

## My Brightest Diamond *This Is My Hand*



photo credit: Bernd Periml

*This Is My Hand* began with a question. What is the value of music?

My Brightest Diamond's Shara Worden was working on an audio-visual collaboration, Matthew Barney and Jonathan Bepler's six-hour long cine-opera, *River of Fundament*, set in the automobile factories of latter-day Detroit. In the film, a high school-style marching band is seen in procession through the streets of Motor City and playing in its vast, echoing factory spaces. This struck a chord in Shara, for whom the new album would be a purposeful readdressing of music-making on the most basic, tribal level.

"In the States, the marching band is still alive in most public schools, so it represented to me inclusive music making, something anyone can learn. That's the definition of folk music to me, music made by the people," Shara explains. "I loved the communal quality . . . the way drums and horns travel in large

three-dimensional spaces." But it also sparked a search for more personal meaning. "The genesis of the new album was looking at the changes that have happened in music over my career, and trying to reevaluate what [music] meant to me in the first place. What is the value of music?"

Answering that became a journey beyond the composition of music, which Shara has demonstrated mastery over time and time again, and into the cultural history of music. "I had this 'back-to-basics' moment of reading how humans were making sounds before we were using words," says Shara. "The album started with these fundamental ideas of music's function. I just made a list: clap, singing along, and so on . . . ways in which people can simply join in with music."

The opening track on *This Is My Hand*, "Pressure," is an invitation. "Diamonds," Shara sings, "so wild I cannot tame them / so shiny I cannot name them." Within seconds of lowering the needle, listeners hear a sharp, drum-rolled call to attention, courtesy of the Detroit Party Marching Band. What follows is a Shara-choreographed whirlwind of horns, woodwinds, beats, xylophones and synths. The sound propels one of the most immediate songs in the MBD canon to date. The ensuing "Before the Words" ("Before the verse there was the sound") and the title track are no less direct in exploring and defining the fundamentals of not just pop music, but, well, life. "This is my voice/ this is my heart / this is my choice," sings Shara. And "Lover Killer," with its imagery of battlefields encircled by crows, evokes the influence of author Daniel Levitin. "Apparition," the final track, is a Tron-like electronic, slow-motion departure from the physical world.

Produced by Shara herself and keyboardist Zac Rae, *This Is My Hand* is a bold chapter in the unfurling MBD story. Its exploration of music and rhythmic urgency escort Shara's chamber-music aesthetic out of the chamber and back into the dance hall and rock bar.

## My Brightest Diamond Bio

Not many people can front a rock band, sing Górecki's Third Symphony, lead a marching band processional down the streets of the Sundance film festival and perform in a baroque opera of their own composing—all in a month's time. But Shara Worden can.

Her multi-faceted career as My Brightest Diamond, which began with an acclaimed independent rock record, has reflected her journey into the world of performing arts. *This Is My Hand*, her fourth album, marks a confident return to rock music, one informed by her mastery of composition and a new exploration into the electronic.

Born in diamond-rich Arkansas and then raised all around the country, Worden came from a musical family of traveling evangelists. She went on to study operatic voice and then classical composition after a move to New York City.

Shara began issuing recordings as My Brightest Diamond in 2006, following a protean period in the band AwRY, and joining Sufjan Stevens' Illinoismakers live ensemble. Asthmatic Kitty Records released her debut album, *Bring Me The Workhorse* in 2006, *A Thousand Sharks' Teeth* in 2008, and 2011's *All Things Will Unwind*, which featured songs written for the chamber ensemble yMusic.

In between MBD, well-known fans became collaborators, and collaborative projects amassed. Highlights include singing in Laurie Anderson's 2008 show "Homeland," delivering guest vocals on The Decemberists' 2009 *Hazards of Love* album and subsequently joining them on tour, performing in Bryce and Aaron Dessner's multi-media presentation "The Long Count," singing and recording for Pulitzer Prize winning composer David Lang and singing in Sarah Kirkland Snider's "Penelope" and "Unremembered." Shara has also worked with David Byrne (on his concept musical "Here Lies Love"), Fat Boy Slim, Bon Iver and The Blind Boys of Alabama.

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**For more information, please contact  
Asha Goodman 615.320.7753 or Carla Sacks 212.741.1000 at Sacks & Co.,  
asha.goodman@sacksco.com or carla@sacksco.com.**