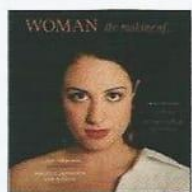


the foolish world in the rhythms of a French courtly dance, while virtuoso roulades for bassoon and bass voice paint the devouring embers and surging floods that are sure to engulf the material world. —*Judith Malafronte*

## Lilian Farahani: *WOMAN— the Making of..*



**CD** Works by Heggie.  
Van Bueren, piano.  
Texts. Zefir Records  
ZEF 9665



**THIS RECORDING** pairs two thematically related works by Jake Heggie—*Eve-Song* (1995),

a song cycle that recasts Genesis from Eve's point of view, and *At the Statue of Venus* (2005), a dramatic scena in which a successful businesswoman, Rose, waits to meet a blind date at a museum. The juxtaposition was the brainchild of soprano Lilian Farahani and pianist Maurice Lammerts Van Bueren, who give rapturous performances of both pieces. Philip Littell's insightful texts for *Eve-Song* depict Eve railing against her male-defined origins and legacy. Heggie introduces her with a lyrically sung version of a primal scream, allowing her to claim her identity in the sound of her own name as she comes into being. In "Snake," Eve's dialogue with the serpent is sensual and self-aware, and Farahani, a gifted word-painter, strikes the perfect balance between jazz stylings and classical vocalism. The playful coloratura in "Woe to Man" is a tongue-in-cheek acknowledgment of the fun to be had in engineering man's downfall. This Eve calls into question all the accepted notions of the Creation: Eden was a farm, not a garden; knowledge is not straightforward but complicated by contrasting flavors. *Eve-Song* is a sensuous herstory, a chance to set the record straight, and Eve makes its necessity clear from the start: "I am allowed no clothing. I am allowed no shame. I have nothing to

wear but my beautiful hair, my body, my face and MY NAME."

In *At the Statue of Venus*, librettist Terrence McNally introduces the normally confident Rose second-guessing her outfit, but as we know from Eve's observation, it will make no difference to her date. Rose herself sings, "I'm being judged for all the wrong reasons," as she compares herself to both the women in the paintings and those happily exploring the museum with no agenda. The disadvantage of arriving first unleashes inevitable mind games. In "It's him," Rose imagines that each man who approaches is the one, with varying degrees of excitement ("...even more handsome than I pictured") and disgust ("You say you voted for who?"). The romantic memory piece "At night we dream of love" expresses her desire to re-create the safe, unconditional love she knew as a child. Her final, soaring aria, "Will I know him," bodes well for romantic success, as she concludes that her ideal mate will not necessarily be perfect, but perfect for her. While *Eve-Song*, Heggie's first commission, is warmly tonal and effusive, *At the Statue of Venus* reflects an expansion of his compositional palette. Here, his writing is more adventurous in terms of rhythm, harmonic vocabulary, meter and piano textures. The restlessness of the accompaniment in "The slacks were a mistake" mirrors Rose's churning thoughts, and "It was a sexy voice" effectively incorporates silences and cluster chords.

The Dutch-Iranian Farahani is a marvel. Her opulent soprano offers abundant color and personality, as well as unparalleled diction that never sounds forced or compromises her tone. A genuine singing actor, she gives equal weight to Heggie's tuneful, vocally sympathetic music and to the texts. Van Bueren partners her with commensurate expressivity and passion. The artists have made an effort to make this recording an experience with a handsomely produced hardcover package that includes Van Bueren's art photographs of the photogenic Farahani in locations and attitudes suggested by the songs. The result is a complete winner.

—*Joanne Sydney Lessner*