

# WILLIAM SCHUMAN



## CREENDUM

Concerto for Piano  
and Orchestra

Symphony No. 4

Albany Symphony Orchestra  
David Alan Miller, conductor

John McCabe, piano

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## WILLIAM SCHUMAN

The recipient of two Pulitzer Prizes, the first New York Critics' Circle Award and two Guggenheim fellowships, William Howard Schuman was born in 1910 in Manhattan, where he lived and worked most of his life. He came from, in his own words, a "completely bourgeois atmosphere and background" — his family's range of musical appreciation rarely strayed from a player-piano rendition of the *William Tell Overture* and Sunday-evening singalongs. He endured violin lessons in grade school, but baseball was his true boyhood passion.

By the time he was a teenager, however, a fascination and facility with music more and more asserted itself. He organized a dance band — Billy Schuman and His Alamo Society Orchestra — in which he sang and played (badly, he would later confess) the violin and banjo. Barely able to notate a melody properly, he nonetheless provided arrangements for the group and also started writing reams of pop songs. But with practicality the byword of his upbringing, he eventually enrolled in New York University's School of Commerce.

A life-altering event occurred when one evening, less than willingly, he went with his sister to a Carnegie Hall performance. At 19, he

had never been to a classical concert before. The sheer sonic power of the experience transformed him, apparently overnight, from a full-time business student and occasional Tin Pan Alley tunesmith into an aspiring composer of serious music.

By the time of his death in 1992, the 81-year-old Schuman had composed — beyond the 150 or so pop songs of his dance-band days — ten symphonies and other large-scale orchestral works, choral and vocal pieces, band pieces and fanfares, four string quartets and assorted chamber works, as well as five ballets and *The Mighty Casey*, his only opera, a whimsical one but well-befitting a man who had once been so in love with baseball.

His status as one of America's top composers — in a league with Aaron Copland and Roy Harris — endured throughout his long career. Yet within that creative expanse, the period from 1941 to 1956 stands out as especially productive, bookended by his breakout *Symphony No. 3* and the popular *New England Triptych*. It is from that period that the three works on this disc are drawn.

Together they offer a trove of distinctive Schuman trademarks: vigorous rhythmic statements; the alternation or overlapping of power-

"Finale" breaks in with a recurring scherzo-like motif, a succession of contrasting musical ideas and, at last, a reworking of the "Declaration" material and its urgent rhythms.

*Credendum* was premiered by the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, Thor Johnson conducting, on 4 November 1955, in a special concert honoring the Fifth National Conference of the United States National Commission for UNESCO.

### *Concerto for Piano and Orchestra*

Derived from an unperformed version Schuman fashioned in 1938-39, and following the classic three-movement, fast-slow-fast concerto format, this work was originally called Concerto for Piano and Small Orchestra. Scored for solo piano and a chamber-like ensemble of one flute, one oboe, one clarinet, two horns, two trumpets, one trombone, plus strings, it is spartan beside the imposing violin concerto of 1947 and the 1973 *Concerto on Old English Rounds* for viola, orchestra and female chorus. Yet as lean as it is, it pulsates with drive and vibrancy.

Its biting energy is most evident in the outer movements. The first builds on a terse, syncopated idea announced at the top by the piano in cut time; the third begins with a nimble piano

ostinato or repetitive figure, leading to a four-voice fugal cadenza (Schuman had a fondness for counterpoint) and ending with a brief running motif in the solo, pierced by slashing chords from the rest of the ensemble.

But it is the introspective middle movement that is especially persuasive. There is a decidedly urban feel to the long, languorous melody carried by the flute and violins, an aching metropolitan plaintiveness. (One also catches that same big-city ache in the "Lonely Town" *pas de deux* from the musical *On the Town*, written a year later by Schuman's friend and champion, Leonard Bernstein.) It is as unmistakably American as the echo of wide-open prairies associated with Harris and Copland. Technically, the movement may not be jazz or the blues, but these lie at its heart and at the heart of the entire little work. It exists in an altogether other universe from the sweeping concertos of Brahms, Grieg and Tchaikovsky.

Which may clarify why one disgruntled listener, in Manhattan's Town Hall on 13 January 1943, demanded that Daniel Saidenberg — who had just led the Saidenberg Little Symphony and pianist Rosalyn Tureck in the premiere performance — explain himself. "You conduct modern music," the young woman said. "Why?" At this

Schuman had even revised the end of the second movement based on the senior composer's comments.

But then, that had been four decades prior: the symphony was premiered by the Cleveland Orchestra under Artur Rodzinski (to whom it was dedicated) on 22 January 1942 — a few scant weeks after the attack on Pearl Harbor. In light of that shattering occurrence and the many other events that would fill the lives of both men over the years, such forgetfulness on Copland's part was understandable.

### **John McCabe, pianist**

Born in Liverpool, England, and having studied at Manchester University, the Royal Manchester College of Music and Munich's Hochschule für Musik, John McCabe distinguishes himself not only as one of England's finest keyboard artists but as a composer in his own right. As a soloist, he is esteemed as a connoisseur of classical sensibilities (his 12-CD recording of the complete Haydn piano sonatas was hailed as "one of the great recorded monuments of the keyboard repertoire"); he has also championed the contemporary, soloing in works by composers as diverse as Elliot Carter, Aaron Copland and John Corigliano, among others.

In his own eclectic compositions he has wielded such modern idioms as serialism and minimalism, evoked the medieval world in his ballet *Edward II* and summoned up the enchanting realms of C.S. Lewis in his children's opera *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. His output consists additionally of symphonies, various other orchestral pieces and abundant chamber, vocal and keyboard music, highly regarded around the world.

Appointed Commander of the Order of the British Empire in 1983 for his services to British music, John McCabe has written monographs on Rachmaninov, Bartók and Haydn, and his biography of the British composer Alan Rawsthorne was published in 1999. His own music is published by Novello and Company.

### **David Alan Miller, conductor**

David Alan Miller has established a reputation as one of the leading American conductors of his generation. Frequently in demand as a guest conductor, he has worked with many of America's major orchestras, developing especially close relationships with the Minnesota Orchestra and the Chicago and Detroit symphonies. He has also conducted the orchestras of Philadelphia, New York, Los Angeles, San

*This recording is dedicated to the memory of Audrey Kaufmann, long-time officer and Board member of the Albany Symphony Orchestra. The ASO's historic mission of performing music by living American composers did not happen easily. From her position of leadership on the Board, Audrey gently coaxed those lovers of Mozart, Haydn and Beethoven into realizing the value of performing music by Americans; especially in a place like Albany, with its small unknown orchestra. William Schuman; educator, administrator, visionary, creator, was a composer whose music Audrey especially admired. To the life of this remarkable woman, who was so important to classical music in Albany and beyond, we dedicate this recording.*

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