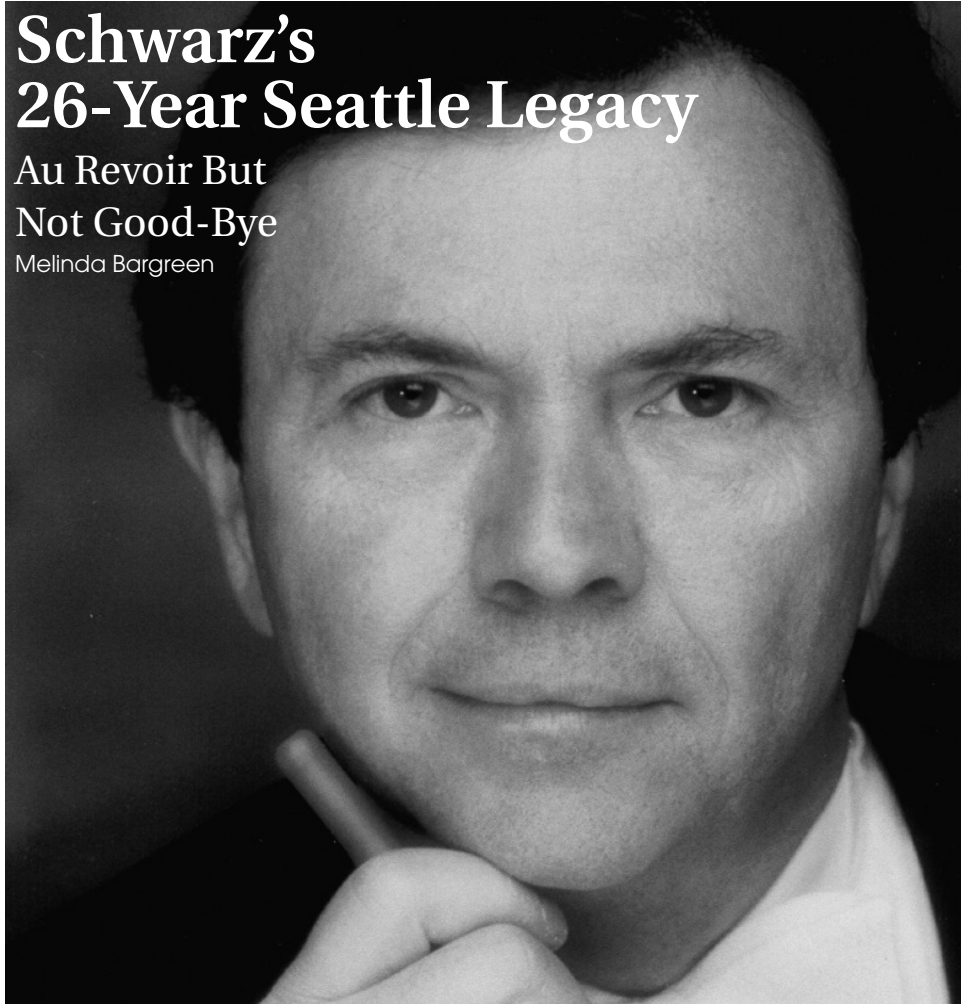


Schwarz's 26-Year Seattle Legacy

Au Revoir But
Not Good-Bye

Melinda Bargreen



They've named a block of a downtown Seattle thoroughfare "Gerard Schwarz Place". They've named Schwarz an honorary one-star general. Marvin Hamlisch has written and performed a witty song in Schwarz's honor; 18 top composers have written short works for him to premiere; the Seattle community has penned congratulations in several big "autograph books"; and the array of pre- and post-concert galas, parties, and other events would challenge the stamina of a marathoner.

What a coda to Gerard Schwarz's 26 years as Seattle Symphony music director! His long tenure, which officially concluded with a set of June concerts that included Mahler's Symphony No. 2 (*Resurrection*) along with a Philip Glass premiere, is all the more remarkable because no one ever expected Schwarz to stay in Seattle for more than a short sojourn.

28 Music in Concert

When he first came to Seattle as music advisor in 1983, Schwarz arrived to a shell-shocked orchestra and music community, following the death of the Seattle Symphony's Music Director Rainer Miedel from cancer. The orchestra and its finances were in disarray; the performance space (the former Seattle Opera House) was an acoustically diffuse barn of a hall that wasn't exactly conducive to a refined orchestral sound. Schwarz was hired to lead the orchestra during the search for Miedel's successor, but it became immediately clear to the orchestra and the community that the best successor just might be Schwarz himself.

"He'll never stay in Seattle!" was the mantra of knowledgeable observers on both coasts. After all, Schwarz was a New Yorker, originally a trumpet phenomenon who in 1972 became the New York Philharmonic's

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youngest co-principal trumpet at age 25, and who left the orchestra five years later to pursue a conducting career. And pursue it he did, with tremendous energy. At the time he came to Seattle, Schwarz was the director of six organizations: the Mostly Mozart Festival, the New York Chamber Symphony (originally the New York "Y" Symphony), the contemporary Music Today series, New Jersey's Waterloo Festival, the Eliot Feld Dance Company, and the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra.

Nobody expected Schwarz to spend much time in the Northwest corner of the country; nor did Schwarz himself. But gradually things changed. He married the former Jody Greitzer (daughter of New York Philharmonic principal violist Sol Greitzer), a flutist of considerable charm who became an immediate favorite in the Seattle music community. The couple settled into a condo overlooking the Seattle waterfront and the Pike Place Market, and in due course they welcomed two children, Gabriella, who now works for CNN, and Julian, now an increasingly busy solo cellist. (Schwarz also has two children, Alysandra Lal and Daniel Schwarz, from an earlier marriage.) Though Schwarz continued his globe-trotting ways (with music directorships as far afield as Liverpool and Tokyo), somehow the New Yorkers had become Seattleites.

Thanks to the trumpeter's earlier relationship with the Delos label, his new orchestra recorded a highly praised series of discs in that exciting new medium, the compact disc. More than 140 CDs on Delos and other labels were to follow, with 14 Grammy nominations and a lasting mark particularly in the repertoire of 20th Century symphonists (Hanson, Piston, Schuman, Diamond, and Hovhaness, among others).

It took many years for Schwarz to get his orchestra out of the old Opera House (increasingly gridlocked with concert dates by the Seattle Opera, Pacific Northwest Ballet, and visiting artists) and into a new concert hall. Schwarz's friends, philanthropists Jack and Becky Benaroya, launched that project with a \$15 million gift; the result, Benaroya Hall, opened in 1998 to national acclaim for its acoustics and amenities. The hall, along with the gradual advent of several gifted new players, allowed Schwarz to raise significantly the quality of the orchestra.

It wasn't all a consistent hymn of praise, however. Discord gradually grew between the music director and several players who objected initially to what they considered his high-handed hiring of John Cerminaro as principal horn, over objections of the players' selection committee. A group of increasingly vocal dissident musicians expressed displeasure later, when the board voted in 2006 to renew Schwarz's contract through 2011. One violinist

filed suit against the orchestra and music director (the suit was later dismissed, but not before drawing considerable attention in the *New York Times*). Two outspoken Schwarz loyalists in the orchestra reported vandalism incidents.

When Schwarz announced his decision to leave at the end of his contract in 2011, plans were set in motion for a blockbuster final season. Chief among the innovations was an unprecedented set of 18 short commissions by some of the country's finest composers, underscoring Schwarz's commitment to new American music: Augusta Read Thomas, Joseph Schwantner, Aaron Jay Kernis, Daron Hagen, Samuel Jones, David Stock, Bernard Rands, Gunther Schuller, Bright Sheng, Daniel Brewbaker, Ellen Taaffe Zwilich, Robert Beaser, Chen Yi, George Tsontakis, David Schiff, Richard Danielpour, Paul Schoenfield, and Philip Glass.

Many of these curtain-raisers, including the festive Zwilich work and the jazzy Schiff piece, used lots of brass as a tribute to this former trumpeter. The longer Samuel Jones work, *Reflections: Songs of Fathers and Daughters*, was an effective and evocative set of vignettes displaying Jones's imaginative harmonic structure and virtuoso scoring. The last of the commissions, Philip Glass's *Harmonium Mountain*, was in his familiar motive-oscillations minimalist style, breaking no ground but entertaining the audience well.

The finale's big piece, Mahler's *Resurrection Symphony*, demonstrated the feisty good health and the resounding brass section of the orchestra, as well as the conductor's ability to shape the score's smaller-scale, more intimate moments. Sustained and lengthy ovations before and after the program made it clear that the maestro had also connected powerfully with his audience.

People who worry about how the Seattle Symphony—which, like most orchestras today, is struggling with a deficit and the difficulty of fundraising in a tough economy—will fare in Schwarz's absence may be relieved to discover that he won't disappear entirely: he is staying on for several weeks each season as "conductor laureate". Also the artistic director of the Eastern Music Festival, Schwarz will devote his considerable energies to composition (he is currently working on a band piece for Cornell). He is also director-conductor of an educational TV-DVD series with an "All-Stars Orchestra" of the country's best players in great concert repertoire, in eight hour-long annual programs with many other enhancements. Don't look for any moss to grow on his baton.