

421 Words

American composer William Susman has created a distinctively expressive voice in contemporary classical music, with a catalog that includes orchestral, chamber, and vocal music, as well as numerous film scores. In addition to his work as a composer, he spearheads the contemporary ensemble OCTET and Belarca Records. AllMusic calls him an exemplar of "the next developments in the sphere . . . [of] minimalism," and *textura* describes him as "not averse to letting his affection for Afro-Cuban, jazz, and other forms seep into his creative output." His music has earned praise from *The New York Times* for being "vivid, turbulent, and rich-textured," from *Gramophone* as "texturally shimmering and harmonically ravishing," and from *Fanfare* for being "crystalline . . . and gloriously lyrical."

Susman's training as both a jazz and classical pianist was influential in his evolution as a composer. His academic training in composition grounded him in the traditions of mid-century modernism, and he was particularly fascinated by the sounds and techniques of Xenakis and Ligeti. He became increasingly dissatisfied with the expressive and formal limitations of post-war modernism, though, and began to incorporate more diverse elements and influences – free jazz, Afro-Cuban techniques, as well as other non-Western traditions – in what has become his recognizably American and individual voice. His music uses an eclectic array of devices, from medieval isorhythm and hoquet to Afro-Cuban clave and montuño rhythmic patterns. With this toolkit, he crafts a bold sound world both familiar and complex, with highly energetic grooves and hypnotic modal-based harmonies.

Susman's music is uniquely suited to film, and he is widely recognized for scoring such award-winning works as *Native New Yorker* (Best Documentary Film, Tribeca Film Festival), which has been included in over 30 film festivals worldwide and was honored in 2015 as one of the best in American experimental film by the National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C. His film catalog includes scores for more than a dozen documentaries, including *Oil on Ice*, awarded the Pare Lorentz award by the International Documentary Association.

First appearing on the international scene after receiving a BMI award in 1985, Susman was selected by Earle Brown to receive a commission from the Fromm Foundation. The resulting work, *Trailing Vortices* (1986), premiered at the Aspen Music Festival and went on to win an ASCAP Foundation Young Composer Award. It has received numerous international performances, including with the Netherlands Radio Chamber Orchestra, where it was featured at the Gaudeamus Festival. His orchestral and chamber music has been widely performed in the U.S., Europe, China, and Japan.