

October 23, 2011 Program Notes

Made in America

Two Pulitzer Prize winning Americans — Samuel Barber and Howard Hanson — wrote pieces on today's program, hence the concert title "Made in America." Interestingly, all of the works on today's program are new repertoire for the Mid-Texas Symphony, although standard orchestral works.

Barber (1910-1981): Essay No. 2 for Orchestra

Samuel Barber was born and raised in West Chester, Pennsylvania. He started composing at a young age and had begun writing an opera at the age of ten. He studied at the Curtis Institute and there met Gian Carlo Menotti. They remained friends and collaborators for life, with Menotti writing the libretto for two of Barber's operas, one of which, *Vanessa*, won a Pulitzer. Barber's Adagio for Strings is one of the most beloved and recognizable compositions of the century. Barber's lyrical, expressive style echoes his 19th century forebears.

Second Essay for Orchestra was commissioned by Conductor Bruno Walter for the 100th anniversary of the New York Philharmonic in 1942. Like a literary essay, this composition explores its themes within a concise framework. The composition opens quietly with solo flute, but beautifully begins to develop some of the fragments in the melody, building excitement and intensity. He concludes with a decidedly martial flair, bold and triumphant. Shortly after completing this work, Barber joined the Army Air Corps and served in World War II. As Barber wrote, "Although it has no program, one perhaps hears that it was written in war-time." Just as the turbulent times are reflected in the music, the New York Philharmonic's program for a 1943 stadium performance is replete with ads for war bonds, and touts Camels cigarettes as being the favorite of servicemen.

Harry Potter fans will recognize themes borrowed by John Williams for his Potter film scores.

Weber (1786-1826): Concerto for Bassoon

Carl Maria Friedrich Ernst von Weber was a child of the second marriage of Franz Anton Weber, a musician and traveling theatre troupe manager whose goal was to father "the next Mozart Wunderkind." Although never achieving Mozart's greatness, Weber had a successful career and, having published his first works at the age of 11, can fairly be labeled a prodigy.

The **Bassoon Concerto in F Major**, was originally written in 1811 and revised in 1822 and 1823. After the success of the Concertino for Clarinet that Weber had written for a concert attended by the King of Bavaria, he received a number of requests by musicians to compose a piece for their instruments. In response, Weber wrote the Concerto in F Major for Georg Friedrich Brandt, a prominent bassoonist of the day.

Weber's Bassoon Concerto is one of the two most frequently performed works for bassoon; Mozart's Bassoon Concerto, written in 1774, is the other. Having performed the Mozart Bassoon Concerto last season with the San Antonio Symphony and performing the Weber this season with the Mid-Texas Symphony, today's soloist Sharon Kuster will have had the opportunity to explore both of the most popular compositions for bassoon. Weber's Concerto has been described as treating the bassoon as if it were different characters in an opera — a pompous general in the opening movement, a jilted lover in the second movement, and a comic clown in the third movement. This characterization is apt for the composer who was hailed as the Father of Romantic Period German Opera and an inspiration of Richard Wagner.

Hanson (1896-1981): Symphony No. 2, "Romantic"

Howard Hanson was born and raised in Wahoo, Nebraska, where he began his musical studies with his mother,

Hilma Hanson. After graduating from Northwestern University and teaching music theory and composition at College of the Pacific in California, Hanson won the Rome Prize from the American Academy, the first American composer to be awarded the honor. While in Rome, Hanson composed his first symphony; a choral piece, *The Lament for Beowulf*; and several other works. When he returned to the U.S., Hanson became Director of the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, which he led to become one of America's leading conservatories.

Hanson's compositions, like Barber's, tend to the conservative, holding on to a tonal center instead of abandoning tonality partially or completely like so many of his composing colleagues. Hanson's **Symphony No. 2** was commissioned by Serge Koussevitzky for the 50th anniversary of the Boston Symphony Orchestra in 1930. It is unabashedly "Romantic" and was described by Hanson as "my escape from the rather bitter type of modern musical realism which occupies so large a place in contemporary thought." Explaining himself later, Hanson noted, "I believe that there are essentially two types of music, warm-blooded music and cold-blooded music, and every possible admixture of the two. The 'Romantic' is definitely warm-blooded music." Toscanini selected this work as one of the few American compositions he programmed; Barber's Second Essay was another.

Film buffs may recognize the theme from this work from the closing credits of *Alien*, while musicians know part of this work as the "Interlochen" theme. The conclusion of each concert at the famous music camp features the Interlochen theme, performed under the leadership of the student concertmaster.