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ANNA'S EPIC POEM INSPIRED BY PICTURES

THE DISCOVERY of an old shoebox at her parents' home led to poet Anna Rabinowitz writing a book-length poem called *Darkling*.

And the poem has been transformed into an experimental opera, as well as a CD, which was released this month by Albany Records.

"The shoebox was filled with old photographs and letters from my family, many of whom were killed in the Holocaust," Anna told the Jewish Telegraph from her New York home.

"There were lots of photographs of my parents' friends and relatives and it was haunting.

"There were also documents in Yiddish and Polish, with pleas by my parents trying to get them out of Poland.

"I felt as a poet that I had to do something with the material."



Anna Rabinowitz

PERSONAL:

Commissioned by American Opera Projects, *Darkling* is set to original music by Jewish composer Stefan Weisman.

It also features four singers (soprano/mezzo/ tenor/baritone), a string quartet and 16 spoken-word artists.

Darkling premiered to great acclaim in New York City in 2006 and toured Europe a year later.

Anna, 78, recalled: "At the time, American Opera Projects was doing a production of *Marina*, about the life of the Russian poet Marina Tsvetaeva, whose libretto was written by Annie Finch.

"Tupelo Press, which published *Darkling*, had just published one of Annie's books and decided to have a book party for her in conjunction with the opening night festivities for *Marina*.

"Michael Comlish, associate producer of American Opera Projects, struck up a conversation with Ronni Leopold, a board member at Tupelo. She gave him a copy of *Darkling* and Michael fell in love with it.

"He felt that it was his opportunity to do something different in opera theatre."

Anna was raised in Brooklyn by Ruth and Sam Goldban, Holocaust survivors from Ostroleka, Poland.

"All their families were killed in the Holocaust - all that remained were my father's brother and his nephew," Anna explained.

"The Holocaust and what happened to my parents' families was always a major undercurrent throughout my life.

"I have vivid memories after the war of my parents going through lists of survivors trying to find members of their families.

"I visited Poland a couple of years ago and went to my father's village, where I met someone who remembered him.

"Not speaking the language, I came to realise how traumatic it must have been for my parents to escape to America, as they didn't speak English, had no money and had left their families behind."

Anna's journey into poetry came quite late. She read English at Brooklyn College before becoming an interior designer and teaching English part-time after meeting her future husband, tax attorney Martin Rabinowitz, at a summer camp when they were teenagers.

Anna continued: "I always wrote and loved it, especially poetry, and I didn't want to wake up one day and realise I had never done the one thing I always wanted to do."

So she decided to embark on a graduate degree in poetry from Columbia University.

And, in the 20 years since Anna decided to follow her dreams, she has enjoyed success.

She has written four books of poetry: *Present Tense*, *The Wanton Sublime*, *Darkling* and *At the Site of Inside Out* - which won the prestigious Juniper Prize.

Editor of the literary journal *American Letters & Commentary*, Anna is also vice-president of the Poetry Society of America.

"My first poetry was published in 1989 and I write about all the kinds of things that interest me," Anna explained.

"It tended not to be personal, until I wrote *Darkling*."

www.annarabinowitz.com and www.albanyrecords.com