

Sheila Silver Full Bio Download January 2025

[Sheila Silver](#) is an important and vital voice in American music today. Her compositions have been commissioned and performed by numerous orchestras, ensembles, and soloists throughout the world. 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)

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 and was short-listed for “Best World Premiere” by the International Opera Awards 2023. *“Sheila Silver’s sweeping score is magnificent — dramatic, richly colored, and full of texture and melody.* (Opera Wire) 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 with Ryan MacEvoy McCullough, piano, and Emmanuel Vukovich, violin. 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. Three *Duos for violin and piano*, have been added to the series, to be premiered 2025 in Germany with Vukovich and Yannick Rafalimanana. The *Caprices* were recently released on the Warner Classics label.

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 *If Trees Could Talk* for 4 female singers, piano, Tibetan bowls, and video projections. It was premiered at Songfest 2022.

One of her most performed works, *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. Of the recording, American Record Guide says "Silver...writes music that marries the delicious bitterness of jazzy discord with lush, cool harmonies and merges the two harmonic moods together with ease...The music is just as rich and captivating as the text that inspired it..."

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

Silver composed the film score for indie feature *Who the Hell is Bobby Roos?* – awarded the New American Cinema Award at the Seattle International Film Festival, 2002 and more recently the scores for *Symbiotic Earth: How Lynn Margulis rocked the boat and started a scientific revolution*, (2018) and *Regenerating Life: How to cool the planet, feed the world, and live happy ever after* (2024).

Born and raised in Seattle Washington, she earned her BA from U.C. Berkeley (1968) and her PhD from Brandeis University (1976). Her mentors and teachers include Edwin Dugger, Erhard Karkoschka, Gyorgy Ligeti, Arthur Berger, and Jacob Druckman. Sheila currently lives in

Spencertown, New York, with her husband, filmmaker John Feldman. Their son, Victor Feldman, is a journalist. Silver is Professor Emerita 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.