same six composers she featured in *And If the Song Be Worth a Smile*, reviewed in these pages by this critic in July 2009. Jake Heggie wrote *From the Book of Nightmares* expressly for Delan, and she performs the four songs with a sense of ownership and true connection. Spooky cello harmonics and wispy piano roudades beckon the listener into Heggie's looking-glass world. Delan approaches the first song, "The Nightmare,"

with tenderness and bright, poignant tone, and in the quirky "In a Restaurant," she imitates a loud child's inappropriate expostulation ("caca") with deadpan authenticity. All the texts of David Garner's *Vilna Poems* are from the Vilna ghetto, except for the carefree "Shpiltsayg" (Playthings), a reflection on the Holocaust days, when toys were plentiful but children scarce. Garner cajoles an impressive range of atmospheric color from the piano, cello and clarinet, adding layers of insidious menace to these meditations. The clarinet's warped klezmeric plaint in "Ekzekutzie" signals the irony of a reluctant gravedigger's discovery of unexpected power when he "executes" a worm by cutting it in half, thus allowing it to regenerate into two worms. John Corigliano's *Three Irish Folksongs* for voice and flute bring out a nasal cast to Delan's tone that seems to drag her pitch down. Most of the interest of these settings is in the flute part, dispatched with energetic whimsy by Maxim Rubtsov. The second song, "The Foggy Dew," is the most compelling.

While Delan's voice is rich and smooth through all registers, and she wields it expressively, her diction in the Heggie, Garner and Corigliano selections is sometimes so murky that it's difficult to match the words to the printed texts. And yet, in five songs by William Bolcom, her diction is absolutely perfect, allowing Arnold Weinstein's wryly perspicacious words to carry half the weight of her expressiveness. This set is without a doubt Delan's most engaging, and at times she recalls Joan Morris, Bolcom's wife and primary exponent, in her prime. Delan exploits a chesty mix for "Song of Black Max" and "At the Last Lousy Moments of Love" and a slouchy croon in "Angels are the Highest Form of Virtue." There is real empathy in her tale of the naïve transvestite, George. She lightens her voice attractively for Gordon Getty's *Four Dickinson Songs*, which were composed originally for Barbara Bonney. Luna Pearl Woolf's settings of texts by thirteenth-century Persian poet Rumi are fragrant, sensual and occasionally elusive; here, too, Delan gives a balanced, idiomatically felicitous performance. "During the Day I Was Singing With You" is a dream-like portrait of longing, and "I Would Love to Kiss You" exploits the extremes of

the cello's range — the high to capture desire and the low to evoke the threat of death to those who break the rules to consummate their passion. Like Garner, Woolf varies the instrumental textures evocatively and imaginatively. □

JOANNE SYDNEY LESSNER

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