



WILLIAM SCHUMAN

Symphony No. 8

Night Journey • Variations on 'America'

Seattle Symphony • Gerard Schwarz



William Schuman (1910-1992): Symphony No. 8

Night Journey: Choreographic Poem for Fifteen Instruments • Variations on “America”

Few people have had a greater impact on the performing arts in America than William Schuman. He made up for the late start in his musical studies by becoming one of the most distinguished composers of the twentieth century, as well as president of The Juilliard School and then Lincoln Center. He composed over one hundred works for various genres, although his great love was writing for orchestra. Schuman saw his music as an integral part of his persona, saying, “Whatever meaning my life has is to be found in the music itself.” William Schuman’s extraordinary life as composer and arts leader reflects his rôle as an artistic catalyst within the fertile and evolving environment of twentieth-century America.

Symphony No. 8

Schuman’s *Eighth Symphony* had its première as part of the inaugural concerts of Philharmonic Hall at Lincoln Center on 4th October, 1962, with Leonard Bernstein conducting the New York Philharmonic; this was during Schuman’s first year as president of the Center. The thirty-minute work is in three movements: *Lento sostenuto–Pressante vigoroso–Lento; Largo–Tempi più mosso–Largo; and Presto–Prestissimo*.

In the symphony’s overall texture Schuman intertwines the various orchestral sections with a complexity first manifested in his *Sixth Symphony*. But now the density of musical lines interacting at once is far greater than in his earlier symphonies. As in those works, however, repetition of melodic material is rare, causing the listener to seek out musical milestones upon which to digest the symphony’s extraordinary aural output.

Schuman writes for a very large orchestra, including woodwinds in threes, six horns, four trumpets and trombones each, two harps, piano, and a large battery of percussion instruments, thus allowing for a diverse palette of instrumental colors.

The first movement is consistently intense, beginning at the very slow tempo of quarter note = c. 40. It could be heard as a heavily-textured lament that moves ominously from long melodies in the French horn—reminiscent of the opening of Schuman’s *Prayer in a Time of War* (1943) and *Night Journey* (1947)—to similar long solo lines in the oboe, violins, and trumpet. Schuman slowly increases the tempo and intensity, constantly providing markings such as *molto espressivo* (very expressive) or *cantabile con fuoco* (songlike but with fire) as new *accelerandi* are inserted. There is also a gradually increasing textural complexity, involving intricate rhythmic figures in the various instrumental choirs intersecting with opposing rhythmic motives. Schuman eventually pushes the tempo to the very rapid pace of quarter note = c. 160 before returning to the original slow *tempo primo*, increasing the intensity at the end of the movement by writing an angular timpani solo underpinned by an ominous snare drum roll concluding on a triple *forte* chord in the woodwinds, brass, and double bass.

The first movement moves without pause into the second movement, *Largo* (quarter note = c. 54). This movement liberally uses melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic elements of the slow third movement of Schuman’s remarkable *Fourth String Quartet* of 1950. In addition to verbatim replication of the beginning of the quartet movement, Schuman juxtaposes long melodic lines against occasional skittish and angular accompanying figures that appear in both works. The aural intensity of the original quartet movement is also ingrained in the symphony’s second movement and then multiplied by a factor of ten with the addition of a strong and insistent brass presence. Chromatic harmonies develop a strong aura of dissonance throughout. The remarkable level of complex harmonic and rhythmic textures heard in the first movement continues apace here. And throughout the movement, one can perceive Schuman’s transformation of the melody of the final

chorus in his 1953 opera, *The Mighty Casey*: “Oh, somewhere in this favored land,” a lament unto itself.

Far from being a traditional slow middle movement, this section of the symphony bristles with juxtapositions of tempi and moods, moving from hushed triple *piano* passages accompanied by the piquant sounds of glockenspiel, harps, and piano to triple *forte* brass figures interspersed with *cantabile forte* lines in trombones and tuba, all to very great dramatic effect. Schuman continues to provide complex and highly dense instrumental relationships marked *sonoro molto*, which create a rich and intricate musical tapestry of enormous imagination. Finally he brings this masterly movement to a close by slowing the tempo yet maintaining the overall intensity by concluding with a triple *forte* chord in the entire orchestra.

The third and final movement begins as a *Presto* at the rapid tempo of half note = c. 144. Once again, Schuman takes inspiration from his *Fourth String Quartet*: he uses the exact pitches and rhythm of the beginning of the Quartet’s fourth movement, marked *agilmente*, in the opening of the symphony’s third movement. A new playfulness emerges, with an engaging interplay of woodwinds and strings in rapid-fire passages. Schuman separates the instrumental choirs early in the movement, allowing them each short solo passages. His extraordinary skills as an orchestrator appear, particularly when he creates an intriguing interplay of glockenspiel, xylophone, vibraphone, and piano against *pizzicato* strings in tetrachords. A playful duo between bass clarinet and bassoon, supported by only sustained octave Ds in the double bass, continues to lighten the mood and also presents rapid-fire meter changes. After the somber and darkly-textured first two movements, this final movement displays a more animated, sunnier quality, although the complex, intertwining instrumental lines appear as earlier in the work, creating an aural density of considerable heft. With an insistent driving force in the strings, complemented by similar figures in the winds and brass, the symphony nears its conclusion with chords presented in rhythmic unison throughout the orchestra

and a final battery of percussion playing over a sustained chord in the entire orchestra, ending with a clangorous triple *forte*.

Night Journey: Choreographic Poem for Fifteen Instruments

Schuman’s compositional career was deeply influenced by his work with two of the most prominent choreographers of the day: Antony Tudor and Martha Graham. Through composing music for these two giants of the dance world his music became more complex, intense, and emotionally charged, compositional traits that would endure throughout his life.

Schuman collaborated with Tudor in the creation of *Undertow* (1945), then with Graham in a total of four ballets: *Night Journey* (1947), *Judith* (1950), *Voyage for a Theater* (1953), and *The Witch of Endor* (1965). Of the four Graham/Schuman ballets, *Night Journey* had the greatest success and is staged periodically to this day. Schuman first met Graham in 1947 when he was introduced to her by the well-known actress Katharine Cornell. He was overwhelmed by her strong personality and recalled Graham saying, “Mr. Schuman, your music *moves* me.” At which point Schuman recalled, “It was so intense that I wanted to run from the hall and scream, ‘Mama!’” He continued, “I was influenced tonally by her aesthetic, if not necessarily consciously . . . The subject matter of these works is so Graham-ish . . . the dark side and the fast side is very prominent.”

Commissioned by the Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge Foundation, the story of *Night Journey* is based on the Oedipus myth but from the point of view of Jocasta “at that instant when she recognized her dual destiny as mother and lover,” according to Schuman. It was premiered on 3rd May, 1947, in Cambridge, Massachusetts, during a symposium on music criticism hosted by Harvard University.

The original version of *Night Journey* was adapted by Schuman in 1981 for small ensemble and entitled *Night Journey: Choreographic Poem for Fifteen Instruments*. The later version is about seven to eight



William Schuman (photo by Carl Mydans)

minutes shorter than the original, owing to the deletion of certain repeats and bridge sections required for the staged version of the ballet.

Night Journey is introspective, pensive, jagged, and dissonant. It begins with static chords in the lower strings and an extended solo horn melody. The ensuing piano figure sets a new and unsettled mood, and the dissonant motive, in rhythmic unison, is heightened by the eerie *sul ponticello* (on the bridge) figure in the strings.

The glacial tempo of quarter note = 48–52 sets the context for the introduction of the principal melodic motive, which is presented by the oboe and reintroduced frequently. A *furioso* section begins with the jagged piano figure heard earlier, extending for several

measures until an *accelerando molto* occurs in a rhythmically strident section, presenting first strings, and then piano and winds, arriving at the exceedingly fast tempo of quarter note = 184.

Soon a variant of Schuman “flourishes” (bursts of sixteenth notes irregularly interrupted by sixteenth rests) appears, involving rapidly ascending figures. The violins and violas then introduce a passionate melody with large expressive intervals — a hallmark of Schuman’s later melodic writing. In this section, Schuman writes triplet figures that eventually become sextuplets in a written *accelerando* — another typical Schumanesque compositional signature — adding even more tension to the music.

As the piece progresses the musical context becomes increasingly violent, with a distinctive dissonance in which the tonality is purposely ambiguous. In a typical gesture, Schuman juxtaposes the wind choir against the strings. The work comes to a quiet conclusion. The tonality remains ambiguous: the sustained D in the piano and the basses with the horn on an F-natural imply D minor, while the upper voices keep the tonal center unclear.

The intertwining melodic lines in this fifteen-instrument version have a clarity and focus not found in the original orchestration, and they create an astringency appropriate to the somber story line of the original Martha Graham ballet.

Variations on “America”

During the dedication of the Aeolian Skinner organ in Lincoln Center’s Philharmonic Hall on 15th December, 1962, the well-known virtuoso E. Power Biggs performed Charles Ives’s 1891 *Variations on “America”*. Schuman had never heard the work before. Excitedly turning to the person sitting beside him, composer Henry Cowell, he announced that the composition was perfectly suited for an orchestral arrangement. Cowell agreed. The next day Schuman asked his publisher about getting the rights to arrange the work but was told that, judging from past

experience, permission would be difficult to realize: he had to obtain the authorization of Ives's artistic executor — who turned out to be none other than Henry Cowell.

Schuman's seven-minute arrangement, commissioned by Broadcast Music, Inc., for its twentieth anniversary, has been an audience favorite ever since its première by the New York Philharmonic, Andre Kostelanetz conducting, on 20th May, 1964. Its popularity clearly stems from the familiarity of the theme and Ives's playful permutations on it. Schuman changed nothing in the original, simply adding prominent percussion parts throughout.

The initial stentorian statement of a variant of the theme followed by the ludicrous four horns soli played with bells in the air sets the stage for a raucous romp, but soon Schuman arrives at a very reverent statement of the theme, showing it appropriate respect before eventually turning it on its head. The ensuing five variations, separated by interludes and *meno mosso* sections, run the stylistic gamut, from contrapuntal accompaniments to Spanish-style castanet and tambourine flourishes to solo trumpet *obbligati* straight

from the nineteenth-century cornet solos of Herbert L. Clarke.

The arrangement engages listeners because Schuman's faster tempos and individual instrumental voices have greater clarity and color than does the organ version. Schuman said:

I took all the liberties that a transcriber must take to make the thing come out, plus the fun of [seeing] if you could do it without changing anything, and I did . . . I tried to orchestrate it in a manner that I thought might have appealed to him [Ives] . . . you can't say that it's typical Ives . . . but I think it's interesting because it shows where he was heading: that whole bitonal section . . . it shows his original mind at work.

Joseph W. Polisi

Joseph W. Polisi is currently the sixth president of The Juilliard School. Excerpts from his most recent book, *American Muse: The Life and Times of William Schuman*, appear in these notes.

Seattle Symphony



Photo courtesy of Yuen Lui Studio

Seattle Symphony, founded in 1903, has been under the artistic leadership of Music Director Gerard Schwarz since 1985. In 1998, the Orchestra began performing in the acoustically superb Benaroya Hall in downtown Seattle. The Symphony is internationally recognized for its adventurous programming of contemporary works, its devotion to the classics, and its extensive recording history. Seattle Symphony has made more than 125 recordings, garnered 12 Grammy nominations and received two Emmy Awards. From September through July, the Symphony is heard live by more than 315,000 people. For more information on Seattle Symphony, visit www.seattlesymphony.org.

Gerard Schwarz

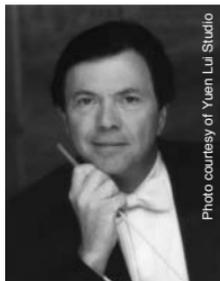


Photo courtesy of Yuen Lui Studio

One of the leading conductors of his generation, Gerard Schwarz has a vast repertoire that includes a major commitment to American music. Schwarz has been Music Director of the Seattle Symphony since 1985, and also serves as Music Director of the Eastern Music Festival. Previously, he has been Music Director of New York's Mostly Mozart Festival, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra and New York Chamber Symphony, as well as Artistic Advisor to Tokyu Bunkamura with the Tokyo Philharmonic. Schwarz's considerable discography of some 260 releases showcases his collaborations with some of the world's greatest orchestras, including The Philadelphia Orchestra, The Czech Philharmonic, The London Symphony, Berlin Radio Symphony, Orchestra National de France, Tokyo Philharmonic, Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, New York Chamber Symphony and the Seattle Symphony, among others. Born to Viennese parents, Schwarz has served on the National Council on the Arts. He has received two Emmy Awards, 13 Grammy

nominations, six ASCAP Awards, and numerous *Stereo Review* and *Ovation* awards. In addition, 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, including from his alma mater, The Juilliard School. In 2002, the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers honored Schwarz with its Concert Music Award, and, in 2003, the Pacific Northwest Branch of the National Academy of Recording Arts & Sciences gave Schwarz its first "IMPACT" lifetime achievement award.

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Zartouhi Dombourian-Eby

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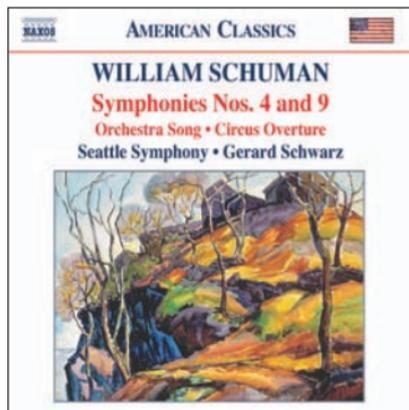
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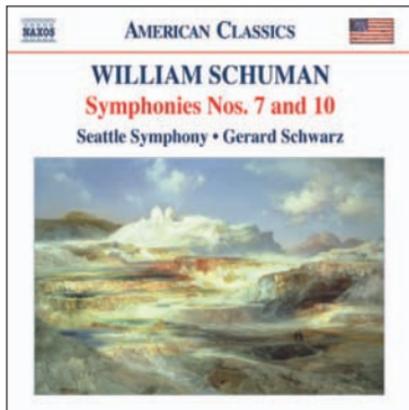
Kimberly Russ
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*The revolving members
of the string section are
listed alphabetically.*

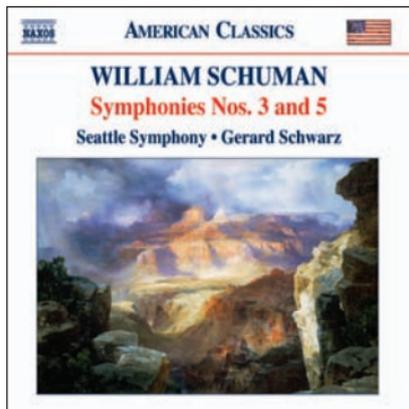
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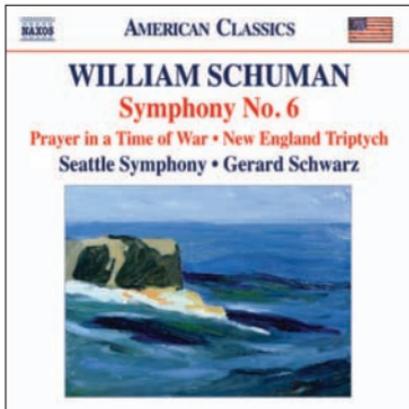
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Playing
Time:
65:04

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William
SCHUMAN
(1910-1992)

Symphony No. 8 (1962)

- | | |
|---|--------------|
| 1 I. Lento sostenuto –
Pressante vigoroso – Lento | 11:09 |
| 2 II. Largo – Tempi più mosso – Largo | 11:49 |
| 3 III. Presto – Prestissimo | 9:30 |
| 4 Night Journey (1947) | 25:28 |
| 5 Charles Ives, arr. Schuman: Variations
on 'America' (1891/1964) | 7:08 |



Seattle Symphony
Gerard Schwarz

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Naxos's acclaimed series of William Schuman's symphonies concludes with his powerful and at times playful *Eighth Symphony*, in which the great American composer takes full advantage of the diverse instrumental colors available from a very large orchestra, including two harps, piano, and batteries of brass, wind and percussion instruments. The introspective *Night Journey* is based on Schuman's score for Martha Graham's ballet about Jocasta's tragic destiny as both mother and wife of Oedipus, while his arrangement of Ives's popular *Variations on 'America'*, again rich in percussion, combines reverence and exuberance.

**This disc is the fifth and final
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