

**LORIN MAAZEL**  
**Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra**

**New World Records 80348**

**William Schuman: Symphony No. 7**  
**Leonardo Balada: Steel Symphony**

**William Schuman: Symphony No. 7**

Some of us are old enough and lucky enough to remember the "discovery" of William Schuman. It was not a single great event, but a series of them that took place over a period of about five years--from 1939 to 1944, say--an exciting time when the musical world was looking for new composers, not running away from them. He was a young New Yorker, born in 1910, whose earliest musical interests and activities, like those of many talented but unschooled young people then and now, were at first confined to current popular music. In 1930, after having been taken, almost against his will, to his first concert of symphonic music, he redirected his life. He heard Toscanini and the New York Philharmonic play a program of music by Wagner, Kodaly, and Robert Schumann, decided that this was a musical world he wanted to enter, and immediately set out to do so.

Schuman became a real composer very quickly--almost suddenly. By 1937 he had written his Symphony No. 2, which Aaron Copland brought to the attention of Serge Koussevitzky, then the conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Koussevitzky and the orchestra played the symphony in February 1939, which is when I first met Schuman. What seized our attention, and held it tight, in his early pieces is still there: the creative vigor with which they are conceived and the tremendous energy they contain and let loose on the listener.

Some years later, Koussevitzky made a place for me on the orchestra staff, and in the early 1950s I organized the joint observance, with the Serge Koussevitzky Music Foundation in the Library of Congress, of the orchestra's seventy-fifth anniversary season. Together we commissioned works from fourteen composers in Europe and the Americas who were historically allied with the two organizations. William Schuman's Symphony No. 7 was one of them, and on October 21, 1960, Charles Munch, who had succeeded Koussevitzky as the orchestra's music director, conducted its first performance.

In the summer of 1960, the composer gave me my first look at the symphony. Although in the time since the commission we had spent many hours talking about what the piece might turn out to be, I knew only that it was a four-movement symphony; nothing about its expressive character, which is not for the composer to tell, but for the listener to hear. Turning the pages of the new score, I saw his typical "choral" writing for orchestra. No matter how full the sound, no matter how active the music, how thick the apparent texture, only rarely did more than two musical elements come into play at one time. Each element was invested with an orchestral color that belonged to it for a time, and was more likely to change all at once than gradually. For me these are the most characteristic stylistic elements in his orchestral works and the ones that most clearly give his audiences the impression of a powerfully declarative, declamatory music.

The forceful opening music may be heard making its way through the entire first movement, with a considerable amount of variation. Soon there is new music in the low strings. Winds are added

progressively until the climactic return of the opening idea, which becomes the accompaniment to the fantasy-duet for clarinet and bass clarinet that is the movement's final section. The next movement follows without pause; it is free in meter and fierce in sound, but the writing is essentially very simple, with the interval of the seventh as a kind of motto, which, with the second and the ninth, will provide the typical dissonances. The music is in constant forward motion and is nonrepetitive and nonsymmetrical, avoiding (or disguising) recapitulation in favor of constant development.

After a brief pause, there are a slow, richly textured string movement--in which one again senses large and small dissonant intervals inverting, expanding, and contracting to give the melodic writing its character--and a finale, *scherzando*, "joking." Three elements come into play simultaneously, and then a great coda, with much percussion, brings the symphony to a grand close in the key of E-flat.  
—Leonard Burkat

Leonard Burkat *was Artistic Administrator of the Boston Symphony Orchestra and Vice President of the CBS/Columbia Records Group.*

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### **Leonardo Balada: Steel Symphony**

"I like to get familiar with whatever is native or traditional about any place," says Leonardo Balada, who was born in Barcelona on September 22, 1933, and has lived in the United States since 1956. Spanish and North American folk cultures loom large in his music--as witness his recent operas *Zapata!* and *Christopher Columbus*. (Most of Balada's works, including those for instruments only, seem to be based on human speech or song.) But shortly after joining the faculty of Pittsburgh's Carnegie-Mellon University in 1970, Balada became fascinated with another sort of folk *melos*: the sounds of the American industrial workplace.

Balada gathered his raw material for the *Steel Symphony* on visits to Pittsburgh's steel mills, then developed scoring and symphonic form that would, in his words, "reflect on the sonorities of the steel foundries in a sophisticated way...The symphony was not meant to be programmatic--it doesn't represent this or that. I wrote down some notation or orchestral ideas that were suggested by the sounds in the mills, and then I composed the whole symphony freely. It became a poetic interpretation of the sounds.

"At that time," Balada says, "I was in a period of composition that had begun in 1966, with my orchestral piece *Guernica*. I was exploring the possibilities of tone clusters and multiple rhythms, for dramatic purposes." And the *Steel Symphony* is indeed grand drama, served up with both awe and affection: one expects Wagnerian thunderclaps, and they are here, but so are an assortment of honks, clicks, rattles, and rumbles, some punctuating sections of the work, others piling up in a quasi-minimalist collage of ostinato figures. "Polyrhythms are something I heard in Spain long before minimalism was invented," Balada recalls. "Years ago, I was in my car and I heard polyrhythmic music on the radio, and I thought somebody had recorded a flamenco concert. It turned out to be a piece by Philip Glass." The immediate source of multiple rhythms for this work, he points out, was the steel mills themselves.

Even at aleatory points in the score--during which individual players may choose at random which pitch to play, or the conductor may repeat certain bars at will---Balada retains firm control of his sonic effects. These issue from a formidable battery of forty-eight percussion instruments (including automobile brake drums, garbage-can lid, thunder sheet, siren, and "a big piece of wood"); from strings played with Bartokian flat tone, glissando, collegno, or snap pizzicato; from brass blown with flutter-tonguing, or lipless for a wind effect; from a piano played or plucked in tone clusters.

The symphony begins almost imperceptibly amid the customary orchestral tune-up around a unison A, and returns to the same A at the close. The composer even gives the orchestra the option (never yet taken in performance) of starting to tune immediately for the next piece on the program: like the work of the mills that once ran twenty-four hours a day, 365 days a year, this piece has no beginning or end.

Finally, it is rhythm that holds all this open-ended, partly improvised music together. The throb of carefully tended machinery underlies much of the piece. The sections of the orchestra play off each other in a way that recalls the cooperative interlocking of skilled work crews. And in the symphony's peroration, the timpani hammer out the "heartbeat" rhythm in an unabashed tribute to the symbiosis of human and machine.

Donald Johanos conducted the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra in the work's premiere on January 12, 1973.

—David Wright

David Wright is a music journalist whose articles and program notes appear in *The New Grove Dictionary of American Music*, *The Metropolitan Opera Encyclopedia*, and in program magazines across the country.

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*Cuatriis* (wind version). Barcelona Conjunto Cameristico. Serenus 12064.

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Lorin Maazel

Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra

Producer: Robert Woods

Recording engineer: Jack Renner

William Schuman:

Symphony No. 7

(publ. Merion Music, Inc.)

1- Largo Assai (12:38)

2- Vigoroso (2:59)

(movements I and II played without pause)

3- Cantabile intensamente (8:02)

4- Scherzando brioso (6:05)

(movements III and IV played without pause)

Leonardo Balada:

5- Steel Symphony

(publ. Belwin-Mills Publishing Corp.)

**This recording was made possible with grants from the President's Discretionary Fund of Carnegie-Mellon University, the Pittsburgh Symphony Society, Francis Goelet, and the National Endowment for the Arts.**

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