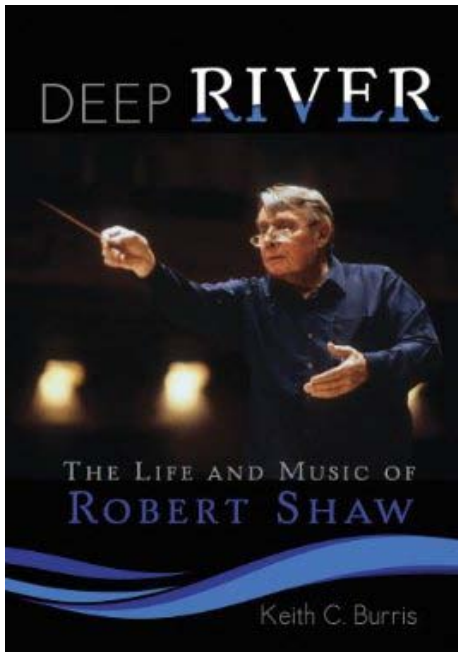


Deep River

The Life and Music of Robert Shaw

by Keith C. Burris



A rich and in-depth biography of the complex man who was the driving force behind the transformation of American choral singing.

Robert Lawson Shaw was born in Red Bluff, California on April 30, 1916 – another century, another America. By the time he died, 82 years later, on January 25, 1999, Shaw had become one of America’s classical music’s icons – standing as tall as a California redwood alongside a very few other key figures who created a culture of classical music in the United States.

When Shaw was a boy, there scarcely was such a culture outside of New York, Boston, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Philadelphia, Yale University, and a few other places. -And a classical choral tradition? It existed, but its existence was neither broad nor deep.

More than any other single person, Shaw was responsible for changing this. He was the principle re-inventor of the choral art in America. Shaw did not transform choral music from a hobby or an academic pursuit all alone. But he was the driving force behind the

transformation of American choral singing. He led the way. He made it important, artistic, and popular. And this was not a role someone handed to him or created for him. It was a role he invented. Indeed, Robert Shaw had to invent the idea of Robert Shaw – he had to invent himself.”

Shaw is part of an American mythic tradition that encompasses Jay Gatsby, Ronald Reagan, “American Idol,” and Barack Obama. Shaw was his own mold, an American prototype – like Dwight D. Eisenhower, Mohammad Ali or Ernest Hemingway.

Great American lives are self-inventions. Shaw re-imagined his chosen craft, and in the process he created his own place in it – a character named Robert Shaw who did what only Robert Shaw did. And just as there was no Robert Shaw before, there will be no “next” Robert Shaw. He made and broke the mold.

“I recently had the privilege of reading Keith Burris’ biography of Robert Shaw. This is an extraordinary document – there is nothing like it in current publication. I suspect that there will never be anything like it again – so the significance of this book cannot be overstated.”

—Dr. Pam, Elrod Director of Choral Studies at Southern Methodist University.

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