

## Weisman

### Darkling

Maeve Höglund *sop* Hai-Ting Chinn *mez* Jon Garrison

*ten* Mark Uhlemann *bass-bar* Tom Chiu, Philip Payton

*vns* Kenji Bunch *va* Raman Ramakrishnan *vc /*

Brian Demaris

Albany ④ ② TROY1315/16 (86' • DDD)



### Stefan Weisman's take on Rabinowitz's Holocaust poem

One could argue that the key difference between theatre and opera is the latter's potential to be more poetic. Obviously this is not always reflected in the final results, but when it comes to drawing a narrative line through disparate, often irreconcilable plot points, music does offer a solution that relies on neither verbal nor logical coherence. *Darkling* is that potential pushed to its logical extreme.

Originally a book-length poem, then a multimedia theatre piece, Anna Rabinowitz's tale of a Holocaust survivor rummaging through the scattered memorabilia of her murdered family spins a powerful, unsettled web, the often allusive nature of the story reflecting significant gaps in her own family history in the wake of Poland's Nazi occupation. Where Rabinowitz originally found a structural solution in an acrostic poem inspired by Thomas Hardy's *The Darkling Thrush*, composer Stefan Weisman mirrors that approach in his tight, emotionally mercurial score.

Through an interplay of spoken and sung text with a string quartet backdrop, Weisman unfolds his emotional tapestry with confident strokes, with this recording's superb audio production (headed by studio veteran Judith Sherman) resulting in something resembling a high-art radio drama. Periods of emotional darkness alternate with lush melodic passages, generally offering only partial light at best.

Be forewarned: the cumulative emotional weight of the piece, compounded by its lack of a linear story, make this a tough work to follow, particularly on first listening. But after a couple times through, the most crucial elements of the story become perfectly clear.

Ken Smith