

Wuorinen: Eighth Symphony; Fourth Piano Concerto CD review – energy and rigour

3/5stars

Serkin/Boston SO/Levine
(Bridge)



Unrepentant modernist ... the composer Charles Wuorinen. Photograph: Pierre-Philippe Marcou/AFP/Getty Images

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First performed in 2007 by [James Levine](#) and the Boston Symphony, [Charles Wuorinen](#)'s Eighth is his most recent symphony to date. It carries the title Theologoumena, which apparently means “a private non-dogmatic theological opinion”, in this case a second-century attempt to reconcile ancient classical belief systems with Christian monotheism. The text suggested to Wuorinen a kind of symphonic progression, a fast-slow-fast structure in which each movement is dominated by a single type of material. It generates wiry, energetic music, sometimes densely contrapuntal, sometimes thinning out into a flamboyant instrumental solo, and all very much in the style of late [Schoenberg](#) and serial Stravinsky; Wuorinen has always been one of the most unrepentant of US modernists.

Two years earlier, the Fourth Piano Concerto had been a commission from Levine and the BSO, too – one of a number of pieces that Wuorinen has composed for [Peter Serkin](#). It's marginally more compact and a bit less prickly than the symphony, but it remains a formidably rigorous piece. As with the symphony, the recording is taken from the premiere, in which Serkin's playing is consummately authoritative.



The conductor James Levine. Photograph: Reuters