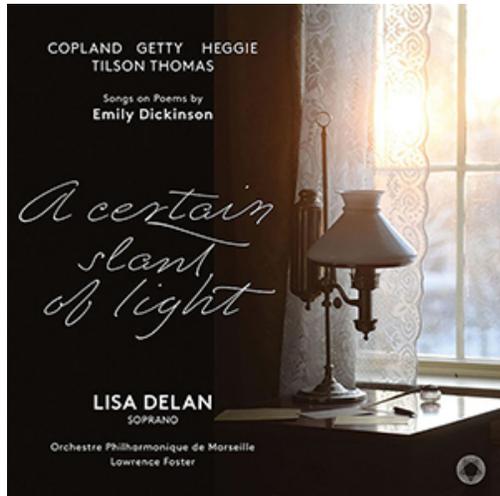


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Lisa Delan: *A Certain Slant Of Light*

CD Songs by Copland, Getty, Heggie and Tilson Thomas on poems by Emily Dickinson. Orchestre Philharmonique de Marseille, Foster. Pentatone PTC 5186 634



SOPRANO LISA DELAN

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SOPRANO LISA DELAN, a tireless and exemplary advocate of American song,

has united four composers here through a poet. Orchestrated song cycles by Aaron Copland, Jake Heggie, Gordon Getty, and Michael Tilson Thomas are settings of Emily Dickinson poems. Delan clearly believes deeply in both the poetry and the music. The album is superbly recorded and engineered; we hear all the orchestral detail, but the voice is never swamped. This is also a tribute to Delan's naturally radiant timbre and fiercely communicative delivery.

Aaron Copland's *Eight Poems of Emily Dickinson* are a subset of the twelve he composed as a cycle for piano and voice; these are the ones he considered most suitable for orchestral adaptation. "Nature, the gentlest mother" opens the cycle with the composer's familiar bright, spacious harmonies, leading to an unexpected clamor on the phrase "The most unworthy flower." "There came a wind like a bugle" is more harmonically dense and strikingly illustrative. "Heart, we will forget him" makes a big impact, capturing well the lingering effects of heartbreak. The

song benefits from the surging orchestration and Delan's soulful delivery. Copland's setting of "Going to Heaven" is a good musical rendering of Dickinson's intellectual excitement as she deconstructs the concept; the song also delivers the emotional punch of the last four lines, when the poem moves from the speculative to the personal, referencing the death of two dear ones.

Heggie's cycle includes "I'm Nobody," which is fun and imaginative (and winningly enacted by Delan), but the heavy orchestration is at odds with Heggie's seemingly playful intent. "Fame" begins and ends arrestingly with two slashing D-major chords and features tremolo strings depicting the metaphorical buzzing bee, plus a vocal yelp before the line "it has a sting." "That I did always love," which Heggie says examines the commonality of the human spirit, is quiet, thoughtful and passionate, while "Goodnight" is both playful and poignant, with a gently rocking 6/8 rhythm and occasional unaccompanied phrases.

Delan previously recorded Getty's cycle *The White Election*, which consists of thirty-one Dickinson settings. The set featured here, *Four Dickinson Songs*, consists of songs that were not included in *The White Election* but are among his best. "Safe in Their Alabaster Chambers" has reverent, cinematic grandeur and superb coloristic contrast. "A Bird Came Down the Walk" makes inventive use of fragmented solo harpsichord in its first two stanzas and a romantically soaring vocal line for the rest. "There's a certain Slant of Light," the album's title track, features clangorous, dissonant chimes representing the "oppress[ive] heft of cathedral tunes." The famous "Because I could not stop for Death," which opens with a driving duplet figure on the xylophone, is swirling and ghoulish, with a touch of macabre humor. (There's another setting of the same poem in the Copland set, but Getty's is better.)

Tilson Thomas's set of five opens with "The Bible," which both evokes and parodies the sternness of the Scriptures via "a pedantic Sunday School teacher," as Tilson Thomas puts it. (Delan's characterization has the right touch of exaggeration and humor.) "Fame" is a fickle food" lays down a finger-snapping samba-like groove, and Delan makes a delicious meal of it. Tilson Thomas provides an intriguing, unearthly soundscape for "The earth has many keys," and the last song, "Take All Away From Me," has an epic conclusiveness that makes a satisfying ending to this grandly varied collection. The Orchestre Philharmonique de Marseille sounds magnificent under Lawrence Foster; throughout, it's Delan's essential partner. —*Joshua Rosenblum*