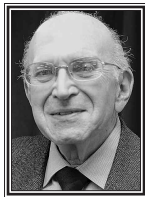


As I Heard It



REVIEWED BY MORTON GOLD

Excellent Musicians, Varied Music is Professional and Effective

A new release (Nov. 2019) has come out of a CD titled: *Rejoice! Honoring the Jewish Spirit*. (EssentialVoices USA). It was published by Acis (APL97092). The CD contains nine compositions, all selected and conducted by Judith Clurman.

The excellent accompanist is James Cunningham, and the fine cellists are David Miller in track 3 and Raman Ramakrishnan in track 5. The music is varied, and their arrangements are all professional and effective. I will make brief comments about each selection and then some final comments about the CD to sum up. A handsome booklet with texts and commentary is included.

I must add a *mea culpa*. What follows are merely my opinions. (Yours may be different.)

Track 1: *The Eight Days of Lights* composed by Judith Clurman and David Chase. The text is from the liturgy and was adapted by Ms. Clurman. The music reflects an artistic rendering of the text. The piano part supports the choir and adds to the enhancement of the composition.

Track 2: *Dayeinu* (trad.) arranged by Trude Rittmann. This is a vibrant concert rendition of the familiar Seder melody.

Track 3: *Ki Hineih Kachomer* composed by Ms. Clurman and arranged by Ryan Nowlin. This work features a lovely melody enhanced by a tasteful arrangement. (I confess that this selection along with the next and the last one are my favorites on this CD.)

Track 4: *Shlof Mayn Fegele* music by Mikhail Lermontov, lyrics by Abraham Goldfaden and is arranged by Ryan Nowlin. This beautiful tune of Russian descent speaks for itself.

Track 5: *Yeish Kochavim* composed by Jonathan Tunick and Track 6: *Everlasting Light*, composed by David Shire can both



J. Clurman

Book Review



REVIEWED BY SUE SWARTZ

While Preparing for Passover, Jews Expelled from Spain

In the Time of Leaving. By Shana Ritter. April 2019. 218 pgs. Paperback \$12.99.

There is a market in the Jewish quarter of Toledo, Spain, but there are no shoppers haggling over chickpeas & olive oil. There are public baths, bread ovens, and a place for ritual slaughter of cattle – but no Jewish residents. Two of 10 synagogues remain, serving as ornate memorials to Spain's once-thriving Jewish community; the entire quarter is a museum maintained by the government.

How are we to understand the past? How are we to remember it? How does the past bleed into the present? These questions permeate Shana Ritter's novel, *In the Time of Leaving*, set in Toledo in 1492, as the entirety of Spanish Jewry confronts the Alhambra Decree (also known as the Edict of Expulsion) and how best to survive.

Three women form the backbone of the story. Esther and her two daughters Sarah and Chava, not yet out of their teens, must weather a time of intense change and danger. The marriage of Ferdinand of



Shana Ritter

be described as examples of modern treatments composed for a well trained chorus (which describes the vocal ensemble on this disc.) My sole reservation with this otherwise well trained group concerns the lapses in intonation in the soprano section.

Tracks 7 and 8 are called *Songs of Peace* by Jeremiah Klarman, both arranged by David Chase. No. 7 is called *Hineih Ma Tov* and is nothing like the traditional tune. This is particularly well performed. No. 8 is a rousing setting of *Oseh Shalom*. (What's not to like?)

Ms. Clurman is to be congratulated for (see Gold, page 17)

Aragon and Isabella of Castile in 1469 brings de facto unification of Spain as a Christian nation, a nation in which half its Jewish citizens are converted in the decades prior under threat of expulsion, pogrom, or death.

Esther and her husband Benjamin have done well for themselves. He is a translator and scholar, of use to the royal court, but rumors swirl: now that the Moors have been pushed out, who will rise to power? Who will rule? Who will protect the Jews?

On March 31, 1492, as preparations for Passover are under way, Esther and her daughters must confront rumor turned to reality: an end to their lives as Jews in Spain, no matter how useful they have been and no matter how careful. They have weeks to make the kinds of decisions that Jews and other people have, and continue to make: stay or go. Flee towards where? What can be taken, what must be left, what will be risked?

Write down everything, Esther tells Chava on the eve of her journey, *so even the daughters you have not yet had will know what the leaving was like*. Write down everything – even if you return someday, it will never be as it was. The leaving will color everything. Chava writes in her wrapped silk journal, cherishes her quill cut from black stork. She carries a handkerchief with the smell of almonds and the last ceremonial candle lit on her family's table, each containing an entire story.

The women take with them everything remembered – the smell of bread, sound of horses on stone, fog rising from the river – along with memories that will never have a chance to form, that will only remain dreams. *The Portuguese have a word, saucedo, which means longing for what is now gone... I hear it in our prayers. Even when there is exaltation, there is sadness. I think it is always missing home, a place where you truly belong. A place you will never be asked to leave.*

Ritter captures this longing perfectly throughout her novel, not just for a life left behind, but for the words that made that life possible. A thousand years of manuscripts must be smuggled to Fez and the Ottoman Empire, in trunks and hems. The words are in peril. There is peril in every choice.

We are gone, gone like the petals of the almond trees, one week so full of scent and the next scattered on the ground. Yet even as the Jews of Spain are scattered, this beautiful novel brings hope: memory, tradition, and story making each arriving possible.

Sue Swartz is the author of *We Who Desire: Torah Riffs & Poems as well as a visual artist living in Bloomington, Ind., where she is active in Congregation Beth Shalom.*

The book is available through Ritter's website: shana-ritter.com or amazon.com. ★