

Best of Bandcamp Contemporary Classical: April 2019

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By Peter Margasak

Maryanne Amacher – *Petra*



Before her death in 2009, the composer Maryanne Amacher devoted most of her career to designing perception-altering installations—daring explorations of the physicality of sound. She created stunning multi-channel electronic works that allowed listeners to experience sound in fascinating new ways. Moved by one such installation, Swiss pianist Marianne Schroeder commissioned Amacher to write for her. Years passed, and the original commission for a trio ended up as a single-movement work for two pianos. *Petra* gives us a rare glimpse into Amacher’s use of conventional instrumentation. It was shaped in part by her visit to the cathedral in Boswil, Switzerland, where *Petra* would premiere in 1991. She noted the environment, ambience, and architecture of the church, and deployed those qualities with the storyline from a short story by science fiction writer Greg

Bear (which gave the piece its title), in which various gargoyles, saints, and other figures captured in stone and stained glass come to life and breed with humans in the cathedral of Notre Dame.

Amacher used these characters as abstracted narrative elements in the piece, although it’s hard to deduce a clear plotline. And it doesn’t ultimately matter. This performance is rendered beautifully by Schroeder and fellow pianist Stefan Tcherepnin, moving from melancholic fragility to harrowing density. On the most delicate passages the pianists achieve something ineffably light, but rumbling through patterns on the left end of the keyboard, they also summon a spirit of troubling darkness.

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