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Joseph W. Polisi

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THE WILLIAM SCHUMAN VIOLIN CONCERTO: GENESIS OF A TWENTIETH-CENTURY MASTERPIECE

By Joseph W. Polisi

The saga of the composition and revisions of William Schuman's Violin Concerto spans approximately fourteen years. Schuman received the commission in 1946, and the concerto was performed in three versions—1950, 1956, and 1959—leading to its final published version of 1960. The genesis of this work represents a rare and lengthy process for Schuman. Evidence in his letters and oral histories, a close examination of the extensive manuscript and audio sources of the concerto's three versions, and a consideration of the composer's overall musical output during this time period provide an intriguing look into the mind of Schuman as he composed this most affecting work.

When World War II ended, Schuman was positioned, at age thirty-five, as one of America's most important composers and arts leaders. Not only had he won the very first Pulitzer Prize for music in 1943, for *A Free Song: Secular Cantata No. 2*, but he took on his new responsibilities as president of the Juilliard School of Music at the beginning of the 1945–46 academic year. His music had been performed by prominent American orchestras, especially the Boston Symphony Orchestra (BSO) under Serge Koussevitzky, and he had already composed five symphonies (the first two of which were withdrawn), including the expertly crafted Third and the animated Fifth for strings alone.

Thus, at this time Schuman was in the prime of his compositional life. A new concerto for violin and orchestra would most likely embody the energy, musical creativity, and expert orchestration that were becoming the hallmarks of a Schuman composition.

Schuman was approached by the well-known violinist Samuel Dushkin in 1946 to compose a violin concerto that Dushkin hoped he would be able to premiere with Koussevitzky and the BSO. Dushkin had a very distinguished record of first performances of violin works, including Stravinsky's Violin Concerto, the *Duo concertant*, and *Suite italienne*.

Joseph W. Polisi is the sixth president of The Juilliard School. Brief excerpts from his 2008 book, *American Muse: The Life and Times of William Schuman* (Amadeus Press), appear in this article. The year 2010 marks the one hundredth anniversary of Schuman's birth.

Schuman had first met Dushkin at Stravinsky's hotel suite many years earlier when the young composer had been entrusted with the manuscript to Stravinsky's *Jeu de cartes*, which he had been asked to compare with the publisher's printed proof. Regrettably, Schuman no longer remembered that the violin playing he had heard at the hotel room door was shockingly bad.

Schuman's completed concerto score was sent to Koussevitzky for his review in late 1947, around the same time Dushkin had invited Schuman to come to New York's Town Hall to hear him play. Unfortunately, the quality of Dushkin's playing had not improved. Koussevitzky stepped in and said, "I vill play, but not with Dushkin. You must tell Dushkin."[1] Schuman was in a horribly awkward position, because Dushkin had already paid for the concerto and had exclusive rights to it for three years. Koussevitzky could not be bothered by these legal niceties: "I don't care what your agreement is. Take it away from him. We'll give it to Isaac Stern and play it with the Boston Symphony."[2]

Schuman decided to advise Dushkin of this decision after attending a concert with him at the Museum of Modern Art at which Koussevitzky was honored. As they settled in for drinks at the Plaza Hotel—Dushkin ordered a cognac in a stemmed glass—Schuman said, "Listen, Sam, this is the most difficult moment of my life in personal relationships, and it will be for you, too, but I can't go on with the Violin Concerto. I know you were a great performer at one time, but no one is going to play it [with you], and this is what I have to tell you."[3]

Dushkin's response was intense and immediate. In a moment of white-hot anger, he snapped the stem of his glass in two. Although Dushkin was not cut, Schuman remembered that the experience was "*just terrible* . . . it was one of the saddest things in my life. I still don't know whether I was right or wrong."[4]

One would have thought that the relationship between Schuman and Dushkin would have been acrimonious from that time forward. But upon the death of Schuman's mother in September 1947, he received a gracious letter of condolence from Dushkin's wife, Louise. In January 1951, Dushkin wrote a personal and warm letter on the death of Schuman's father the prior November. In a final rapprochement, Schuman wrote Dushkin at the time of the premiere of the concerto's final version in 1959: "I thought about you this summer during the period of preparation and performance of the Concerto in Aspen. I cannot help but feel that somehow you would have been pleased. Maybe this is wishful thinking on my part."[5]

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[1] William Schuman and Heidi Waleson, "William Schuman Memoirs, 1990–92, New York" [unpublished manuscript] (hereinafter cited as Schuman and Waleson), chap. 11, p. 15; Schuman Family Archives (private collection).

[2] Ibid., 15–16.

[3] Transcript of interview by Vivian Perlis with William Schuman, no. 46 a–hh, 2 February–16 November 1977, New York City and Greenwich, CT [unpublished manuscript] (hereinafter cited as Perlis), p. 315; American Music Series.

[4] Ibid.

After the three years had passed—Dushkin had held on to the concerto for the period of contractual exclusivity—the work was scheduled for performance on 10 February 1950, with the Boston Symphony Orchestra under its new conductor, Charles Munch, with Isaac Stern as soloist. According to Schuman, "Munch loved the work and said it was one of the great concertos of our time."[6] In Schuman's view, though, Stern did not grasp the intellectual underpinnings of the work and therefore did not present the concerto in its best light. Schuman was troubled by

> the inability of certain performers who are only conventional literature performers to come to grips with a new piece on its own terms, so he [Stern] never understood it except superficially. He always thought the opening, which he used to sing, was frenetic, even though I wanted that to be broadly romantic . . . he would never play it that way.[7]

Critical reaction was generally positive. One writer considered it "fiendishly difficult, although Stern's art conquered all with seeming ease. . . . Undoubtedly the concerto is a skillful, intelligent and forceful piece of work. Yet judging by the audience's reaction, it is not destined for early public acceptance."[8] Another saw the concerto as

> a study of the individual, as represented by the solo violin, to maintain his integrity and balance . . . in the face of a harsh and often overbearing surrounding milieu. That milieu seemed to be the large, twentieth century city. Mr. Schuman is too sophisticated a musician . . . to be interested in reproducing the common noises of the city. But surely some of the sounds of the second movement must have been suggested by tugboat whistles and one got the impression of factory whistles in the finale.[9]

Time wrote whimsically that Charles Munch found the work

> "horribly difficult" but it had its good features; it "exploited the orchestra very adroitly, used the modern language" effectively, and altogether it was

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[5] William Schuman, letter to Samuel Dushkin, 29 September 1959; The William Schuman Papers, Music Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations, box 13, folder 8.

[6] Perlis, 315.

[7] Ibid., 316.

[8] Jules Wolffers, "Bostonians Premiere New Schuman Violin Concerto," *Musical Courier*, 1 March 1950.

[9] R. P., "Stern the Soloist in Schuman Work," *New York Times*, 16 March 1950.

> "très intéressant." Pudgy violinist Isaac Stern agreed. He had "worked and worked until the music was part of me." When his fiddling was finished he grinned up into the balcony of Symphony Hall, then hammed his exit offstage, staggering as if brutally exhausted [after the rehearsal].[10]

Although Schuman expressed reservations with Isaac Stern's interpretation of the concerto at its 1950 world premiere, live recordings of Stern's performances in both the 1950 and 1956 versions tend to validate his approach. Stern played the demanding work with impeccable technique, and his intensity in the opening solo violin line is totally justified when it is noted that Schuman marks the tempo *Allegro risoluto* and the accompaniment includes staccato figures in the winds and a *col legno* staccato marking for the strings, plus a snare drum part with wire brush. A "frenetic" approach to the opening line would certainly be an appropriate artistic choice. Although there is a difference between "frenetic" and "broadly romantic," as Schuman stated, the intensity and focus of the opening line is brought forward by Stern in those two live recordings with energy, power, and presence.

Schuman recalled that upon hearing the concerto's premiere in 1950, "I realized I didn't like the second movement and wanted to rewrite it."[11] "I told Isaac [Stern] that I was not happy with it, that the second movement seemed all wrong to me, out of place, and that the third movement had terrible problems. And I asked Aaron [Copland] . . . , who said I was absolutely right, that the second movement was much too much in contrast, and he agreed with me . . . that my plan was to drop the second movement."[12]

The revised work was introduced in a performance with Stern and the Juilliard Orchestra, Jean Morel conducting, on 24 February 1956. Once again Schuman felt changes were needed. He stated in one oral history, "I worked on that piece for fourteen years, the most time I ever spent on a work. I knew I never wanted to do another violin concerto, that I had said everything I had to say in a violin concerto in this one, and I wanted to do it right."[13] The third and final version of the work was presented on 9 August 1959, at the Aspen Music Festival in Colorado with Roman Totenberg as the soloist and Izler Solomon conducting. Schuman, finally satisfied with the piece, was thrilled by the Aspen performance and the audience response, which included a standing ovation.[14]

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[10] "Music: Bread & Butter," *Time,* 20 February 1950.

[11] Schuman and Waleson, chap. 11, p. 17.

[12] Perlis, 316.

[13] Schuman and Waleson, chap. 11, p. 17.

[14] Telephone conversation between the author and Roman Totenberg, 16 September 2009.

The reworking was a unique experience for Schuman, who called the process “very unusual.”[15] In light of the numerous changes made in the Violin Concerto, it is interesting to note the composer’s view of such changes in his manuscripts. Schuman once commented that all of his manuscripts, which are held by the Library of Congress, can be

> most unreliable [for study purposes] because when I make changes, I never go back and make the changes in the manuscript . . . so that any errors that are in the manuscripts are still in the manuscript. . . . I don’t make cuts that I’ve made, I don’t put in additions. I am just so happy to be rid of it, of the manuscript itself, physically.[16]

Because of Schuman’s less-than-fastidious approach to the correction of his previous manuscripts, the author needed to compare the extant manuscript materials of the concerto with available scores in copyists’ hands and the final published score of the 1959 version, as well as the actual recordings of the first- and second-version premieres in 1950 and 1956. For the sake of clarity, the three versions of the Violin Concerto will be designated in this article by their first-performance dates, i.e., the 1950 version,[17] the 1956 version,[18] and the 1959 version.[19]

There are no fewer than seven items included in the Library of Congress’s holdings related to the Schuman Violin Concerto, all cataloged individually and listed under the call number ML96.S414:

1950 version

Item 1. The original holograph manuscript full score in three “parts” (Schuman seldom used the word “movement” in the work’s various versions) with dates at the end of Part I: July 7, 1946; and the end of Part III: July 13, 1947.

Item 2. Holograph manuscript score pages that were discarded from Item 1, Parts II and III, dated Summer 1946; Revisions May 1947.

Item 3. Revisions to Item 1, Part I, dated November 1946.

Item 4. Ozalid copy of copyist’s manuscript full score dated July 13, 1947, and including the changes indicated in Items 2 and 3.

1956 version

Item 5. Revisions to Item 4 of twenty-seven holograph manuscript pages with the composer’s written comment “1st revisions for 2nd performance” dated June 22, 1954.

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15. Perlis, 318.
16. Ibid., 497.
17. William Schuman, *Concerto for Violin and Orchestra.* Ozalid copy of copyist manuscript score, 1947. Music Division, Library of Congress. ML96.S414 Item 4.
18. William Schuman, *Concerto for Violin and Orchestra*, 1956. Peter Jay Sharp Special Collections, The Juilliard School Library, New York, NY.
19. William Schuman, *Concerto for Violin and Orchestra* (Bryn Mawr, PA: Merion Music, 1960).

1959 version

Item 6. Fifty-five holograph manuscript score pages of the final revisions to the concerto with a notation in the composer's hand at the end of Part II: "Composed July 13, 1947, Revised 1954, Final Version started July 7, 1957, completed March 3, 1958."

Item 7. An ozalid copy of copyist's score, with extensive corrections, which incorporates most of the revisions from Item 6 with a notation on the front cover: "WS's score with corrections. Oct. '59."[20]

In addition, a copy of the score for the 1956 performance,[21] with many notations by the concert's conductor, Jean Morel, is held by the Lila Acheson Wallace Library of the Juilliard School; it was invaluable in determining the precise changes between the 1950 and 1956 versions of the concerto. The author's references to the revisions of both the 1956 and 1959 versions are based on this score. Finally, sound recordings of the 1950 premiere (provided by the Historical Recordings Collections of the Fine Arts Library of the University of Texas at Austin) and of the 1956 premiere (provided by Juilliard's recording department) presented the opportunity to confirm the changes made by Schuman in the first public performances of those two versions.

All of Schuman's manuscripts and related materials were given to the Library of Congress over a period of years, and most are held in the William Schuman Collection, Music Division, Library of Congress. Schuman's correspondence and other archival documents are housed in the William Schuman Papers, Music Division, the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations. The Peter Jay Sharp Special Collections of the Juilliard School Library also hold invaluable material relating to Schuman's time as president of Juilliard, including musical scores used for Juilliard public performances.

In the copyist's manuscript score for the 1950 performance,[22] the concerto is divided into three "parts" (movements), indicating that the completion of Part I was on 7 July 1946, and that of Part III on 13 July 1947. Schuman would use the July 1947 date as the completion date for the 1950 version of the concerto.

The 1950 version contains the stand-alone Part II that would be discarded entirely by Schuman in subsequent versions. Conventional wisdom has indicated that the most significant changes to the concerto occurred when the composer turned the work into a two-part concerto for the 1956 version, and basically that is correct. But a close comparison between the 13 July 1947 copyist's score and the final scores of the 1956 and 1959 versions shows that Schuman made numerous articulation, dynamic, notational (enharmonic), orchestration, rhythmic, and melodic changes—as well as deletions—to Part I in his 1956 and 1959 revisions. Although these alterations never amount to the fundamental structural changes seen in the Part II revisions, it is quite clear that Schuman spent considerable time and thought in refining Part I.

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[20] Music Division, Library of Congress. ML96.S414.

[21] See n. 18.

[22] Library of Congress, call number ML96.S414 Item 4.

When one hears the soulful and passionate Part II of the 1950 version, marked *Andantino* (♩ = 96), it seems unfortunate that he excised the entire movement from the concerto. Could it be, as suggested by Christopher Rouse, the distinguished composer and a personal friend of Schuman, that Part II was deleted because it was *too* melodious and tonal?[23] This would reflect Schuman's comment, noted earlier, that "the second movement was much too much in contrast" with the rest of the work.[24] It will never be definitively known if Schuman was in any way influenced by the powerful cadre of American composers who had embraced serialism and who often railed against older compositional practices as tired and intellectually barren. However, as will be discussed later, there is no question that Schuman's music, with a few exceptions, became more chromatic and dissonant as the 1960s approached.

Part II (1950 version) is about six minutes in duration and begins with a languorous violin solo accompanied by divisi cellos in four parts, then incorporating *dolce* lines in oboe and English horn, eventually joined by flute and three horns (fig. 1a).

Schuman subsequently changes the accompanying texture by underpinning the solo violin line with homophonic sustained string chords (fig. 1b), which lead to an accompanying chorale of intense beauty in woodwinds and strings (fig. 1c).

The muted solo violin, accompanied by strings, then slowly brings the short movement to a hushed conclusion on a *morendo* final chord (fig. 1d).

This slow movement would eventually find another life as the basis for the third movement, entitled "Remembrance," of Schuman's 1980 work, *Three Colloquies* for French horn and orchestra. Christopher Rouse had suggested to Schuman that this slow movement of the Violin Concerto was a beautiful work worthy of public exposure. Schuman took Rouse's advice, but chromatically adjusted many of the existing melodies to produce only a shadow of the original work. He also changed rhythms, melodies, harmonies, and orchestration, although overall the solo horn

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[23] Telephone conversation between the author and Christopher Rouse, 3 September 2009.

[24] Perlis, 316.

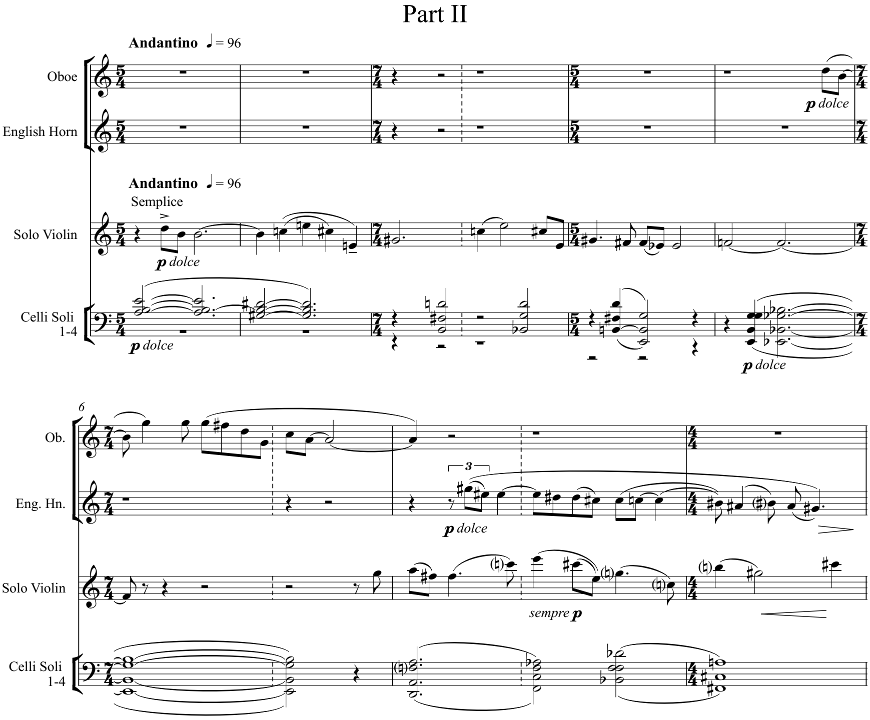
Part II
Andantino ♩ = 96
Oboe
English Horn
Andantino ♩ = 96
Semplice
Solo Violin
p dolce
Celli Soli 1-4
p dolce
p dolce
p dolce
6
Ob.
Eng. Hn.
3
p dolce
Solo Violin
sempre p
Celli Soli 1-4

Fig. 1a. 1950 version, Part II, mm. 1–8

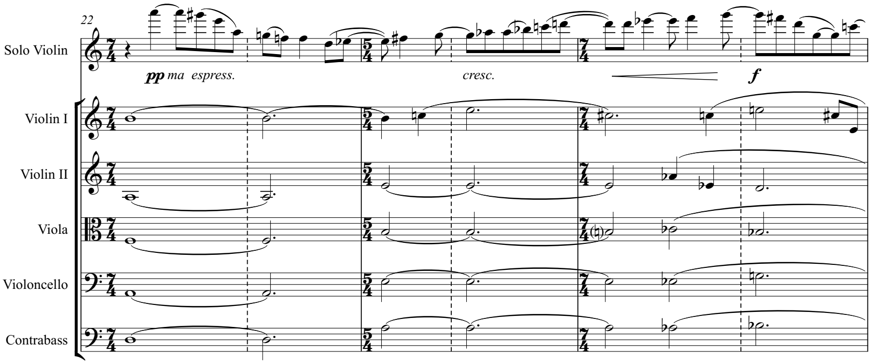
22
Solo Violin
pp ma espress.
cresc.
f
Violin I
Violin II
Viola
Violoncello
Contrabass

Fig. 1b. 1950 version, Part II, mm. 22–24

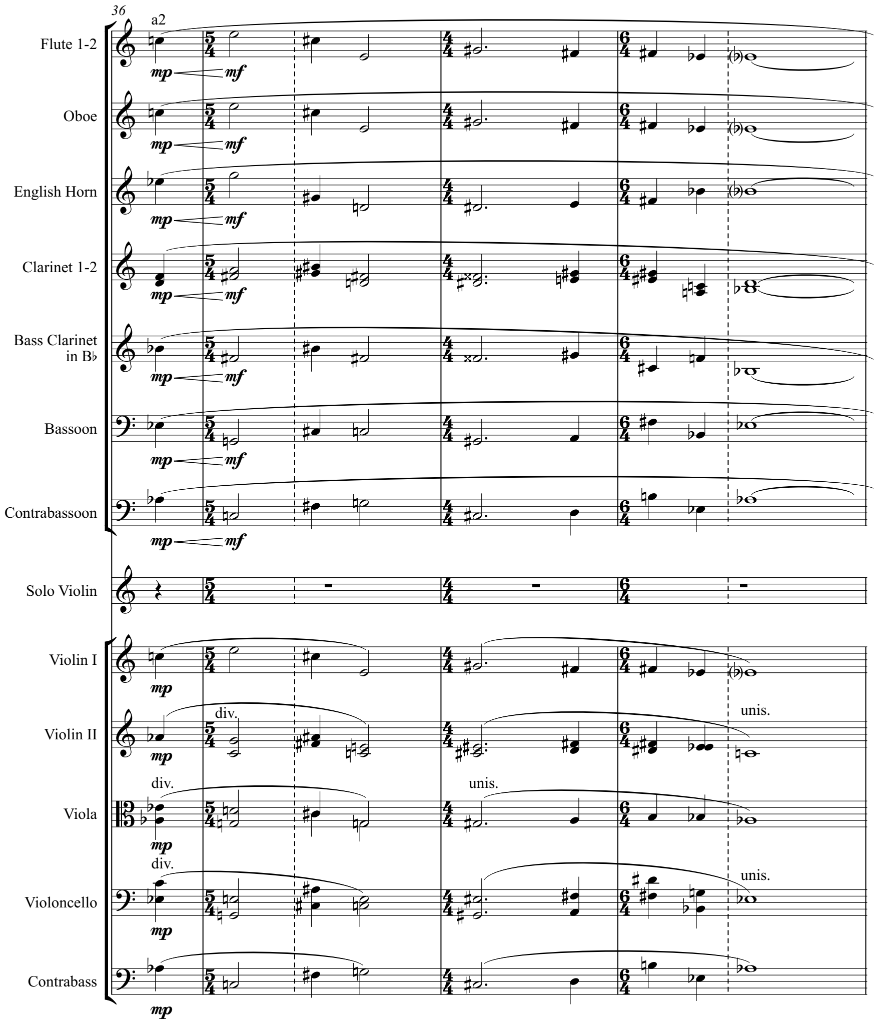
36
a2
Flute 1-2
Oboe
English Horn
Clarinet 1-2
Bass Clarinet in B♭
Bassoon
Contrabassoon
Solo Violin
Violin I
Violin II
Viola
Violoncello
Contrabass
mp
mf
div.
unis.

Fig. 1c. 1950 version, Part II, mm. 36–39

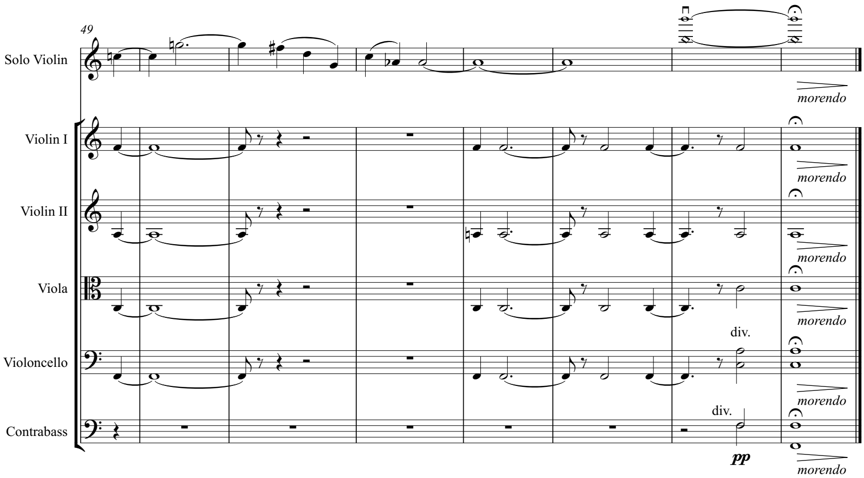

Fig. 1d. 1950 version, Part II, mm. 49–56

matches the original solo violin part quite closely. Interestingly, the beautiful chorale section first heard in Part II of the Violin Concerto (fig. 1c, mm. 37–39) is replicated almost exactly in "Remembrance" and brings a tonally-centered respite to what is otherwise a heavily chromatically-inflected movement. Although Part II (1950) disappears in future versions of the concerto, it will be noted later that, in Part II of the subsequent 1956 and 1959 versions, sections appear that are reminiscent of the beautiful, and rejected, slow movement.

Part III (1950 version), marked *Presto leggiero* (♩ = ca. 176–184), begins with a solo cello line that eventually develops in counterpoint with the progressive insertion of the entire string section and ultimately winds and brass (fig. 2).

Schuman creates a tumultuous aural setting that functions as an introduction to the solo violin, which does not enter until Part III's (1950) fifty-seventh measure. This entry of the solo violin in the 1950 version will be transmogrified by Schuman in the later versions into a *quasi cadenza* for the soloist. The new introductory material will eventually embrace mm. 1–24 of the 1956 version and mm. 1–80 of the 1959 version.

In the recording of the concerto's 1950 premiere, approximately twenty-six seconds of Part III—or sixty-eight measures (mm. 145–213)—were deleted by Schuman from the original manuscript score even before he subjected the concerto to major revisions in later years.

Soon after its premiere, Schuman set about to modify the work significantly. In the 1954 manuscript score (Item 5) Schuman includes a state-

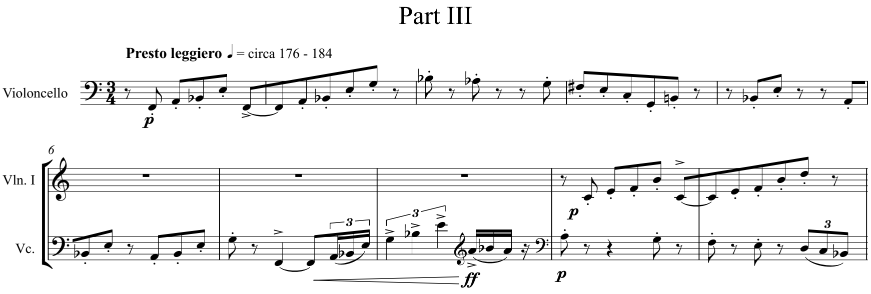

Fig. 2. 1950 version, Part III, mm. 1–10

ment on the first page, "1st revisions for 2nd performance," and on the last page, "Work completed July 13, 1947—Revised last movement in 1954. Completed June 22. W.S."[25] In this revision the composer makes wholesale changes to what were Parts II and III of the work.

As noted earlier, the first and most significant adjustment was changing the concerto from a three-movement to a two-movement work and deleting the existence of the original slow movement (Part II, 1950 version). Throughout Schuman's compositional career, in his large orchestral works he often rejected conventional structural forms (e.g., three-movement concertos, four-movement symphonies). His Third Symphony is divided into two "parts," and has the closest structural relationship to revised versions of the Violin Concerto. His Sixth Symphony is in one movement, and his Seventh and Ninth Symphonies are played without pause between movements, while his Eighth Symphony has no break between the first and second movements.

The 1956 version's Part II, Adagio (♩/♩. = ca. 48), begins with a stentorian pronouncement in trumpets, trombones, and strings followed in the second measure by the introduction of a slowly flowing eighth-note passage for solo violin marked *p dolce.* The music eventually increases in intensity and moves toward the aforementioned *quasi cadenza,* in which the solo violin skittishly jumps from one pitch to another in an improvisatory fashion. This section subsequently leads to the original cello line found at the very beginning of the 1950 version's Part III. In the 1956 version Schuman adds twenty-four measures of new material to the beginning of the second movement of the concerto (figs. 3a, 3b).

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[25] William Schuman, *Concerto for Violin and Orchestra.* Holograph manuscript score, 1954. Music Division, Library of Congress. ML96.S414 Item 5.

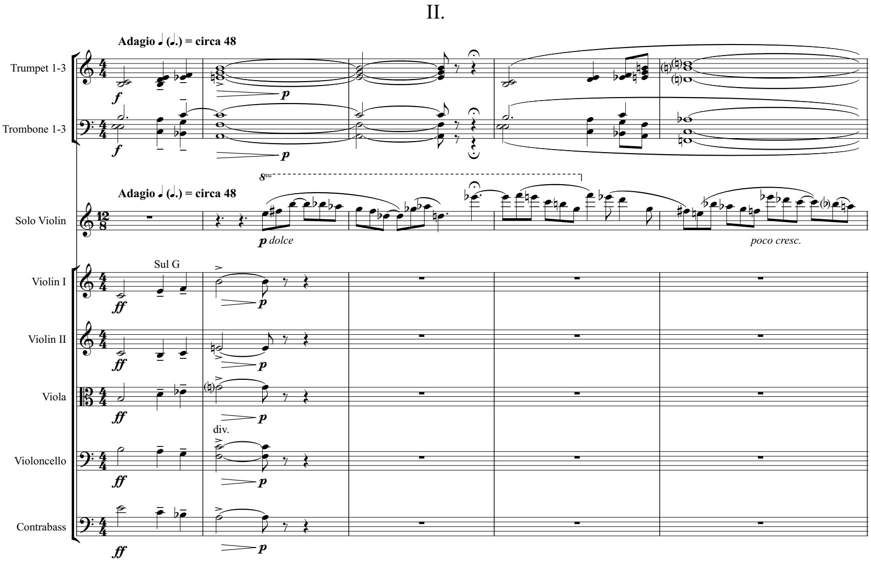
II.
Adagio ♩ (♩.) = circa 48
Trumpet 1-3
Trombone 1-3
Solo Violin
8va
p dolce
poco cresc.
Violin I
Sul G
Violin II
Viola
div.
Violoncello
Contrabass
f
ff
p

Fig. 3a. 1956 version, Part II, mm. 1–5

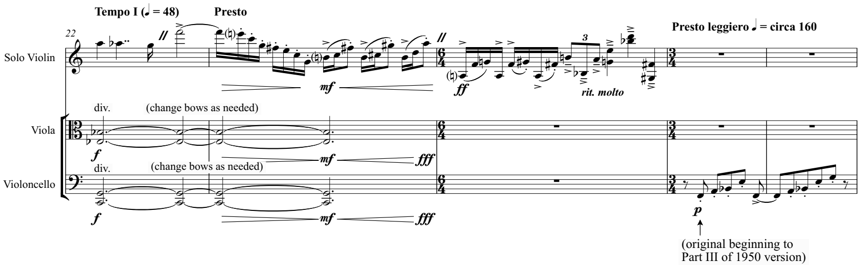
Tempo I (𝅗𝅥 = 48)
Presto
Presto leggiero ♩ = circa 160
22
Solo Violin
mf
ff
3
rit. molto
Viola
div.
(change bows as needed)
f
mf
fff
Violoncello
p
(original beginning to Part III of 1950 version)

Fig. 3b. 1956 version, Part II, mm. 22–26

The next significant change occurs in the 1950 version's Part III, m. 106 (the 1956 version's Part II, m. 130), where Schuman adds a more animated solo violin line that naturally leads into the Allegretto (♩. = ca. 76), which is kept intact from the original version, where, however, no allegretto marking exists (figs. 4a, 4b).

Schuman then adds further intensity to the conclusion by modifying the score in the 1950 version's Part III, m. 344 (the 1956 version's Part II, m. 312), and writing an *accelerando* (𝅗𝅥 = ca. 112) that juxtaposes the solo violin in sextuplets and triplets against triplet figures in the winds and

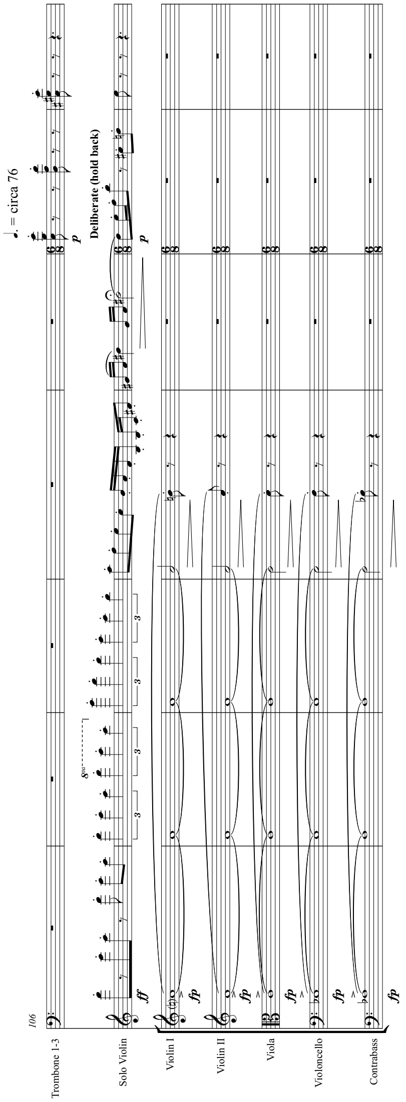
106
Trombone 1-3
Solo Violin
Violin I
Violin II
Viola
Violoncello
Contrabass
ff
fp
8va
3
Deliberate (hold back)
♩. = circa 76
p

Fig. 4a. 1950 version, Part III, mm. 106–12

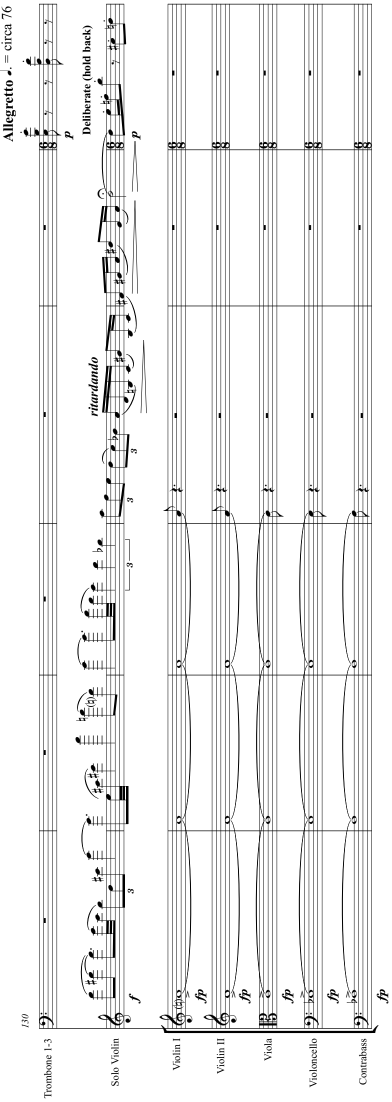
130
Trombone 1-3
Solo Violin
Violin I
Violin II
Viola
Violoncello
Contrabass
f
fp
3
ritardando
Deliberate (hold back)
Allegretto ♩. = circa 76
p

Fig. 4b. 1956 version, Part II, mm. 130–35

strings, driving the concerto to an even more bombastic end than in the 1950 version (figs. 5a, 5b).

This 1956 version shows Schuman attempting to focus the intensity of the concerto and deleting what he clearly felt was a slow movement of insufficient presence, albeit quite beautiful in its own right. The newly composed opening to the 1956 Part II also continues the passionate energy developed at the conclusion of Part I, although the composer quickly lowers the tension through a diminuendo from ***f*** to ***p*** in the brass and strings.

What Schuman did *not* change is the prodigious cadenza for solo violin in Part I. In fact, the composer expressed great pride that throughout the many revisions of the concerto not a note of the cadenza was ever changed.[26] Violinists who played the solo part were enthusiastic in their praise of how well the cadenza was shaped. Its virtuoso turns and introspective measures prove Schuman's intimate knowledge of the violin, and it stands as one of his finest compositional achievements.

It is with the final revisions of the concerto, completed on 3 March 1958, that Schuman made the most substantial changes to Part II. The concerto's new and final version was performed on 9 August 1959, in Aspen, Colorado.

Although changes in Part I of the 1956 version were not as many as in Part II, Schuman continued to make small adjustments in this opening movement. He changed the musical material of the solo violin in mm. 61–72 (same measures in both the 1956 and 1959 versions), although several measures of the orchestral accompaniment remain unchanged in both of those versions. In the 1956 version at m. 61 the solo violin plays a *tranquillo* passage (fig. 6a) that is deleted entirely in the 1959 version.

In the 1959 version the violin enters at the section marked *Meno mosso* (𝅗𝅥 = ca. 69; ♩ = ca. 138), at m. 67, presenting a solo violin part completely different from the 1956 version until the two versions mesh at m. 73 with a slight modification in dynamics (***f*** to ***mf***) between the two (fig. 6b).

A change is also made to the prominent trumpet part in mm. 115–24 (same measures in both versions; figs. 7a, 7b).

It is worth noting that the *molto tranquillo* section (mm. 137–205 in both the 1956 and 1959 versions) presents a similar aesthetic to the discarded Part II of the 1950 version. Otherwise, there are no additional significant changes in Part I between the 1956 and 1959 versions, only adjustments to dynamics, phrasing, or use of mute. With the remarkable coda at the end of the movement, this first part of the concerto truly represents a compositional tour de force on Schuman's part.

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[26] Perlis, 317.

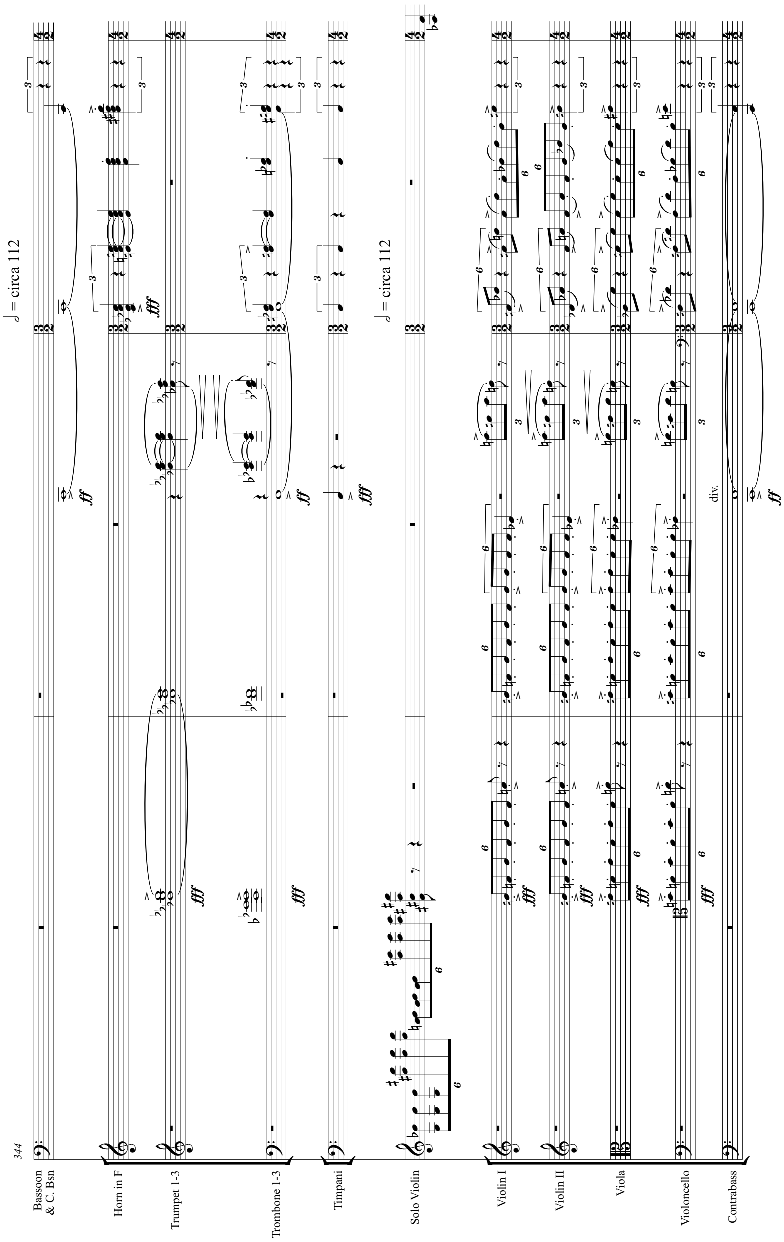
344
Bassoon & C. Bsn
Horn in F
Trumpet 1-3
Trombone 1-3
Timpani
Solo Violin
Violin I
Violin II
Viola
Violoncello
Contrabass
𝅗𝅥 = circa 112
𝅗𝅥 = circa 112
fff
ff
div.

Fig. 5a. 1950 version, Part III, mm. 344–46

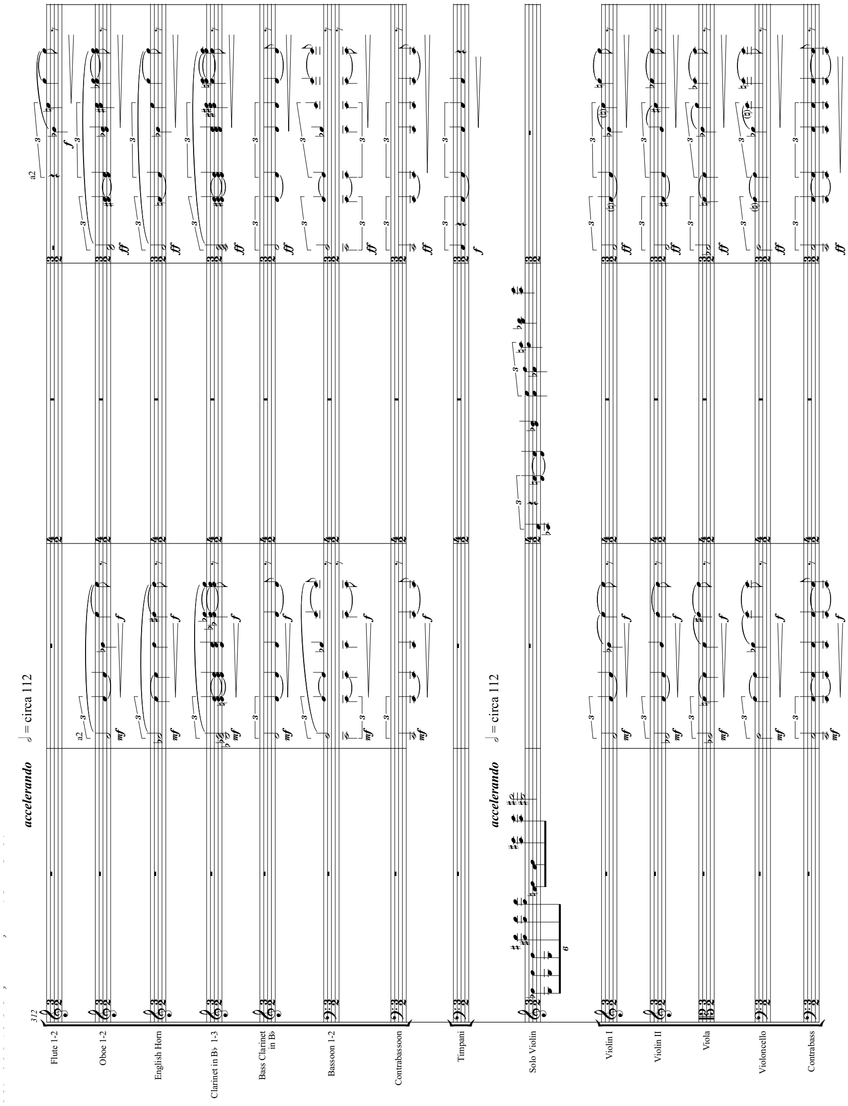
312
accelerando
𝅗𝅥 = circa 112
a2
Flute 1-2
Oboe 1-2
English Horn
Clarinet in B♭ 1-3
Bass Clarinet in B♭
Bassoon 1-2
Contrabassoon
Timpani
Solo Violin
Violin I
Violin II
Viola
Violoncello
Contrabass
mf
f
ff

Fig. 5b. 1956 version, Part II, mm. 312–15

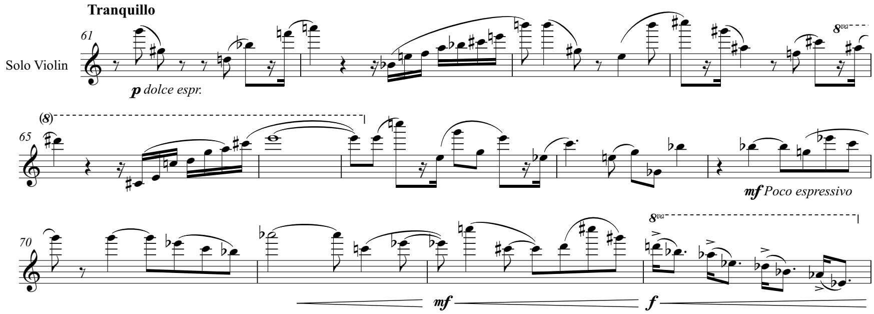
Tranquillo
61
Solo Violin
p dolce espr.
8va
65
(8)
mf Poco espressivo
70
8va
mf
f

Fig. 6a. 1956 version, Part I, mm. 61–73 (solo violin only)

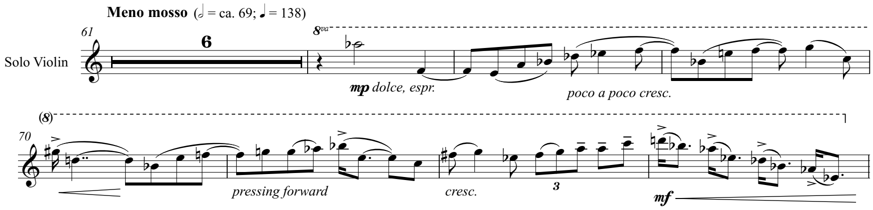
Meno mosso (𝅗𝅥 = ca. 69; ♩ = 138)
61
Solo Violin
6
8va
mp dolce, espr.
poco a poco cresc.
70
(8)
pressing forward
cresc.
3
mf

Fig. 6b. 1959 version, Part I, mm. 61–73 (solo violin only)

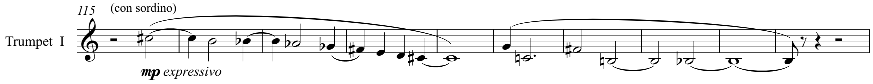
115
(con sordino)
Trumpet I
mp expressivo

Fig. 7a. 1956 version, Part I, mm. 115–24 (solo trumpet only)

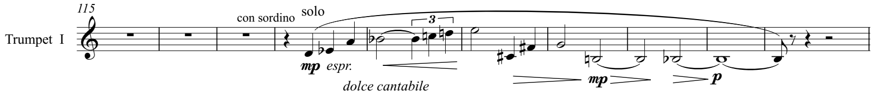
115
Trumpet I
con sordino
solo
3
mp espr.
dolce cantabile
mp
p

Fig. 7b. 1959 version, Part I, mm. 115–24 (solo trumpet only)

It is, of course, with Part II that one sees the considerable changes Schuman made for the final version of the work. As noted earlier, when the composer first deleted the 1950 version's second movement, he added twenty-four measures to create the beginning of the 1956 version's Part II. In the 1959 version he deletes those measures entirely and creates eighty new measures in their place.

The opening of the 1959 version's Part II is grander and more ominous than that of the 1956 version, especially with the presence of the threatening timpani part over quietly sustained strings leading to the entrance of the solo violin at m. 33. The solo violin's extended slow melody is also more developed and soulful than in the 1956 version, bringing to mind the discarded 1950 Part II (fig. 8; see also fig. 3a).

At the beginning of Part II in both the 1956 and 1959 revisions, the composer writes prominent brass parts. Although it could be argued that the enlarged 1959 version provides a brass presence that is sonically out of balance with the delicacy of the violin, Schuman's use of brass choirs, such as that heard at the very beginning of the movement at ***fff***, supplies the coloring and character for much of the movement. It should also be noted that at m. 50 of the 1959 version, the composer incorporates verbatim the music that begins at m. 9 of the 1956 version, with the slight modification in orchestration of deleting the second and third trombone parts and adding cello and double bass sustained chords below trumpet and trombone lines.

This first section of Part II then moves to the solo violin's *quasi cadenza,* which is exactly the same for the first five measures in both the 1956 and 1959 versions. It is at the conclusion of the *quasi cadenza* at the Tempo I (1956: m. 22; 1959: m. 65) that Schuman makes lengthier changes to the 1959 score and considerably extends the solo violin part in a cadenza-like line with sustained string accompaniment (mm. 65–80), eventually adding brass and percussion before finally arriving at the contrapuntal section for cellos that was the beginning of the original (1950) version of Part III of the concerto (fig. 9; see also fig. 3b).

A subsequent small revision occurs in mm. 130–34 (1956)/mm. 186–92 (1959). The solo violin in the 1959 version plays a variant of the 1956 solo line of roughly the same number of measures. This short section, in particular, seemed vexing for Schuman and he needed all his revisions to get it right. In addition, in the 1959 version Schuman adds the marking *Meno mosso* (𝅗𝅥 = ca. 76) at m. 186 on the manuscript score page dated 3 March 1958. He adds the term *a la recitativo* to the *Meno mosso* only in the corrected copyist's manuscript score of October 1959, *after* the first performance of the 1959 version. All three versions ultimately lead into the Allegretto section on a fermata D♯ (fig. 10; see also figs. 4a, 4b).

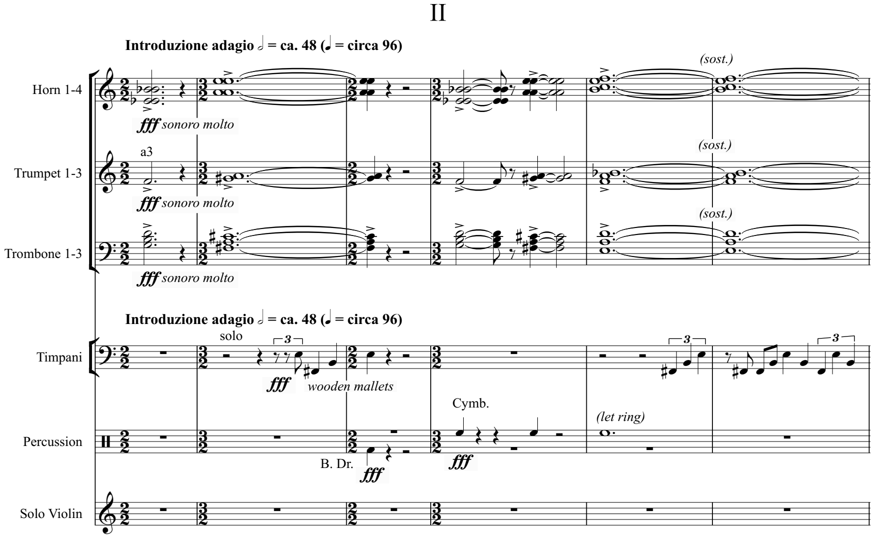

Fig. 8. 1959 version, Part II, mm. 1–6

Schuman's next revision is by far the longest in the movement, stretching for 115 measures (mm. 211–326) in the 1959 version, and spanning mm. 153–239 in the 1956 version. There are significant changes in the orchestration of the accompaniment, as well as a considerable modification of the solo violin part, although the playful quality of the 1956 version remains.

In evaluating the 1956 version of this section, one hears a certain listless quality to both the accompaniment and the solo line that Schuman changes for the better. The rhythmic dotted figures appearing at the beginning of this section seem repetitive and lacking in energy. The longer-lined melody that the solo violin begins at m. 193 (1956) has increased tension, but the accompaniment is still rather dry and episodic. This feeling continues at m. 216 (1956) and beyond, where both solo line and accompaniment present highly repetitive versions of earlier music, creating a type of stasis with which the composer was obviously not satisfied. Finally, the buildup to the section marked—in the woodwind, brass, and percussion parts only—*wild* (m. 240, 1956/m. 326, 1959), gives inadequate preparation for the eventual bombast to be heard in this new section.

Beginning at m. 221 (1959), Schuman replaces the quadruplet rhythmic figures of the 1956 version with a more stable accompaniment emphasizing the principal beats of each measure but occasionally adding duplets and triplets to the solo line and accompanying strings (figs. 11a, 11b).

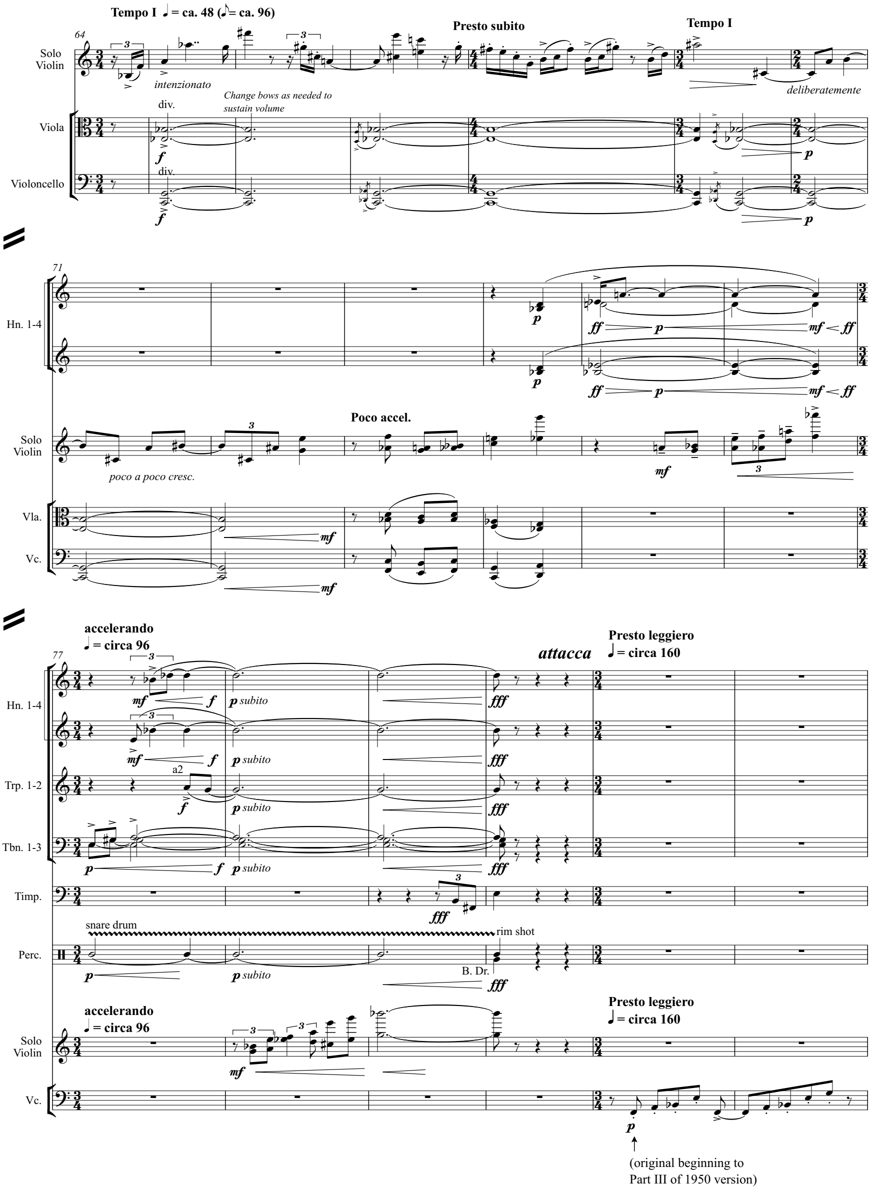
Tempo I ♩ = ca. 48 (♪ = ca. 96)
64
Solo Violin
intenzionato
div.
Change bows as needed to sustain volume
Viola
Violoncello
Presto subito
Tempo I
deliberatemente
71
Hn. 1-4
Solo Violin
Poco accel.
poco a poco cresc.
Vla.
Vc.
77
accelerando
♩ = circa 96
attacca
Presto leggiero
♩ = circa 160
Trp. 1-2
a2
Tbn. 1-3
Timp.
snare drum
rim shot
Perc.
B. Dr.
p subito
Solo Violin
Vc.
(original beginning to Part III of 1950 version)

Fig. 9. 1959 version, Part II, mm. 64–82

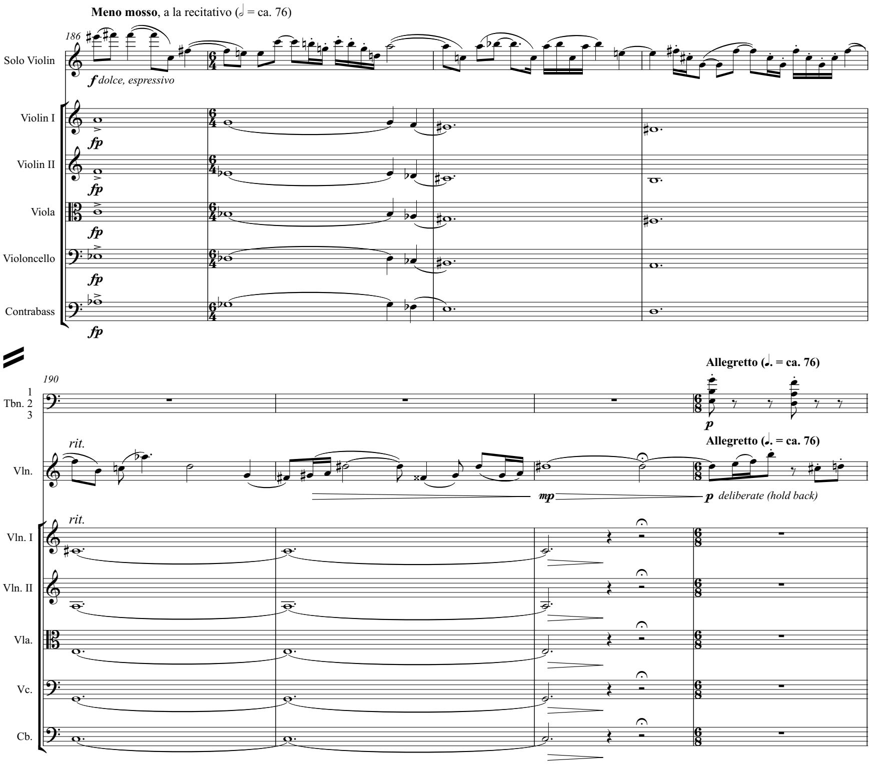
Meno mosso, a la recitativo (𝅗𝅥 = ca. 76)
186
Solo Violin
f dolce, espressivo
Violin I
Violin II
Viola
Violoncello
Contrabass
fp
190
Tbn. 1 2 3
Allegretto (♩. = ca. 76)
p
Vln.
rit.
mp
p deliberate (hold back)
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.

Fig. 10. 1959 version, Part II, mm. 186–93

Schuman writes what he notes is a “dialogue between solo violin and violin I”[27] (this instruction appears only in the copyist’s manuscript score of October 1959),[28] that adds not only to the playfulness but also the cohesion of this section. He then creates a jaunty *leggiero* section (m. 262, 1959) as the solo violin presents rapid sixteenth- and eighth-note figures over an accompaniment of three trombones playing staccato eighth notes (fig. 12).

At m. 284 (1959) the solo violin presents a forceful melodic line in half notes, reminiscent of the 1956 version of this section (figs. 13a, 13b).

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[27] Page 81 in the 1960 published score (n. 19).

[28] William Schuman, *Concerto for Violin and Orchestra.* Ozalid copy of copyist manuscript score, 1959. Music Division, Library of Congress. ML96.S414 Item 7.

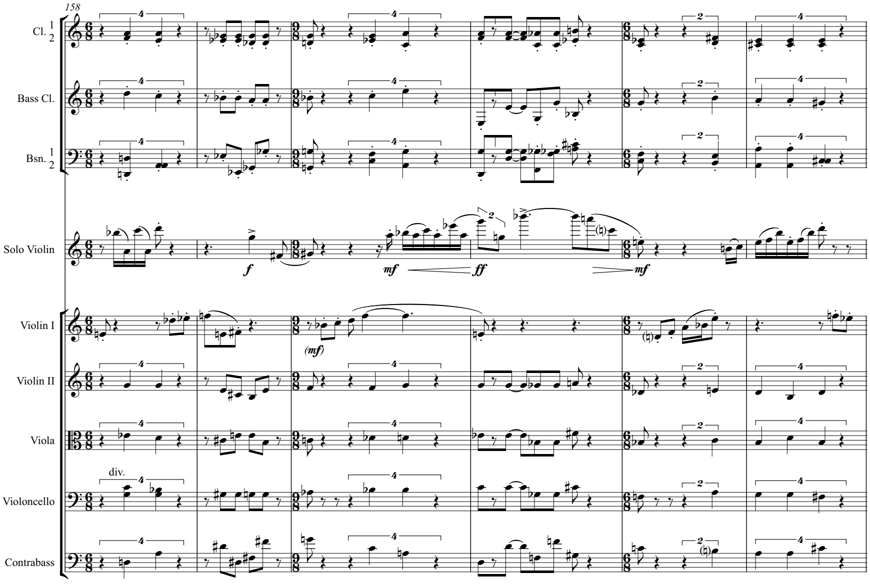
158
Cl. 1 2
Bass Cl.
Bsn. 1 2
Solo Violin
Violin I
Violin II
Viola
Violoncello
Contrabass
div.
f
mf
ff
mf
(mf)

Fig. 11a. 1956 version, Part II, mm. 158–63

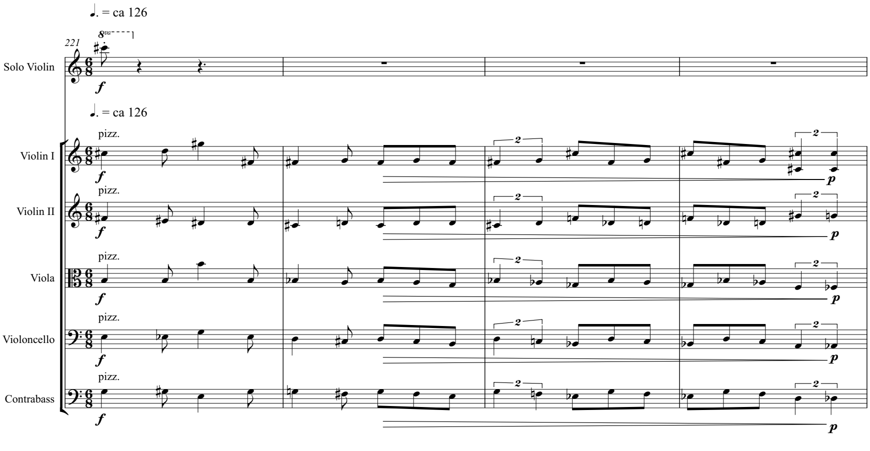
♩. = ca 126
8va
221
Solo Violin
f
♩. = ca 126
pizz.
Violin I
Violin II
Viola
Violoncello
Contrabass
f
p

Fig. 11b. 1959 version, Part II, mm. 221–24

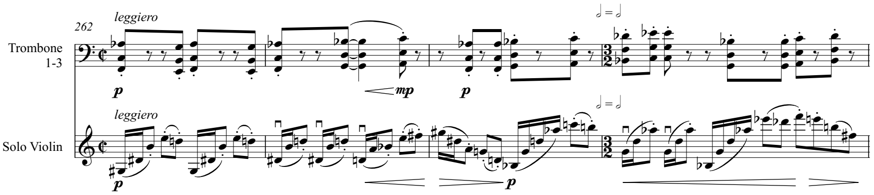
262
leggiero
Trombone 1-3
Solo Violin
p
mp
𝅗𝅥 = 𝅗𝅥

Fig. 12. 1959 version, Part II, mm. 262–65

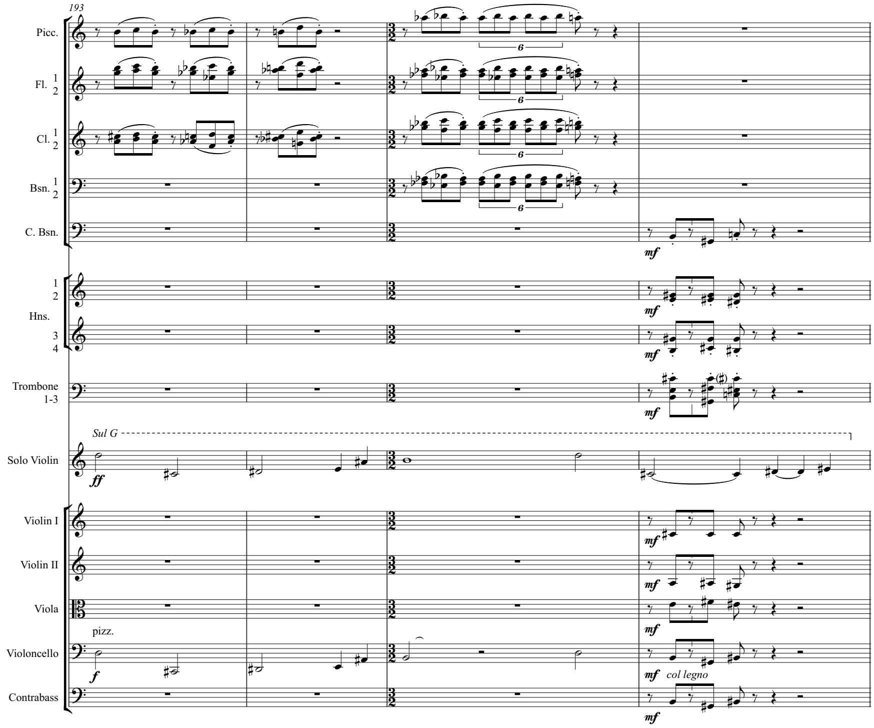
193
Picc.
Fl. 1 2
Cl. 1 2
Bsn. 1 2
C. Bsn.
Hns. 1 2 3 4
Trombone 1-3
Solo Violin
Violin I
Violin II
Viola
Violoncello
Contrabass
Sul G
pizz.
col legno
ff
f
mf
6

Fig. 13a. 1956 version, Part II, mm. 193–96

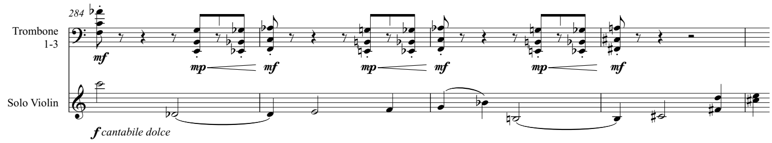
284
Trombone 1-3
Solo Violin
mf
mp
f cantabile dolce

Fig. 13b. 1959 version, Part II, mm. 284–87

Beginning at m. 296 (1959) Schuman then begins to intensify the solo violin part, inexorably moving to the bombastic brass triplets (mm. 325–26, etc., 1959) heard in earlier versions of the concerto.

The ensuing (previously noted) section, marked *wild, sonoro molto,* and *fervente* (𝅗𝅥 = ca. 100–104), represents one of the concerto's most dramatic moments, with an accelerando leading to a *molto ritard* including ***fff*** chords, rim shots, and horn, trumpet, and woodwind lines reminiscent of a Hollywood score for a Roman chariot race. The composer was clearly enamored of this section, raucous as it may be, and kept it in all versions of the concerto. As the passion of this section dissipates, Schuman adds an additional eight measures of new music (1959, mm. 345–53) for accompanying strings and winds before reprising the solo violin line found in m. 260 (1956)/m. 354 (1959).

Finally, Schuman considerably extends and strengthens the concerto's ending. In the 1956 score the coda is composed of fourteen measures (mm. 325–38), which are expanded to thirty (mm. 418–47) in the 1959 version. Schuman writes driving, propulsive eighth-note figures in the solo violin, as opposed to triplets and ♪♪♪𝄾 rhythms in the 1956 version (fig. 14a), which lack the propulsive quality of the newer version (fig. 14b).

Ultimately Schuman pushes the energy level to the maximum in his final version, adding rim shots, chimes, ***fff*** brass chords, all concluding on a major chord (in this case F major), a trademark of Schuman's compositions during this period.

For the sake of completeness it should be noted that Schuman made numerous but minor changes, involving mostly phrasing marks and enharmonic shifts, to the copyist's manuscript score dated October 1959, after the premiere of the final version in Aspen in August 1959.

The question that shadows Schuman's various revisions of the concerto is that of why he was motivated to continually readdress this particular composition. As noted earlier, Schuman was not a composer who tinkered with his scores. As an active arts administrator, as well as a frequently-commissioned composer, he famously kept a diary of the number of hours he composed each year, contending that a minimum of six hundred annual hours would be adequate for him to produce the works he wished to create. Also, he rarely shared his compositional drafts with other composers. He was professionally and personally quite close to Aaron Copland and Leonard Bernstein, but Schuman's extraordinary self-confidence—some would say hubris—allowed him to compose his works with an assurance that left little room for critiques from colleagues. Yet he sought out Copland to corroborate his concerns about this work. Why did the Violin Concerto generate a rare compositional introspection?

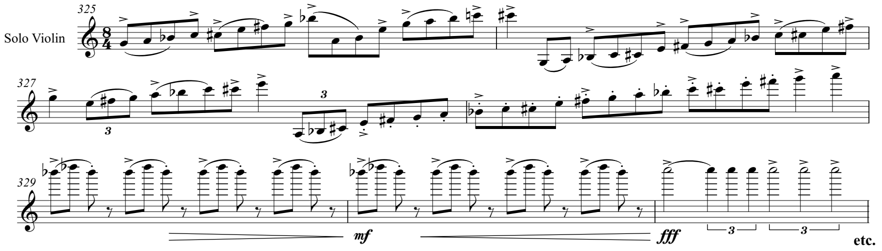

Fig. 14a. 1956 version, Part II, mm. 325–31 (solo violin only)

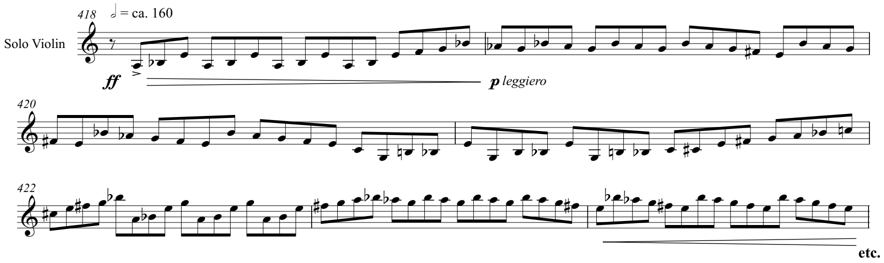

Fig. 14b. 1959 version, Part II, mm. 418–24 (solo violin only)

Schuman's comments in his oral histories regarding the concerto's revisions are quite nonspecific. A fuller answer may lie in the unique circumstances of the work's evolution. When Dushkin prevented the performance of the concerto during the three years of exclusivity included in the commission contract, Schuman was forced to put the work aside and develop new compositions. It was in the late 1940s and the 1950s that Schuman's compositional style changed significantly, from the extroverted, tonally-direct aesthetic of his *American Festival Overture* (1939)[29] and the Third (1941) and Fifth (1943) Symphonies to the more dissonant and chromatically-inflected *Night Journey* (1947) and especially the Sixth Symphony (1949). During Schuman's collaborations with the great twentieth-century choreographers Antony Tudor—*Undertow* (1945)—and Martha Graham—*Night Journey*, *Judith* (1950), *Voyage for a Theater* (1953) and, eventually, *The Witch of Endor* (1965)—the composer was influenced by the psychologically complex and forbidding stories that provided the dramatic underpinnings for the ballets. One sees here an evolution of his compositional approach from diatonic to chromatic textures and complex rhythmic and harmonic juxtapositions, which make his works edgier and less audience-accessible.

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[29] Parenthesized dates of compositions other than the Violin Concerto refer to first performances rather than dates of completion.

Schuman's first ballet for Graham, *Night Journey*, has a distinctly more ominous ethos than does his earlier work with Tudor, *Undertow*, although the Tudor ballet, dealing with rape and murder, certainly could have motivated Schuman to explore greater dissonance. His Sixth Symphony of 1949 is a complex and densely-constructed work, compressed into one movement approximately twenty-eight minutes long. It can be seen as craggy, dark, and emotionally impenetrable, but it stands as one of Schuman's finest compositions for its structural cohesion and musical intensity. It also exists as a kind of compositional bridge from his earlier to his later works, exuding a new level of pathos and expressivity.

In turn, the Fourth String Quartet (1950) represents a break from Schuman's earlier compositional approach. Aaron Copland summed up the transformation best by commenting,

> I cannot remember another work of Schuman that strikes so somber a note. . . . a more tentative expressivity has taken over; a darker, more forbidding tone that seems far different from the basically optimistic—sometimes boyishly optimistic—tone of his earlier music.[30]

In the midst of this compositional transition, the first version of the Violin Concerto was premiered. It seems not illogical to suggest that its tuneful, "romantic" Part II was no longer looked upon by Schuman as representative of his current musical voice and therefore was discarded in favor of an evolving new aesthetic.

Between 1950 and 1959 Schuman wrote more than ten new works or arrangements, which ranged from his folksy baseball opera, *The Mighty Casey* (1953), to a one-movement work of great symphonic power, *Credendum* (1955), to his most audience-friendly and engaging *New England Triptych* (1956), to his haunting choral work, *Carols of Death* (1959) with text by Walt Whitman.

Although Schuman utilized an eclectic array of musical styles during this period, his continuing efforts to distill the Violin Concerto in versions two and three focused on intensifying the presence of the solo violin, which is required not only to play with pathos and feeling, but also to drive the work forward in the more animated sections and especially at its conclusion. In addition, the *quasi cadenza* for solo violin in Part II (1956) adds a rhythmically complex and improvisatory-type line filled with an unexpected playfulness missing in the 1950 version. Schuman also has no qualms about providing a muscular brass presence that occasionally enlarges the sonic environment to Mahlerian proportions, although he always succeeds in bringing the accompaniment down to a dynamic level that never overwhelms the solo violin. This distinctive brass presence in Part II of the later versions is reflected in his approach to the brass parts in *New England Triptych* and especially in the bombastic brass writing in *Credendum.*

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[30] Aaron Copland, "William Schuman (1951)," in *Copland on Music* (New York: Doubleday, 1960), 233.

Schuman would continue to emphasize chromatically dense and somber textures in his later compositions. His last four symphonies—No. 7 (1960), No. 8 (1962), No. 9 (1969), and No. 10 (1976)—all encompass an ominous and dissonant aural environment, as do such works as *Amaryllis: Variations for String Trio* (1964), *To Thee Old Cause* (1968), *The Young Dead Soldiers* (1976), and *Three Colloquies* (1980). Ultimately, Schuman was a young composer who moved to middle age during the gestation of this work. One has to admire his ability to maintain the spirit of youthful vigor throughout the concerto's revisions.

In his Violin Concerto Schuman combines his skills as a symphonist and his knowledge of the violin to create a work of pathos, passion, and drive that showcases the virtuosic and expressive qualities of the solo instrument. In particular, Schuman liberates the solo violin line from the harmonic underpinnings in the orchestra, allowing the principal melodic elements of the concerto, as heard in the solo violin, to float above the accompaniment. Schuman's extensive editing of the work gives it a focus and passion that merits consideration of the Violin Concerto as one of his most successful and masterfully composed works and one of the finest violin concertos of the twentieth century.

ABSTRACT

The saga of the composition and revisions of William Schuman's Violin Concerto spans approximately fourteen years, from 1946 to 1959. The genesis of this work represents a rare and lengthy process for Schuman. Evidence in his letters and oral histories, a close examination of the extensive manuscript and audio sources of the concerto's three versions, and a consideration of the composer's overall musical output during this time period provide an intriguing look into the mind of Schuman as he composed this most affecting work. In his Violin Concerto Schuman combines his skills as a symphonist and his knowledge of the violin to create a work of pathos, passion, and drive that showcases the virtuosic and expressive qualities of the solo instrument. In particular, Schuman liberates the solo violin line from the harmonic

underpinnings in the orchestra, allowing the principal melodic elements of the concerto, as heard in the solo violin, to float above the accompaniment. Schuman's extensive editing of the work gives it a focus and passion that merits consideration of the Violin Concerto as one of his most successful and masterfully composed works and one of the finest violin concertos of the twentieth century.