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Lara St. John: Shiksa



By C. MICHAEL BAILEY
November 1, 2015

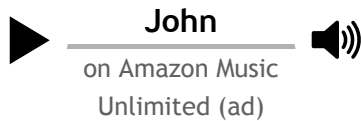
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The Mulligan Chronicles
By David Larsen



Play Lara St.



..."all this music from different countries and cultures pulled together and recorded by a random Canadian chick."

And that is the charm of Lara St. John.

One-time *enfant terrible* violinist Lara St. John has morphed into a beautifully iconoclastic and enigmatic cultural presence in the staid world of classical music. Things started off innocently enough with Bach. St. John made her way through three Bach-oriented recordings ([Bach Works for Violin Solo](#) (Well- Tempered, 1996),

Bach: The Concerto Album (Ancalagon Records, 2002), *Re: Bach* (Sony, 2003)) and one violin firebrand recording (*Gypsy* (Well-Tempered, 1997)). Then, in 2007, St. John doubled down on Bach, releasing *Bach: The Six Sonatas & Partitas for Violin Solo* (Ancalagon Records) to wide acclaim.

After this ten-year digital apprenticeship with Back, St. was ready to breakout with a series of recordings intent on demonstrating both her artistic courage and exceptional chops in all genre. First was *Violin Concerto* (Ancalagon, 2008), featuring St. John with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra under the direction of Sarah Ioannides in a contemporary program including pieces by Hindson, Corigliano, Liszt/Kennedy/St. John. The violinist followed this recording with a unique coupling of Vivaldi's *The*

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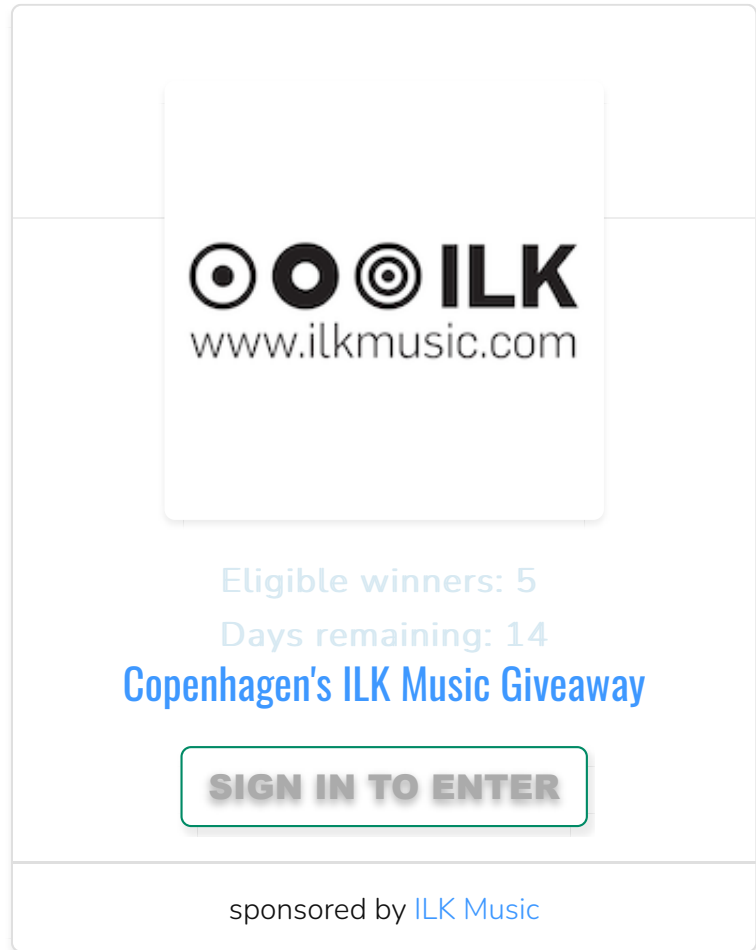
Jennifer Roberts
voice / vocals



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Four Seasons with Astor Piazzolla's *The Four Seasons of Buenos Aires* on *Four Seasons* (Ancalagon, 2009).

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A [Mozart](#) release with her brother, Scott and a [Bach](#) disc with harpist Marie-Pierre Langlamet followed in 2010 and 2012. St. John expanded her format and repertoire, by being added to soprano Anna Prohaska and cellist Ludwig Quandt by leader Langlamet for a program of [Schubert](#) (Ancalagon, 2014). These previous recordings

RADIO
▼

complement two releases by (1, 2) St. John's talented and cheeky, side project, Polkarestra.

With her present *Shiksa*, St. John doubles down again, this time with an inspired and well-programmed theme: music of the Jewish Diaspora, Europe and points east. But that is not where her inspiration stops. St. John selects 14 melodies that she has fancied in her life and challenged a host of contemporary composers to reconsider them. This approach was applied with great success by violinist Anne Akiko Meyers on [Serenade: The Love Album](#) (eOne Music, 2015) using the Great American Songbook. St. John magnifies this approach, building a monument to the folk center of Babylon.

Relying on alto saxophonist [Art Pepper](#)'s admonition, "Never begin a performance with a



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WEEKLY NEWSLETTER

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ballad...," St. John opens her recording with "Czardashian Rhapsody" an adaptation by composer Martin Kennedy, of the *Czardas*, a traditional Hungarian folk dance. Kennedy interpolated throughout the piece, elements of Franz Liszt's *Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2*, transforming the piece into a violin tornado as great as anything Wieniawski, Ysaye, or Szymanowski could envision. But St. John does not solely rely on other composers for transformative inspiration. She and pianist Matt Herskowitz take a traditional Romanian hammer dulcimer melody and transform it into something that would please a dark and musty Deadwood, South Dakota saloon. And the remainder of the selections only emphasize the art.

The music here, is densely conceived and performed. There are layers of pathos



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DOESN'T
ALWAYS
KNOCK**

and ethos to be discovered. St. John's tone and double- and triple-stops are pan-virtuosic while Herskowitz' muscular approach is well suited to the peasant origins of these pieces. Music like this is beyond imagination and talent. It exists only in the loosely-held molecules found on the razor's edge of Creation.



Track Listing

TCzardashian Rhapsody;
bar Fight (Variajuni; Cocek;
Maftule Shpilt Far Dem
Rebn; Ah Ya Zayn;
Misirlouri' Sari Siroun;
Nagilara; Kolo; Five Sadino
Songs; Oltenian Hora;
Miscow; The Pain Will Find
Us; Ca La Breaza.

Personnel

Lara St. John: violin (1779
"Salabue" Guadagnini);
Matt Herskowitz: piano.

Album Information

Title: [Shiksa](#) | Year

Released: 2015 | Record

Label: [Ancalagon](#)

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