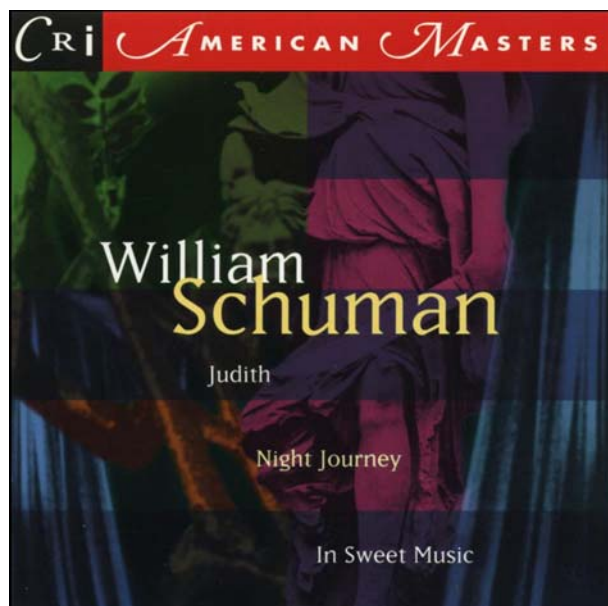


William Schuman



1. *Judith* (1949) (23:41)
Choreographic Poem for Orchestra (Written for Martha Graham); Eastman Philharmonia, David Effron, conductor
2. *Night Journey* (1947) (21:28)
Choreographic Poem for 15 instruments (Written for Martha Graham); Endymion Ensemble, Jon Goldberg, conductor
3. *In Sweet Music* (1978) (24:54)
Serenada on a setting of Shakespeare for flute, viola, voice and harp; Rosalind Rees, soprano; Orpheus Trio: Paula Robison, flute; Scott Nickrenz, viola; Heidi Lehwalder, harp

Total playing time: 70:16

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Notes

William Schuman (1910–1992) is remembered today chiefly for his concert scores, which include ten excellent symphonies and several concertos and overtures. But throughout his life he maintained a keen interest in music for theater and dance, and the present disc brings together three works with origins in stage music: the ballet *Judith* (1950), one of the composer's most acclaimed scores; *Night Journey* (1947), composed for the dance but heard here in the composer's concert version of 1981; and *In Sweet Music*, which grew from Schuman's own incidental music for a 1944 production of Shakespeare's *Henry VIII*. The first two works were created for Martha Graham, whom Schuman once called "the preeminent seminal force in the development of American modern dance." The third brings together the multifarious strands of Schuman's outlook, in a taut, focused chamber work that must count among the best Shakespearean settings by an American.

Born in New York in 1910, Schuman spent his youth writing popular songs and performing in jazz bands, and in general not paying much heed to "serious music." Nevertheless in April 1930 he attended a concert of Toscanini conducting the New York Philharmonic in music of Wagner, Kodály, and Schumann, and the experience electrified him. Thereafter he began seeking formal training in music, first at the Malkin Conservatory and at Columbia University Teachers College, then from 1936 at the Juilliard School, where he was a student of Roy Harris. In 1938, Schuman's Second Symphony won a composition contest, and Aaron Copland (who was on the jury) was so impressed with the work that he brought it to the attention of conductor Serge Koussevitzky, at that time the most powerful advocate of new music in America.

Clearly, there was something in this music—the synthesis, perhaps, of vernacular and cultivated styles—that struck a nerve in the American psyche. During the 1940s Koussevitzky championed many of Schuman's works on his Boston

Symphony concerts, including the Second and Third Symphonies, the *American Festival Overture* and the *New England Triptych*. Schuman won nearly every conceivable award, grant, and prize available in music, including two Guggenheims, membership in the National Institute of Arts and Letters (1946), the Horblit Award (1980), and two Pulitzer prizes (1943 and 1985). In addition to his musical stature, he exerted a potent influence on American music throughout his long life—first, as the Juilliard School's director (1945–62, the period in which the school took on its international renown) and then as director of Lincoln Center during its initial years. At one point the *New York Times* wrote that Schuman was "probably the most powerful figure in the world of art music."

In the 1940s Schuman found himself inspired, like many musicians of his generation, by the innovations of Martha Graham (1894–1991), whose restless experimentalism demanded the continual creation of new scores. "What can so easily be overlooked," the composer wrote, "is the enormous contribution she made through her insistence upon specially composed music for each of her creations." He pointed out that a list of the composers who wrote for her was like a Who's Who of American music of the era.

In 1949 the Louisville Orchestra commissioned Graham to create a solo piece, and permitted her to choose the composer. She selected Schuman, who completed *Judith* in August 1949 for a premiere on January 4, 1950 in Louisville, with Robert Whitney conducting. Graham danced in front of a translucent scrim that hid the orchestra, which was seated onstage. The work's success was so vigorous that the event was later credited with having saved the struggling Louisville Orchestra, which during the ensuing decades would grow into a bellwether for the performance of new orchestral music.

Graham's striking "choreographic poem" (as the collaborators called both it and the earlier *Night Journey*) was based on a

story from the Biblical Apocrypha, in which the heroic Israelite widow Judith frees her people by defeating (and beheading) the Assyrian despot Holofernes, who had deprived the Israelites of food and water. Longing to defeat this symbol of death and male power, Judith cries out to God: "Give into mine hand the power I have conceived.... Break down their stateliness by the hand of a woman." Appearing at Holofernes's tent, Judith makes off with the fellow's head. That the tale is imbued with deep social and psychological ramifications is attested by the many depictions of its image in Western art—that of Judith holding the tyrant's severed head by the hair. "The story has its foundations in some ancient fertility rite or ritual of re-birth," Graham wrote, "in which the woman casts off the garments of mourning... symbolic of her isolation, and puts on her garments of gladness . . . symbolic of her femininity, thereby defeating the enemy... Death."

Schuman's score is a vivid representation of the tale, yet at the same time it maintains a symphonic coherence through its division into five clearly demarcated sections. The initial Adagio, mournful and potently dramatic, depicts the Israelites in downtrodden state; a scherzo-like *Moderato con moto* follows, representing Judith's self-preparation and her journey to the tent of Holofernes. She dwells in the tyrant's camp for three days (*Tranquillo*) before she is called in to see Holofernes's extravagant imbibing—to the accompaniment of a *Presto* of thrilling dynamism. The concluding Andante presents the stately, triumphant heroine. "Behold the head of Holofernes," she says. "The Lord has smitten him by the hand of a woman.... I will sing unto the Lord a new song."

Judith was not Graham's first collaboration with Schuman. Three years before, the two had created *Night Journey* for performance in Cambridge, Massachusetts, on May 3, 1947. It became a staple of the Graham repertoire. Based on the Oedipus myth, this version lends the tale a spin all its own. It is not Oedipus but Jocasta who is the protagonist," writes Schuman. "The action turns upon that instant of Jocasta's death when she relives her destiny, sees with double insight the triumphal entry of Oedipus, their meeting, courtship, marriage, their years of intimacy which were darkly crossed by the blind seer, Tiresias, until at last the truth burst from him."

A quarter-century later, Schuman created a concert score of *Night Journey* for the Endymion Ensemble, which performed the new version in Albany, New York, on February 27, 1981, under the baton of Jon Goldberg, and shortly afterward at

Carnegie Recital Hall. The concert score—which contains only small alterations of the original—divides itself into coherently delineated segments, beginning with a gentle introduction and followed by music that is alternately furious, mysterious, and bacchanalian.

In 1978 the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center commissioned Schuman to write a chamber work for its 1978–79 season. The result, *In Sweet Music: Serenade on a Setting of Shakespeare*, also took an earlier work as a point of departure—this time the deliciously lyrical Shakespearean song from Schuman's 1944 incidental music for *Henry VIII*. But this new work bore little resemblance to its model; it was a marvelous new creation. *In Sweet Music* received its first performance on October 19, 1978, with Jan DeGaetani, soprano, Paula Robison, Flute, Walter Trampler, viola, and Osian Ellis, harp.

After briefly intoning the song's title ("In sweet music"), the soprano falls silent; the full text to the song is not heard until the end of the piece. Significantly, however, Schuman prints the lyric below the alto flute line, "to enable the flutist to perform the melody with the clarity of a singer's projection." The work is cast into three sections, A-B-A, with the flute's initial "text-declamation" balanced by the soprano's final presentation of the whole song, accompanied by an instrumental fabric of rich color and delicacy. In the central section, mounting instrumental virtuosity is employed to create a dazzling climax, bolstered by the soprano's intoning of wordless melodic fragments.

—Paul J. Horsley

In Sweet Music

William Shakespeare

Orpheus with his lute made trees,
And the mountain tops that freeze,
Bow themselves, when he did sing:
To his music plants and flowers
Ever sprung; as sun and showers
There had made a lasting spring.
Everything that heard him play,
Even the billows of the sea,
Hung their heads, and then lay by.
In sweet music is such art,
Killing care and grief of heart
Fall sleep, or hearing, die.

Production Notes

Digitally remastered by Joseph R. Dalton and Robert Wolff, engineer, at Sony Music Studios, NYC.

From CRI SD 439:

In Sweet Music: Recorded in 1980 by David Hancock.

Produced by Carter Harman.

This original recording was made possible in part by the New York State Council on the Arts, a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Alice M. Ditson Fund of Columbia University.

From CRI SD 500:

Judith: Recorded by Ros Ritchie, Rochester, October 1983.

Produced by Rayburn Wright and John Santuccio.

Night Journey: Recorded in 1981 by David Hancock.

Produced by Carter Harman.

Original recording of CRI SD 500 was made possible in part by a grant from the Eastman School of Music of the University of Rochester.

Publishing: *In Sweet Music* and *Night Journey*: Merion Music (BMI); *Judith*: G. Schirmer (ASCAP).

CRI Production Manager: Allison Wolf

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Executive Director: Joseph R. Dalton

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