



# AMERICAN CLASSICS



## DAVID DIAMOND

### **Symphony No. 6**

**Rounds for String Orchestra • Romeo and Juliet**

**Indiana University Chamber Orchestra**

**Indiana University Philharmonic Orchestra • Arthur Fagen**



## David Diamond (1915–2005)

### Symphony No. 6 • Rounds for String Orchestra • Music for Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet

David Diamond (1915–2005) was held in the highest esteem by his colleagues in American music. At the age of 19 he won a composition competition judged by George Gershwin. The work that won, *Sinfonietta*, prompted Gershwin to approach the younger composer and ask, "Hey, kid, where did you learn to orchestrate like that?" His music was embraced by conductors as well, with regular premieres and performances occurring under the batons of Leopold Stokowski, Serge Koussevitzky, George Szell, Eugene Ormandy, Dimitri Mitropoulos, and Leonard Bernstein.

But his popularity with the general listening public has never really caught up with the regard in which he was held by his fellow musicians. His staunchly tonal writing kept him out of the avant-garde, where he could have been found by aficionados, but he was overshadowed in his own milieu by the likes of Bernstein and Aaron Copland.

And it is a shame that audiences have been slower to embrace Diamond than they have other composers, for his music is directed at the listening majority. Of serialist and twelve-tone composers, Diamond said that he "hated all that avant-garde stuff. It was all wrong. They don't write out of love." Instead, he wrote music that was direct in its emotional output and meant to appeal to an untrained musical audience: truly populist music. Audiences in the 1940s generally received it well, but by the 1950s Diamond and his music had largely fallen out of favor, a position from which his music has never fully recovered.

Diamond blamed his fall into obscurity, at least partially, on public attitudes towards his open homosexuality – and that certainly played some part. But equally likely reasons include his embrace of a seemingly old-fashioned style and his notoriously difficult personality. A possibly apocryphal but nevertheless illustrative story has Diamond being dismissed from a rehearsal of his *Second Symphony* by the music director of the New York Philharmonic, retiring to the Russian Tea Room to get drunk, and then punching the

aforementioned director in the nose when he dared to enter the room after the rehearsal.

Nevertheless, Diamond has found champions in modern conductors such as Gerard Schwarz [Naxos 8.559155-57: *Symphonies Nos. 1–4 and 8*], and listeners have had numerous opportunities to become more familiar with his work. The present recording presents three of Diamond's compositions from the height of his popularity: *Rounds for String Orchestra* (1944), *Romeo and Juliet* (1947), and the *Sixth Symphony* (1951–54). These were pieces composed in the waning years of the Second World War and the immediate aftermath when populism was in high demand. As such, these are exceptionally approachable works. But that should not be confused with "simple," as they display the structural complexity that Diamond was so deft at deploying.

*Rounds for String Orchestra*, written in 1944, was a response to Dimitri Mitropoulos's cry for something uplifting. "These are distressing times," the conductor told Diamond, "most of the difficult music I play is distressing. Make me happy." The result is a short work for string orchestra that has proven to be the composer's most enduringly popular piece. It was performed extensively by other American composers, but was a particular favorite of Aaron Copland. "He would conduct my *Rounds* a great deal because he seemed to find that there was something very much like what he would like," Diamond said of Copland. "He used to say, 'Oh, I wish I had written that piece. It really works for the audience very well.'"

What likely appealed to Copland was the simple economy of means deployed in the work. It begins, precisely as its title indicates, as a round for string orchestra. Diamond said of his work, "The different string choirs enter in strict canonic fashion as an introduction to the main subject, which is played by the violas and soon restated by the cellos and basses." Syncopation provides energy to the movement, and the timbre of the string orchestra affords a sort of dry astringency to the proceedings.

A lyrical slow movement follows the first without interruption. It is nearly impossible to avoid a comparison between this *Adagio* and Samuel Barber's *Adagio for Strings*. Diamond's movement has some of the latter's yearning, but it is hardly as plaintive as its more famous counterpart. Performers must be careful to avoid imbuing the movement with too much pathos, lest it become saccharine and overwrought.

This is followed (again, without interruption) by the third movement, which Diamond explained as making "use of characteristic canonic devices, though it may be more specifically analyzed as a kind of fugal countersubject for the principal thematic ideas, so helping to 'round' out the entire work and unify the entire formal structure." In the work, Diamond further plays on the title by adding what he called a "spherical" symmetry. For him, the key that "rounded" everything out was the rhythmic figures of the first movement returning in the third as a countersubject.

Three years later Diamond composed a concert suite based on William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. This five-movement work might be more accurately thought of as a tone poem, even if that is not how the composer himself described it.

*Music for Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet* is Diamond's attempt to convey "the innate beauty and pathos of Shakespeare's great drama," within a limited orchestral scope. It is far more restrained than the 20th century's other great *Romeo and Juliet* by Sergey Prokofiev, composed nearly a decade earlier. There is no set form in the work which lends credence to the description of it as a tone poem.

What the work is *not*, however, is incidental music. A 1951 Broadway production of the play directed by Peter Glenville asked Diamond if it could use his suite for its music. "When I got to rehearsal," Diamond wrote, "they started talking about chopping up the long, sustained movements I had written, and I said, 'Nothing doing.' If it's agreeable to you, I'd prefer to write a whole new score." Thus, the suite remains as a purely orchestral work.

It was in the same year that Diamond was working with Glenville's production of *Romeo and Juliet* that he began work on his *Sixth Symphony*. The symphony would not be premiered until 1957, when Charles Munch led the Boston Symphony Orchestra in the work. Early reviews were acerbic. Winthrop Sargeant, writing in *The New Yorker* about a performance a few weeks later, said that the symphony "which was given its New York premiere in Carnegie Hall ... is, I think, possibly the worst composition of its type by a composer of any pretensions to have been heard here since the Philharmonic performed Carlos Chávez's *Third*, about a year ago, and I can only attribute the flutter of polite and tepid hand-clapping that greeted it to the apathy of an audience that has ceased to make the effort required to distinguish good music from bad."

What seems to have set Sargeant off is what he perceived as a disregard for music of the past. "I can only conclude that Mr. Diamond either is ignorant of the tradition or is perversely and fashionably bent on writing as if it didn't exist." Strange words to hear applied to Diamond, especially in the context of this symphony, which relies heavily on traditional techniques. Written in three movements, the symphony is cyclical: material in the second and third movements is derived from that found in the first. This is a technique that is found everywhere in the work of 19th-century Romantic composers and continued to have an impact well into the 20th century.

The second movement of the symphony alternates between the slow and fast themes while the third movement uses those materials to create an introduction, passacaglia, and fugue. Certainly, Diamond shows a connection to the long tradition of classical music, and this symphony is a rewarding listening experience, regardless of what Sargeant had to say.

Robert Lintott

### Indiana University Chamber Orchestra



Photo courtesy of Indiana University  
Jacobs School of Music

Designed for the performance of smaller scale orchestral repertoire, the Indiana University Chamber Orchestra averages approximately 35 members. The ensemble has performed under conductors such as Marzio Conti, David Efron, Arthur Fagen, Jeffrey Meyer, David Neely, Christof Perick, Uriel Segal, and Carl St.Clair, among others. The orchestra performs annually with a premier choral ensemble of the Jacobs School, such as NOTUS: Contemporary Vocal Ensemble or the University Singers.

### Indiana University Philharmonic Orchestra



Photo courtesy of Indiana University  
Jacobs School of Music

The premier orchestra of the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music has performed at Carnegie Hall and at the opening of the Bastille Opera House in Paris, among other notable venues. Averaging 95 members, the ensemble has appeared under Leonard Bernstein, James DePreist, David Efron, Arthur Fagen, Stefan Lano, Kurt Masur, Gerard Schwarz, Robert Shaw, Stanislaw Skrowaczewski, Leonard Slatkin, Michael Stern, Franz Welser-Möst, Thomas Wilkins, Xian Zhang, Gerhardt Zimmermann, and many other distinguished conductors.

## Arthur Fagen



Photo courtesy of Indiana University  
Jacobs School of Music

Arthur Fagen has been professor of orchestral conducting at the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music since 2008 and music director of the Atlanta Opera since 2010. He has conducted at the world's most prestigious opera houses and music festivals, and, from 1998 to 2001, he was guest conductor at the Vienna State Opera. On the concert podium, he has appeared with numerous internationally known orchestras. He has served as principal conductor in Kassel and Brunswick, chief conductor of the Vlaamse Opera, music director of the Queens Symphony Orchestra, and a member of the conducting staff at Lyric Opera of Chicago. From 2002 to 2007, he was music director of the Dortmund Philharmonic Orchestra and the Dortmund Opera. Fagen has made recordings for BMG, Bayerischer Rundfunk, SFB, and WDR Cologne. He records regularly for Naxos, for which he has completed a cycle of the Martinů *Symphonies* [8.553348, 8.553349, 8.553350]. His Naxos recording of Martinů's *Piano Concertos Nos. 3 and 5* with Giorgio Koukl [8.572206] was awarded an Editor's Choice award in the March 2010 issue of *Gramophone* magazine.

David  
**DIAMOND**  
(1915–2005)

**Rounds for String Orchestra (1944) 15:31**

- 1** I. Allegro, molto vivace – 4:51
- 2** II. Adagio – 4:04
- 3** III. Allegro vigoroso 6:33

**Music for Shakespeare's  
Romeo and Juliet (1947) 22:34**

- 4** I. Overture 3:21
- 5** II. Balcony Scene 4:52
- 6** III. Romeo and Friar Laurence 3:38
- 7** IV. Juliet and Her Nurse 2:26
- 8** V. The Death of Romeo and Juliet 8:05

**Symphony No. 6 (1951–54)\* 27:16**

- 9** I. Introduzione: Adagio –  
Allegro, fortemente mosso 10:13
- 10** II. Adagio 8:51
- 11** III. Deciso; poco allegro 8:06

\*WORLD PREMIERE RECORDING

**Indiana University Chamber Orchestra** **1–8**

**Indiana University Philharmonic Orchestra** **9–11**

**Arthur Fagen**

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Producer and editor: Konrad Strauss  
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AMERICAN CLASSICS

The three works on this recording were composed at the height of David Diamond's popularity. *Rounds* is his most enduringly popular piece, whose simple economy of means prompted Aaron Copland to exclaim, "Oh, I wish I had written that piece." The concert suite *Romeo and Juliet* explores the "innate beauty and pathos" of Shakespeare's play. Taking its cue from the work of 19th-century Romantic composers, *Symphony No. 6* is cyclical, the second and third movements deriving from material found in the first.

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Playing  
Time:  
**65:38**