



AMERICAN CLASSICS



CONVERSE

The Mystic Trumpeter

Flivver Ten Million • Endymion's Narrative

Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra • JoAnn Falletta



Frederick Shepherd Converse (1871-1940)

The Mystic Trumpeter • Flivver Ten Million • Endymion's Narrative

Frederick Shepherd Converse was born on 5th January 1871 at Newton, MA, and died on 8th June 1940 at Westwood, MA. The youngest of seven children, he began lessons on the piano at the age of ten. His unusual talent was spotted very early on, in particular a gift for composition. In turn, he pursued advanced musical studies at Harvard, from which he graduated *summa cum laude*. He then tried his hand in business, although it was not long before his passion for music reforged the course of his life. Converse began serious study in composition with George W. Chadwick in Boston and followed with work under Joseph Rheinberger in Munich. In a relatively short time, his music began to attract considerable attention. In fact Converse's *The Pipe of Desire* of 1905 became the first American opera ever to be performed at the Metropolitan Opera in New York. Today he is best known for a small but hearty collection of orchestral tone poems, three of which are featured on this recording.

About *The Mystic Trumpeter* of 1904, Converse related that he recast Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* into five contrasting sections, omitting the fourth stanza. As a tone poem the music follows the new literary scheme in a sequence of five musical events without pause. The following has been excerpted from the poem:

1) Mystery and Peace (Moderato molto e tranquillo): *Hark, some wild trumpeter, some strange musician, hovering unseen in air, vibrates capricious tunes to-night. I hear thee trumpeter, listening alert I catch thy notes, now pouring, whirling like a tempest round me...thou freest, launchest me, floating and basking upon heaven's lake.*

2) Love (Poco più moto, amoroso): *Blow again trumpeter! and for thy theme, take now the enclosing theme of all, the solvent and the setting - Love, that is pulse of all, the sustenance and the pang, the heart of man and woman*

all for love, no other theme but love - knitting, enclosing, all-diffusing love.

3) War and Struggle (Allegro con molto fuoco): *Blow again trumpeter - conjure war's alarms. Swift to thy spell a shuddering hum like distant thunder rolls - Lo, where the arm'd men hasten - Lo, mid the clouds of dust the glint of bayonets, I see the grim-faced cannoneers, I mark the rosy flash amid the smoke, I hear the cracking of the guns;*

4) Humiliation (Adagio lamentoso): *O trumpeter, methinks I am myself the instrument thou playest, thou melt'st my heart, my brain - thou movest, drawest, changest them at will; And now thy sullen notes send darkness through me...I feel the measureless shame and humiliation of my race...Utter defeat upon me weighs...Yet 'mid the ruins Pride colossal stands unshaken...resolution to the last.*

5) Joy (Poco largamente, Grazioso, Allegro molto): *Now trumpeter for thy close, vouchsafe a higher strain than any yet, sing to my soul, renew its languishing faith and hope, rouse up my slow belief, give me some vision of the future, give me for once its prophecy and joy...O glad, exulting, culminating song!...Joy! joy! all over joy!*

Flivver Ten Million was inspired in part by the success of another graphic in sound, *Pacific 231*, by Arthur Honegger, who in 1924 used orchestral sound to 'paint' an image of a great steam locomotive. Converse followed in 1927 with a score titled in full: *Flivver Ten Million: A Joyous Epic Inspired by the Familiar Legend "The Ten Millionth Ford is Now Serving Its Owner."* The term 'flivver' is old American slang that was appropriated by the Ford Motor Company as a nickname for its inexpensive, production-line automobiles. About the piece Converse noted: "I set about it for my own amusement. I wondered what Mark Twain would have done with such a theme if he

had been a musician. He who wishes to express American life or experience must include the saving grace of humor.”

Flivver is scored as a series of eight musical vignettes played without pause:

1. *Dawn in Detroit* (sunrise over the city)
2. *The Call to Labor* (the auto workers report to work)
3. *The Din of the Builders* (factory noises)
4. *The Birth of the Hero - He Tries His Metal* (the car wanders off into the great world in search of adventure)
5. *May Night by the Roadside - America's Romance* (love music via solo violin)
6. *The Joy Riders - America's Frolic* (happy, have-a-great-time music)
7. *The Collision - America's Tragedy* (poignant, sad intonations)
8. *Phoenix Americanus - The hero, righted and shaken, proceeds on his way with redoubled energy, typical of the indomitable spirit of America.* (great fun)

Quite early in his career, Converse wrote two works based on the exquisite poem *Endymion* by John Keats (1795-1821). Both were set in the lyrical form of the orchestral romance, the first completed in 1900 and titled *Festival of Pan, Op.9*. This was followed in the spring of

1901 with *Endymion's Narrative, Op.10*. About the latter Converse wrote that the idea for the piece derived from a scene in Keats' poem at the point where Endymion is withdrawn from the festival by his anxious sister Peona, who leads him to a secluded place. There she divines the source of her brother's sorrow and soothes him with sisterly affection. Converse describes Endymion's despondency as "The struggle of a mind possessed by an idea beyond the common view, and yet bound by affection and devotion to conditions which confine and stifle its surging, internal impulses - one of the most painful spiritual struggles to which a man is subject, whether it be found in the life of an artist, a patriot or a martyr."

Keats wrote *Endymion* in 1817, set in four books of about a thousand lines each. It is one of the most revered masterpieces in English literature and begins with the celebrated lines:

*A THING of beauty is a joy for ever:
Its loveliness increases; it will never
Pass into nothingness; but still will keep
A bower quiet for us, and a sleep
Full of sweet dreams,
and health, and quiet breathing.*

Edward Yadzinski

Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra

The world-renowned Buffalo Philharmonic was founded in 1934 and makes its home in Kleinhans Music Hall, a National Historic Site with an international reputation as one of the greatest concert halls in the United States. Through the decades the orchestra has grown in stature under a number of distinguished conductors, including Joseph Krips, Lukas Foss, Michael Tilson Thomas, and Semyon Bychkov. As Buffalo's cultural ambassador, the Philharmonic has performed across the United States and Canada, including concerts at Lincoln Center, Kennedy Center, Boston's Symphony Hall, San Francisco's Davies Hall, Montreal's *Place Des Arts*, with more than twenty appearances in Carnegie Hall. The Philharmonic also made two national tours under the well-known Boston Pops conductor Arthur Fielder, as well as a highly successful European tour in 1988 under Semyon Bychkov. Currently, the orchestra presents more than a hundred concerts each year in Western New York.

JoAnn Falletta

Buffalo Philharmonic Music Director JoAnn Falletta has been hailed by the *Los Angeles Times* as "one of the brightest stars of symphonic music in America," and by *The New York Times* as "one of the finest conductors of her generation." Winner of the Stokowski, Toscanini, and Bruno Walter conducting prizes, she has also received eight awards from the American Society of Composers and Publishers (ASCAP). A champion of American music, she was awarded the Columbia University Ditson Award, having presented nearly three hundred works by American composers including over sixty world premières. In addition to her post as Music Director of the Buffalo Philharmonic, JoAnn Falletta is Music Director of the Virginia Symphony and Music Advisor to the Long Beach Symphony. In great demand as a guest conductor, she has been invited to conduct many of the world's great symphony orchestras, including the Philadelphia Orchestra, the London Symphony Orchestra, the Montreal Symphony Orchestra, the Houston Symphony, the National Symphony, the St Paul Chamber Orchestra and the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra.



JoAnn Falletta

Playing
Time:
53:13

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Frederick Shepherd CONVERSE (1871 - 1940)

Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra JoAnn Falletta, Conductor

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|---|----------------------|-------|
| 1 | The Mystic Trumpeter | 20:20 |
| 2 | Flivver Ten Million | 12:14 |
| 3 | Endymion's Narration | 20:39 |

Recorded at Kleinhans Music Hall, Buffalo, New York,
from 19th to 20th February, 2001

Producer: Blanton Alsbaugh

Engineer: John Newton

Music Notes: Edward Yadzinski

Cover Photo: An early morning misty view of Hoyt Lake, Buffalo,
New York (©Jim Bush)

Special thanks to Converse scholar, Robert Garofalo.
American flag, folk artist, 1880s.



AMERICAN CLASSICS

Born in New England in 1871, Frederick Shepherd Converse studied at Harvard but was at first urged by his father to a career in business. This he soon rejected in favour of music, moving to Munich for study with Rheinberger. On his return to America, he taught at the New England Conservatory and then at Harvard, while acquiring a reputation as one of the leading American composers of his time. In 1907 he retired from teaching in order to devote his time to composition and to the affairs of the Boston Opera Company. After war service, he returned in 1920 to the New England Conservatory, continuing there until 1938, two years before his death. His compositions include operas, the first of which was the first American opera to be staged at the Metropolitan Opera in New York, and a series of symphonic poems. Of these last *The Mystic Trumpeter*, based on Walt Whitman, is the best known.

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