

Sheila Silver Full Bio May 2023

Sheila Silver is an important and vital voice in American music today. She has written in a wide range of mediums: from solo instrumental works to large orchestral works; from opera to feature film scores. Her musical language is a unique synthesis of the tonal and atonal worlds, coupled with a rhythmic complexity which is both masterful and compelling. Again and again, audiences and critics praise her music as powerful and emotionally charged, accessible, and masterfully conceived. “Only a few composers in any generation enliven the art form with their musical language and herald new directions in music. Sheila Silver is such a visionary.” (*Wetterauer Zeitung*, Germany)

Born in Seattle, Washington in 1946, Silver began piano studies at the age of five. She earned her Bachelor of Arts from the University of California at Berkeley in 1968 where she began composition studies with Edwin Dugger. Upon graduation she was awarded the coveted George Ladd Prix de Paris for two years study in Europe where she worked with Erhard Karkoschka in Stuttgart and Gyorgy Ligeti in Berlin and Hamburg. She earned her doctorate from Brandeis University where she studied with Arthur Berger, Harold Shapero, and Seymour Shifrin. Her studies also included an Abraham Sachar Traveling Grant which enabled her to spend 18 months in London and a Koussevitzky Fellowship for a summer at the Berkshire Music Center at Tanglewood where she studied with Jacob Druckman.

Sheila Silver’s compositions have been commissioned and performed by numerous orchestras, chamber ensembles, and soloists throughout the world.

Her opera, ***A Thousand Splendid Suns***, based on Khaled Hosseini’s international best-selling novel, was premiered in 2023 by the Seattle Opera to [rave reviews](#). In preparation for and throughout the composing of this opera, Silver studied Hindustani music with the late Pandit Kedar Narayan Bodas in India in order to incorporate an authentic Hindustani musical color into her score.

Her honors include: a 2013 Guggenheim Fellowship, numerous Opera America awards for the development of [A Thousand Splendid Suns](#), the Sackler Prize in Music Composition for Opera, for [The Wooden Sword](#); Bunting Institute

Fellowship; the Rome Prize; the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters Composer Award; NEA awards, twice winner of the ISCM National Composers Competition; and awards and commissions from the Rockefeller Foundation (Bellagio Residency), the Camargo Foundation, the MacDowell Colony, New York State Council of the Arts, the Barlow Foundation, the Paul Fromm Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Cary Trust.

[*Resilient Earth*](#), *Seven Preludes for piano*, and *Four Caprices for solo violin*, was premiered in July, 2022 at the Samuel Dorsky Museum, New Paltz, NY, for the closing celebrations of the art exhibit, *The Observing Heart*, a retrospective exhibit of the work of Mary Frank. The *Preludes* were performed by Ryan MacEvoy McCullough, and the *Caprices* were performed by Emmanuel Vukovich whose recording of them will be released by Warner Classics. Composed 2020-2022 during COVID, each of the *Caprices* and *Preludes* is inspired by the natural world and in some cases, our destructive relationship to it.

[*Being in Life*](#), a 2018 Paul Fromm Commission for horn/Alphorn, string orchestra, and 5 Tibetan singing bowls, composed for Ann Ellsworth and the Northwest Philharmonia, has been arranged for horn trio plus optional bowls. The quartet version was recently premiered as part of Stony Brook Premieres series by Ellsworth with Phil Setzer (violin), Miki Aoki (piano), and John Ling (Tibetan bowls.)

Silver was the Elliot Carter Resident Composer at the American Academy in Rome in Spring 2020, where she worked on a new piece, [*If Trees Could Talk*](#), for 4 female singers, piano, Tibetan bowls, and video projections. It was premiered at Songfest 2022.

[*Beauty Intolerable*](#), *A Songbook based on the poetry of Edna St. Vincent Millay*, contains 14 songs and two rounds and was recently recorded with singers Dawn Upshaw, Stephanie Blythe, Lucy Fitz Gibbon, Deanne Meek, and Risa Renae Harman on a 2 disc CD set with all of Silver's song repertoire from 1979-2018.

Other recordings, both on the Naxos label, include her [*Piano Concerto*](#) and [*Six Preludes for Piano on poems of Baudelaire*](#), with Alexander Paley, piano, and the Lithuanian State Symphony Orchestra, Gintaras Rinkev

ius, conductor; and [*Shirat Sara*](#) (Song of Sarah) with Gerard Schwarz and the Seattle Symphony Strings; and [*Twilight's Last Gleaming*](#), (Gilbert Kalish and Christina Dahl) for two pianos and percussion on the Bridge Label.

Silver composed the film score for *Who the Hell is Bobby Roos?* – a feature film which was awarded the New American Cinema Award at the Seattle International Film Festival, 2002. She created the score for *Symbiotic Earth: How Lynn Margulis rocked the boat and started a scientific revolution*, released in 2018 and being screened internationally. A new film score for the documentary *Regenerating Life*, about a Gaian understanding and solutions to climate change, will be released in Fall, 2023.

Sheila Silver lives in Spencertown, New York, with her husband, filmmaker John Feldman. Their son, Victor Feldman, is a journalist. Silver is Professor Emeritus of Music at the State University of New York, Stony Brook. Her music is published by [*Lauren Keiser Music*](#), [*Mostly Marimba*](#), and [*Argenta Music*](#), and is recorded on various labels.

Sheila Silver Short Bio May 2023

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Her recent opera, *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, based on the international best-selling novel by Khaled Hosseini, was premiered to rave reviews by the Seattle

Opera in February, 2023. In order to develop a musical vocabulary with which to evoke the color of Afghanistan in the opera, Sheila made several trips to India to study Hindustani music with Pandit Kedar Narayan Bodas. This Hindustani sound world has filtered into many of her recent compositions.

Her honors include a Guggenheim Fellowship, the Sackler Prize in Opera; several Opera America awards; Bunting Institute Fellowship; Rome Prize; Prix de Paris, American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters Composer Award and numerous grants and commissions. Her music is performed internationally.

A two CD album of her vocal works, *Beauty Intolerable: Songs of Sheila Silver*, was recently released on the Albany label and includes performances by Dawn Upshaw, Stephanie Blythe, Lucy Fitz Gibbon, Deanne Meek and Risa Renae Harman. *Resilient Earth*, a set of 7 piano preludes and 4 caprices for solo violin, was premiered in July 2022 at the Dorsky Museum in New Paltz, NY, in connection with the Mary Frank retrospective, *The Observing Heart*, with Emmanuel Vukovich, violin, and Ryan MacEvoy McCullough, piano.

Silver is Professor Emeritus of Music at Stony Brook University. Her teachers have included Arthur Berger, Harold Shapero, Erhard Karkoschka, and Gyorgy Ligeti. She was born and raised in Seattle, Washington and began studying piano at the age of 5. Sheila and her husband, film-maker John Feldman, make their home in the Hudson Valley, New York.

For more information: www.sheilasilver.com