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A Stellar Performance of Ward's opera "The Crucible"

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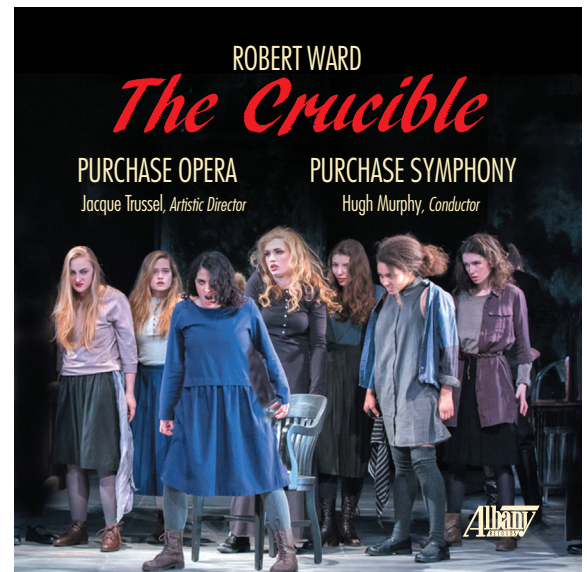
By Dennis E. Ferraraon

Albany has now released this superb recording of Robert Ward's *The Crucible* with a libretto by Bernard Stambler, based on the outstanding play (1952) by the late Arthur Miller. Inspired by the McCarthy witch-hunt of the 1950's, Miller was summoned in front of the un-American Activities Committee and he was cited for contempt of Congress when he refused to 'finger' potential 'Communists' in the arts in the United States. The opera was commissioned in 1961 by the New York City Opera and this new two-CD set is the first recording of the opera in over 50 years. This fine performance is by members of the Purchase Opera - (2016). 27 page booklet - two color photos; 23 b & w photos.

The Program - Robert Ward - (1917-2013) - The Crucible' -Purchase Opera, Jacques Trussel, Artistic Director; Purchase Symphony, Hugh Murphy, conductor;

The word "crucible" denotes "a severe searching test, ordeal or trial." Curious, it shares its plot and similar-like characters with those of Richard Strauss' opera *Salome*. The soloists' singing is based on *Sprechgasang* - (speech song). There are only two major arias in the entire opera, "Act I - "I Do Not Judge You," and Act I - "If She Be Innocent." The music is idiosyncratic harmonic language and melodic motifs to create distinct musical landscapes for each of the operatic characters. Throughout the negative atmosphere there are conflicts between these historically real characters life and death consequences; thus, there was never harmony, trust or honesty. Everything here was suspicion and doubt which leads to destruction for the major character.

The singing is very acceptable throughout this performance. Excellent diction with subtle, sensitive and empathic accompaniments by the Purchase Symphony Orchestra. Superb program notes are here by John Ostendorf, record producer. Highly recommended for those opera lovers who enjoy 20th century American opera.



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