



American Record Guide

May/June 2019

SCHUMAN: *Witch of Endor*
Boston Modern Orchestra Project/ Gil Rose
BMOP 1062 [2CD] 1:41

Three pieces choreographed by Martha Graham. These are all ancient tales set in Schuman's advanced Americana style with tall chord harmony and Schoenberg-inspired lines.

Judith (1949) is described as a "choreographic poem". It was a ballet for Martha Graham. The apocryphal story involves the beautiful Sarah trying to save Israel by seducing the Philistines' leader. Schuman writes elegiac music and expressive chromaticism, contrasted with angular dance and jazzy rhythms. Elaborate counterpoint leads to the murder, which is suitably bloodcurdling. The work ends with a quasi-tonal climax.

Night Journey (1947) recounts Jocasta's suicide after she learns of the horrors of the Oedipus tragedy. The language is more indicative of the 40s American symphonic style, expanded triadic-based harmony with expressive abstraction. It would have been helpful to see Graham's ballet in conjunction with this piece. The music itself is striking, but the notes do not offer detailed information about the plot.

The Witch of Endor (1985) tells of Samuel meeting the witch to enlist her aid in defeating the Philistines. Schuman's attraction to Schoenberg is particularly in evidence. Without the choreography, this is a chore.

The program is of documentary importance, but the music does not compete with the great dance scores of the period.

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