



Living American

Timothy Schwarz is an acclaimed violinist known for his solid technique and considerable flair. Throughout his career, he has been dedicated to championing American composers, and his latest album, *The Living American*, continues this tradition.

CCM: What inspired you to record *The Living American*, and why did you choose to focus on contemporary American composers?

Timothy Schwarz: During the past five years there has been a substantial awakening among American composers, who are finding unique ways of addressing what defines music as American. But if you ask many musicians – including Americans – to name even one living American classical composer, you will often get a blank stare. This recording hopes to make people aware of the golden age I believe we are entering in classical American composition.

CCM: In your opinion, what are the defining characteristics of

American classical music, and how do these characteristics manifest themselves in the works of the composers featured on the album?

Timothy Schwarz: For decades, when people thought of composers that were “uniquely American” they immediately thought of George Gershwin or Aaron Copland. What I think is so appealing about these composers is the inability to clearly define their musical style. If there is one thing that holds all of the compositions on this CD together, it is that same inability to neatly define them. My original title for this album was “Un-Defining American Music,” and while I decided that title was too wordy, the basic concept is still in place.

CCM: Can you tell us more about the diverse styles and traditions that the composers draw from in their writing, and how they blend these styles to create something new and unique?

Timothy Schwarz: The three most obvious compositions that are drawing from vastly different musical traditions are *Darshan* by Reena Esmail, *Australian Sketches* by Denis Diblasio, and *C – Minor Jam* by Joseph Goodrich. *Darshan* uses Raag Charukeshi (an Indian tonal system) along with a highly improvised style of writing. *Australian Sketches* is essentially a large jazz ensemble represented by violin, piano, double bass and drum set, and *C – Minor Jam* somehow manages to combine Funk, Rock, and Broadway all in under five minutes using only the violin and the piano.

CCM: What was your process for selecting the works to include on the album, and how did you work with the composers to prepare for the recording?

Timothy Schwarz: I am very fortunate to have a strong professional relationship with Jennifer

Higdon, Avner Dorman, Joseph Goodrich, Steven Sametz, and Denis Diblasio, all of whom coached me in preparation for this recording. Some of these pieces were commissioned by me but had never been recorded, making them obvious choices. Unfortunately, there is a long list of excellent works I was not able to prepare because of time restraints; hopefully a second CD will be forthcoming in the near future.

CCM: *The Living American* includes works by three notable female composers. How important is it to you to champion the work of female composers, and how do you see the role of women in classical music evolving?

Timothy Schwarz: My own Aunt, who would be 100 if alive today, was unable to audition for the New York Philharmonic because of her gender, despite having a master degree in violin performance from the Juilliard School of Music. The struggles of notable female composers such as Clara Schumann, Fanny Mendelssohn and Rebecca Clarke are both heartbreaking and engaging. Despite centuries of obstacles, the recent outpouring of compositions includes many by female composers, which I strongly believe should be promoted and performed as much as possible.

CCM: Can you speak to the challenges and opportunities presented by performing contemporary classical music?

Timothy Schwarz: Many concert series get anxious when hearing the words “contemporary music,” especially when it comprises of the entire program. This is not unwarranted; for many years the music being written was so intellectually complex it was difficult to enjoy. By having a recording like *The Living American I* can let the music speak for itself, and hopefully change pre-conceived notions of what composers are actually writing today.

CCM: You have had a long and accomplished career as a violinist, chamber musician, and pedagogue. What have been some of the highlights of your career so far, and how have these experiences influenced your approach to music-making?

Timothy Schwarz: Between 1996 and 2001, I served as an Artistic Ambassador for the United States, which resulted in over 50 recitals ranging from private homes in Saudi Arabia and Pakistan to the Cairo Opera House in Egypt. More recently, I have been a Visiting Professor at universities in the United Kingdom, Greece, Colombia, and Brazil, which usually involves a combination of teaching and performing with university faculty and students. Performing in such diverse countries has exposed me to musical traditions far older than the Western Classical tradition I was raised in, effecting how I perform and teach the next generation.

CCM: As an avid educator, what advice do you have for aspiring musicians who are interested in

pursuing a career in classical music?

Timothy Schwarz: It is important to see the total picture of what makes a successful career. Musicians today need to do much more than just play their instrument well; they need to write contracts and grants, form non-profit organizations, promote their performances on social media, and even engineer and edit their own recordings. While this can sound overwhelming, it is also empowering; musicians today have the ability to control their own voice more than ever before.

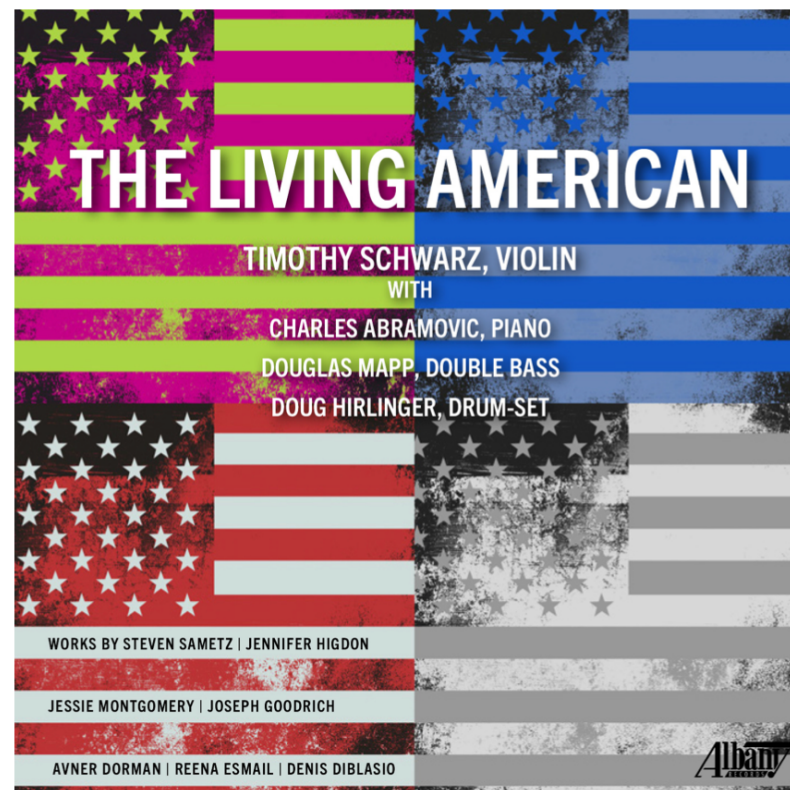
CCM: What projects do you have planned for the future, and what are you most looking forward to in the coming years?

Timothy Schwarz: The immediate future has another recording which is the culmination of a semester-long project at the London College of Music (LCM), where I am currently a Visiting Professor of Performance. Several dozen students and faculty submitted works for solo violin, all based on a chapter from *Book of Imaginary Beings* by Luis Borges. I was tasked with picking 10 of these works for a CD recording, and worked extensively with the composers as they finalized the compositions.

CCM: How do you hope *The Living American* will contribute to the ongoing conversation about American classical music and the work of contemporary composers?

Timothy Schwarz: Musicians are well aware their work is much more than dots on a page. Yes, this CD will continue the conversation about

classical music in America. But it will hopefully do much more than that. It will continue our much-needed discussion of what it means to be American at all. And, just maybe, when someone hears an instrumental composition without any words, from a culture that they know nothing about, it will reach a part of them that allows for words and dialogue to blossom. If even a small crack is opened in that way, this CD will have done what it was meant to do.



“The Living American” was released on Albany Records and may be purchased at albanymusic.com.