

MAHSA VAHDAT

A Cappella – The Sun Will Rise Kirkelig Kulturverksted FXCD 422

To state the bleeding obvious, in the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution that toppled the Pahlavi stooge-state dynasty in 1979, life changed dramatically in the newly-founded Islamic Republic of Iran. That also pertained to the arts in a region and culture in which poetry and music have been inseparable since time immemorial. For example, female musicians were prohibited from performing in public in front of men. One inspiration that endured in private was tapping the well-springs from antiquity of such great poets as Hafez, Rumi and Khayyam. All three are represented on *A Cappella*.

For *A Cappella* Kirkelig Kulturverksted's Eric Hillestad captured Mahsa Vahdat singing unaccompanied in eight public spaces between October 2014 and November 2015. The first piece is poet Forough Farrokhzad's *The Sun Rises* ("See how sorrow melts drop by drop/In my eyes..."), recorded in Oslo's Emanuel Vigeland Museum. Aref Ghazvini's *Plea* ("Woe is me in separation from you...") comes from the Église Saint Claude in Sigonce in Provence. Recorded at the Armenian Crimea Memorial Church in Istanbul, *The Leila Lullaby* ("Your lips smile pomegranate seed by seed..." runs its mysterious opening) is a piece of 'oral literature' inspired by an Armenian lullaby. None of the 21 tracks reaches even four minutes in length but that is hard to believe, such is the transporting power of her unaccompanied voice.

What she also captures is a malleable tradition. For example, *Elegy For A Beloved One* is a very free setting of the 18th Century Swedish poem *Märk Hur Vår Skugga* (*Behold Our Shadow*) by Atabak Elyasi. In the distilling she bottles something else. Vahdat's voice is exquisite, melismatic and 'church' in the old blues sense. Just listening before reading the exemplary notes, the word 'church' sang out. Hillestad recorded this masterpiece in churches in Norway, France, Spain, Turkey and Poland. He has succeeded in capturing Mahsa Vahdat and her voice with a nigh-palpable sense of space and silence.

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Ken Hunt