



AMERICAN CLASSICS



STEPHEN ALBERT

In Concordiam • TreeStone

Ilkka Talvi, Violin • Lucy Shelton, Soprano • David Gordon, Tenor
Seattle Symphony • New York Chamber Symphony
Gerard Schwarz



Stephen Albert (1941-1992) In Concordiam • TreeStone

During the 1970s and 1980s, two important trends emerged in American music as alternatives to what struck many observers as the arcane and hermetic high-modernism that had come to dominate composition after the middle of the twentieth century. The first of these new developments was the “minimalism” pioneered by Steve Reich, Philip Glass and others. The second was what came to be called “The New Romanticism.”

The latter tendency was, in some ways, the more surprising. In reclaiming not only certain features of traditional harmony but the dramatic rhetoric of nineteenth-century composition, the practitioners of “The New Romanticism” explicitly rejected a central tenet of modernism, its revolt against the musical past. In particular, these neo-Romantic composers sought to reclaim for music a degree of emotional expression they felt had been sacrificed by their high-Modernist predecessors.

Stephen Albert was perhaps the most accomplished pioneer of “The New Romanticism.” A native of New York, Albert began composing during his adolescence under the tutelage of Elie Siegmeister. He subsequently studied at the Eastman School of Music, the Philadelphia Academy of Music and the University of Pennsylvania. He also spent time in Stockholm, where he worked with Karl-Birger Blomdahl. Albert’s music quickly gained recognition, earning the composer commissions from the New York Philharmonic, the Chicago Symphony, The Philadelphia Orchestra and other major ensembles, an appointment as Composer in Residence with the Seattle Symphony Orchestra and a faculty post at The Juilliard School, and a series of impressive awards, most notably the 1985 Pulitzer Prize for music.

Albert produced more than a dozen orchestral compositions, as well as works for smaller ensembles and for voices. This impressive body of work undoubtedly would have grown in size and scope had the composer lived to develop it. Tragically, Albert died in an automobile accident in December 1992, at age 51.

In Concordiam, a composition for violin and orchestra, reveals the range and complexity of Albert’s style. The work unites angular, dissonant writing with mellifluous harmonies having clear tonal foundations. Albert initially wrote the piece in 1986 and revised it two years later, during his Composer in Residence tenure with the Seattle Symphony.

The composition’s title indicates something of the musical workings of the piece. Albert noted that different groups of instruments within the orchestra have proprietary thematic material. Trumpets, metal percussion, violins, low strings, woodwinds and horns all sound distinct ideas. The solo violin serves, Albert explained, as a “mediator” between these instrumental groups and the thematic material associated with them. In time, the composition’s diverse ideas come together harmoniously, in several senses of that word. The resulting movement from disparity to concord explains, and is explained by, the composition’s Latin title, which best translates as “into harmony.”

The arresting trumpet fanfare that begins the piece is echoed by bells and plucked strings, then by woodwinds and finally by the solo violin. This music is strident and decidedly modern in its harmonic contours. But immediately the violins and violas answer quietly with a series of soft, widely spaced chords that convey quiet mystery. As these harmonies continue to unfold, the violin, in a rough-hewn cadenza, ruminates on the implications of its initial utterance. Albert’s superimposing of a restive, angular soliloquy against seemingly imperturbable harmonies in the strings calls to mind the musical allegory of Charles Ives’ *The Unanswered Question*, which seems very much the progenitor of this passage.

With the conclusion of the soloist’s cadenza, the focus turns to the orchestra — specifically, to the woodwinds, who trace song-like lines in unison and in rich contrapuntal tapestries. The solo violin rejoins the proceedings, spinning out a new theme loosely related to

the woodwinds’ music. Albert now begins to develop this theme, the music growing increasingly energetic until it reaches a cadenza for the solo instrument. The composer now revisits each of his ideas, beginning with the violin’s theme but touching on the trumpet fanfare, the bell sonorities and other elements. In the final minutes of the piece, these different elements join together in seemingly joyful accord, the violin exultantly reiterating a signature five-note figure belonging to its theme and leading its colleagues quite literally to harmony in the form of a radiant A major chord at the conclusion.

Stephen Albert repeatedly drew inspiration from the writing of James Joyce. Among his compositions based on Joyce’s works are the cantata *Distant Hills*, with texts from *Ulysses*; the song cycle *To Wake the Dead* and the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Symphony RiverRun*, both prompted by *Finnegans Wake*; and *TreeStone*, also written as a response to Joyce’s final novel. Albert composed the latter work in 1983, concurrently with *Symphony RiverRun*. The two pieces are related not only in their Joycean inspiration but through shared musical material. Indeed, Albert described them as “adaptations of each other.”

Scored for soprano and tenor accompanied by a small orchestra, *TreeStone* treats Joyce’s gloss on the legend of Tristan and Iseult, a recurring motif in *Finnegans Wake*. The tale of the ill-fated lovers “hovers ghost-like throughout the novel,” Albert observed, “never wholly perceived but nearly always felt.” Joyce, the composer continues, renders “an abbreviated, irreverent and often deranged version” of the medieval romance, “communicated in coded fragments ... challenging our reason and powers of intuition.”

Albert prefaces the first of the six songs that comprise *TreeStone* with an instrumental prologue. Here a shimmering texture of metal percussion, high-pitched pizzicato and isolated woodwind sounds create an atmospheric “rain music.” A wistful clarinet arabesque serves as a transition to the song *I am Leafy Speaking*, in which the soprano presents the voice of the Liffey River flowing through Dublin. In Joyce’s characteristically allusive language, she sings to the city, calling forth

memories they share. Albert’s orchestral setting develops both the “rain music” and the clarinet arabesque in a movement that is as freely associative as its text.

A Grand Funerall, the second song, combines somber and antic music to create an air of raucous surrealism. The scene is a wake for the deceased Tristan and Iseult, but a truncated funeral dirge and fragments of Latin liturgy given out by the tenor are overwhelmed by a children’s ditty, a bit of parlor song and generally excessive exuberance.

The third song, *Sea Birds*, brings a marked change of tone. Its text recalls the ocean voyage during which Tristan and Iseult succumbed to their fatal passion, imagining the lovers’ first kiss as seen by birds flying over their ship. The first sounds evoke the lonely vessel on the water. The more animated music that follows suggests the fluttering and swooping of the titular birds.

The next two songs, *Tristopher Tristan* and *Fallen Griets*, also view the legendary lovers from an unusual perspective. Their texts are from a chapter of *Finnegans Wake* in which two washerwomen stand on opposite banks of the Liffey, gossiping as they launder. Their discourse, which flows as freely as the river between them, touches on a scandalous liaison of young cousins, these being Tristan and Iseult. In the first song, restless rhythms intimate the eager gossip of the women. The ensuing song, *Fallen Griets*, is more sober, touching on the sorrows of she who, Joyce wrote, “wove a garland for her hair ... of fallen griets of weeping willow.”

The final song takes its text from the most famous portion of *Finnegans Wake*, a long passage known as *Anna Livia Plurabelle*. As darkness descends over the river, the elder washerwomen grow weary. One complains, “I feel as old as yonder elm.” The other feeling as “heavy as yonder stone.” Slowly, they become that which they have named, the first transformed into a tree, her companion into a stone. Tree and stone, *TreeStone*: a symbol of eternity and enduring nature, which Albert intimates poetically in the final measures of the piece.

Paul Schiavo

Ilkka Talvi



Photo courtesy of Yuen-Lai Studio

Finnish-born violinist Ilkka Talvi was initially self-taught and later studied with famous teachers in Helsinki, Vienna (Odnoposoff), Paris (Bouillon) and in the United States (Heifetz at USC and Galamian at the Curtis Institute). Talvi has performed as soloist and in recital in many European countries, as well as in many American cities. At the age of twenty he became a faculty member at the Sibelius Academy, Finland's leading conservatory. He has made numerous recordings, many of which have been world premières, including concertos and other works by Bach, Hindemith, Diamond, Albert, Klami, Piston, Creston and many others, on the Delos, Nonesuch, Angel, Naxos and Finlandia labels. He has performed regularly as soloist in concertos by Tchaikovsky, Beethoven, Brahms, Hindemith, Shostakovich and Glazunov, among others. After immigrating to the United States, he worked for motion picture and recording studios in Los Angeles and served as principal in the L.A. Chamber Orchestra, before moving to Seattle in the 1980s. Talvi has served as concertmaster of the Mostly Mozart Festival, Malmö Symphony, and Waterloo Festival, as well as the Seattle Symphony and Seattle Opera. He currently teaches at Seattle Pacific University and is concertmaster for the Rainier Symphony.

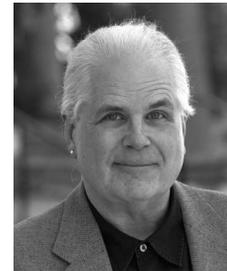
Lucy Shelton



Photo: Beth Kelly

The only artist to receive the International Walter W. Naumburg Award twice, as a soloist and as a chamber musician, soprano Lucy Shelton has performed repertoire from Bach to Boulez in major recital, chamber and orchestral venues throughout the world. Highly acclaimed as an interpreter of new music, Shelton continues to bring new audiences into the sound world of new works, often composed for her. A native Californian, her musical training began early with the study of both piano and flute. After graduating from Pomona College she pursued singing at the New England Conservatory and at the Aspen Music School, where she studied with Jan de Gaetani. Lucy Shelton has taught at the Cleveland Institute of Music, the New England Conservatory and the Eastman School. She is currently on the faculty of the Tanglewood Music Center and coaches privately at her studio in New York City. She has recorded for Deutsche Grammophon, KOCH International, Bridge Records, Unicorn-Kanchana and Virgin Classics.

David Gordon



Since his operatic début with Lyric Opera of Chicago in 1973, David Gordon has forged a distinguished and innovative career as opera and concert singer, recitalist and seminar presenter. A concert artist of international stature, he has appeared as featured guest soloist with virtually every major North American symphony orchestra, and with other prestigious orchestras and music festivals on four continents. His concert repertoire spans eight centuries of music and eight languages. Praised as “One of the world’s great Bach tenors” (*Chicago Tribune*), he has been heard worldwide in hundreds of performances of J.S. Bach’s music. As soloist, lecturer, and master-class presenter, he has appeared at every major North American Bach Festival, including serving as dramaturge of the annual Carmel Bach Festival, and at Bach festivals in Europe, South America and Japan. He served on the music faculty of Sonoma State University, San Francisco State University and the University of California, Berkeley, and has recorded for RCA Red Seal, Decca, London, Telarc, Dorian, Newport and Vox.

New York Chamber Symphony

Founded in 1977, the New York Chamber Symphony earned a distinguished reputation, presenting programs and recordings of both Baroque and Classical repertoire with an emphasis on contemporary work and American music. The orchestra, under founding music director Gerard Schwarz, played at Lincoln Center’s Alice Tully Hall and disbanded in 2001. The orchestra’s discography consists of over 20 recordings and includes works by Paul Creston, David Diamond, Howard Hanson and Walter Piston. The orchestra received three GRAMMY® Award nominations for works by Copland and Hanson. In 1993 the New York Chamber Symphony received an ASCAP Award for its commitment to new music programmes and in 1994 Gerard Schwarz was named conductor of the year by *Musical America*.

Seattle Symphony

The Seattle Symphony has gained international prominence with more than 140 recordings, twelve GRAMMY® nominations, two Emmys and numerous other awards. Under the leadership of Music Director Ludovic Morlot since September 2011, the Seattle Symphony performs in one of the world’s finest concert venues – the acoustically superb Benaroya Hall – in downtown Seattle. The Orchestra is internationally recognized for its innovative programming and extensive recording history. From September through July, the Symphony is heard live by more than 315,000 people. For more information on the Seattle Symphony, visit www.seattlesymphony.org.

Gerard Schwarz



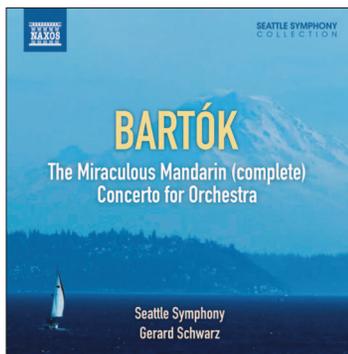
Internationally recognized for his moving performances, innovative programming and extensive catalogue of recordings, American conductor Gerard Schwarz serves as Music Director of the Eastern Music Festival and Conductor Laureate of the Seattle Symphony. A renowned interpreter of nineteenth-century German, Austrian and Russian repertoire in addition to contemporary American composers, Schwarz recently completed his final season as music director of the Seattle Symphony after an acclaimed 26 years. His previous positions as Music Director include New York's Mostly Mozart Festival, the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra and the New York Chamber Symphony. As a guest conductor he has

worked with many of the world's finest orchestras and opera companies. His discography of over 350 releases showcases his collaborations with the Seattle Symphony, Berlin Radio Symphony, Philadelphia Orchestra, Czech Philharmonic, London Symphony Orchestra, and L'Orchestre National de France, among others. His pioneering recordings of American symphonists Diamond, Hanson, Hovhaness, Piston, and William Schuman have received high critical praise, as have his cycles of works by Brahms, Mahler, Rimsky-Korsakov, Robert Schumann, Shostakovich, Richard Strauss, Stravinsky, and Wagner. Schwarz has received hundreds of honours and accolades including two Emmy Awards, thirteen GRAMMY® nominations, six ASCAP Awards and numerous *Stereo Review* and *Ovation Awards*. He holds the Ditson Conductor's Award from Columbia University, was the first American named Conductor of the Year by *Musical America* and has received numerous honorary doctorates. The National Academy of Recording Arts & Sciences gave Schwarz its first "IMPACT" lifetime achievement award.



Gerard Schwarz conducts the Seattle Symphony in Benaroya Hall, Seattle
Photo courtesy of Yuen Lui Studio

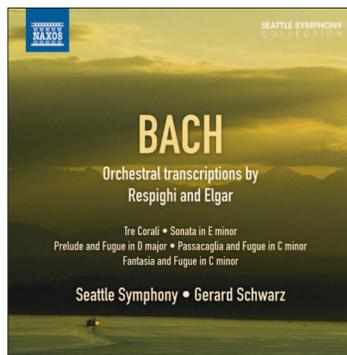
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NAXOS

Stephen
ALBERT
(1941-1992)

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| 1 | In Concordiam (1983)* | 17:11 |
| | TreeStone (1986)† | 38:36 |
| 2 | Part I: I am Leafy Speafing | 12:50 |
| 3 | A Grand Funferall | 4:26 |
| 4 | Sea Birds | 3:23 |
| 5 | Part II: Tristopher Tristan | 1:50 |
| 6 | Fallen Griefs | 5:15 |
| 7 | Anna Livia Plurabelle | 10:52 |

Ilkka Talvi, Violin*
Lucy Shelton, Soprano†
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Seattle Symphony*
New York Chamber Symphony†
Gerard Schwarz

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AMERICAN CLASSICS
SEATTLE SYMPHONY
COLLECTION

Stephen Albert is counted as one of the most accomplished pioneers of 'The New Romanticism': a generation of composers seeking to reclaim some of the emotional expression lost through the rigors of intellectual Modernism in music. Inspired by James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, *TreeStone* is a moving exploration of the tragic legend of Tristan and Iseult. *In Concordiam* reveals the range and complexity of Albert's style in uniting angular dissonance with mellifluous harmonies. Albert worked closely with the Seattle Symphony on this work, revising it during his three year tenure as Composer in Residence. Albert's *Symphony No. 1 'RiverRun'* is available on Naxos 8.559257.

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