



WILLIAM SCHUMAN
Symphonies Nos. 7 and 10
Seattle Symphony • Gerard Schwarz



William Schuman (1910-1992)

Symphonies Nos. 7 and 10

Born on 4th August, 1910, in New York City, William Schuman's first musical studies centered on the violin, though a passion for jazz and popular music led him to teach himself a variety of instruments. On hearing Arturo Toscanini conduct the New York Philharmonic in 1930, Schuman withdrew from the School of Commerce at New York University after a two-year stint there and embarked upon private studies in harmony with Max Persin and counterpoint with Charles Haubiel.

Following studies at Columbia University (B.A. from Teachers College, 1935) and at Juilliard with Roy Harris he joined the faculty of Sarah Lawrence College and in 1943 won the first Pulitzer Prize in music for his cantata, *A Free Song*. Two years later he left academe to assume dual rôles as director of publications of G. Schirmer, Inc. and president of the Juilliard School of Music. From 1962 to 1969 he served as president of Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts.

Balancing multiple careers as teacher and administrator, he was able to write a large amount of music. His *Second Symphony* (1937) caught the collective attention of the musical world when it was performed the following year in New York City. His best-known works are *New England Triptych*, based on music written by the eighteenth-century American composer William Billings, and his orchestration of Charles Ives's wittily irreverent *Variations on "America."* He died on 15th February, 1992, in New York City.

A dozen years elapsed between the completion of Schuman's *Sixth* and *Seventh Symphonies*. The *Seventh*, dating from 1960, resulted from a commission from the Koussevitzky Music Foundation in the Library of Congress to commemorate both the 75th anniversary of the Boston Symphony Orchestra and the memory of Serge and Natalie Koussevitzky. Charles Munch led the première with the Boston Symphony Orchestra on 21st October 1960.

Though laid out in the traditional four-movement classical symphonic format, the work is played without

pause as a single continuous entity. Striking contrasts in mood and sonority among the movements ensure a sense of both contrast and continuity. Throughout the *Seventh Symphony* one notes a balance between the composer's penchant for relentless energy and ripening Romantic utterance that in retrospect may be seen as a harbinger for the emergence of the post-serialism of the 1970s and onward among a younger generation of composers.

The initial movement, *Largo assai*, begins with stark, intensely focused chords. The prevailing mood is stern, even threatening. Chordal strings alternate with ominous interjections by winds, darkened further by the bass clarinet. No percussion is used. As in much of Schuman's music, a strong rhythmic undertow (strongly dotted "packets" of energy) leads us irresistibly forward, creating a state of anxiety reinforced by chromatic and dissonant harmonies. Psychologically dark sonorities are created by dialogue between the bass clarinet and other instruments, especially the movement-ending cadenza for clarinet and bass clarinet that acts as bridge to the second movement. Marked *Vigoroso*, this begins with a brass fanfare that recalls Copland's *Fanfare for the Common Man*. Though the harmonies retain their forceful dissonance, the mood is increasingly festive and bright, providing great contrast with the dark musings of the opening movement. Added contrast comes through the prominent use of timpani and percussion, including piano and xylophone. The aptly termed *Cantabile intensamente* third movement, for strings only, is quieter and calmer though tinged with mystery. The endlessly unfolding melody, in an arch-like structure, creates an atmosphere of continuous yearning that finally relaxes into a state of serenity. The concluding *Scherzando brioso* begins with punching energy and uses the full resources of the orchestral palette, in bold contrast to the strings-only sonority of the previous movement. Dance-like, with echoes of jazz, the composer's earliest love, the movement is bright and festive, reflecting the score's character as a celebration of the Boston Symphony Orchestra's glorious history.

In anticipation of the nation's bicentennial celebration in 1976, the National Symphony commissioned Schuman to compose a suitable orchestral work to reflect two centuries of American experience. He accommodated the request with his *Symphony No. 10*, subtitled "*American Muse*," which reflected the composer's dedication "to the country's creative artists, past, present and future". Antal Dorati led the National Symphony in the work's première on 6th April, 1976.

It was Schuman's wife who suggested that he revisit the opening music he had written four decades earlier, a choral setting of Walt Whitman's *Pioneers! O Pioneers!* The composer reflected: "My wife's instinct proved fortuitous, for recalling *Pioneers* and experiencing again its optimism was precisely what I needed to get me started on the Symphony. Optimism is, after all, an essential ingredient in understanding America's beginnings."

The first movement, *Con fuoco* (with fire), gets straight to the point, using drum rolls, percussion and brass instruments to suggest the brash and assertive spirit of the nation's origins in revolution. Using a tonal vocabulary intensified with pithy dissonance, the music is emphatic, angular, lean-textured and propelled by packets of energizing clipped notes. A long-breathed theme from violins and horns enters and is underpinned by strongly insistent rhythmic prodding from mixed brass, winds and percussion. A highly contrasted *Larghissimo* second movement begins close to inaudibility with *pianississimo* muted high strings supported by woodwinds. Out of gently insistent soft, repeated string chords a low melody begins to unfold in cellos augmented by basses. High in the first

violins, a Romantic melody unfolds, marked *cantabile dolce, quasi parlando*. The prevailing harmonies are modestly dissonant. The music has a quiet, haunting, reflective quality that is frequently nocturnal, both beautiful and somewhat anxious. Gradually the dynamic level rises as winds and French horns add punctuating rhythmic figures. Halfway through the movement, a flute melody enters with a scintillating theme floating over trumpets. The flutes continue as dynamics rise and stressful sonorities emerge from brass and strings below. After a portentous climax, the dynamics drop suddenly; anxiety abates immediately, replaced by a return to the spirit and letter of a *cantabile* indication, ending the movement quietly and with notable consonance. The finale, *Presto*, begins with pizzicato in strings and a piano in unison. Quirky dialogue evolves between plucked strings and mixed winds. The strings assume a legato articulation in unfolding a long melody surrounded by chirping winds. Xylophone, glockenspiel and other percussion enter in alternating conversation with winds and/or strings. Further contrast in timbre is achieved through dense, dissonant brass chords. About halfway through, the mood and sonority change; light-hearted strings play an animated and syncopated melody against long-held notes in violins. Trumpet and other instruments enter with equal animation and rhythmic playfulness. The symphony ends on an exuberant blast of triple forte energy from stratospheric piccolos to deeply resonant string basses.

Steven Lowe © 2005 Seattle Symphony

Gerard Schwarz

Gerard Schwarz, Music Director of Seattle Symphony since 1985 and Music Director of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra since 2001, is also Principal Conductor of the Eastern Music Festival as well as Conductor Emeritus of New York's Mostly Mozart Festival, having served there as Music Director from 1982 to 2001. He stepped down as Music Director of the New York Chamber Symphony in 2002, taking the orchestra he founded in 1977 through its 25th anniversary. A graduate of the Juilliard School, Gerard Schwarz began his conducting career in 1966. His Music Directorships have included the Waterloo Festival, the New York Chamber Symphony, the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, and Music Today. In 1981 he established the Music Today contemporary music series in New York City and served as its Music Director through 1989. Gerard Schwarz has led the Mostly Mozart Festival Orchestra in débuts at the Tanglewood and Ravinia Festivals, and from 1991 to 1999 he conducted the Mostly Mozart Festival in Tokyo. From 1994 to 1999, he served as Artistic Advisor to Tokyu Bunkamura's Orchard Hall, conducting six programmes annually with the Tokyo Philharmonic Orchestra. He has guest-conducted major orchestras throughout the world. In 1994 Gerard Schwarz was named Conductor of the Year by Musical America International Directory of the Performing Arts. He also has received the Ditson Conductor's Award from Columbia University, an honorary Doctorate of Music from the Juilliard School, and honorary doctorates from Fairleigh Dickinson University, University of Puget Sound, Seattle University, and the Cornish College of the Arts. In May 2002, the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers awarded special recognition to Maestro Schwarz for his efforts in championing the works of American composers and the music of our time. In April 2003 the Pacific Northwest Branch of the National Arts & Sciences gave Maestro Schwarz its first "IMPACT" lifetime achievement award. He was also named an Honorary Fellow at John Moores University, Liverpool. In 2004 he was appointed to the NEA's National Council on the Arts.

Seattle Symphony

Founded in 1903 the Seattle Symphony (www.seattlesymphony.org) is one of the oldest and largest cultural institutions in the Pacific Northwest. Gerard Schwarz has been Music Director since 1985. In 1998 the orchestra began performing in the acoustically superb Benaroya Hall in downtown Seattle. It is recognised for its adventurous programming and tradition of performing music by contemporary composers. Since the 1980s, Gerard Schwarz and the Seattle Symphony have released nearly 100 compact discs for Naxos, Artek, Delos, EMI, Koch International, CRI, New World, JVC, Nonesuch, Reference Recordings and RCA. From September to July, the orchestra is heard live by more than 330,000 people annually in its main concert series and by over a quarter of a million in its broadcasts on Classical KING FM 98.1 and at www.king.org.

Playing
Time:
60:48

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William
SCHUMAN
(1910-1992)

Symphony No. 7

- 1** Largo assai —
- 2** Vigoroso —
- 3** Cantabile intensamente —
- 4** Scherzando brioso

28:57

11:00

2:52

9:14

5:52

Symphony No. 10 “American Muse” 31:51

- 5** Con fuoco
- 6** Larghissimo
- 7** Presto — Andantino — Leggiero —
Pesante — Presto possibile

6:03

13:25

12:22

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by Thomas Moran (1837-1926)

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American flag, folk artist, 1880s.



AMERICAN CLASSICS

William Schuman juggled many careers in his full and productive life: teacher, administrator, conductor and composer of ten symphonies and a significant representation of music in many genres. Dating from 1960 and 1976 respectively, Schuman's *Seventh* and *Tenth Symphonies* were commissioned for and inspired by two anniversaries, the 75th season of the Boston Symphony and the bi-centennial celebration of the United States. Given the composer's long connection with the city of Boston and his important work in creating an American symphonic “sound”, these symphonies are emblematic of Schuman's musical roots.

This disc is the second release in a series devoted to Schuman's complete symphonies.

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