

PRESS COVERAGE EXCERPTS

The New York Times

MUSIC REVIEW | LUKAS FOSS

‘Red, White and Blue Celebration for an American Born in Berlin’

By Bernard Holland
Published June 30, 2007

Lukas Foss, who turns 85 in August, has in him a little of both the American dream and the American reality. He lived until 15 as a German in Berlin but has since been just about as American as an American can be. Mr. Foss was recognized at the Rose Theater at [Lincoln Center](#) on Thursday night.

Thursday’s event involved the [Brooklyn Philharmonic](#); a flutist, Carol Wincenc; a conductor, Mark Mangini; four singers; and two choruses.

This collection of pieces represented Mr. Foss in his pastoral mode. “The Prairie,” a kind of cantata based on Carl Sandburg’s poetry, was Mr. Foss’s introduction to wide celebrity. In 1944 he was newly a citizen, and the country was at war. The seven sections of “The Prairie” make their obeisances to Copland, a friend, colleague and

the inventor of an American style featuring hollow spacings of chords, modal melody and a variety of dance styles that exude simplicity but are anything but simple.

Mr. Foss’s Americanisms are gracefully handled, and his off-kilter rhythms have an originality and self-assurance about them.

Of the four vocal soloists, Gerard Powers offered a tenor that was especially clear and clean.

The chorus part brought together the Choral Society of the Hamptons and the Greenwich Village Singers.

The “Renaissance Concerto” for flute and orchestra, with the ever excellent Ms. Wincenc, takes its title more or less literally.

The Southampton Press

Foss Gets Glorious Tribute from Choral Society

by Fred Volkmer - July 11, 2007

This past Saturday ... East End music lovers were treated to the culmination of one of the most ambitious projects ever undertaken by the Choral Society of the Hamptons.

The showpiece of the evening was Mr. Foss’s monumental secular cantata, “The Prairie,” based on the poem of the same name by Carl Sandburg. The orchestra was, fittingly, a chamber ensemble from the Brooklyn Philharmonic, which Maestro Foss conducted for 20 years. The performance had previously been given at the Rose Hall of Lincoln Center on June 28.

“The Prairie” is the work that put Lukas Foss on the musical map. He arrived in the United States at the age of 15, having fled Hitler’s Germany, met Aaron Copland when he had been here for only a year, and began composing “The Prairie” at age 19.

The work was first performed by no less than Robert Shaw, probably the greatest American choral conductor, and his Collegiate Chorale. It received rave reviews...

But Mr. Mangini fell in love with it when he first sang it 30 years ago, and determined to make every effort to restore it to the choral repertoire. Hence, what has become known as “The Prairie Project,” and these two very significant performances.

I came away from the performance filled with admiration for my fellow singers, and profoundly stirred by what seemed the great story of the westward expansion, the immensity and emotional power of the great American landscape, and the yea-saying American spirit. Mr. Foss gives legitimacy to the language of Sandburg.

This was by every measure, a significant performance of what can only be classified as a major work, and one that clearly deserves to be returned to the repertoire. What a wonderful gift for—and from—a composer who has graced the local and the international stage for nearly 65 years.

These articles have been redacted as space would not permit printing them in their entirety.

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THE EAST HAMPTON STAR

Choral Society Rediscovered Masterpiece

by Daniel W. Koontz – July 03, 2007

Music lovers of the East End are about to be treated to a most exciting and ambitious concert, courtesy of our local stalwarts the Choral Society of the Hamptons and their music director, Mark Mangini. The concert, called “An American Awakening,” premiered last Thursday at the Rose Theater at Lincoln Center.

The Choral Society of the Hamptons is joined by the Greenwich Village Singers, the Brooklyn Philharmonic, and four fine vocal soloists, all under the baton of Mr. Mangini. These forces unite in a celebration of the music of Lukas Foss, a resident of Bridgehampton since 1988, featuring a rare performance of his early masterpiece “The Prairie.”

Mr. Foss started writing “The Prairie,” based on a Carl Sandburg poem, at the age of 19, and it premiered when he was 22. A massive undertaking at any age, the piece is scored for large chorus, solo soprano, alto, tenor, bass, and orchestra.

The first movement, “I Was Born on the Prairie,” is a tenor solo, sung with force and impeccable diction by Gerard Powers. It starts with a series of signature chords in the orchestra, and as the tenor begins to sing about the prairie, his tune is redolent of cowboy songs, establishing the American folk-song idiom that will return throughout the piece.

Soon, the mood changes as the words describe the formation of the land, and a busy pulse creeps in when the subject becomes the human forming of the “timber claims and cow pastures, the Corn Belt, the Cotton Belt, the cattle ranches.”

This pulse continues in the second movement, “Dust of Men,” as the chorus plays the part of the timeless land, singing in unison, “I am here when the cities are gone. I am here before the cities come,” while the orchestra plays an active fugue. Soon the choral singing becomes more fugal, and here the combined chorus prove themselves up to the challenge of Mr. Foss’s complex rhythms.

Folklike melodies return in the third movement, “They Are Mine,” which opens with the soprano soloist Elizabeth Farnum and the alto soloist Julia Spanja and the closest thing to a hoedown in Mr. Foss’s piece. The chorus follows with an exquisitely beautiful a cappella fugue on the words “I am the prairie, mother of men,” sounding so good that it brings tears.

The seventh and final movement, “Tomorrow,” takes the work to a stunning climax. The tenor soloist returns to remind us of the first movement, and the chorus sings the words “I speak of new cities and new people” to a leaping, unison line.

But at the words “yesterday is a wind gone down,” Mr. Foss works a thrilling change upon the music; where up until now there were wide melodic leaps and rhythmic complexity, here the music becomes suddenly scalar and smooth. This change marks the rest of the piece, which ends with the words “I am a brother of the corn huskers who say at sundown: Tomorrow is a day,” accompanied with the same signature chords that began the first movement.

Mr. Foss’s music transports the listener though its clear, focused energy. Where some composers might use bold gestures, orchestrational effects, or surprise to draw listeners in, Mr. Foss is a master of simplicity: Compelling musical ideas and an unerring sense of musical direction give his works an inevitability shorn of ornament.

Mr. Mangini leads this work with great assurance, and the performance throughout is tight and controlled. The soloists dig into their parts with bravado, at times seeming to want to move about the stage to better express the text. And the combined chorus is great as only 100 voices strong can be.

Dr. Koontz is a composer and performer with degrees from the Eastman School of Music and the State University at Stony Brook. His piece “Causerie” recently premiered at Merkin Concert Hall in New York City.

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