

Composers of Great Band Works

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William Howard Schuman (1910 - 1992)

Lifeline

- born in New York City (August 4), the youngest of two children (sister, Audrey).
- received a few years of violin lessons in grade school, but did not enjoy practicing.
- because of his academic abilities, was sent to a public junior high for gifted students.
- attended summer camp in Maine, where he began writing musical shows and songs.
- in high school, organized a successful jazz band known as “Billy Schuman and his Alamo Society Orchestra.”
- at age 17, enrolled in business studies at New York University.
- at age 19, attended his first orchestral concert – the next day he enrolled in private harmony lessons and decided to leave the university in order to pursue a career in music.
- began collegiate studies at the Juilliard School at age 21 and later studied in Europe at Salzburg’s Mozarteum.
- at age 24, received a bachelor’s degree in music education at Columbia Teacher’s College.
- accepted a music teaching position at Sarah Lawrence College (Bronxville, NY) the same year.
- married at age 25 (Frances Prince).
- at age 25, his First Symphony was premiered
- completed his master’s degree at Columbia University at age 26.
- at age 27, his Second Symphony won a contest judged by Aaron Copland, who became an advocate and lifelong friend.
- wrote his first piece for band (*Newsreel*) at age 31.
- when 32, first child Anthony William was born.
- won the first Pulitzer Prize ever awarded for music at age 33.
- at age 35, became director of the Juilliard School of Music, initiating changes that promoted it to premiere status.
- when 38, daughter Andrea Frances was born.
- wrote *New England Triptych* for orchestra at age 45, later transcribing each movement for band (*Be Glad Then, America; When Jesus Wept; Chester Overture*).
- at age 51, he left Juilliard to assume leadership of the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts.
- retired from the Lincoln Center after suffering a mild heart attack at age 57.
- was actively composing new works until his death at age 81.
- died (February 22) of heart failure after hip surgery in a Manhattan hospital.



Anecdotes and Trivia

- both parents (Samuel and Rachel) were of German descent.
- was named after President William Howard Taft; but known as “Bill” to family.
- as a youth, his passion was baseball, not music.
- showed an early interest in drama, writing and producing his own play in junior high school.
- learned to play string bass in high school, also experimenting with piano and saxophone.
- bought a clarinet at a pawn shop and sterilized the reeds by boiling them in coffee “to give them a better flavor.”
- was known for being aggressive, with a reputation as a “wild boy” and a practical joker.
- in college, created his own party society, the UMPPAA (“United Musical Poker Players’ Association of America”).



Works for Band

Newsreel, In Five Shots – 1941

George Washington Bridge – 1950

The Band Song – 1953

Chester Overture – 1956

When Jesus Wept – 1958

Variations on “America” (Ives) – 1968

Dedication Fanfare – 1968

Be Glad Then, America – 1975

Sources

William Schuman by Flora Rheta Schreiber and Vincent Persichetti (1954); *William Schuman: Documentary* by Christopher Rouse (1980); *William Schuman: A Bio-Bibliography* by K. Gary Adams (1998)