

ALICE SHIELDS ---COMPOSER---LONG BIOGRAPHY (1,121 words)

Alice Shields is known for her cross-cultural operas and vocal electronic music. In her new chamber opera, *Zhaojun - A Woman of Peace* (2013), Shields takes the next step in her cross-cultural explorations, into the position of women in ancient China. Her previous operas include *Criseyde* (2010), a 2-hour-long chamber opera for 5 singers, ensemble of 3 singers, and 14 solo instruments performed in concert by the New York City Opera VOX Festival (May, 2008), The American Virtuosi Opera Company at CUNY's Elebash Hall (April, 2008, with support from the Alice M. Ditson Fund), and by the University of North Carolina-Greensboro (June, 2009). *Criseyde* is a new Middle English retelling of Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde:

*"Female historical figures were explored with Alice Shields' Criseyde, a feminist interpretation of Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde. ...a rare chance to hear Middle English sung. The melodic development and ornamentation of the intense, richly scored work reflect Ms. Shields' lengthy study of classical Indian raga."* — *THE NEW YORK TIMES*.

*Komachi at Sekidera* (2000/2011), a chamber opera with music and libretto by Shields written for mezzo-soprano, alto flute and Japanese koto, is recorded on Koch International Classics. A new setting of the opera for contralto, flute and cello was premiered at Tenri Institute NYC in 2011: *"...based on a Noh play, depicting a Japanese poet legendary for her ravishing beauty, ...a touching piece which makes effective use of mezzo-soprano Laurie Rubin's rich lower register."* — *THE NEW YORK TIMES*.

Among Shields' operas are some of the first electronic operas created, like *Apocalypse* (New World Records, 1994) with music and libretto by Shields for 3 singers, electric guitar and fixed audio media, which uses musical and theatrical techniques from Bharata Natyam dance-drama:

*"...All very current, and very serious. Apocalypse is relentless."* — *AMERICAN RECORD GUIDE*.

The opera *Mass for the Dead* (American Chamber Opera Co., 1992) with music and libretto by Shields for 4 singers, live or recorded chorus, 3 instruments and fixed audio media, uses theatrical techniques and text from Bharata Natyam dance-drama and Greek drama:

*"...a startling extension of the consciousness of India, in an equally startling Western opera of the seen and unseen."* — *SRUTI, India's Music and Dance Magazine*.

*Shaman* (American Chamber Opera, 1987) with music and libretto by Shields for 3 singers, chorus, 4 instruments and fixed audio media, uses elements of Native American shamanism:

*"...eerily evocative, transporting one to an other-worldly place where spiritualism and magic are interwoven. From the opening darkness to shrieks to distant cries in the wilderness, it holds the listener spellbound. Shields exudes integrity, originality, and courage."* — *MUSICAL AMERICA*.

The mini-opera *Shivatanz* (Akademie der Künste, Berlin, 1993) with music and libretto by Shields for mezzo-soprano and fixed audio media, is based on a traditional South Indian poem and dance to the god Shiva. *Wraecca* (Golden Fleece Composers Chamber Theater, 1987) with music and libretto by Shields for 3 singers, cello and piano, is based on two poems in Anglo-Saxon. Large computer music works for the stage include *The Mud Oratorio* (2002) with music and libretto by Shields for Theater Dept. of Frostburg State University: *"mind-boggling art."* — *ASSOCIATED PRESS*, and *Dust* for Dance Alloy of Pittsburgh and the Arangham Dance Theatre of Madras, India, which toured India in 2002 (New Delhi, Hyderabad, Madras): *"...the exciting blend of two cultures that reflect the ancient with the modern..."* — *THE HINDU, India's National Newspaper*. Upcoming premieres include *Four Indian Songs* (2012) for voice and piano, in Sanskrit and Hindi, to be premiered in Montreal in Dec. 2012 by soprano Kripa Nageshwar.

## **SHIELDS' PERFORMANCES AS SINGER and The Effect on Her Vocal Writing**

As composer Shields has sought out and eagerly submitted herself to the study and performance of classical vocal and theatrical traditions of both the West and the East, in order to apply what she has learned to her own unique works for the stage and voice. In graduate school at Columbia, in order to write better for the voice Shields took up singing lessons, and shortly thereafter became the first AGMA Apprentice Opera Composer-in-Residence in the U.S. at the Lake George Opera Festival for three years, where she served as both composer and singer, conducting and producing her opera *Odyssey* and scenes from her other early operas, and singing small roles. Shields went on to sing operatic roles with the New York City Opera, Metropolitan Opera Studio, Washington National Opera, Wolf Trap Opera and other companies in the U.S. and Europe. Later, having professionally performed challenging leading roles such as the Contessa in *Le Nozze di Figaro* and Idamante in *Idomeneo*, and having had to cover the difficult role of Donna Anna in *Don Giovanni*, Shields based the vocal techniques required for the role of Criseyde in her own opera *Criseyde* on her intimate knowledge of the refined vocal techniques necessary to perform Mozart's leading roles. Shields eventually professionally sang virtuosic roles with very different vocal requirements, such as in the operas of Wagner and Strauss, and thereby gained the knowledge as a composer of how to make it possible for the singer to endure such physically taxing roles with relative ease. During the 1990s Shields intensively studied South Indian Bharata Natyam dance-drama, and performed as vocalist with the Swati Bhise Bharata Natyam Dance Company at venues including the United Nations, Asia Society and Wesleyan University. All Shields' compositions since 2000 reflect her immersion in Indian classical music and drama.

**Education, Teaching, Lecturing:** Shields earned three degrees from Columbia University: Doctor of Musical Arts in music composition (1975), Master of Arts in music composition (1967), and Bachelor of Science in music (1965), studying with Jack Beeson, Vladimir Ussachevsky, Otto Luening and Chou Wen-Chung. At Columbia she served as Associate Director of the Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Center (1978-1982) and Associate Director for Development of the Columbia University Computer Music Center (1994-1996). She has taught the psychology of music as Assistant Professor of Psychology at NYU and Rutgers' Mason Gross School of the Arts, and lectures on the psychology of music at institutions such as the Santa Fe Opera, CUNY Center for Developmental Neuroscience, International Society for Research on Emotion, American Psychological Association and the National Association for the Advancement of Psychoanalysis.

## **Funding**

Alice M. Ditson Fund of Columbia University (2008), New York City Dept of Cultural Affairs (2008), PatsyLu Fund for Women's Music Projects (2008, 2005), Mary Flagler Cary Charitable Trust for Music (2008, 1989, 1976), Meet the Composer Soloist Champions Commission (2008), American Music Center Copying Assistance Program (2009, 2008, 2003), New York Foundation for the Arts (1990, 1982), National Endowment for the Arts (1979, 1977), National Opera Institute (1975) and Martha Baird Rockefeller Fund for Music (1974).

## **Recordings**

Koch International Classics, New World, CRI, Opus One and Albany Records. For more information please see [www.aliceshields.com](http://www.aliceshields.com)