

**SEEN AND HEARD
INTERNATIONAL
CONCERT
REVIEW**

Dawn Upshaw in Recital: Dawn Upshaw (soprano), Stephen Prutsman (conductor and piano), Evan Hughes (bass-baritone), Michael Ward-Bergeman (hyper-accordion), Ensemble ACJW, Zankel Hall, New York City, 2.11.2008 (BH)

Dawn Upshaw, *Soprano*
Stephen Prutsman, *Conductor and Pianist*
Evan Hughes, *Bass-Baritone*
Michael Ward-Bergeman, *Hyper-accordion*

Ensemble ACJW
Elizabeth Janzen, *Flute*
Carol McGonnell, *Clarinet*
Eric Reed, *Horn*
Nathan Botts, *Trumpet*
Anna Elashvili, *Violin*
Owen Dalby, *Violin*
Meena Bhasin, *Viola*
Claire Bryant, *Cello*
Kristoffer Saebo, *Bass*
Jared Soldiviero, *Percussion*

John Dowland: Songs (*arr. Stephen Prutsman*)

Come again, sweet love doth now invite
Can she excuse my wrongs
Weep you no more, sad fountains
Now, O now I needs must part

Osvaldo Golijov: *Lúa Descolorida*

Michael Ward-Bergeman: *Treny (Laments) (World Premiere)*

Ruth Crawford Seeger: *White Moon*

Stephen Foster: *Beautiful Child of Song*

Bill Crofut: *A Man of Words*

David Bruce: *Piosenki*

How can we clone Dawn Upshaw? I can't imagine another major singer with her ambitious commitment to contemporary music, and Exhibit A would be this full-throttled evening. All right, fair enough: it wasn't all modern. A set by John Dowland made a gorgeous opener, in attractive arrangements by pianist Stephen Prutsman for soprano and string quartet. Even if her voice didn't seem quite completely warmed up, some of the choices, such as "Weep you no more, sad fountains" were particularly affecting.

Upshaw is a huge champion of Osvaldo Golijov, whose affecting *Lúa Descolorida* is included on her recording, *Voices of Light*. She explored its mysteries beautifully here. But by far the most wrenching choice of the program was the world premiere of Michael Ward-Bergeman's *Treny*, based on one of the benchmarks of early Polish literature by Jan Kochanowski (1530-1584). Skillfully using a "hyper-accordion" (the instrument is amplified and able to produce unusual electronic effects), Ward-Bergeman has created a gentle yet piercingly sad work. One measure of his taste as a composer: near the end Upshaw leans forward into his microphone to allow her own voice to be gently processed, a compositional device he uses just once in the entire work.

After intermission Upshaw and Prutsman did Ruth Crawford Seeger's *White Moon*, Stephen Foster's *Beautiful Child of Song*, and *A Man of Words* by the late banjo player Bill Crofut (d. 1999). Taken as a set, these three could be a microcosm of Upshaw's omnivorous taste. To end the concert, Prutsman led a spirited reading of David Bruce's *Piosenki* (2007). Bruce couples anonymous texts with those by Julian Tuwim for a sort of contemporary take on folk songs, sung with gusto by Upshaw and bass-baritone Evan Hughes. In the furious opening "Tańczyły dwa Michały," Bruce transforms the chamber ensemble into a sort of postmodern klezmer band, which returns later in "Idzie Grześ" ("Grzes walks along") and "Ptasie Plotki" ("Gossiping birds"). Later, in "Śmierdziel" ("Smelly"), some in the group grimace and hold their noses as others produce entertaining sounds of flatulence.

The final section, a traditional song using nonsense syllables called "Trumf, Trumf," boasts an entertaining guest star: a large pole festooned with bottle caps and round metal discs called the lagerphone. When the pole is shaken or stamped on the floor, the metallic rustle resembles that of an oversized tambourine. It added a final bit of rowdiness to a concert already notable for its programmatic savvy, informality and humor. Dawn Upshaw: we could use ten more like her.

Bruce Hodges