

## **ROSALIND REES sings WILLIAM SCHUMAN**

Notes by Gregg Smith

Much has been made of WILLIAM SCHUMAN's dual role as composer and administrator. He is President Emeritus of both the Juilliard School, where he was president from 1945 to 1962, and Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts (1962 to 1969). Through those busy years he also managed to produce more than 70 works, large and small, in a wide variety of media. Since 1969 he has continued to compose at an impressive rate, completing three large orchestral works, two concertos, a choral cantata and other music, including the three works in this album.

Schuman's creative career supports my thesis that the best orchestral composers are equally strong writers for the voice. Until lately most of his vocal writing has been for chorus — one of his first professional positions was director of the chorus at Sarah Lawrence College — and one of his early rewards as composer was a prize for the charming *Choral Etude*. Schuman was the first composer to win a Pulitzer Prize, and I have always been pleased that it was for a choral work, his cantata, *A Free Song*.

But while Schuman often returned to the choral medium (he wrote the great Carols of Death in 1958), he did not write very much for the solo voice. That his capabilities are just as strong there as in the choral and orchestral media may be heard in his delightful baseball opera, *The Mighty Casey*. It is sad to think that he didn't use Casey as a stepping stone to other full-scale operatic endeavors (he once owned the rights to Theodore Dreiser's *An American Tragedy*, but unfortunately he abandoned the project).

Why is it that we had to wait so long for solo songs? Texts were no doubt a major problem. Every master composer with whom I have worked — Schuman, Carter, Krenek, Stravinsky— has been acutely discerning about poetry, and such discernment inevitably narrows the choice of poetry for song texts. Perhaps what Schuman calls his “rediscovery” of Archibald MacLeish is a factor in his recent attention to the solo voice. Perhaps, too, the arrival on the scene of specialists in contemporary song such as Jan DeGaetani and Rosalind Rees has been an inspiration.

With the advent of these three large-scale solo vocal works, an important dimension has been added, not only to Schuman's output, but also to the 20th century American vocal legacy. At 70, Schuman seems at the height of his creative powers, and these vocal works are as powerful, moving and challenging as anything he has written.

### **IN SWEET MUSIC**

**Serenade 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)**

IN SWEET MUSIC uses the voice as an instrument, on a par with the flute, viola and harp; in fact, there are no words at all between the opening phrase and the final three minutes of the work (Schuman notes that “the suggested sounds for singing the textless music reflect the composer's concept of the most appropriate phonetics for conveying the spirit of the music”).

The structure of the piece is basically A B A' with the A sections built almost entirely on the “Orpheus” song which Schuman wrote as incidental music for Henry VIII in 1944. The song is first stated by the alto flute and then by the voice. In the contrasting middle section comes that Schuman trademark: pulsating rhythmic passages that burst with energy and brilliance. A third section returns to the stately

and lyrical mood and tempo of the first, and finally the “Orpheus” song is presented in its entirety, but here enmeshed in intricate contrapuntal lines rather than the simple triadic harmonies of the original. The work was commissioned by the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center and first performed on October 29, 1978 at Lincoln Center by Jan DeGaetani with Paula Robison, flute; Walter Trampler, viola; and Osian Ellis, harp.

## 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 asleep, or hearing, die.

## **THE YOUNG DEAD SOLDIERS**

**Lamentation for soprano, French horn,  
eight woodwinds and nine strings**

**Poem by Archibald MacLeish**

**Rosalind Rees, soprano; Robin Graham, French horn;**

**White Mountains Festival Orchestra; Gerard Schwarz, conductor**

THE YOUNG DEAD SOLDIERS, commissioned by the National Symphony for the U.S. Bicentennial celebration, is a lamentation of 15 minutes duration. Slowly and inexorably, the music soars to one climax after another, with little change of mood. Its style is the essence of Schuman's writing: thick, acerbic harmonic structures, almost atonal or polytonal, yet resolving continually in a tonal manner. Coupled with that is a vocal lyricism which is always deeply expressive. Schuman writes:

“In my search for texts suitable for the Bicentennial, I became reacquainted with many favorite American authors and explored much unfamiliar material. Time and again I returned to the riches of Archibald MacLeish. In setting words so complete within themselves, a composer cannot hope to enhance but rather to bring that special unspoken meaning which alone is the province Particular to music.

“The Lamentation begins with a wordless introduction, a vocalese by the soprano, followed in imitation by the French horn. The setting is then ushered in by the ensemble sounding a sustained chord, a harmony characteristic of the whole piece.”

Rosalind Rees premiered the work with Edwin C. Thayer, horn, and the National Symphony under Antal Dorati on April 6, 1976.

## **TIME TO THE OLD**

### **Three Song Set on Words of Archibald MacLeish**

#### **1. The Old Gray Couple**

#### **2. Conway Burying Ground**

#### **3. Dozing on the Lawn**

Schuman calls *TIME TO THE OLD* a three song set, but it has the quality of one long song, reinforced by the fact that each movement segues into the next without pause. Although the long vocal lines make tremendous demands on the singer, and the pianist must color his notes with many varying shades, there are no fireworks, no attempts at virtuoso display. The first song begins almost atonally with the opening vocal melody “behaving” as a 12-tone row. That row not only closes the first song, but is used again in the second. The generic title, *TIME TO THE OLD*, was chosen by MacLeish himself.

Schuman wrote this cycle for Rees, who gave it its premiere performance with Thomas Muraco in New York on May 19, 1980.

ROSALIND REES is typical of the new breed of singers that is distinguished by its versatility. She has had long years of choral activity with the Gregg Smith Singers (she is Mrs. Gregg Smith). Her solo career has included numerous performances of Medieval and Renaissance music, oratorio, contemporary opera and, of course, contemporary song. She has given first performances of many works by William Schuman, Elliott Carter, Jack Beeson, Ned Rorem, Gregg Smith and a host of others. She has appeared with the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, Brooklyn Philharmonia, Detroit, Boston and National Symphonies in the U.S., and in Europe she has made solo broadcasts for Westdeutscher Rundfunk, Kbin, Nederlandse Christelijke Radio Vereniging, Belgische Radio en Televisie, Sudwestdeutscher Rundfunk, Baden-Baden, ORTF in Paris, and BBC in London. Rosalind Rees' solo recording credits number more than 20 albums including two complete disks of her own, 20th Century Music for Voice and Guitar (Vox-Turnabout) and the present album.

Like many of today's chamber ensembles, the ORPHEUS TRIO is made up of outstanding virtuosi — an inimitable flutist, an indefatigable violist and a brilliant harpist. PAULA ROBISON, flutist, is a charter member of the prestigious Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center and has been a regular participant in the Spoleto and Marlboro Festivals. Her Vanguard recordings have won critics' accolades and her recital series in New York are regularly sold out. Each season she tours this country and abroad, performing in recital and with orchestras. SCOTT NICKRENZ, violist, has concertized extensively on four continents. Long associated with chamber music, he was a founder of the Lenox Quartet and the Vermeer Quartet and was also a member of the Claremont Quartet. He is Director of Chamber Music at the Brooklyn Academy of Music and is on the faculty of the New England Conservatory of Music. HEIDI LEHWALDER, harpist, has appeared as soloist with many orchestras including the New York Philharmonic, Cleveland Orchestra, National Symphony and Seattle Symphony, and is a guest at festivals such as Marlboro and Spoleto. She frequently performs the world premieres of works for harp and has received many honors, notably the Concert Artists Grant of the Ford Foundation and the Avery Fisher Prize.

The WHITE MOUNTAINS FESTIVAL ORCHESTRA was formed in 1973 by the White Mountains Center for the Arts. Dennis Russell Davies was appointed music director in 1977. In 1979, GERARD SCHWARZ succeeded him, and the season was expanded. In 1980 the Festival moved to the Mt. Washington Hotel at Bretton Woods, New Hampshire. Schwarz, already famous as a brilliant trumpet player, recently became music director of the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, New York's "Y" Chamber Symphony, and the Waterloo Village and White Mountains Festivals. He has been a teacher, notably at the Aspen Music Festival, and also guest conductor of many important orchestras and ensembles. ROBIN GRAHAM, principal horn of the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, Pasadena Symphony Orchestra and the Aspen Chamber Symphony, was appointed principal horn of the Houston Symphony at age 20. She has performed with the Los Angeles Philharmonic and New York Philharmonic, and with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center. THOMAS MURACO has specialized in coaching and accompanying singers and instrumentalists. Among the artists with whom he has collaborated are Adele Addison, Phyllis Curtin, Martina Arroyo, Jennie Tourel, Zara Nelsova, Maureen Forrester, Robert Mann, Ransom Wilson and the American String Quartet. He teaches at the Philadelphia College of the Performing Arts, the Aspen Music Festival and the Cleveland Institute of Music.

Orchestra members participating in this recording:

Allan Vogel - oboe  
Claudia Coonce - oboe  
Vicky Bodner - english horn  
David Singer - clarinet  
Shannon Scott - clarinet  
Laura Flax - bass clarinet  
John Steinmetz - bassoon  
Charles Nussbaum - bassoon  
Janet Hill - viola  
Stephanie Fricker - viola  
Francie Martin - viola  
Dorothy Zeavin - viola  
Andre Emelianoff - cello  
David Calhoun - cello  
Margaret Moores - cello  
Donna Robbins - cello  
Richard Fredrickson - bass

This recording employed hand-made ribbon microphones in pairs, spaced six feet apart, in the best available acoustical environment. Their output was fed to a 30 IPS Studer A-80 tape recorder, slightly modified for constant velocity record-playback characteristics. In this way the need for conventional (and troublesome) noise reduction devices was eliminated.

This project is supported in part by public funds from the New York State Council on the Arts and a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts in Washington, D.C., a Federal agency. Additional support is provided by the Alice M. Ditson Fund of Columbia University.

*(original liner notes from CRI LP jacket)*