

REVIEWS FROM ALBANY

Audiophile Audition

February 27, 2017

An important American masterwork given a very fine performance.

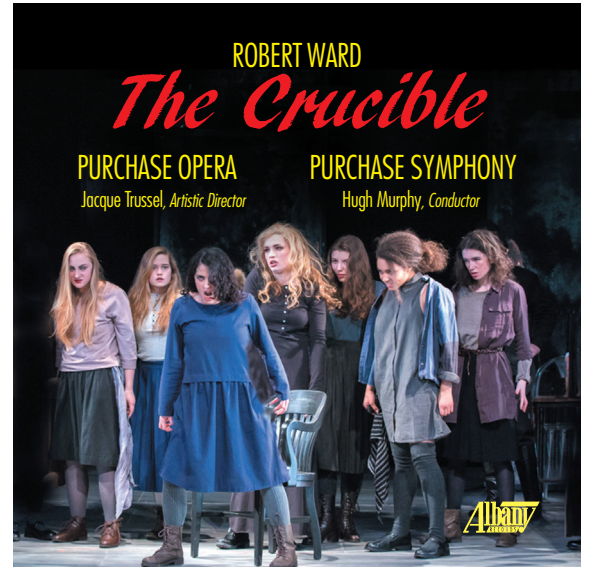
ROBERT WARD: *The Crucible* – Purchase Opera/
Jacques Trussel, artistic dir./Purchase Sym./Hugh
Murphy – Albany TROY 1656/1657, 2 CDs: 113:54,
(1/01/17) ***1/2:

Robert Ward (1917-2013) was Eastman and Juilliard-trained and even studied with Aaron Copland for a bit. His opera, *The Crucible*, after the play by Arthur Miller won the 1962 Pulitzer Prize. It is a fine work, indeed, and for a variety of reasons became Ward's "signature" work; the one by which he is most remembered.

I remember hearing the original cast recording on vinyl many years ago. If I had a copy of the CRI release, I sure cannot find it, unfortunately! So kudos to Albany for releasing this recording of Ward's *The Crucible* with a libretto by Bernard Stambler. Miller's play, upon which Stambler's libretto is based, was directly relevant to the Sen. Joe McCarthy anti-Communist 'witch-hunt' indictments and trials of the 1950s.

This really is, still, a very fine work that pays equal deference to the Miller play and implicitly recreates the mood and paranoia of the seventeenth-century Salem, Massachusetts "witch trials." So the work sounds like a product of its time and place but is still very captivating and worthy of a 'large house' production.

The Purchase Opera under Jacque Trussel and Hugh Murphy is a young artists' training company affiliated with the State University of New York is a very pleasant surprise here. I admit I had never heard of them before but this performance is splendid; particularly Rachel Weishoff as Elizabeth Proctor and Bryan Murray as John Proctor. All other leads and supporting cast are equally impressive and the orchestra under Hugh Murphy plays very well. There is a slight "theater sound" to the balance and acoustics that – rather than detracts – gives the listener a real sense of live performance. I would like to check out their recording of Lee Hoiby's *The Tempest*.



So, *The Crucible*, is now fifty-five-years old and does sound somewhat like a 'period piece' but it remains a very strong and important American opera that paved the way for the many which have been written since. I haven't heard the CRI original cast in a long time so I cannot make an informed comparison. No matter because if this your first exposure to Robert Ward's masterpiece it is well worth your time.

—Daniel Coombs

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