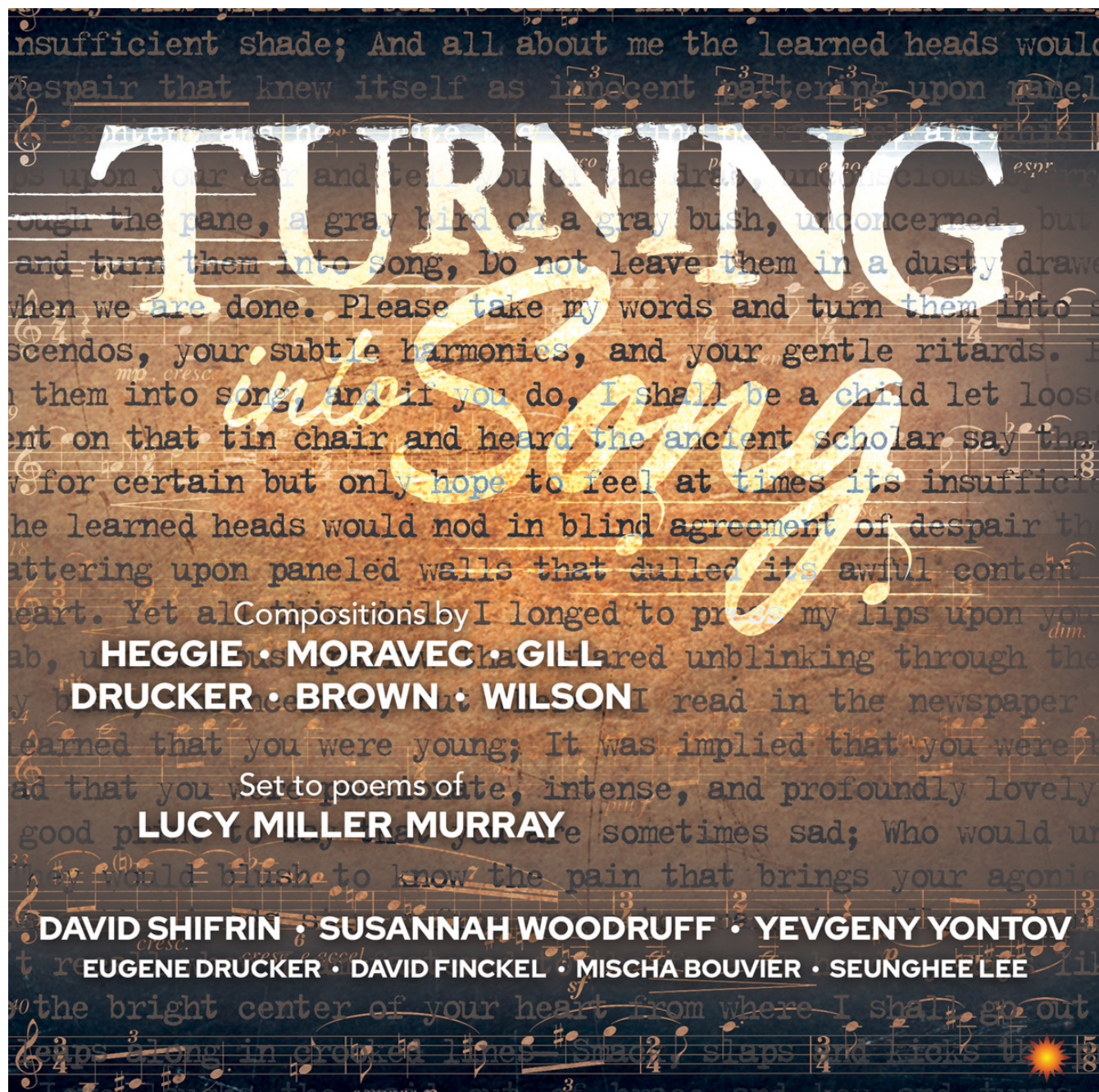


GRAMMOPHONE

ISOUNDS OF AMERICA

A special eight-page section focusing on recent recordings from the US and Canada



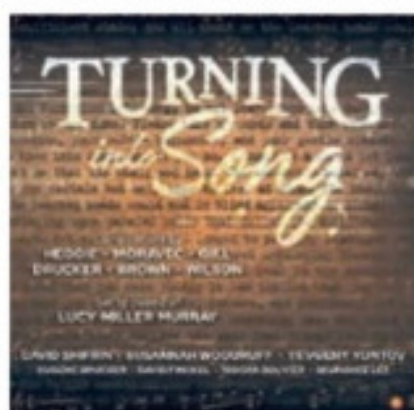
'Turning into Song'

'A Celebration of Songs by American Composers'
Brown After Three Statues in the Metropolitan Museum Drucker Of Troubled Times^a Gill Three Songs About Words Heggie Ode to Image. Would that I were Edna St Vincent Millay Moravec Three Love Songs R Wilson My Antique Phrases. On the Death of Juan Gelman. Words and Music: An Argument^b

SOUNDS OF AMERICA



Susannah Woodruff *mez*^a Mischa Bouvier *bar*
David Shifrin, ^bSeunghee Lee *cls*^a Eugene Drucker *vn*
^aDavid Finckel *vc* Yevgeny Yontov *pf*
Musica Solis (MS202308 • 52' • T)



In a provocative twist, this new recording captures the results of a commissioning project initiated not by a musician but by a poet. In 2010 Lucy Miller Murray, founder of Market Square Concerts in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania's state capital, and widely read for her programme and booklet notes and articles, took the unusual step of commissioning six composers to write settings for clarinet, mezzo-soprano and piano of her poetry. This recording of the 15 songs that resulted, made at the urging of clarinetist David Shifrin, takes its theme from one of her poems: 'Please take my words / And turn them into song.'

In her *Chamber Music: An Extensive Guide for Listeners* (Rowman & Littlefield: 2015), Murray writes about music with a poet's

grace. She describes Brahms achieving affects 'opposite of what is expected in the use of major and minor keys', and it is clear that the six composers have been deeply affected by the way she uses language, casually beginning and unobtrusively striding through the telling of her narratives, and by her love of Schumann and Brahms. Their music, setting poems from her earliest years to the present, shares a profound, introspective quality. The performances feature the wonderful voice of Susannah Woodruff, who sings with infinite sympathy for the meaning of her words alongside the sense of their music. Shifrin plays with both autumnal Brahmsian sadness and delicious, liquid licks. With Yevgeny Yontov marvellously inventive with his own colours and responsive energy, it turns out to be an enhanced way of experiencing her poetry.

Although the tone and style of the poetry remains constant, there is no sameness to the musical responses. Jake Heggie's are expert and wonderful in 'Would that I were Edna St Vincent Millay', a brilliant four-minute set piece seen through a

kaleidoscope's geometric blocks of colour, featuring Woodruff's command of the music's intoxicating gymnastics. Paul Moravec introduces the singer with spiky structures and delights in the Herrick-like lyric of 'Love leaps along in crooked lines'.

More seriously, Michael Stephen Brown's *After Three Statues in the Metropolitan Museum* captures Murray's vast static awe of the beauty of a man, an angel and Aphrodite. The Emerson Quartet's Eugene Drucker, with former colleague David Finckel, contributes a brief reminiscence, 'Of Troubled Times', scored for mezzo-soprano, violin and cello. Richard Wilson contributes three songs with nuanced rhetorical emphasis and compelling flow. 'On the Death of Juan Gelman' is inspired by conversations with Jan Swafford (author of biographies of Ives, Brahms and Beethoven) about the power of poetry. 'Words and Music: An Argument' and 'My Antique Phrases' are absorbing discourses on the power of music.

The sound is immediate and full, and the booklet includes detailed notes by Murray and texts of the poems. **Laurence Vittes**