

# ALICE SHIELDS

Composer & Librettist

*... vivid use of the tensions between electronic scoring, onstage voices, directional movement and choreography... an almost surreal emotional dynamic, ... a telling and eclectic sense of theatre*

SRUTI, INDIA'S MUSIC AND DANCE MAGAZINE  
on Alice Shields' opera Mass for the Dead

Alice Shields spins stories rich with the cultures of the world. Her operas and other music for voice, instruments and media morph together Western and non-Western forms of classical music and theater, such as the Noh Theater of Japan and the Bharata Natyam dance-drama of India. The result is Shields' intense body of work: highly sculptured sound and singing with impassioned, complex movement and powerful drama.

Shields holds a doctorate in music composition from Columbia University, has taught psychology of music at NYU and has been Associate Director of the Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Center and Director of Development of the Columbia University Computer Music Center. One of the pioneers of electronic music, she is also unique as a composer in having become a professional opera singer, singing traditional and modern roles with the New York City Opera, Washington National Opera, the Clarion Music Society and other companies. Her expertise as a composer and librettist is highly informed by her training and onstage experience as a singer.

Her music has been performed by the Akademie der Künste in Berlin, Venice Biennale, New York City Opera's Vox festival, New York City Electroacoustic Music Festival, Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Center, American Chamber Opera Company, Composers Chamber Theater, Santa Fe Opera Gallery Concerts, American Virtuosi Opera Theater, Lake George Opera Festival, Dance Alloy, Frostburg State University Dept. of Theater and Dance, George

Mason University Dept. of Theater and Dance, Arangham Dance Theater (India), Azure Ensemble, American Composers Alliance and the Association for the Promotion of New Music.

Shields has received grants and awards from Chamber Music America, Meet the Composer, NEA, NYFA, the National Opera Institute, Mary Flagler Cary Trust and other institutions. Her music is recorded on New World Records, CRI, American Composers Alliance, Albany Records, Koch International Classics, Opus One and Tellus. Her work is published by the American Composers Alliance: <https://composers.com/alice-shields>

## Works

### Opera

- **JACK DUNNE'S' REVENGE** (1966) - opera in 1 act, for 2 singers & chamber orchestra. Libretto & choreography by the composer in Middle English and Renaissance English, on the death-obsessed writings of John Donne & the obscenity of medieval English plays.
- **The ODYSSEY of ULYSSES the PALMIPED** (*Odyssey I*) (1968) - opera in 1 act for 2 singers, male chorus & 4 instruments; Libretto & choreography by the composer in Noh Theater style, based on Roger Gilbert-LeConte's Dada play *The Odyssey of Ulysses the Palmiped*.
- **ODYSSEY 2** (1970) - opera in 1 act for 2 singers, male chorus, piano & percussion. Libretto & choreography by the composer in Noh Theater style, based on the Egyptian Book of the Dead.
- **ODYSSEY 3** (1975) - opera in 1 act for 2 singers, male chorus & 21-piece chamber orchestra. Libretto & choreography by the composer in Noh Theater style, based on the Homeric *Odyssey*. Odysseus meets his son Telemachos without recognizing him, and tricks him.
- **SHAMAN** (1987) - opera in 1 act for 4 singers, chorus, 4 instruments & fixed audio media. Libretto by the composer & Edward Barrett based on Native American shamanism.
- **WRAECCA** (1989) - opera in 1 act for 3 singers, cello & piano. Based on Gregorian chant & Anglo-Saxon poems. Libretto by the composer, in which the god Odin manages to sacrifice himself.
- **KOMACHI AT SEKIDERA** (1990) - opera in 1 act for soprano, alto flute & koto. Libretto by the composer based on the Noh play *Sekidera Komachi*.
- **MASS FOR THE DEAD** (1992) - opera in 1 act for 4 singers, chorus, 4 instruments & fixed audio media. Libretto by the composer set in Latin, Greek and English, based on a ghost story & the Requiem Mass.
- **SHIVATANZ** (1993) - opera in 1 act for mezzo-soprano and fixed audio media. Libretto by the composer based on traditional Sanskrit hymn to the god Shiva, and Hindi poem by Shields.
- **APOCALYPSE** (1994) - opera in 2 acts for 3 singers, chorus, dancers, electric guitar, electronic keyboard & fixed audio media. Libretto by the composer based on Greek, Gaelic, and Sanskrit texts; choreographed by the composer in Bharata Natyam style.

- **CRISEYDE** (2010) - opera in 2 acts for 4 singers, ensemble of 3 singers & 14 solo instruments. The libretto by the composer is a feminist reworking of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, sung in Middle English. Despite what Chaucer and later Shakespeare did to her, Criseyde emerges as a heroine in this dramatic rewriting -- from a woman's perspective -- of Chaucer's famous tale.
- **ZHAOJÜN - THE WOMAN WHO SAVED THE WORLD** (2018) - opera in 1 act for soprano, baritone & 7 instruments. Libretto by the composer, inspired by ancient Chinese poetry & plays. To stop environmental destruction & create universal peace, the sex slave Zhaojün steps out of ancient times into the 21st century to confront the Emperor, the modern ruler of the world.

## Vocal and Instrumental

- **Two Amerindian Poems** (1965) for 2 unaccompanied voices, on Native American poems.
- **Three Songs on Poems of Samuel Beckett** (1965) for voice & cello.
- **Sow (as in "pig")** (1966) cantata for mezzo-soprano, baritone, 2 choruses & chamber ensemble, based on Medieval English mystery plays.
- **Wildcat Songs** (1966) for soprano & piccolo, in English, based on Native American shaman's song.
- **Spring Music** (1967) for soprano, trumpet & oboe, on poem of Ronald Johnson.
- **The Storyteller** (1967) cantata for bass-baritone and orchestra, on Native American story.
- **Richard III: Speeches for Male Actor, Trumpet and Drum** (1968) incidental music for Shakespeare's "Richard III".
- **Incidental Music for Solo Singer in Strindberg's "The Father"** (1968) incidental music for theater.
- **Neruda Songs** (1981) for soprano & cello, in English, on poems of Pablo Neruda.
- **Levertov Songs** (1986) for mezzo-soprano & viola, on poems by Denise Levertov.
- **Aurora** (1987) for violin & oboe.
- **Ave** (1989) music-drama in one act for unaccompanied mezzo-soprano & baritone.
- **Rani tero** (2002) for alto, four viols & tambura on traditional poem in Hindi, in raga Puria Dhaneshri.
- **From the Ocean of Beauty - Saundarya Lahari** (2006) for flute, viola & harp.
- **Hindustani Songs** (2013) three songs for soprano & piano, on traditional Indian melodies.
- **Namasté** (2013) for mezzo-soprano & piano, in Hindi.
- **Larynx** (2018) for piccolo, piano & three percussionists.
- **The Wind in the Pines** (2018) for soprano, alto recorder, alto flute, Renaissance bray harp, oud, & percussion(1), based on the Noh play Matsukaze. Commissioned by Chamber Music America.

## Instrument and Electronics

- **Azure** (2003) for flute, violin, viola, cello & fixed audio media, in Todi raga.
- **Mioritza — Requiem for Rachel Corrie** (2004) for solo trombone & fixed audio media, with poem by Shields.
- **Kyrielle** (2005) for solo violin and fixed audio media, based on Gregorian chants associated with the Virgin Mary.
- **The River of Memory** (2008) for solo trombone & fixed audio media.

## Electronic / Fixed Audio Media

- **Electronic Cues for Sam Shepard's Radio Plays "Icarus" and "4-H Club"** (1966) directed by Sam Shepard & Omar Shapli, with featured actor Joseph Chaikin, for Riverside Radio (WRVR).

- ***Electronic Cues for Robert Ward's opera "The Crucible"*** (1966) composed assisting Vladimir Ussachevsky, with Shields' electronically-manipulated singing voice, for performances at the Lake George Opera Festival.
- ***Walking on the Surface of the Sun*** (1967) electronic music.
- ***My Feathers are Growing Longer*** (1967) electronic music for modern dance
- ***Electronic Cues to Marvin Levy's opera "Mourning Becomes Electra"*** (1967) composed assisting Vladimir Ussachevsky, for the Metropolitan Opera premiere at Lincoln Center of Marvin Levy's opera "Mourning Becomes Electra", using Shields' electronically-manipulated singing voice; conducted by Zubin Mehta.
- ***Line of Apogee*** (1967) electronic film score composed with Vladimir Ussachevsky & Pril Smiley for the psychedelic film "Line of Apogee" by Lloyd Williams.
- ***Incredible Voyage*** (1967) the first feature-length electronic music score for television; composed with Vladimir Ussachevsky, Otto Luening & Pril Smiley for CBS-TV documentary narrated by Walter Cronkite.
- ***The Witches' Scenes from Macbeth*** (1968) electronic incidental music for the Stratford Shakespeare Festival (Conn.), directed by John Houseman.
- ***Study for Voice and Tape*** (1969) Shields' recorded voice sings; on poem by Shields.
- ***The Transformation of Ani*** (1970) Shields' recorded voice chants and sings from the Egyptian Book of the Dead.
- ***We*** (1970) electronic score for radio play of Yevgeny Zamiatin's 1920's futurist novel, composed with Vladimir Ussachevsky for the Canadian Broadcasting System.
- ***Farewell to a Hill*** (1975) bells, the cries of mallard ducks and electronic sounds; the first quadraphonic recording of electronic music. Released by Atlantic Records.
- ***Incidental Music for "Woyzeck" for Four Actor-Singers*** (1988) theatrical incidental music for Georg Büchner's play "Woyzeck".
- ***The Red Woman (An Bean Rua)*** (1993) for female actor & fixed audio media, on English & recorded Irish poem by Shields.
- ***The Lament of the Fairies (Port Na bPucaí)*** (1993) fixed audio, with recorded voice singing in Irish; from the West Coast of Ireland.
- ***Snow*** (1993) for male actor & fixed audio media; on the poem "Snow," by Greg Muirhead; the live narrator speaks of a homeless man frozen to death in the snow.
- ***Hier Spukt Es, Fragile Breakfast, and Sparkling Brains: Three Animations created on Macromedia Director and KPT Bryce*** (1995-1996) poems and graphics by Alice Shields.
- ***Vegetable Karma*** (1999) in Todi raga, with sounds sampled from hiphop.
- ***Dust*** (2001) in Madhuwanti raga & Todi raga, with traditional Bharata Natyam jethi-s (rhythmic cycles).
- ***Shenandoah*** (2002) for modern dance, based on oral histories of recent immigrants to the Shenandoah Valley.
- ***The Mud Oratorio*** (2003) for modern dance-drama, on two Nature Conservancy swamps; libretto by Shields based on the book "Stirring the Mud" by Barbara Hurd.
- ***White Heron Dance*** (2017) for Noh Theater dancer, based on the Japanese Sa-gi Mai ritual: a human being experiences a moment of union with the sounds of nature. Created out of digitally transformed bird calls and Japanese singing voice, with human voices and bird calls changing into into trilling flutes, deep drums and singing bells.