

Sheli Nan

Composer Performer and Teacher

SHELI NAN is a composer, author, teacher and performer. Her music is published by PRB Productions of Albany, California, SMM Productions and Tech-Clazz Publishing Co. Sheli considers her music studio to be a laboratory of educational revelation. She has taught piano, harpsichord, voice, guitar, composition and Afro-Cuban percussion for years. Many of her students have become accomplished musicians and all have benefited from the effect music has had on their lives. As Sheli often says, “Music is philosophy with sound effects.” This profound exploration of the human condition vis a vis the musical language cannot help but deepen the thought process and capacity for feeling in the individual.

Sheli also has 18 editions of music published to date, her most recent editions in 2008; “The Mad Dance of Judith with the Head of Holofernes”, for solo flute and spoken word, “Absinthe avec mes amis” for violin and piano and for violin and harpsichord, and, “I Have a Constant Fever” for recorder, baritone voice, piano and cello, all published by Tech-Clazz Publishing Co. Berkeley, Ca. Her Book, “The Essential Piano Teacher’s Guide” and her (3) cds are available on amazon.com.

2008

April and May: 2 concerts by the San Francisco Cabaret Opera that included arias from Sheli’s new “opera for our time”, “SAGA – Portrait of a 21st Century Child” at St. Gregory’s Church in San Francisco.

June 13: “The Mad Dance of Judith with the Head of Holofernes” for solo flute and spoken word, was premiered along with new arias from “SAGA- Portrait of a 21st Century Child”, by an all star cast along with “Journey, The Song Cycle”, with Ms. Nan at the piano, sung by baritone Zachary Gordin. “Absinthe avec mes amis”, the new sonata for violin and keyboard, was premiered by Andrew Fouts, violin, winner of the American Bach Soloist Competition and Jonathan Davis on harpsichord. This concert took place at The Giorgi Gallery, in Berkeley Ca.

November 8: At Old First Church, San Francisco, The San Francisco Composer’s Chamber Orchestra premiered the first two movements of “Signatures in Time and Place, Sheli’s new symphony.

November 22: The premiere of “I have a Constant Fever”, Sheli’s newest piece, for recorder, baritone voice, piano and cello took place at The Music Studio, in Berkeley, Ca. performed by Zachary Gordin, voice, David Davis cello, Glen Shannon recorder with Ms. Nan on piano.

December 14: The Ariel Quartet - The Sacramento Chamber Society ensemble, directed by Bill Barbini and joined by Jonathan Salzedo, performed “Absinthe avec mes amis”, Sheli’s new sonata for harpsichord and violin. The holiday concerts took place in Davis and Sacramento. The sonata was performed along with the Brandenburg concertos 5&6.

Currently: Sheli is finishing a commissioned string quartet for The Ariel Quartet. Her further projects include the production her opera, “SAGA” and she is beginning a new concerto for keyboards and orchestra.

Sheli’s keyboard music has been performed by Igor Kipnis, Arthur Haas, Elaine Funaro, Jane Chapman and others. Her orchestral work has been performed by The San Francisco Composer’s Chamber Orchestra and the Los Angeles Jewish Symphony, and her chamber work is performed by Elaine Kreston, Andrew Fouts, Bill Barbini, The Ariel Quartet, and others. Sheli will soon publish, (in collaboration with Laurette Goldberg), her second book. “Bach the Teacher – A Practical Approach to teaching Bach from the Beginning”.

For more information and to read excerpts of Sheli’s books and the many published articles she has written on music please go to: <http://www.shelinan.com>.

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REVIEW EXTRACTS

SIGNATURES IN TIME AND PLACE

--*Concert Review by Allan Crossman*

Sheli Nan's "Romanesque", the enjoyable first movement of her "Signatures in Time and Place", radiates a sensual glow. From the first measure, it's all about tunefulness and color, as solo alternates with ensemble to create a memorable piece in somewhat the style of Respighi's Ancient Airs and Dances - a fresh, modern update of early dance music. Every moment is both humable and danceable, and the progression of instrumental color is clearly as central to the character of the piece as are melody and harmony.

"The Corinthian Order" is a dance piece - rhythmic and playful. The inspiration comes from Corinthian columns, but, as we hear, the columns seem to be in motion! - the music is always melodic, the tunes constantly transforming into one another, creating a kind of tapestry of color, as instrumental voices emerge and return to the texture, as though solo dancers in turn moving to the front.

Closer to the end of the movement, we hear a more introspective passage, adding to the emotional range of the piece. This is a festive mosaic of color, emotion, gesture, all seamlessly woven into a memorable texture

Allan Crossman has written for many soloists/ensembles, and a recent commission is the piano trio Icarus, for the Bay Area's New Pacific Trio. Recordings can be found at northsouthmusic.org. His theatre score, The Log of the Skipper's Wife, was produced by the Royal Shakespeare Company at Stratford and the Kennedy Center, with music drawn from Irish/English shanties and dances. He is Professor Emeritus, Concordia University (Montreal), and is on the faculty of the SF Conservatory of Music. acrossman.com.

THE BERKELEY BAROQUE AND BEYOND EXPERIENCE

--*Concert Review by Gilbert Martinez*

"The Berkeley Baroque and Beyond Experience" on Friday June 13 offered its attendees a much needed respite from the deluge of uncreative, uninspired, and just plain dull programming from the main stage offerings of the Berkeley Early Music Festival.

This is not to say that there was nothing to appreciate about the Biennial early music week. I attended a truly exciting world premiere of the Alessandro Striggio's mass for 40 voices, and there was a deserved collective sense of discovery and excitement around that event. But still, there are lingering questions as to the validity of our West Coast festival when clearly the force behind it has slowed to a screeching halt and has acquired a truly amateurish tone in terms of publicity, programming and management. Northern California's claim as the early music capital has now slumped into a provincial state and is dangerously teetering toward being regarded as an early music backwater compared to Boston or Europe.

While I am not a zealous champion or fan of contemporary music, I found myself retreating towards Sheli Nan's offerings for a breath of fresh air. I respect the voice of composers, living or dead, and I am eager to witness unrestrained creativity.

This sensibility and esprit is what really made me enjoy the energy created by Sheli Nan and her intrepid band who put together a respectable cluster of premiere compositions, and performed them convincingly and obviously as a labor of love, peppered with a sense of daring.

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Nan's creations have thus far been hard for me to comment upon, mainly because I have not made the time for any living composer in the way that I have with my own programs based on a philological point of view and based on much older music. This is not in any way meant to invalidate other efforts, but to explain that all artists have a role to play, and that different paths are oft times chosen. What we chose to play or hear as our daily bread does not mean we cannot take excursions off the beaten path. Nan has certainly made poignant commentary on an interdependence of all the arts, old and new, and the need to reawaken the public's consciousness to value those things which are not easily quantifiable.

If any need to seek further for relevance, one would be hard put not to find it in the "sneak peeks" offered of Nan's opera in progress, "SAGA, portrait of a 21st century Child".

But first let me comment on moments leading up to that part of the program.

The program opened with several harpsichord works, Fortune's Fancie (from "Virtuous Virginals) and Love Letter to Leumas and Love Letter to Telemann (from 2 Love Letters and a Prayer). All performed by Ms. Nan on a robust Eric Herz harpsichord from Johnny Davis' collection. I was surprised by her choices of tempo, which seemed more brisk than what I have become accustomed in previous performances. I have to say that I have never heard them performed to better effect. All were played with absolute fluidity and the tempi seemed to enhance their gem like quality and exploitation of the harpsichord's capacity for resonance. It is worth mentioning that Nan's technique at the harpsichord was well in control of her own material, every moment was played with a calm sprezzatura.

The flute solo, "The Mad Dance of Judith with Holofernes' Head" was a premiere performance, but I should say here that this work ought to be played again, since it convinces by the means of creating a perfumed delirium for the listener. My only regret is that it could and should be played with more confidence and technical mastery.

The song cycle "Journey" saw Sheli at the modern piano and the harpsichord as accompanist to baritone Zachary Gordin. Gordin is a powerful soloist, almost too powerful for a recital setting, but he brings a great amount of élan and stage presence to even the slightest turn of phrase or simple cadence. He performed the song cycle with a well focused sound and absolutely flawless diction. As to the content of the songs, and Nan's technique as a composer, her style is tonal, and never resorts to anything atonal or minimalist. The music has a key signature and for the most part a time signature. This is not to say her syntax is old fashioned or trite. It is still a product of our time. It is nice to know that such a product need not be ugly or repugnant to be relevant or interesting. There are many "high profile" composers who receive important commissions and accolade, and I find most of their work to be a dreadful bore. Nan is certainly able to interest an audience to newer sounds (sometimes, ironically on old instruments) without ever pandering or simplifying to an uneducated ear. She is constantly and vigorously exploring new mediums, and she keeps a watchful eye on all music, even old music. There is an obvious inspiration and kindred spirit with old masters, but without reverting to mimicry or making ersatz baroque music.

An example is the accompanied keyboard sonata, a tradition seen with Mondonville in the 18th century and best known by the sonatas of J.S. Bach. The premiere of "Absinthe avec mes amis" was worth the price of the ticket alone. It should become a welcome part of the new repertoire. A simple, organic composition, it revels in the sounds and interplay of the gut strung baroque violin and the harpsichord. The best type of writing for this medium is to be found. Fragments of melody and gesture are tossed about by the two instruments, in dialogue and chorus. At times the soloists form one large instrument sonically, or spin out motives singly. This work also shows a range of development by its composer. It is confidently handled and its framework is interesting. There is no padding or note spinning and it is a lovely tapestry of sound. It could not have had better advocates than Johnny Davis (harpsichord) or

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Andrew Fouts (baroque violin). Fouts reflected the harpsichord's decay perfectly, and tuning was flawless.

Now we turn back to the work in progress, Nan's opera, "Saga, Portrait of a 21st Century Child."

Nan selected an excellent ensemble of fresh voiced young soloists, who presented the work in a semi staged fashion, all from memory and acted with impromptu stage elements.

"Saga" is a work about our modern day apocalyptic science fiction reality. Its characters are presented to us at a safe distance, but they are in reality closer in real life than we like to admit. Each character is equally a victim but also a repugnant monster of the most frightful kind. The characters have no moral compass, not regard for past or future. They only satisfy their present needs, and they have only infantile remorse and no sense of pity or mercy.

It is this inescapable reality that makes me think of Berg's "Wozzeck" or Poul Ruders "Tjenerindens Frotælling" (The Handmaid's Tale). They all convey a helpless sense of foreboding and doom. The characters in "Saga" are a new breed of human, entirely formed with new DNA strands from our modern computer age. Artists, thinkers,.. those with a moral conscious are near extinct and are rendered obsolete.

Its title character, the CHILD was sung by Meghan Dibble. She captured her character's inability to process the forces that created her or the ones that guide her tragic steps. Often her music is in a rocking 6/8 meter, underlining her simple nature and arrested emotional development. In this and other ways, Nan underscores certain kinship with ancient operas and morality plays. For example, there is a greek style chorus, which stays to the side of the action but comments upon the proceedings. They occasionally intervene and shape events.

Another standout was Ayelet Cohen, a sparkling coloratura and casting an ominous glow as the negligent "Mother." Again, this character is an archetype, (mercifully NOT autobiographic!) and portrays a mother with no capacity to nurture a child. Her utter rejection of her own blood creates a "free range child" unleashed on humanity. As the "PREDATOR" Joe Vincent Parks created for us the troll under the bridge from fairy tales. Or is it a fairy tale? The bridge in this case is the internet, a modern means of creating fantasy and traps for unsuspecting innocents. In this work Sheli Nan has created a living nightmare, but we are in reality not allowed to awake with a happy ending. As a work in progress, she has truly created a "Saga" by allowing a select audience discover the course of the journey and insight into the seer's vision.

I think the work will raise many more questions than it answers, but isn't that the essence of many great works of art, ancient and modern?

Gilbert Martinez is the artistic director of MusicSources, Center for Historically Performed Performance in Berkeley, CA. In a short time he has revitalized its programs and created a scholarship promoting outstanding young talent in honor of its founder, early music pioneer, Laurette Goldberg. In addition to devoting much energy towards the development of this institution and giving it a truly international status, he maintains much activity as a popular harpsichord soloist and conductor of large scale renaissance and baroque works.

BAROQUE & BEYOND: SHELI NAN AT THE GIORGI GALLERY

-- Ken Bullock - *Special to the Berkeley Daily Planet*

My goal is to reach the audience, to evoke and provoke," said Berkeley composer Sheli Nan of the multi-faceted program, for both modern and Baroque instruments and voice, of her music, "The Berkeley Baroque & Beyond Experience," Friday at Giorgi Gallery. There will be a possible second performance on Saturday.

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The program will include new arias from *Saga—Portrait of a 21st Century Child*, Nan's "opera for our time," as she calls it: "Absinthe Avec Mes Amis," a violin and harpsichord sonata (with Nan accompanying American Bach Soloists first place winner violinist Andrew Fouts, for whom she composed the piece); "Journey," a song cycle for baritone and piano; and "The Mad Dance of Judith with the Head of Holofernes," for solo flute and voice.

Other performers include Jonathan Davis, Zachary Gordin, Ayelet Cohen, Meghan Dibble, Jo Vincent Parks and Marvin Sanders. Nan will play harpsichord and piano.

Nan, who refers to herself as "a contemporary Baroque composer," said her music "draws a great deal from Baroque form, but with 21st Century harmonies—neo-melodic harmonies." With over 16 editions of her music published by East Bay publishers (Peter Ballinger of PRB Productions and Glen Shannon of Screaming Mary Music), Nan's career as a composer took off when "I was discovered by Charles Amirkhonian [then of KPFA]." Nan declares, "I'm very much a Berkeley phenomenon!"

Discussing her opera, from which other selections have been presented by San Francisco Cabaret Opera earlier this spring, Nan compared it to work by Kurt Weill and Bertolt Brecht: "an awful theme couched by beautiful music. I often wonder about this as a composer, offering the music to listeners in order to digest hard truths. There'll be three arias from the second act. The singers are really aligned to the characters, pouring themselves into it. The story's important to tell; the opera has such immediacy to it. Now, in the third act, I have to decide who lives and who dies. These are my characters! But the old have to make way for the new. Can that be rendered symbolically? Is redemption really a necessity?"

Nan, who has three CDs and two books (*The Essential Piano Teacher's Guide* and the forthcoming *Bach the Teacher*), as well as many articles on music to her credit, played with a Nigerian band and an Afro-Cuban group and was invited by the Cuban government to play in Cuba in 2003, for which she received special permission from the State Department.

Her symphony, *Signatures in Time and Place*, will be performed by the San Francisco Composers Orchestra this fall.

For additional reviews, please visit www.shelinan.com

DISCOGRAPHY

Sheli Nan composes and performs on the frontier of definition, blending early musical forms with the sounds and harmonies of the 21st century thus confirming their prominence at the forefront of the new early music movement. She has received praise for her performances from international venues to salon concerts and chamber recitals.

She breaks the musical rules in [*Old Age Meets New Age*](#) by performing period as well as contemporary pieces on the harpsichord. [*Palomino*](#) is her signature album of original jazz and Latin piano. In [*Undercurrents*](#) by **The Elixirs**, she has created an instrumental CD of performance art that surprises and delights.

PUBLISHED EDITIONS

1. Collective Echoes, for guitar duet, guitar solo, lute and voice
2. Fandango Ardiente!, for harpsichord solo
3. Fandango Ardiente!, for 2 harpsichords
4. Fandango Ardiente!, for 2 guitars
5. Suite de mes amis, for solo harpsichord

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6. The Last Gesture, for solo keyboard
7. The Last Gesture, for voice, cello and harpsichord
8. Bach Boogie Blues, piano edition
9. Bach Boogie Blues, harpsichord edition
10. Sarah and Hagar – The Reconciliation of the Jewish Mother and the Arab Mother, for sopranos and string quartet
11. Two Love letter and a Prayer, for solo harpsichord
12. The Virtuous Virginals, for harpsichord/virginals
13. Diptyque, for harpsichord
14. Journey; A Song Cycle, for voice and keyboard(s)
15. Johann's Hidden Hollow, a suite for solo violin and dancer
16. Johann's Hidden Hollow, a suite for solo cello and dancers
17. The Mad Dance of Judith with the Head of Holofernes
18. I Have a Constant Fever