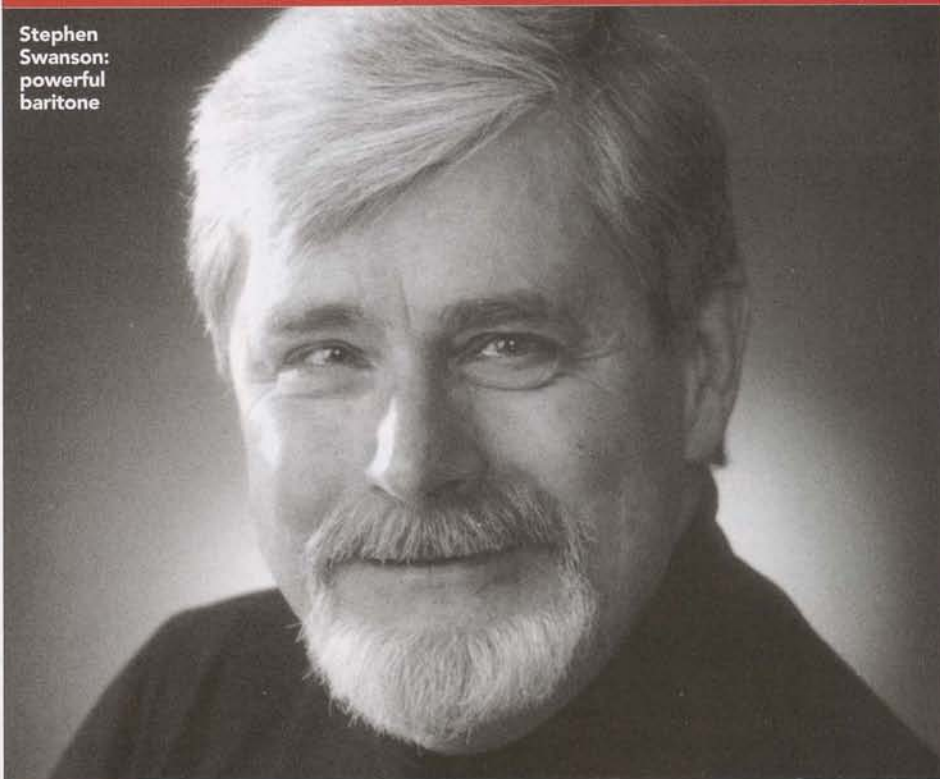


Stephen Swanson: powerful baritone



## A singer's heartfelt response to war gives rise to a moving recital

### 'Was my brother in the battle?'

'Songs of War'

Includes songs by **Bob Dylan, Flanders & Swann, Sheldon Harnick, Stephen Foster, David Gompper, Charles Ives, Tom Lehrer, Tom Paxton, Gene Scheer** and **William Steffe**

Stephen Swanson *bar*

Nicole Esposito *fl/picc*

David Gompper *pf*

Albany © TROY1056 (61' • DDD)

"This recital grew out of my frustration and anger with the build-up to and coverage of Operation Iraqi Freedom." So begins Stephen Swanson's booklet-note to the moving recital he and David Gompper first performed at the University of Iowa in 2004. Recorded in 2007, and rounded off by the addition of two songs by Stephen Foster, it is a testament to the art of the performers and its ability to probe the human spirit.

With Swanson's powerful but carefully wielded baritone and Gompper's imaginative piano, the programme masterfully mixes strikingly classical songs by Charles Ives with Gene Scheer's moving setting of soldiers'

recollections and a mix of the bittersweet (Sheldon Harnick's *Merry Little Menuet*) and the funny, including a delightful bow to Flanders & Swann. The result is an absorbing exploration of unexpected gems.

The recital concludes with David Gompper's deeply conflicted setting of Lincoln's letter in late 1864 to a mother whose five sons were lost

**'It is a testament to the art of the performers and the ability of art to probe the human spirit'**

in the Civil War. It is, like everything else, performed with such attention to the words that, no matter how entertaining any one item may be – and there is a lot of entertainment here – the underlying message comes through without becoming maudlin.

The booklet is beautifully put together and the sound, recorded at the University's state-of-the-art facilities in Clapp Recital Hall, is of profoundly beautiful proportions. **Laurence Vittes**