

New Morning for the World:
A Landmark Commission by the Eastman School of Music

Introductory reflections by Paul J. Burgett
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Robert Freeman, Director of the Eastman School of Music from 1972 to 1996, is an avid baseball fan. He is fond of recounting that he became especially impressed by the Pittsburgh Pirates while watching the 1979 World Series at home, with his wife Carol, in which the Pirates, trailing the Baltimore Orioles three games to one, rebounded and won the Series in game seven. Bob marveled especially at the grit, inspiring spirit, elegant demeanor, and warm mellifluous voice of the Pirates' iconic captain and that year's MVP, Willie Stargell.

The wheels of invention began to turn in Freeman's mind. If Stargell and his teammates could fill a baseball stadium with 59,000 fans for a game, he mused, might Stargell, whose very gracious manner and resonant baritone voice, together with a Pulitzer Prize-winning composer from the Eastman School's faculty, collaborate in a musical masterpiece to fill American concert halls that would draw thousands of baseball and music enthusiasts? And could they parlay their collective expertise and visibility to draw attention to one of the most critical social movements of the time, the Civil Rights movement?

At Freeman's initiative, AT&T commissioned Joseph Schwantner, professor of composition at Eastman, to create a major work for orchestra and narrator, the texts of which were taken from speeches of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Thus was *New Morning for the World* born. The piece received its world premiere in 1983 to a full house at the Kennedy Center in Washington D.C. on Dr. King's birthday, January 15. The performance featured the Eastman Philharmonia, conducted by David Effron with Willie Stargell, narrator. In attendance were notable dignitaries including Secretary of State George P. Schultz, who represented the President of the United States. The audience response was electrifying, and the work also earned favorable critical acclaim.

The premiere was followed in subsequent days by appearances, to full houses, in New York City's Carnegie Hall, Philadelphia's Academy of Music, Pittsburgh's Heinz Hall, and a triumphant tour finale in Rochester's Eastman Theater. As captain of the Pittsburgh Pirates, Stargell was famous for providing individual players with "Stargell Stars" after particularly fine performances on the field.

Coveted by the players, they affixed these to their baseball caps. As the students of the Eastman Philharmonia exited the Eastman Theater stage after the final performance, Mr. Stargell awarded each orchestra member a “Stargell Star.”

A recording of the piece followed and included Aaron Copland’s *Lincoln Portrait*, narrated by Eastman alumnus and renowned baritone William Warfield, and *An Eastman Overture* by Eastman alumnus and Pulitzer Prize-winning composer George Walker. The *Lincoln Portrait* recording, engineered by John Santuccio, then Eastman's assistant director for administration, won a Grammy. Since the time of that historic month of January 1983, *New Morning for the World* has been performed and recorded by major symphony orchestras and has earned its place in the orchestral literature. What you can hear on the present site is the commemorative performance of Schwantner’s *New Morning for the World* at its Rochester premiere on January 19, 1983.