

Spirituals are spiritual. They are simple and profound, unique and recognizable. While national in origin, they echo man's soul everywhere. Their appeal is universal. They were the start of our jazz, and have spiced and seasoned our creative musical scene, both popular and symphonic. Spirituals are derived from both Negro and white sources, and these influences combine, like all folk expressions, to make an indigenous musical language.

It is the touching and human spirituality of spirituals that communicates to both the most sophisticated and the naïve listener. They have been born of work and play, of suffering and joy, of oppression and liberation. Listening to spirituals is not passive; it is rather an act of participation — a sense of communal expression. The words are invariably basic, and the music mirrors their inflection. Perhaps it is due to this inflection, which is so characteristic, that when one hears the musical phrases alone the matching words are immediately evoked.

— Morton Gould

# **GOULD FALL RIVER LEGEND BALLET SUITE**

# **SPIRITUALS Eastman-Rochester Orchestra HOWARD HANSON**



Lizzie Borden took an ax, according to the children's rhyme, and whacked her father and mother in August 1892. The sensational trial of the sedate "Miss Lizzie," age 33, drew attention far beyond the town limits of Fall River, MA. Despite heavy evidence against her, Borden was acquitted. In 1948, choreographer Agnes de Mille and composer Morton Gould collaborated on a balletic treatment of the tale, assuming Borden's guilt, probing her psychological motivations, and ending with her conviction and hanging.

The full ballet includes about 45 to 50 minutes of music and includes a few spoken lines; it consists of a prologue, seven scenes, and an epilogue. Gould took his inspiration from New England hymns and dance tunes, but each of his themes is original. The music is strongly if irregularly rhythmic and just dissonant enough to convey village exuberance and a troubled psyche. The opening orchestral shriek of anguish is as discordant as the score ever gets, though.

In 1952, Gould drew a suite of six pieces from the ballet, which strips out the pantomime and other purely dramatic sequences and presents only the pieces that can comfortably stand alone. It fuses the full ballet's two initial sections, Prologue and Waltzes, excising the short "Indictment" passage read by an actor. After the grim,

forceful Prologue, the Waltzes seem almost frantic; here Borden, known as The Accused, is remembering not entirely happy scenes from her childhood. Both the ballet and suite continue with Elegy, gentle music led primarily by woodwinds, with the strings taking over for a wistful waltz passage. The next 15 minutes of music with little independent interest -- Interlude, Dirge, Lullaby, Serenade, and "Axe" -- are omitted from the suite, which picks up with "Church Social," where a syncopated brass tune evolves into a gruff, repetitive treatment of a melodic fragment that could come from some old hymn. Most of this music is loud, outgoing, and roughly festive. "Hymnal Variations" are gentle elaborations on a brief, meandering chorale tune of Gould's own invention. "Cotillion" is a boisterous piece exploiting the full orchestra, with whooping horns and jittering, repetitive thematic kernels reminiscent of barn-dance music. The suite omits another chunk of pantomime-supporting sequences -- "Cotillion Coda," "Death Dance," "Mob Scene" -- and goes directly to the Epilogue, a funereal dirge with the strings playing a jagged figure over a lurching rhythm, with the Prologue's woodwind shrieks and brass snarls returning to bring the score full circle.

# Could Fall River Legend Spirituals

**Howard Hanson The Eastman-Rochester Orchestra**

## **Fall River Legend (Ballet Suite)**

- 1 Prologue And Waltzes 3:30
- 2 Elegy 2:55
- 3 Church Social 4:02
- 4 Hymnal Variations 3:57
- 5 Cotillion 3:31
- 6 Epilogue 2:39

## **Spirituals In Five Movements**

- 7 Proclamation 5:02
- 8 Sermon 3:43
- 9 A Little Bit Of Sin 1:55
- 10 Protest 3:08
- 11 Jubilee 3:39

Recorded by Mercury 1959 & 1960

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[admin@highdeftapetransfers.com](mailto:admin@highdeftapetransfers.com)  
or visit our website:  
[www.highdeftapetransfers.com](http://www.highdeftapetransfers.com)

