

STEPHEN PAULUS
Concerto for Violin and Orchestra

New World Records 80363

Stephen Paulus, born in Summit, New Jersey, in 1949, earned his bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees at the University of Minnesota under such teachers as Paul Felter and Dominick Argento. He is a co-founder of the highly successful Minnesota Composers Forum, established to promote support of composers and performances of their works. Now composer in residence with the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, Paulus has held similar positions with the Minnesota Orchestra, The Tanglewood Festival, and the Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival. His Violin Concerto won recognition in the Kennedy Center Friedheim Awards in 1988. He has received fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts, as well as commissions from numerous musical organizations, including the Fromm Music Foundation and the Berkshire Music Center.

Important among his works are his three operas; they have had successful premieres and, perhaps even more heartening, subsequent productions by other companies. Each was commissioned by the Opera Theatre of Saint Louis, whose general director, Richard Gaddes, was impressed by Paulus' cantata *The North Shore*, and engaged him to compose the one-act opera *The Village Singer* in 1979. Its success led to commissions for a two-act opera, *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, based on the novel by James M. Cain, and *The Woodlanders*, a three-act work inspired by Thomas Hardy's novel. In September 1983, *Postman* became the first American opera ever presented at the Edinburgh Festival.

Stephen Paulus' musical style is melodic and highly rhythmic. He tends to work in traditional forms, and his music is accessible to listeners possessing a wide range of tastes. He is a methodical composer and works on one project at a time, seeing each piece through to completion before beginning the next.

Concertante was commissioned by the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra through Meet the Composer, which sponsors Paulus' residency. Completed on March 29, 1989, the work is dedicated to the orchestra's music director, Yoel Levi, who conducted the first performance. Paulus has incorporated numerous solo passages written with particular Atlanta principals in mind.

As its title implies, the work is chiefly concerned with contrasts between solo instruments, small groups of players, and the full orchestra. Although, as the composer notes, its form and juxtaposition of ideas are "quite freewheeling," the work falls into three clearly defined sections: a rapid opening marked to be played "quietly, with intensity," a contrasting slow section for strings alone, offering dialogue between a *concertino* group of eight soloists and the massed strings, and a conclusion that gathers speed while recalling earlier ideas and building to a climax, interrupted by an outburst of percussion before the close.

The Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, through its American Music Project, commissioned the Concerto for Violin and Orchestra while Paulus was still affiliated with the Minnesota Orchestra. Dedicated to violinist William Preucil (then concertmaster of the Atlanta Symphony), the concerto was completed on September 9, 1987, and introduced in Atlanta two months later. Paulus had already worked with Preucil at the Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival in 1986, where Preucil performed the premiere of the composer's Partite for Violin and Piano.

The concerto is in three discrete movements, beginning with a brash *Allegro con fuoco* that is by turns assertive, frenetic, and lyrical. The middle movement's *moderato* central section borrows a theme from the first movement and treats it in a slower, more playful manner. The finale, *Allegro di bravura*,

emphasizes spirited and brilliant solo work. Mined with virtuosic difficulties in the Paganinian manner, it also contains a brief central interlude in a more idyllic mood.

The Symphony for Strings was commissioned by the Oregon Bach Festival, with funding assistance from Security Pacific Bank of Oregon. The festival presented the premiere in Eugene, Oregon, during the summer of 1989, conducted by music director Helmuth Rilling. While Paulus had already composed several works for full orchestra, this was his first composition for strings alone. The first movement, *Moderato*, begins wistfully and gives an overall impression of restlessness. Next is an *Allegro vivo* crafted of ostinatos and repeated-note figures, with a little waltz at its heart. *Misterioso* is the marking of the third movement, and the music merits its performance direction, "In a haunting fashion." The concluding *Presto* is just the sort of cheery rondo that Haydn or Prokofiev might have given to such a work, and makes cyclic reference to the motive that opened the first movement.

—Nick Jones

Nick Jones is Program Annotator of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra.

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Yoel Levi, music director of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra since 1988, has appeared as guest conductor throughout the United States and Europe with, among others, the Berlin Philharmonic, the New York Philharmonic, the orchestras of Boston, Chicago, and Philadelphia, and the major orchestras of London and Paris. In 1978 he won First Prize in the Conductors' International Competition in Besancon, France. Levi was resident conductor of the Cleveland Orchestra for six years, and has recorded with the Atlanta Symphony and the Cleveland Orchestra on the Telarc label.

Robert Shaw, music director emeritus of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra since 1988, served for 21 years as the orchestra's music director. Also principal guest conductor of the San Diego Symphony, he is active as a guest conductor of major orchestras and leads frequent workshops in the United States and abroad. He formed the Collegiate Chorale and the famed Robert Shaw Chorale, and for ten years was associate conductor of the Cleveland Orchestra under George Szell. His honors include eight

Grammy awards, four ASCAP Awards for service to contemporary music, and the first Guggenheim Fellowship ever awarded to a conductor.

William Preucil is first violinist of the Cleveland Quartet and lives in Rochester, New York, where the quartet members are artists in residence at the Eastman School of Music. He was concertmaster of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra for seven years, having previously held similar positions with the Nashville and Utah symphonies. A prizewinner at national and international competitions, Preucil has appeared as a soloist and recitalist across the United States and Europe and has performed at numerous chamber music festivals, including those of Seattle, Santa Fe and Sarasota.

The Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, which began as a youth orchestra in 1945, has grown into one of the nation's major symphony orchestras. In 1988, the orchestra made a highly successful European tour, performing in East and West Germany, Switzerland, France, and England. Its recordings, on the Telarc, Vox, Pro Arte, and New World labels, have drawn international praise and have won eleven Grammy awards, including Best Orchestral Recording in 1989 for a recording of works by Ned Rorem on New World (80353). The orchestra's broadcasts include a national radio series and annual Christmas telecasts on the Public Broadcasting System.

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Stephen Paulus

Concerto for Violin and Orchestra

1- I. Allegro con fuoco (31:14)

2- II. Cantabile (11:11)

3- III. Allegro di bravura (8:46)

William Preucil, violin

Robert Shaw, conductor

4- Concertante (10:33)

Yoel Levi, conductor

Symphony for Strings

5- I. Moderato (5:24)

6- II. Allegro vivo (4:39)

7- III. Misterioso (6:40)

8- IV. Presto (4:29)

Yoel Levi, conductor
Atlanta Symphony Orchestra

Producer: Robert Woods

Engineer: Jack Renner

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Symphony for Strings recorded December 12, 1989.

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