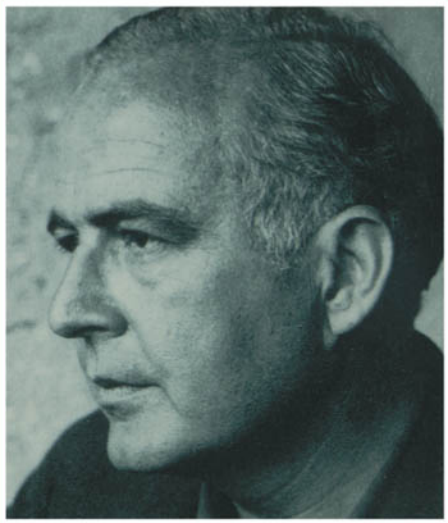
SAMUEL BARBER

THE COMPOSER AND HIS MUSIC



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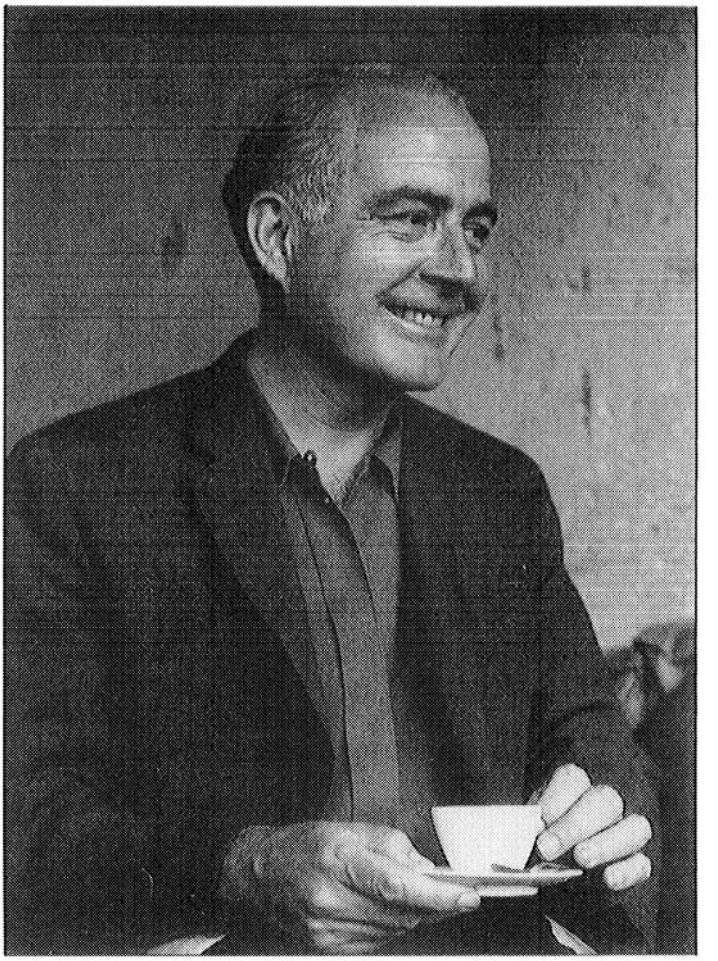

Samuel Barber, *ca.* 1964

SAMUEL BARBER

The Composer and His Music

BARBARA B. HEYMAN

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To my mother
SUSAN LACHOLTER BRODY
and to the memory of my father
SAMUEL H. BRODY

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Preface

Samuel Barber (1910–1981) was one of the most honored and most frequently performed American composers in Europe and the Americas during the mid-century decades. Through most of his career he made his living almost entirely by composing, perhaps one of the few composers who could make this choice. His works—comprising forty-eight opus numbers and more than one hundred unpublished pieces—are representative of nearly every musical genre, and many entered the repertoire soon after he wrote them.

In spite of his position as a major American composer of the twentieth century, there has been a relative paucity of scholarly writings about Barber's music and no exhaustive, documented study of his career and oeuvre. The short biography by Nathan Broder is the most substantial and frequently cited work about Barber. While it covers only up to 1954 and is not dependable in every detail, it is to this time the only biography of the composer based on information provided by Barber, his family, and newsletters from the Curtis Institute of Music. Richard Jackson's general article on Barber in the *New Grove Dictionary of American Music* builds on Broder's work and adds material through 1981. A number of dissertations have focused on selected aspects or genres. Don A. Hennessee's study is largely a bibliography of review excerpts and includes limited (though sometimes inaccurate) material on first performances, a discography, and sketchy biographical information. Over the last five decades, numerous articles, reviews, or record liner notes mostly concern individual works. Several sympathetic profiles of Barber by Hans W. Heinsheimer, of his publisher, G. Schirmer, Inc., offer interesting anecdotes focusing on the composer's personal and creative struggles.

This historical study traces Barber's career in relation to all his published and all but a few of his unpublished works. The considerable bio-

graphical material presented is designed to illuminate the course of that career and Barber's compositional process. Information about the circumstances surrounding a work's composition, premiere, critical reception, and revisions is included when available.

It is not my intention to present an analytical study of the music, or to arrive at a critical judgment, but it is part of my documentary purpose to weave in the judgments of Barber's contemporaries as historical context. I have tried to document the genesis of each work and explore the formative stages of composition. Discussion of the music itself is limited to a brief description of the work with some references to existing analytic studies and the relevant holographs. Occasionally more detailed discussion is included to trace the particular influence of performing artists, or when it bears on the nature of revisions after a performance, or when it helps to clarify patterns of stylistic tendencies in Barber's music.

Primary source material for the study consists almost entirely of letters, diaries, journals, sketchbooks, holographs, autograph manuscripts, and other related documents from the Barber estate. Barber was an ardent and eloquent letter writer, and fortunately his family, colleagues, and friends valued his letters enough to preserve most of them. These sources include the extraordinary, rich correspondence (1912–1953) between Barber and his uncle Sidney Homer and numerous letters to his parents, Serge Koussevitzky, William Strickland, Jeanne Behrend, Orlando Cole, Eugene Ormandy, William Schuman, Charles Turner, Henry-Louis de La Grange, and Manfred Ibel, among others.

Other sources include manuscripts from private collections or libraries: the Library of Congress (the largest repository of Barber holographs), the Curtis Institute of Music, the Sibley Library at the Eastman School of Music (housing the G. Schirmer collection), and the Chester County Historical Society, where lie the early sketches of many of Barber's juvenile works, including *The Rose Tree,* his first opera, written when he was ten. Individual manuscripts, or copies of them, were given by Barber as gifts to performers, close friends, or family. The largest number of privately owned manuscripts belonged to Louise Homer and are preserved by her daughter Katharine Homer Fryer.

From 1939 on, Barber was unusually fortunate in that only first-rate performers—proven virtuosos—premiered his works, and therefore most of his instrumental compositions were written with a particular performer or performing group in mind. In this study, interviews were conducted whenever possible with those artists who gave first performances. Thus an oral history emerges that focuses on several themes—discussions between Barber and performers as a piece progressed, its special challenges or innovations, and specific suggestions about its performance.

For the most part, each work is taken up chronologically, following the course of Barber's career. The narrative digresses if there were significant revisions or performances of a work well after its completion. Thus

the reader will usually find most of the information about a work in one location in the text. If equal attention is not given to all pieces, it is sometimes because primary source material was sparse or unavailable; this is the case, for example, with some of Barber's songs, which were usually composed with such facility that he rarely wrote about them in his letters.

Future analytic study of Barber's music will be facilitated by the holograph sketches and drafts deposited at the Library of Congress in 1984, which will support work in greater depth than was possible for studies completed before that date. New sources continue to emerge. These and the many inquiries I receive from scholars, performers, and conductors confirm a pressing need for a descriptive catalogue—which I hope to complete at an early date—that can serve as a guide for future Barber research and performances of his music. It will be a thematic *catalogue raisonné* that will provide an entry for each of Barber's published and unpublished compositions, including dates of beginning and completion, instrumentation, first performances, tempi markings, duration, and discography as well as locations, descriptions, and comparisons of manuscripts—holographs, sketches, and revisions. I hope that the present documentary study will prove useful in itself and, in combination with the completed catalogue, will pave the way for future analytical and critical studies of Barber's music.

New York B. B. H.
September 1991

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This study owes much to the support of Gian Carlo Menotti, executor of the Estate of Samuel Barber, whose early endorsement of the overall project has made possible much of the documentary investigation on which it is based. I am especially indebted also to Katharine Homer Fryer for her lively recollections and for lending me the extraordinary collection of correspondence between Barber and her father, Sidney Homer, and the treasured manuscripts of her mother, Louise Homer.

The many, many excerpts from Samuel Barber's published works, as well as unpublished manuscript materials, appear by kind permission of G. Schirmer, Inc. I thank Steven Culbertson, Susan Feder, Peter Herb, and Paul Wittke for their help in solving mysteries and unravelling knots.

One of the most gratifying aspects of piecing together Barber's life has been the savoring of his own written words, but the mosaic could not have been fully set without the words of others. Mrs. Eugene Ormandy graciously granted permission to use correspondence from her late husband's papers. The letters of Serge Koussevitzky are quoted with the permission of the Serge Koussevitzky Foundation. The letters of John Nicholas Brown are quoted with the kind permission of Anne S. K. Brown. The letters of William Schuman are quoted with his permission.

The project in its particular form would not have been possible without the enthusiastic participation of the many colleagues, friends, and schoolmates of Barber's who shared with me their recollections in interviews or by letter and in many instances made available their personal copies of his manuscripts, letters, notebooks, and journals: Martina Arroyo, Rose Bampton, Samuel Baron, Herbert Baumel, the late Jeanne Behrend, Ralph Berkowitz, Brunetta Bernard, John Bitter, the late Nellie Lee Bok, Todd Bolender, John G. Briggs, Iso Briselli, John Browning, Leonard Burkat, Paul Callaway, Orlando Cole, Rohini Coomara, Patrick Creagh, Suso Cec-

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My appreciation is boundless to the many librarians, archivists, and representatives of other organizations, whose knowledge and spirit of cooperation have enabled my research to move forward with remarkably few delays. At the Curtis Institute of Music Library, Elizabeth Walker provided invaluable assistance in the launching of the research nine years ago and continued to alert me to new materials. Working in the Music Division of the Library of Congress is like going to heaven without dying; Gillian Anderson and Ray White have an uncanny talent for locating elusive manuscripts, Margaret Kieckhefer was diligent in overseeing the photoreproduction of holographs; and my gratitude is enormous to Wayne Shirley for his enthusiastic reading of the manuscript and for providing valuable textual advice on matters beyond music.

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It is a special pleasure to thank colleagues at the City University of New York: Barry S. Brook, as my earliest mentor and teacher, introduced me to the joys of the scholarly treasure hunt; and beyond the immediacy of giving expert bibliographic and editorial suggestions, his way of thinking about music and musicians in society in general has in large measure influenced the particular focus of this book. I am sincerely grateful to H. Wiley Hitchcock for much valuable advice and for the continuous flow of Barberiana sent in my direction; and to Stephen Blum, Leo Kraft, and Edward O. D. Downes for their helpful criticisms of the manuscript in its early stage.

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B. B. H.

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SAMUEL BARBER

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INTRODUCTION

> There is a degree of innovation beyond which one does not pass without danger—Lamartine had the gift of seizing the exact point of permissible innovation.[1]
>
> *Franz Liszt*

Nothing could more clearly illuminate the musical aesthetic that guided Samuel Barber throughout his career than this quotation—in effect an undeclared credo—written by the composer on the final page of an early sketchbook.* When, near the end of his life, he said, "I myself wrote always as I wished, and without a tremendous desire to find the latest thing possible. . . . I wrote as I wanted to for myself,"[2] he was acknowledging his insulation from the stylistic trends of his generation.

Barber entered his professional career in the mid-1930s upon the wave of Depression-era conservatism that characterized the music of many American composers who were at least a decade older than he. But unlike many of his contemporaries whose careers came to maturity between the two world wars, he rarely responded to experimental trends that infused music in the 1920s and again after World War II, instead pursuing a path marked by a vocally inspired lyricism and a commitment to the tonal language and many of the forms of late nineteenth-century music. Although he shared the concern of his generation for writing music accessible to a broadly based audience, unlike Copland, Harris, Blitzstein, and Thomson, who searched for a music with national identity and who from the thirties on began incorporating popular, jazz, and folk idioms in their compositions, Barber attempted to communicate to established concert audiences whose taste was based on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European models. Even an anomaly among his works—"Adventure," scored partially for non-Western instruments—maintains a firm connection to European rather than Asian musics. When he did incorporate Americana into

* The sketchbook, kept by Barber from about 1932 to the early 1940s, is at the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. Barber donated this book to the library in 1962 and at that time identified many of the works in it.

his music, it was transitory, yielding *Excursions* (1941–42)—stylized pieces based on American idioms—and the Piano Sonata (1949) and the Piano Concerto (1962), both of which lightly display motoric jazz rhythms. His song texts—only occasionally by American poets, overwhelmingly by Irish or English—were usually selected for their inherent musical interest or because they held personal significance. *Knoxville: Summer of 1915*, for example, based on James Agee's memoir and sometimes considered the most "American" of Barber's works, was selected because it evoked an identification with, and nostalgia for, the composer's own childhood. In this regard, he bears a closer resemblance to nineteenth-century Romantics than to his peers, whose choice of subjects was often motivated by social consciousness or a sense of nationalism. His international literary orientation is reflected in the 1945 commencement address he delivered to young musicians at the Curtis Institute of Music: "One might think there were no poets except Sara Teasdale and Walt Whitman. . . . Do you know the poems of Spender, T. S. Eliot . . . W. H. Auden?"[3] Barber not only read their works but became a friend to many poets and writers.

Of the many influences on Barber's music, three seem most prominent in preserving his consistent connection to the nineteenth century. The first is the character of his formal musical education, which was traditional, Europe-oriented, and institutionalized—nine rigorous years of training in composition at the Curtis Institute of Music under the tutelage of Rosario Scalero, a student of Eusebius Mandyczewski, friend and colleague of Brahms.

The second is the impact on his intellectual development of travels to Europe. Beginning in his student years, Barber's affinity for European culture intensified with travel and extended residence abroad and found fulfillment in his close personal relationship and professional collaborations with Gian Carlo Menotti. Although such experiences freed him from the social provincialism and intellectual conservatism of Philadelphia, instead of being attracted to Paris—the "Boulangerie" and the arena of avant-gardism—Barber turned to Italy and mingled with young artists whose temperament and interests were in sympathy with his own Romantic orientation. His conviction that the narrow intellectual interests of American artists, resulting from an "intense vogue for specialization," so limited the vision of a musician that he virtually became "ossified within the very limits of his techniques" led him to form few alliances with composers and, in general, to prefer the company of nonmusician intellectuals (among the few exceptions were Menotti, Francis Poulenc, Alexei Haieff, Rudolf Serkin, and Dimitri Mitropoulos).*

* The quotations are from the Curtis Institute of Music commencement address, 12 May 1945. His delight in long conversations with poets in particular is made clear in a letter of 13 February 1946 to Katherine Garrison Chapin: "I am always interested in talking to poets," he wrote. "It's such a pleasure after musicians!" (Francis and Katherine Biddle Papers, Special Collections Division, Georgetown University Library).

A third force that molded Barber's artistic principles was the personal guidance he received from his uncle, the composer Sidney Homer, whose advice and mentoring can scarcely be overestimated. Homer's importance to his nephew is strongly disclosed by selected letters Barber thought significant enough to transcribe. They demonstrate that, from the time he was twelve until Homer's death in 1953, the younger composer was barraged with specific advice about his training. Early on, Homer held up to him as role models the giants of the nineteenth century, while at the same time directing his nephew to trust the validity of his "inner voice." He counseled him to ignore superficial intellectualism and transient opinions, to shun the mediocre in art. Yet within this context, paradoxically, he preached to his nephew an antielitist, populist point of view.

As much as Barber's nonrevolutionary posture was a product of his experience, however, it derived also from his personal motivation for writing music—to express feelings. From his earliest piano piece, "Sadness," to the song cycle written near the end of his career, *Despite and Still,* self-expression was inseparable from the compositional process:

> I suppose if I'm writing music for words, then I immerse myself in those words, and I let the music flow out of them. When I write an abstract piano sonata or a concerto, I write what I feel. I'm not a self-conscious composer.[4]

This self-projected image of the composer for whom writing music was always spontaneous and easy is contradicted over and over again, however, by Barber's letters and individual testimonies describing the birth-pangs that accompanied many of his large-scale works. Menotti, who knew Barber better than anyone, draws a profile of his friend as "gifted" but "tormented" by his need for perfection.[5]

Exceptions were his songs, which were often composed spontaneously during periods when he was having difficulty beginning a new piece or revising an old one. His facility with this genre is supported statistically: excluding large-scale vocal works—operas, choruses, and orchestral settings—Barber wrote 103 solo songs (of which only 37 are published). These represent more than half of his more than two hundred compositions.

No matter how unfashionable his tenacious loyalty to melody may have been judged from time to time in his career, Barber's impeccably crafted compositions continue to move listeners. Perhaps this is precisely because he had the "gift" of knowing how to merge "permissible innovation" with tradition.

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I

BEGINNINGS

I was meant to be a composer

When he was nine years old Samuel Barber left a letter on his desk announcing his intention to become a composer:

> NOTICE to *Mother* and *nobody else*
> Dear Mother: I have written this to tell you my worrying secret. Now don't cry when you read it because it is neither yours nor my fault. I suppose I will have to tell it now without any nonsense. To begin with I was not meant to be an athlet [*sic*]. I was meant to be a composer, and will be I'm sure. I'll ask you one more thing.—Don't ask me to try to forget this unpleasant thing and go play football.—*Please*—Sometimes I've been worrying about this so much that it makes me mad (not very),
>
> *Love,*
> *Sam Barber II**

Although there are many legendary stories about composers, especially if they were child prodigies, this Barber legend is supported by material evidence, for the note itself has been preserved. In his adult years, Barber enjoyed retelling the story whenever interviewed about his career.

Samuel Osborne Barber II—named after his paternal grandfather—was born 9 March 1910 in the quiet town of West Chester, Pennsylvania, thirty miles from Philadelphia. In the mid-nineteenth century West Chester had been an affluent industrial town, but by the turn of the century what remained as a reminder of former wealth were gracious large homes, en-

*This letter is quoted in several different sources: Nathan Broder, in *Samuel Barber* (New York: G. Schirmer, 1956), reports that Barber was eight when he wrote it; the composer on two other occasions said he wrote the note when he was nine (quoted by James Felton in the *Philadelphia Bulletin*, 9 March 1980, and by Phillip Ramey in liner notes for the recording "Songs of Samuel Barber and Ned Rorem," New World Records, NW 229, 1978).

hanced with ornate cupolas, pillared doorways, and grand lawns.[1] The Barbers' three-story red brick house at 107 South Church Street was of generous proportions, fronted by an expansive porch with a decoratively striped awning and bordered along the sidewalk by neatly trimmed low hedges.*

A prevailing moral and cultural conservatism marked community and family life, perhaps an influence of a once dominant Quaker population that still existed in the town. Although a literary figure might be venerated—for example, the novelist Joseph Hergesheimer, West Chester's "most celebrated inhabitant"[2]—musicians and theater people were regarded with suspicion.† Music was considered to be mainly a diversion, "and a rather odd one at that," wrote Barber's cousin Anne Homer about West Chester: "There was a certain attitude toward music, a belittlement, as though it had no valid place in the scheme of things."[3] Nor, according to novelist Owen Wister, was Philadelphia any more open-minded about creative innovation; he is said to have remarked, "proper Philadelphians seem to distrust our own power to do anything out of the common; and when a young man tries to, our minds close against him with a civic instinct of disparagement."‡

This provincialism partially explains the resistance exerted by Barber's maternal relatives, the Beattys, when their daughter Louise, who had married the composer Sidney Homer, went off to Paris to study voice and dramatic acting. She became a celebrated opera singer,§ and during her career with the Metropolitan Opera, which began in 1900 and spanned two decades, she was one of the leading contraltos of her time.

Barber's mother, Marguerite McLeod Beatty Barber, called Daisy, was of English, Scottish-Irish descent, and her family had lived in the United States since Revolutionary times. Her great-great-grandfather, Captain Oliver Brown, had, according to his letters, "stood in front of the first cannon fired by the British on the Americans at Lexington" and was entrusted with "many small adventures" by General Washington. Her grandfather's cousin was Robert Fulton, the inventor of the steamboat.‖ The youngest

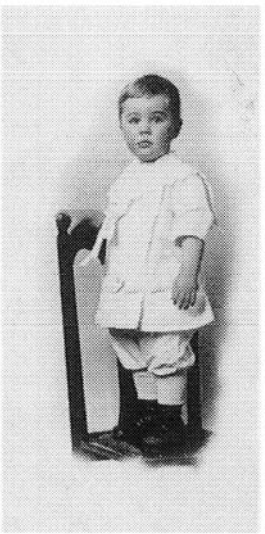
* A photograph of the Barber house is in Broder, *Samuel Barber,* between pages 32 and 33. The Barber family moved to this house in January 1919 (*West Chester Daily Local News,* 17 January 1919).

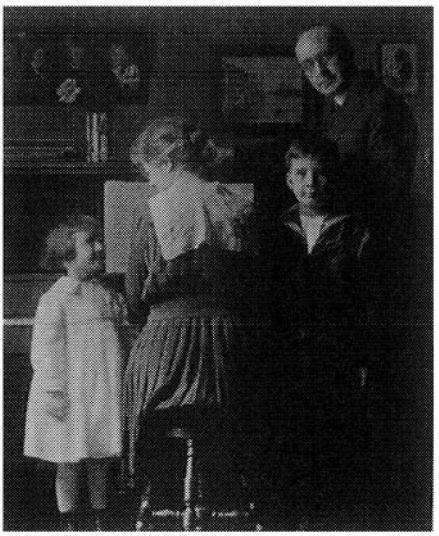
† Anne Homer refers to her grandmother's concern about her daughter Louise's choice of composer Sidney Homer for her husband: "The most stringent of her stipulations was that he should be earning enough to support a wife, for his unconventional, seasonal and somewhat uncertain occupation was looked upon with great suspicion in West Chester" (*Louise Homer and the Golden Age of Opera* [New York: William Morrow, 1974], p. 100).

‡ William K. Stevens, "Bashful Philadelphians Changing with Newcomers Who Want to Stand Out," *New York Times,* 6 October 1985, p. 52. Wister and his sister Marina opened their home to Barber during the early 1930s.

§ When, during the beginning of her operatic career, she played several *travesti* roles, Louise pacified her family's shock by having costumes specially designed to minimize the masculine character of her dress (see Anne Homer, *Louise Homer,* pp. 172–76).

‖ Brown's letters are quoted in detail in Barber's unpublished memoir of his own childhood, "Fadographs of a Yestern Scene," ca. 1974, p. 1.





(Left) Samuel Osmond Barber II, fifteen months old. *(Right)* The Barber family ca. 1916.

of eight children and the daughter of a pastor, Daisy Beatty moved from Minneapolis to West Chester with her widowed mother in 1885, and when on 17 October 1905 she married the young doctor Roy Barber, she lived at 35 High Street, only a few blocks away from her family's home.* Their only son, Sam Barber, as he was called, was reported by a cousin to be "an unusually handsome child, strong, lively, and intelligent."[4] He had one sister, Sara, who was three years younger than he and the close companion of his youth. "I think she really understood my 'makeup' as an artist, about which my parents remained somewhat withdrawn," Barber wrote in his 1974 memoir. Sara was high-spirited, romantic, and by her own account greatly influenced intellectually by her older brother. Barber wrote some of his earliest songs for Sara. A family photograph shows Daisy Barber at the piano, flanked by Sam and Sara with song books in hand.†

* *West Chester Daily Local News*, 18 October 1905. Roy Barber's father, Samuel O. Barber, had come from Philadelphia to West Chester in 1888 to take charge of the Denny Tag Factory. In 1909 the family was considered among the "best known people in West Chester, and highly respected on account of their worth and genial disposition" (*West Chester Daily Local News*, 4 March 1908).

† Among the Beattys, Barber's mother's family, music making was a tradition. Although their father, Will Beatty, a minister and educator (he founded the Pennsylvania Female College, now Chatham College), was dedicated fully to his spiritual mission in the Presbyterian church, he often played the flute for his family (reportedly undergoing an "astonishing transformation") and saw to it that all four of his girls learned to play the piano. Duets were sometimes accompanied by Louise on the tambourine (see Anne Homer, *Louise Homer*, pp. 8–10).

Sara and Sam Barber.

The Barbers handled their warm feelings for one another by gentle, though sometimes unmerciful, teasing: for example, Sara's musical training included singing lessons and years of piano lessons, and when she finally managed to learn the A-major intermezzo by Brahms, her father caused laughter with his remark, "That is the piece I have paid eight hundred dollars for."* But in fact Barber encouraged, sometimes even guided, Sara's musical development, and, although one cannot surmise how deep her commitment actually was, she must have been at least a competent musician.† "I'm so proud of Sara," he wrote from Italy in 1930, "perhaps she will be the first woman orchestra conductor, not a bad idea really."[5]

By the time he was six, Sam Barber was inventing melodies at the piano and his talent was recognized by his family.‡ Daisy Barber wrote proudly

* Barber, "Fadographs," p. 12. Katharine Homer Fryer reports that Sara spent several summers at Lake George studying singing with Louise Homer.

† A letter from Barber to his parents on 27 June 1930, for example, advises, "Tell Sara to learn the Brahms Intermezzo, Op. 116, No. 2. It should be among my music in Vol. II of his works; if not, she can get the single edition from Pressers. It is very easy, and a beauty—in A minor. Tell her not to play the part marked *Ossia* unless she can't possibly get the other."

All letters from Barber to his parents written between 1928 and 1931 cited in this book were made available to the author by the Estate of Samuel Barber through Valentin Herranz, companion to Barber from 1967 to 1981.

‡ Broder, *Samuel Barber*, p. 6; Anne Homer (in *Louise Homer*, p. 369) reports, however, that when the young Sam was barely two, Daisy Barber wrote to her family that he was making up tunes on the piano; a news article in the *West Chester Daily Local News*, 13 July 1921, boasts that Barber had been a pianist "since his infancy."

to her relatives of her son's musical accomplishments and helped him write down his first compositions. Because of her aversion to "amateur male pianists," however, for a short time he was given cello lessons.[6]

Barber's father, president and treasurer of the board of trustees of the First Presbyterian Church of West Chester and president of the West Chester School Board for twenty-five years, was a "reserved type of person" who appeared distant until one got to know him.* In his memoir from the mid-1970s, Barber described his father as "a man of exquisite manners, much loved in town, affable, outgoing. . . . He was witty and gentle, with the fine hands of a surgeon, very conventional in his tastes, and devoted to and over-protective of my mother, who was somewhat childlike." Apparently he had other goals for his son than to be a composer. At the very least—as Sam's letter suggests—he wished his young son's preoccupation with music to be tempered by an interest in sports and other more conventional childhood activities.† At the crest of his career, Barber would say: "I was supposed to be a doctor. I was supposed to go to Princeton. And everything I was supposed to do I didn't."‡

From the time he was seven, Sam Barber, as he signed his pieces, had been writing down his own compositions.§ Exemplary of his youthful style are three works written between July and December 1917: two for piano—"Sadness," Op. I, No. 1,‖ in C minor, acknowledged by the composer to be his first composition; and "Melody in F," with the melody daringly placed in the left hand—and a song dedicated to Barber's mother, "Sometime," on an affectionate text by Eugene Field. These and other early efforts of the young composer can be found in a leatherbound volume titled "Earliest Compositions" at the Library of Congress.# Of ten youthful pieces written between 1917 and 1919 in the collection, half are for voice (a proportion that would hold for his complete oeuvre) and are based on poems by poets popular with young people—Field being one of Barber's

*This account by John Sepella, a childhood friend of Barber, is recorded in "Samuel Barber: Portrait of a Musical Master," p. 29, an unpublished American history seminar project by students at Henderson High School, West Chester Area School District, 1982–83.

†Dorothy Bates, who was two grades behind Barber in school, recalled hearing Dr. Barber say about his son that he would ask nothing more out of life than to starve in a garret and become a musician ("Samuel Barber: Portrait of a Musical Master," p. 26). Sepella, when interviewed, said about the young Sam Barber: "He didn't quite understand people who didn't love music as he did. You couldn't talk to him about sports. . . . It was that his whole life was dedicated to one purpose and that was composition" (ibid., p. 29).

‡Interview by Robert Sherman, WQXR, 30 September 1978. John Sepella, music director and music supervisor of the West Chester Area School District for thirty-eight years, asked Barber (presumably early in his career) what kind of a mark he wanted to leave on the world; he is reported to have said: "I'm not out to make any mark for anyone or anything but to please myself and what I feel is right about music" ("Samuel Barber: Portrait of a Musical Master," p. 29).

§A complete listing of Barber's earliest compositions is included in my catalogue, in progress.

‖Barber numbered his youthful works with Roman numerals.

#The portfolio was given to the library in the 1984 bequest of the Estate of Samuel Barber.

favorites. A waltz set to J. G. Whittier's poem "Isabel" (1919), on the other hand, represents a more sophisticated choice for a nine-year-old and demonstrates an early gift for grateful parlor tunes as well as a budding instinct for building tension through harmonic means.

Barber's interest in the piano was too strong to be denied—he was beginning to teach himself—thus in 1919 his parents obtained lessons for him with the best piano teacher they could find in West Chester, William Hatton Green, a former pupil of Leschetizky in Vienna. Green played an important role in the musical life of West Chester; he frequently gave recitals himself and accompanied Louise Homer and other singers when they performed in the community. Barber studied with Green until he entered Curtis in 1924 and kept in contact with him long after. With the devotion typically accorded by a teacher to a successful student, Green followed Barber's career avidly and kept a clipping file of programs, news articles, and reviews about him.* Barber participated in recitals of Green's students from the time he was nine years old, and on these occasions he sometimes played his own works. At one such recital, on 7 April 1920 at the First Presbyterian Church in West Chester, he played duets and solo piano pieces by Clementi, Bach, Tchaikovsky, Beethoven, and Stephen Heller, and three works of his own: two for piano—"At Twilight" and "Lullaby" (both 1919), a "virtuosic" effort requiring complicated hand crossings and including his first use of dynamic and tempo markings—and a song, "Child and Mother" (on words from the ubiquitous *Book of Knowledge*, vol. 12), in which he was joined by the versatile young soprano Miss Charlsie Eddins. The pair further impressed their audience with a selection of "Auto Harp Duetts." "Sam was at his best," the local paper puffed; "the manner in which he executed different selections. . . . brought round after round of applause."†

Barber's early piano compositions are, as might be expected, modeled on the kind of music Barber himself studied. His "Allegretto on C" (the third movement of "Themes," 1920, see below), for example, coincided with the study of Clementi's Sonatina, Op. 36, No. 1,‡ and bears characteristic bass figurations, decorative turns, and the doubling in thirds of the melodic line. Even these earliest pieces, however, give some hint of Barber's coming individuality. His focus was so strongly on song that many of his instrumental compositions were in fact "songs without words." Most,

* After his death, the collection of clippings was deposited in Philadelphia at the Curtis Institute of Music. The sources of these news articles are not always named or precisely dated but with some detective work could be identified.

† *West Chester Daily Local News*, 10 April 1920. A year later at the Art Alliance in Philadelphia on 25 May 1921 Barber performed three works for piano from Leo Ornstein's *Nine Miniatures*. The program and all other programs of piano recitals by Green's students cited here are in the William Hatton Green clipping file at the Curtis Institute of Music Library.

‡ Barber and Charlsie Eddins played a two-piano arrangement of the sonatina in two recitals on 23 June 1919 and 7 April 1920.

up to 1919, are in simple forms—there was a fondness for codas in compound meter—and contain a clearly defined, undecorated diatonic melody, usually placed in the right hand, with an accompaniment of triads in simple cadential harmonies. Dominant and diminished-seventh chords and arpeggios began to appear sparingly, but even his more daring harmonizations suggest that although Barber enjoyed an occasional dissonance as an expressive device, it generally resulted from cross relations or voice leading—based on a linear, rather than vertical, logic.

Barber's precociousness at eight is evident in "War Song," Op. I, No. V (Example 1.1), whose title, year of composition (1918), and character—somber and militaristic—all suggest it was stimulated by his awareness of World War I.

The young composer seemed to enjoy the reiteration of the dissonance C♮ in the left hand against the C♯ in the right (mm. 2–3), for he repeated it several measures later with D and D♭. A suggestion in this piece of the vocabulary that later was intrinsic to Barber's mature style is the shifting between minor and major modes: the first section begins in G minor and ends in F major; the second begins in F minor.

The titles of Barber's piano works during this period reflect their character—"Sadness," "War Song," "At Twilight," "Lullaby," and "Largo"—and suggest that, from the start, even abstract music was for Barber synonymous with expression of feeling. "In the Firelight" (Eugene Field) demonstrates his penchant for melancholy themes, even at a tender age (Example 1.2).

By the time he was eleven Sam Barber was studying the pipe organ and showed some proficiency on the instrument at the First Presbyterian Church, to which his family belonged.[7] The following year he obtained a job as organist for the Westminster Church in West Chester, where he earned $100 a month. One of his compositions, a "Sacred Solo" dedicated "to Auntie,"* was sung by a parishioner, Mrs. Fred Dutt, on words from a little volume of newspaper poetry from the *New York Herald* published under the inspiring title "The Uplands of God." His employment was short-lived, however, for in less than a year he was fired for refusing to hold fermatas in hymns and responses. An elaborate work for organ written in 1923, "To Longwood Gardens," was dedicated to Mr. and Mrs. Pierre DuPont, whose great organ Barber had played on numerous occasions.†

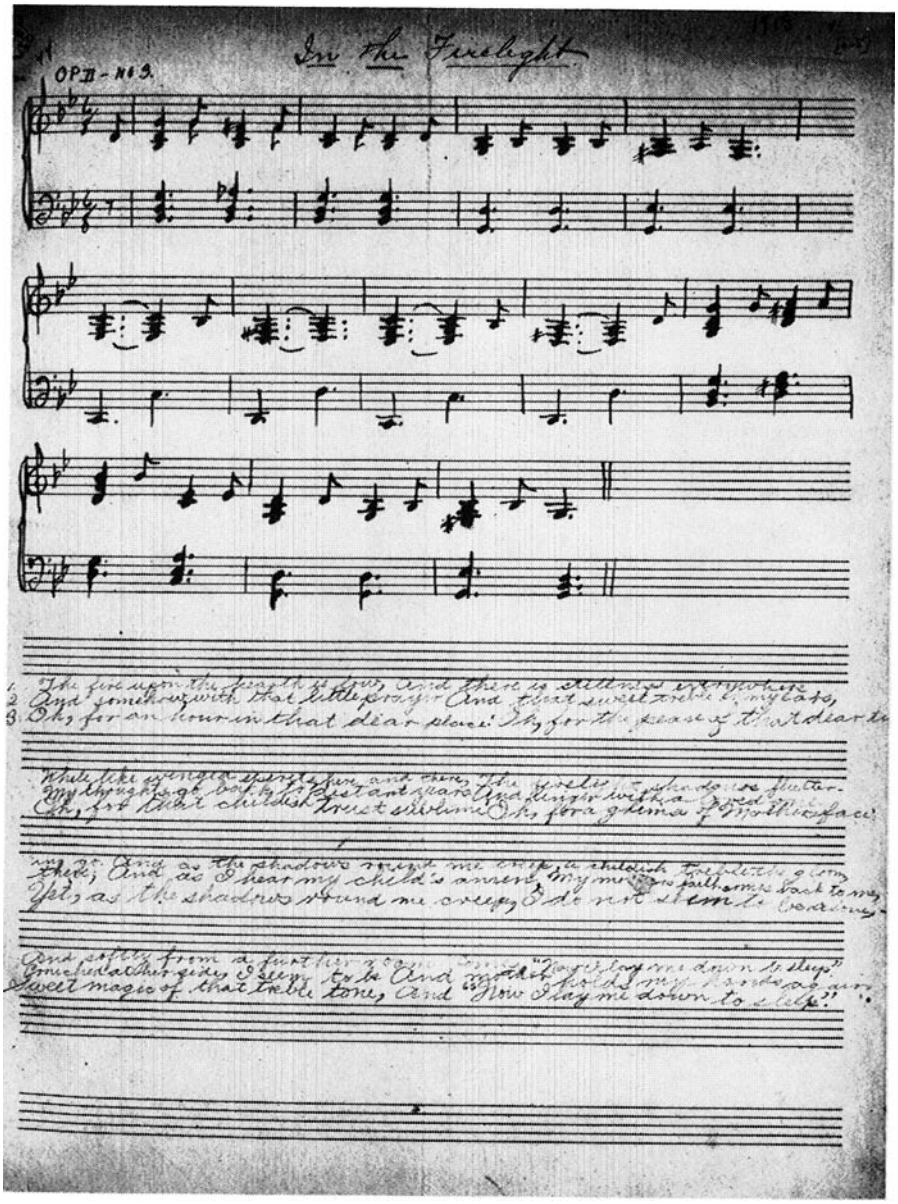
* Mrs. William C. Husted was organist at the First Presbyterian Church for several years. The manuscript is at the Chester County Historical Society.

† The manuscript is at the Library of Congress. The *West Chester Daily Local News* (6 November 1922) reported the young composer's attendance at a concert by John Philip Sousa at the DuPonts' Longwood Conservatories:

> Mr. du Pont, seeing the lad, whom he knows and for whom he has great admiration, realizing that Sam is a musician of no mean note, came forward and took the boy up and introduced him to the March King.

Example 1.1 "War Song," holograph, 1918. *(Library of Congress)*

Sousa was pleased to talk to the chap and learning some facts as to Barber's musical ability, sat down and dashed off three lines . . . of "The Stars and Stripes Forever." He signed the same and presented it to Sam, who is about the proudest boy in town, and would not part with his treasure for a good deal.



Example 1.2 "In the Firelight," holograph, 1918. *(Library of Congress)*

Perhaps the most important personal relationship determining the early course of Barber's career was that with his uncle Sidney Homer. The older composer acted as his mentor from 1922, when Barber showed him his first compositions, up to the time of Homer's death in 1953. From wher-

ever he traveled, Barber wrote in detail to Homer about his music and its compositional progress, and he wrote in greater depth to him than to any other person.* His appreciation for his uncle and his high regard for Homer's own compositions found tangible expression in 1942 when Barber initiated an "all-Homer" radio broadcast,[8] and in 1943 when he arranged for G. Schirmer to publish some of Homer's more popular songs in a volume, *Seventeen Songs by Sidney Homer.*†

Given his family's initial ambivalence toward music as a profession for their son, one might well imagine how important was the time the young Barber spent during the summers with his uncle and aunt at Homeland, on Lake George, in Bolton, New York. Barber recalled that from his childhood on—in Lake George and New York City—he heard his aunt sing her husband's songs integrated into programs of works by more recognized European composers. "She did not give them a place only at the end of her programs, which is the common destiny of most American songs, brought up at the rear, like after dinner mints, for an audience whose best attention has already been given elsewhere."[9] "She was one of the most radiant creatures one could imagine," Barber recalled in the 1970s. "My aunt's voice sounded like no other . . . the rich low voice combined with brilliant high notes that Verdi would have liked and is so rare today."[10]

Compared to the somewhat staid, dry attitude of West Chester, the Homers represented a lively cultural oasis for the young Sam Barber, who was consumed with the idea of being a composer and for whom writing songs "just seemed a natural thing to do." Louise Homer often visited her sister's home in West Chester. Many years later, after he had written his first opera, Barber spoke about her arrivals:

> For a little boy, the sight of the train stopping at Paoli (where the Western express never stopped and where the stationmaster told us it would never stop) was an impressive experience. I knew this was because the Met had arranged it, and I found it exciting. On the other hand, once she got there, she would never sing for us but, with the most endearing smile in the world, would tell us children that she was "out of voice." We thought she was really "out of voice."[11]

* The correspondence between Homer and Barber has been preserved by Sidney Homer's daughter Katharine Homer Fryer and is one of the richest sources of information about Barber's career between 1941 and 1953; all letters from Barber to Homer that are quoted in this book are in Fryer's collection. Barber transcribed selected letters of his uncle's, written from 1912 to 1953; excerpts from these letters are quoted with the permission of Katharine Homer Fryer.

† Homer, born in Boston in 1864, studied there with Chadwick and received further training with Rheinberger in Munich. He wrote at least 103 songs between 1899 and 1915, all of which were published by G. Schirmer. "Throughout his life," his nephew wrote in the introduction to the volume of Homer's songs published in 1943, "a sturdy New England reliance balanced his respect for European tradition."

Barber recalled watching her make a recording for RCA Victor in Camden, New Jersey, in "those pre-electric, pre-patchwork days, when a miss was really a miss, and no splicing could correct it. . . . I saw the exhaustion," he wrote in his memoir in the seventies, "Caruso exhausted, Galli-Curci exhausted. But I was more interested in getting a close-up view of the orchestral instruments." Barber attended his first opera with his uncle Sidney at the Metropolitan Opera House. His memory of the experience was vivid:

> I was six and entranced. It was in New York. The opera: *Aida*. Caruso sang Radames and my aunt, Louise Homer, was Amneris. Even the details are clear in my memory. We missed "Celeste Aida," due to parents' and uncle's irritating habit of lingering over coffee. Once arrived, there was the usual tussle as to who could keep the opera glasses longer (it seemed to me I always had to give them back at just the best moment). And then the kindly old Bishop, in whose box we sat, asked me, at the beginning of the Nile scene, whether I could hear the mosquitoes. This was a signal for me to retrieve my glasses—the best ones. I looked and listened long and hard. I could hear no mosquitoes, only high violins. Ever since that day I have thought that people who listen for too much description in music are rather silly.[12]

At Homeland, Barber and his uncle often reviewed the younger composer's work and sometimes studied music together—a Bach invention or some other classical work. The Homers encouraged Barber "to become acquainted with only the finest music."[13] His aunt did not want him to become a dilettante, and it was only after he entered the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia that she and her husband gave Barber's intention to compose their full support. It was entirely due to Sidney Homer's encouragement that the Barbers allowed their son to be excused from school at noon to travel to Philadelphia to study at the Curtis Institute of Music in its charter year, 1924. Several years earlier, Barber solicited advice from his uncle about a group of songs and part of an opera that he had written. Apparently his uncle's evaluation was crucial to the Barbers' decision to provide professional training for their son.

Barber asked his uncle two questions that were uppermost in his mind: "Do you think from these works of mine that I can become a composer? And if so, what should I do to further my musical career?"[14] Homer weighed his answer carefully, for he did not want to conflict with the interest of Barber's parents. But recognizing the urgency of obtaining early training for a musical profession, even though he couched his persuasive letter in moderate terms, he was explicit in his reply:

> I am returning the Gypsy Dance and the Mother Goose which you sent me. There is no doubt you have the making of a composer in you. There

are touches all through this work which prove it. Therefore, I think it would be fully worth your while to take an intensive course of study with the best man in Philadelphia.

There are three things you must aim for definitely. The first is the development of a taste that should, in time, amount to a passion, for the best in music in all forms. . . . Your whole life will be influenced by the forming of your taste in the next few years.

Taste is formed by coming into close and intimate contact with the great works of the masters. . . . The way to do this is to look ahead and see what programs are to be given in Philadelphia. You can't attend all the concerts, therefore you pick the best. Suppose, for instance, the Flonzaly Quartet is going to play a Beethoven Quartet. You get your ticket and you buy a copy of the quartet beforehand. You then learn more in an hour at the performance than you could possibly learn in any other way in a year.

The second . . . is to have a good teacher in composition. One fairly long lesson a week would be sufficient. Anyone you study with should be a practical composer himself, and as good a man as you can find. If you will write to Mr. Stokowski himself and . . . say that I have asked you to inquire for the best teacher in composition, I am sure [he] will recommend someone to you.

The third thing is that you should master a practical instrument . . . I should say either the piano or the violin, or, better still, both. That is what Mozart and Beethoven did.

If you can't do all three of these things, I should take up the first and third. You must not think that you can fool with music and get anywhere. Sooner or later you will have to do hard work, and you will make more rapid progress now than when you are older.

You can get good books on Harmony and Musical Notation, and they will interest you. For instance, in your last Mother Goose song, I Love Little Pussy, you divide the right hand into groups of three eighth notes, which give the appearance of 6/8 time, but the piece is in 3/4 time. At the beginning of the third measure, you write B natural, whereas it is really C flat. Little mistakes like these sometimes spoil the looks of really good music.

Affectionately yours,
Sidney Homer[15]

Perhaps what Homer appreciated in these pieces was Barber's command of form and the originality of his melodic lines. This is especially apparent in the nursery song, where the vocal part displays a strong sense of direction and interplays graciously with the contrasting arpeggios in a piano accompaniment that often rises above the voice. A manuscript of "I Love Little Pussy" (Example 1.3) shows that Barber made the corrections suggested by Homer. The layout of the piano part suggests he taught him-

self notation, probably writing the vocal lines first and then adding the accompaniment.

The song is one of a collection titled "Mother Goose Rhymes Set to Music," which Barber eventually bound and illustrated with pictures from nursery books that he hand-colored. (A second manuscript, titled Nursery Songs, Opus VII, is dedicated to Sara.) His models were probably Sidney Homer's "Songs from Mother Goose," written in 1919 as a response to Louise Homer's request for a group of songs that the whole family could sing together and which Barber had undoubtedly heard.* The typewritten preface of Barber's "Mother Goose Rhymes" explains their history:

> From old manuscripts and music books I have collected and copied my Mother Goose Songs. "The Old Man From Jamaica," "The Rockabye Lady," and "I love Little Pussy" have been composed comparatively recently (1922), but the others are much earlier compositions.
>
> The mistakes in notation, the harmonical errors, the poor constructions—they have not been omitted. They are as I first wrote them, before I knew the tiresome rules of harmony.
>
> The ranges are indeed unique. They suit my own Low voice, with an occasional high note beyond my range for effect.
>
> And now I leave you, to sing or play these little child-songs.
>
> *Samuel O. Barber II*
> *April 8, 1923*[16]

The songs were sung by Sara Barber, accompanied by her brother, on 24 March 1923 at a benefit performance for the piano fund of the Sunday school of the First Presbyterian Church in West Chester. A glowing "review" in a local newspaper found "Sam's original compositions particularly interesting, showing a musical conception and feeling which marks him as a budding artist of musical ability. . . . Little Sara Barber sang in a voice marked by its sweetness and clearness. . . . Her manner was unaffected and altogether charming."†

This recital is of special interest because it featured the "Barber Orchestra"—a pair of violins, a cornet, saxophone, drums, and piano—with Sam Barber as "pianist-director" conducting two works by R. H. Bowers and T. H. Morse and, more importantly, selections from *The Rose Tree,* his own opera, written when he was ten.‡ Although the opera never progressed beyond act 1, from its music Barber made many arrangements,

*They were recorded with orchestra in 1922. An earlier recording with piano was never released, but—according to Katharine Fryer—was probably known to the Barber family.

†*West Chester Daily Local News,* 26 March 1923. The box office took in $60.

‡A manuscript of act 1 of *The Rose Tree* is at the Library of Congress, and the complete libretto and various vocal parts are at the Chester County Historical Society in West Chester. Many of the manuscripts of the score, parts, or arrangements are sewn into cardboard covers decorated with colorful florid designs; the "Gypsy Dance" has a characteristic picture of a Spanish dancer on its cover, a design credited to William Palmer Lear. Lear (who eventually

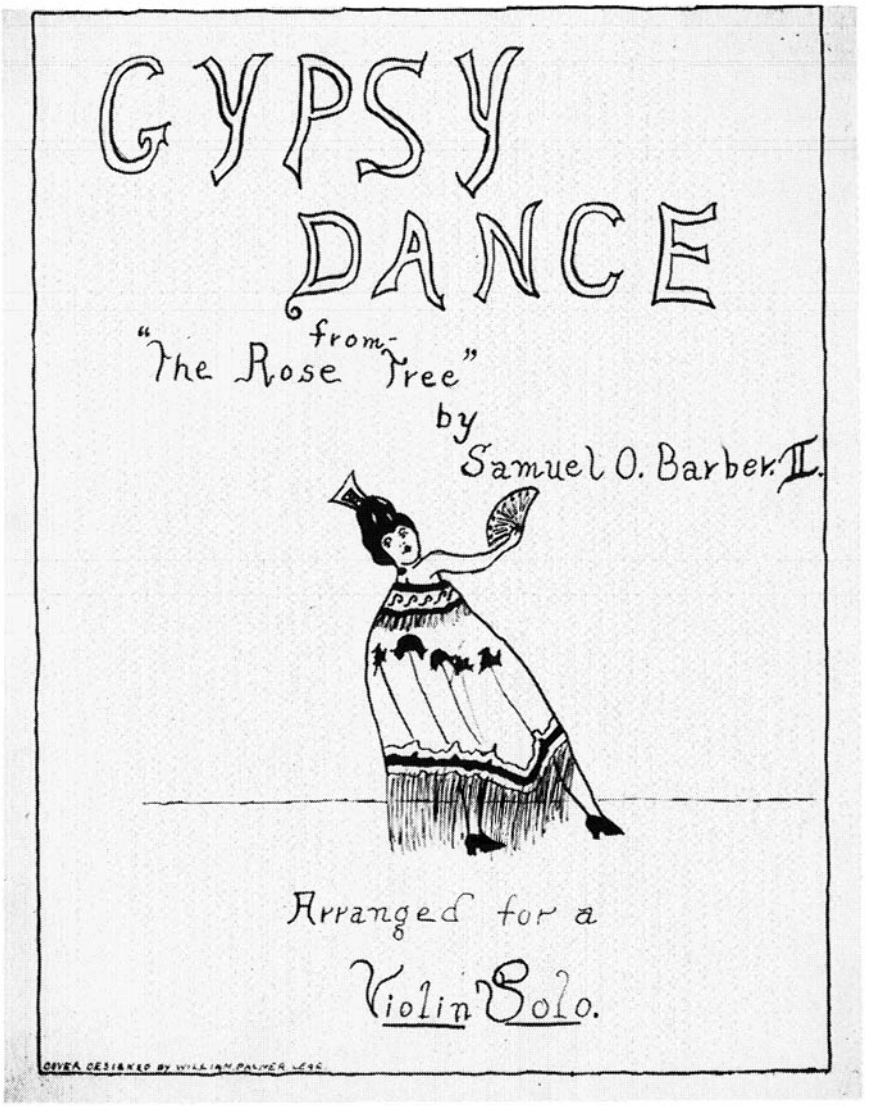
Example 1.3 "I Love Little Pussy," from "Mother Goose Rhymes set to music," holograph, 1922. *(Library of Congress)*

most for piano, some of which he played in Green's student recitals. One, for violin and piano, was the "Gypsy Dance" he had sent to Sidney Homer in 1922, a habanera with a tricky descending chromatic theme for the violin, imitated at the third by the piano (Example 1.4).

became director of the Chester County Art Association) was reported to be—with Edward Dicks—one of Barber's closest childhood friends. All three young men were born on the same day (*West Chester Daily Local News*, 9 March 1937).

The libretto of *The Rose Tree* was written by Annie Sullivan Brosius Noble, the Barbers' cook, who had been imported from Ireland by the composer's grandmother. She had an unlimited repertoire of Irish songs, which Barber often heard her sing. Her darkly humorous imagination and romantic language were things he never forgot.* From her opera text, one

*Samuel Barber, "On Waiting for a Libretto," *Opera News* (27 January 1958): 6. In this article Barber recounts an example of Annie Noble's parlance: once, when Daisy Barber

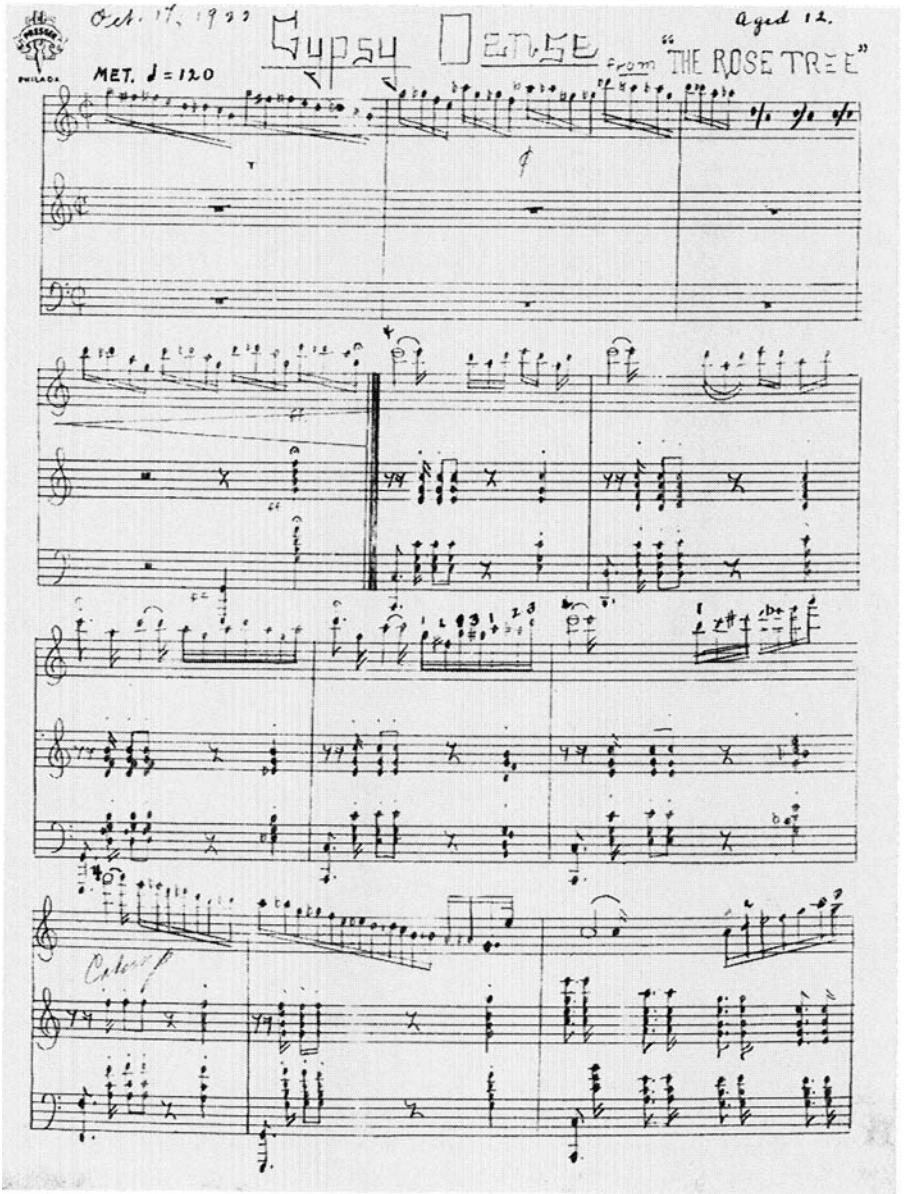


Example 1.4 Cover and title page of "Gypsy Dance," arranged for violin and piano from *The Rose Tree*, holograph, 1922. *(Library of Congress)*

is able to surmise that Annie Noble was quite literate and had read much poetry.* The keen interest in Celtic poetry that emerged in Barber during

inquired what the family was having for dessert, the cook responded, "Madame, a little something of my own. It is called a Bird's Eye View of Death."

* The title itself is significant in that the rose is a favorite symbol with Irish poets in both love poems and addresses to Ireland, and it has given a name to more than one poem in



his teen years may have been as much due to the influence of Annie Noble as that of Sidney Homer, who used Irish texts for his songs.

Interviewed in 1960, Barber recounted the story of his first opera:

Gaelic and Irish. Although Yeats's poem "The Rose Tree" was not published until 1921 (*Michael Robartes and the Dancer* [Ireland: Coala Press, 1921]), he wrote an earlier collec-

> It deals with a tenor of the Metropolitan Opera who comes to a small American town on his vacation and falls in love with a local beauty. I wrote the heroine's part for my younger sister, who can still sing every note of it. The hero's part was for me. I was a contralto then! Somehow, after the words and music were written for the first act, Annie ran out of ideas and the opera went no further.[17]

The principal characters are Juanita Alvarado and the Stranger, with a supporting cast of Landlord, Old Man, and a Band of Gypsies (for which Barber wrote a dance and chorus). A description of the opening scene is in the piano score:

> The scene is laid in the courtyard of an old Spanish Inn in Florida.* Modern civilization of the nineteenth century has not yet reached Connera and the fashions are very quaint and picturesque. To the left is the inn door. The landlord, servants and a few Spaniards are lounging about the yard. As the curtain rises, a group of wandering gypsies enter upon the scene. They dance, clashing their tambourines, and sing.[18]

Barber never forgot the words of the opening "Gypsy Chorus," and in later years he would occasionally amuse his friends at parties by singing bits of the song:

> A wandering gypsy we!
> The whole wide world is ours;
> We dance and sing with gladsome glee
> Through the sunny hours.
> We care not for the toilsome way
> The world so madly follows,
> Our hearts are light, our lives are gay
> And free from care as . . . swallows![19]

The vocal score of *The Rose Tree,* musically intriguing with its occasional instructions for "enharmonic change" and a tenor aria for the Old Man, sung to the accompaniment of a lone bass viol, reveals as well an entrepreneurial spirit with the announcement on the inside back cover: "Other Songs by same composer sold at $.60 1.p." The climax of act 1 is the heroine's "Serenade" (in which she is joined by a second voice), which recounts the tale of a "foreigner" who sought romance with Juanita's forebears at the Rose Tree. Annie Noble's language is that of late eighteenth-

---

tion titled *The Rose* (*Poems,* 1895), which Annie Noble may have read. It is more probable, however, that she was merely well versed in Irish and Gaelic folk culture and mythology.

* In later years, Barber, perhaps in jest, incorrectly described the action as taking place in Chester County (Emily Coleman, "Samuel Barber and *Vanessa,*" *Theatre Arts* [January 1958]: 69).

century lyric poets; her poetic meter and sentiment are akin to Robert Burns's "O my luve is like a red, red rose." The foreigner, Alvarado, sings:

> My love is like a rose that blooms, but never dies,
> Like the flaming sun, shalt not perish from the skies
> 'Tis like the fairest flow'r!
> 'Tis like the fairest bird that flew!
> And so I come tonight, to sing my love to you.[20]

Although rooted in parlor song tradition, the aria demonstrates considerable flair for construction of effective vocal lines for the labors of a boy of ten years (Example 1.5). The flowing melody surges through an octave within four measures and arches to a high G (Sara must have had an agile voice). A twice-recurring refrain is borrowed from Longfellow's "Serenade" in *The Spanish Student:* "Stars of the summer Night! / Far in yon azure deeps, / Hide, hide your golden light! / She sleeps! / My lady sleeps! / Sleeps!" The young composer shows admirable sensitivity to the text in using a persistently chanted G for the last lines of the refrain and the momentary color of minor mode on Noble's phrase *the moon steals through the bars.*

The Composer in His Early Teens

By early adolescence, Barber was composing in a variety of genres, and in the few years before he entered the Curtis Institute of Music at fourteen, he had written many pieces for piano, several for organ, a work for two pianos, a cantata, a suite for violin, his first opera, and a plethora of songs.* During this period, too, it was not uncommon for him to rework themes from earlier works into new ones. An example of his inventiveness in exhausting the possibilities of a theme is a minuet of which there are four versions, all written in 1923. Two, in G major, are for piano: the earliest is the second movement of "Themes," Op. X, No. 2;[21] a later, expanded version dedicated to Sara and including a trio (from Beethoven's Minuet No. 2, WoO 10), was published in 1924 as the last of *Three Sketches* (Example 1.6).† A Suite for Violin, Op. XI, No. 2, is unlocated but adver-

* Most of the works from this period are at the Library of Congress; some, including the cantata, "Christmas Eve, Op. XIII, a trio with solos," are at the Chester County Historical Society in West Chester. A complete listing of locations and manuscripts for works written during Barber's youth will be included in my descriptive catalogue now in progress.

†At the Chester County Historical Society, there is a letter from Barber to the U.S. Copyright Office inquiring about how to secure copyright registration of works. Two other sketches in the collection are "Love Song" (April 1924) and "To My Steinway" (June 1923). "Love Song" is an affectionate waltz, dedicated "to Mother," that was later published in a collection of pieces of intermediate-grade difficulty, *American Composers of the Twentieth Century* (Schaum Publications, 1969). Bennett Lerner's description of the piece with performance practice suggestions is published in *Keyboard Classics* (July-August 1986): 4–5. The second of the Sketches—"To My Steinway," dedicated to Number 220601, Barber's piano—is also a waltz, an expansive exploration of the full range of the keyboard.

tised on the manuscript of a "transcription" for piano solo ("easy") under the imprint "Barber and Co" (20 December 1923). Finally, a trio for contralto, soprano, and piano, for which was added a nostalgic text that may have been written by Barber himself, was undoubtedly—as its dog-eared pages suggest—sung many times by Louise Homer and her daughter Louise Stires.*

Several compositions written between 1922 and 1924 mark a leap forward in the young composer's maturation, demonstrating greater variety of color in harmonic language and an interest in more extended forms. *Petite Berceuse,* for example, displays harmonic similarities to Debussy's *En Bateau*—a motion from tonic to submediant in the opening measures (although Barber alternately uses a flat VI chord)—and includes chords with intervals of tenths and thirteenths in parallel motion.†

Barber's first attempt at handling an extended form is a "Fantasie for Two Pianos Written in the Style of Joseph Haydn" (1924).‡ The sectional design, the shape of the themes—triadic or repeated notes decorated abundantly with ornamental turns—suggest that he may have had in mind a model like the C-major sonata of Haydn.§ At fourteen, Barber was so serious about, and so intensely aware of, his own creative process that he detailed the work's complicated four-year evolution in a typewritten introduction dated 23 September 1924 and entitled "The Life of the Fantasie":

> The Fantasie was composed, rather completed on Feb. 15, 1924, because of a request by Mrs. Kerlin for a two-piano piece. Completed, I say, because its history went back to an earlier date than that. As far as I can tell, the "Andante con moto" theme was composed in 1920 for one piano. I looked at it later in 1922 with the idea of arranging it for violin, cello, and piano. Hence why we still call it the "Trio." But it never worked out. I had then the old theme and the introduction to the B-flat part—the little counterpoint, written sometime before, but I was at loss to find a B-flat section and so let the whole thing drop. In January '24, I found it again and finally, about February first, wrote the first section and the B-flat major, from which the introduction is constructed.

*The text reads "Come dance with me the minuet / Slowly as we loved to do / Sing songs I'll ne'er forget / Oh, dance and I'll dance with you." The holograph is in Katharine Homer Fryer's collection of her mother's music.

†The holograph is at the Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, Pennsylvania. A program of a piano recital on 23 March 1923 (about the same time Barber's *Berceuse* was composed), at the Chapel of First Presbyterian Church in West Chester, indicates that, at the time he composed this piece, Barber was playing *Berceuse* by Leo Ornstein (one of his *Nine Miniatures*).

‡The Fantasie is at the Library of Congress, Music Division. The manuscript's cover is decorated in elaborate script reading "from the original of Bach's Well Tempered Clavichord." The material for this work is derived from the earlier "Allegretto on C" (in "Themes," 1920). A manuscript of the second piano part of an earlier version, titled Sonata in Modern Form, Op. XVI, is at the Chester County Historical Society.

§The work is included in the *Sonatina Album* published by C. F. Peters, which also includes the Clementi sonatina that Barber played when he was ten.

SCENE II
SERENADE.
Sara
ALVERADO
My love is like a rose That blooms but never dies, Like the flaming
sun That not pencil from the skies 'Tis like the fairest flow'r! 'Tis like the
finest bird that flies! But to come to night To sing my love to you.
Stars of the summer night For in you azure deeps -- Hide - hide your
golden light She sleeps! my lady sleeps! She sleeps! My Lady
sleeps The thick shadows creep
heart -- -- -- noon steals thro the boughs! O -- -- -- -- -- o'er my the stars!
Stars of the summer night! Far in you azure summer sky -- -- -- -- --

III

To Sara

Minuet

April, 1923

Example 1.6 Minuet (1923) from *Three Sketches for Pianoforte* (private edition, 1924).

legato
molto ritard
Tempo I
dim. e rall.

The Barbers on the boardwalk at Atlantic City, New Jersey, in the late 1920s.

> I wrote the second piano part out one Sunday morning, and Mrs. Kerlin and I played it that afternoon on Mr. Green's [Barber's piano teacher] Two Pianos. Everyone was much impressed and Mother cried a little for lack of something better to do. I was then thirteen years old.
>
> It was first publicly performed at the New Century Club, April 29, with Mother and I playing it on two specially tuned pianos, a Steinway Grand and an Upright. We had to repeat it.
>
> I like it for its simplicity—it was written in the style of Haydn—and Uncle Sid Homer says it is the best thing I have done!*

Undoubtedly, what Barber's uncle recognized about his nephew's longest abstract work to that time was that he had a good grasp of the use of tonal and thematic structure as an effective unifying principle of design. Unlike Barber's earlier instrumental works, "Fantasie" is based on themes of a motivic, rather than lyrical, character and employs developmental procedures. Yet that even so abstract a form should be imbued with drama is evident from his instructions to play a restless transition passage "mysteriously, with foreboding."

What continues to be striking about Barber's songs during this early

*Library of Congress, Music Division. Sonata in Modern Form, Op. XVI is a much shorter version, but it does contain the B♭ section and so is presumably the result of Barber's February 1924 effort. It is possible that the sonata was completed as late as April 1924, since its opus number is later than Barber's Op. XIV ("My Fairyland") dated 29 March 1924.

period is their intuitive lyricism; melody as a means of expression for him was irrepressible. At this time, his songs also demonstrate an increasingly sophisticated skill in fusing music and poetry. Turning toward through-composed songs, he began to write more intricate accompaniments, which often support the voice in a felicitous counterpoint that sometimes rises above the vocal line. Harmonic or modal shifts color or emphasize specific words of the text. Compared to his instrumental works of this period, the songs seem more spontaneous, more personal and related to his own experience. Occasionally he even wrote his own verses, for example, "October-Weather" (ca. 1923), an ingratiating, rip-roaring waltz in E♭ major that celebrates the onset of autumn. An "encore song" in French-Canadian dialect, "Dere Two Fella Joe," was composed while Barber was at Camp Wyanoke in New Hampshire, on "words related to the composer by a White Mountain Guide, spoken by a French-Canadian father, very much excited and mystified by the arrival of twins in his family."*

Sometimes he set to music texts by local poets, for example, Robert T. Kerlin, the controversial head of the English Department at West Chester State Teachers College who was a great supporter of Barber's aspirations during his teen years.† When Barber was barely fourteen he set Kerlin's "My Fairyland," a poem of moralistic bent promising fulfillment through spiritual fortitude, which was sung by the soprano Gertrud Schmidt on an "all-Barber program" on 25 April 1926, two years after its composition.‡ The song's bristling, pulsating piano accompaniment, which suggests the young composer had heard Schumann's *Ich grolle nicht,* and its harmonic

* Manuscripts of both of these songs are at the Library of Congress, Music Division, and also in Louise Homer's private collection (now owned by her daughter Katharine Homer Fryer).

† Barber played two-piano music with Kerlin's wife. Educated at University of Chicago, Johns Hopkins, Harvard, and Yale, Kerlin had served as a minister for three years with the Methodist Episcopal Church South before coming to West Chester in 1922. A promoter of poetry by black writers and the author of several books on labor and racial subjects, he lost his job at West Chester State Teachers College in 1927 because of a heated debate over the military involvement of the United States in Central America. Kerlin was probably largely responsible for introducing Barber to the poetry of Langston Hughes, whose poem "Fantasy in Purple" the young composer set in 1925.

‡ The first "all-Barber" program, with the singers Schmidt and Lilian McD. Brinton, mezzo-soprano, took place in West Chester in the composer's home on 107 South Church Street. Barber wrote: "About a hundred friends heard this program, given at my home. Auntie and Aunt Bess were here, and the Boyles [George Boyle taught Barber piano his first year at the Curtis Institute of Music] drove out from Philadelphia." The program—a facsimile of which can be found in the liner notes of "Songs of Samuel Barber and Ned Rorem" (New World Records, NW 229)—included seventeen songs composed between 1917 and 1926: "Mother Goose Songs" (dedicated to Sara Barber), "Longing" and "Little Children of the Wind" (Macleod), "Sometime (Dedicated to Mother, 1917)," "Lady, When I Behold the Roses" (Wyatt), "*Au Claire de la Lune* (A Modern Setting)," "Dere Two Fella Joe," "October-Weather," "My Fairyland" (Kerlin), "Music, When Soft Voices Die" (Shelley), "Watchers," "Fantasy in Purple" (Hughes), "Youth" (probably "I Never Thought That Youth Would Go," Rittenhouse), "*La nuit*" (Meurath), "Man," "Slumber Song of the Madonna" (Noyes), "Thy Love" (Browning), "Invocation to Youth" (Binyon). Manuscripts of these songs are in the Library of Congress, Music Division.

motion—restless, chromatic, and vacillating between major and minor modes—beautifully underscore the dramatic fervor of the text.*

Among the friends of his youth, Sam Barber was perceived as "an unusual child" whose whole world was music, about which he seemed to know more than anyone else his age. An anecdote told by a former classmate suggests the acuity of Barber's ear when he was in the sixth grade, probably about twelve years old:

> We used to have assemblies and Sam always played the music. At one particular assembly he was so upset because the music was in the wrong key. All the rest of us didn't even know what a key was. The music sounded all right to us.[22]

Even with the rigors of his musical training, he was an outstanding student in high school and a leader in extracurricular activities as well: he was president of the Music Club, literary editor of the quarterly yearbook, president of the Drama Club, and a member of the Latin and French clubs. In addition, he won numerous awards: first prizes in the Junior and Senior Essay Contests and the Webster Meredith Prize Speaking Contest, and honorable mention in the Lincoln Essay Contest. He wrote the class poem and composed his class alma mater, which still stands as the song for West Chester's high school.[23]

Once Barber's parents realized there was no redirecting the goal of their impassioned son, they did everything they could to encourage him and help him obtain a high-quality musical education. When he was about fourteen, soon after he entered high school, Barber played for Harold Randolph, director of the Peabody Conservatory of Music in Baltimore. Randolph recommended he leave school and direct himself toward full-time study of composition and music.[24] Plans were then made for Barber to commute to Philadelphia every Friday for study at the newly founded Curtis Institute of Music while continuing his high school studies in West Chester.

* A copy, bound in yellow construction paper and decorated with a seascape illustration, is among Katharine Homer Fryer's collection of her mother's music.

2

A SERIOUS STUDENT

Against a background of quiet culture

When the doors of the Curtis Institute of Music were opened for the first time on 1 October 1924, Sam Barber was the second person to enter.* Photographs of the fourteen-year-old Barber show him to be lanky and serious, his handsome features hidden behind large spectacles. His hair, parted in the middle, and square chin give him a marked resemblance to his uncle Sidney Homer.

The Curtis Institute was founded by Mary Curtis Bok, born in 1876, the daughter of Louisa Knapp and the prominent publisher Cyrus H. K. Curtis. By the time the institute held its first classes, Mary Bok's wide circle of friends and her knowledge of the musical world enabled her to select an advisory board of great artistic eminence. Included were Felix Adler, Carl Flesch, Walter Fischer, Ossip Gabrilowitsch, Josef Hofmann, Willem Mengelberg, Marcella Sembrich, Leopold Stokowski, Ernest Urchs (of the Steinway Company), and Edward A. Zeigler (then assistant general manager of the Metropolitan Opera).†

Mary Bok's educational philosophy, stated in the institute's catalogue of 1925–26, reflects the educational standard to which Barber was exposed during his nine years at the Curtis Institute:

> It is my aim that earnest students shall acquire a thorough musical education, not learning only to sing or play, but also the history of music, the laws of its making, languages, ear-training and music appreciation.

*Nellie Lee Bok (Mary Bok's daughter-in-law, who was present the opening day of the school), interview with the author, 12 May 1982, Philadelphia. Bok reported that Max Aronoff, a violinist who later played in the Curtis String Quartet and taught on the faculty of the institute, was the first to enter the doors of the institute.

†The Curtis Institute of Music, *Overtones* 11, no. 1, Fiftieth Anniversary Issue (1 October 1974), pp. 9–12. *Overtones* is a newsletter that was started in 1929 and issued on an irregular basis until April 1940. It was written by members of the Curtis faculty, edited by Elsie Hutt, and conceived by Mary Louise Curtis Bok, who presided over the preparation of each issue. It is a valuable source of information about performances of Barber's music and the progress of his career during the 1930s and early 1940s.

> They shall learn to think and to express their thoughts against a background of quiet culture, with the stimulus of personal contact with artist-teachers who represent the highest and finest in their art.
>
> The aim is for quality of the work rather than quick, showy results.[1]

Mary Bok was more than a philanthropist in the traditional sense. Beneath her gentle, calm, wise, and gracious exterior was a forceful spirit that pervaded the institute and was imbibed by its students. She actively dedicated herself to bringing their talents to fruition by giving them personal encouragement as well as financial support.* Her intense loyalty and generosity and the influential network of social connections with other musical patrons in her milieu led to numerous opportunities for her students to perform in the widest public arena, not only in Philadelphia but in Washington, D.C., London, Italy, Florida, and New York.†

When Sam Barber entered the Curtis Institute of Music, he took up three areas of study, in all of which he distinguished himself. Piano studies with George Boyle led to further study, from 1926 to 1931, with Isabelle Vengerova. He studied voice with Emilio de Gogorza from 1926 to 1930 and composition and music theory with Rosario Scalero from 1925 until 1934.‡ Scalero had studied in Vienna with the eminent Austrian musicologist Eusebius Mandyczewski. A composer himself, he had the dubious distinction of having Toscanini comment that his music was "grey."§

*Her personal stereotypes are hinted at by some of her candid remarks; she is reported to have said, for example, "One thing I have learned, is that the talented youngster is no slacker" (*Overtones*, 1 October 1974, p. 12).

†Bok began to take a special interest in Samuel Barber in 1934, shortly before he graduated from the institute, and, beyond financial patronage, actively provided opportunities that promoted his career. Through her came, for example, the introduction to Carl Engel at G. Schirmer, Inc., the firm that became Barber's exclusive publisher. She invited Barber to spend summers at the beautiful harbor village of Rockport, Maine, where she and her husband Edward provided cottages for selected graduates and faculty members who taught their more gifted students over the summer. In 1943 Mrs. Bok married the violinist Efrem Zimbalist, director of the institute. That same year, she enabled Barber and Gian Carlo Menotti to buy Capricorn, the house in Mount Kisco, New York, which until 1973 was both the hermitage of Barber's most productive years and the center of the two composers' social and intellectual life, a gathering place for the numerous gifted artists, poets, musicians, and theater people who were their friends. Upon his patron's death, Barber reflected, "Rather than recall Mary Zimbalist as a philanthropist and social benefactor, I prefer to think of her as a life-long friend who never failed me" (*Overtones*, 1 October 1974, p. 25). Although Bok had encouraged Barber (and Menotti, too) to write letters to her so that his career might be documented, after her death the extensive collection was said to have been destroyed by her son Carey Bok (author's interview with Nellie Lee Bok, 12 May 1982).

‡Apparently he studied composition with Deems Taylor for a brief period in 1926. Although Taylor's name is absent from Barber's student records at the Curtis Institute, there is a holograph—"A modern setting of the folk tune *Au clair de la lune*"—with the inscription "for Deems Taylor's class" among his "Early Compositions, 1917–1927" at the Library of Congress, Music Division. The composition, for piano, is a dissonant satire of the French folk song, with instructions to be played "mournfully, *con moto*."

§Jeanne Behrend, interview with the author, 21 September 1982, Philadelphia. All quotations and information attibuted to Behrend in this book are from this interview or one in July 1983.

The rigorous, traditional education Scalero dispensed in counterpoint, the experience in writing for all genres, and training in all musical forms—large and small—unquestionably left an indelible mark on his student Samuel Barber. One consistent observation made about Barber's music throughout his career is of its remarkable sense of form and well-crafted design. With Scalero, too, Barber studied orchestration; his handwritten notes and excerpts from French and Italian orchestration texts are at the Library of Congress. Barber's orchestration—imbued with a striking propensity for haunting melodic lines in solo oboe, English horn, or clarinet parts—reflects a strong vocal orientation.

One is able to gain knowledge of Barber's theoretical and technical studies with Scalero through several sources: the catalogue description of the institute's course of study for composition students, the accounts of other students who studied with Scalero—among them Jeanne Behrend,* Ned Rorem, and Gian Carlo Menotti; and a composition notebook kept by Barber from 1925–33, after which Scalero was "dismissed" from the institute in the wake of the "general reduction of students and faculty because of the financial condition of the institute."[2]

Beginning with music of the sixteenth century, Scalero's students worked on counterpoint, fugue, and motets before graduating to the study of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century works. His students analyzed—in Menotti's words, "it was murder to dissect"—works of Palestrina, Lasso, and Monteverdi. He did not teach harmony as such, because he believed harmony is the result of good counterpoint. Scalero was not, according to Menotti, interested in easy solutions: †

> Contrary to what people thought, Scalero was a very intelligent teacher and he taught in a very original way. He never taught us rules; he wanted us to find out for ourselves what the rules were through the study of great music.
>
> With fugues, for example, when I told him, "But Maestro, I have never written a fugue," he answered, "Don't be ridiculous, do you think that

*Behrend (1911–1987) was a piano student of Josef Hofmann. Talented also as a composer, she reconciled her conflicting career interests by dedicating herself to the dissemination of music by other American composers, giving many concerts of American music, and writing numerous scholarly articles and books on the subject. As an authority on Gottschalk, she was the editor of the reprinted editions of *Louis Moreau Gottschalk: Notes of a Pianist* (Philadelphia, 1881; New York, 1964; 1979, incl. letters). When she toured South America on a grant from the State Department in 1945–46, Behrend was cited by Heitor Villa Lobos as the "heroine of the Americas." The Brazilian government awarded Behrend its Order of the Southern Cross in 1965 in recognition of her services to Brazilian music during her Philadelphia Festival of Western Hemisphere Music, 1959–60, a series of 104 concerts of music in all genres.

†John Gruen, in *Menotti: A Biography* (New York: Macmillan, 1978, p. 22), quotes Scalero as saying to Menotti, "I must cut your wings *now*, so that when they grow back, you can fly farther."

> Bach had someone to teach him how to write a fugue? Just look at his fugues; you have eyes, you have ears." He was very sharp about that. . . . And if your fugue had a dull theme, he wouldn't even look at it. He would say, "How can you write a fugue on such a dull theme? Go home and write another one."*

Menotti reports also that Scalero gave a great deal of importance to the theory that music must "breathe"—the arsis and thesis—"lift your foot and put it down; that is the way music will flow. . . . Don't just breathe in, breathe out."[3]

On Friday afternoons, after his lessons at the institute, Barber was able to hear the Philadelphia Orchestra, for Roy Barber exercised his power as chairman of the local school board in West Chester to pass a rule that any student who was a composer could take Fridays off from school to attend their concerts.[4]

Barber was probably one of the few males and one of the youngest who attended these concerts. Some of the colleges—Bryn Mawr, for example—had reserved seats for their young ladies, who would have been at least three years older than the student composer. By the time he was seventeen or eighteen, however, and had student lodging in Philadelphia, he probably attended the Saturday evening concerts at the Academy of Music, for this, according to Kupferberg, was the place to be for any young Philadelphian with intellectual ambitions. At these concerts there was, in general, a more youthful, heterogeneous audience of professionals and their families and students. The seating was stratified, the less expensive seats in the balcony being occupied by students who had usually studied the scores ahead of time.† In preparation for their attendance at these concerts, Barber and his cousin Katharine Homer would often play four-hand versions of the music they were going to hear and bring orchestral scores to the performances.‡

The Philadelphia Orchestra at this time was still under the direction of

*Menotti, telephone conversation with the author, 11 March 1990. Behrend recalled that Scalero kept Menotti on motets for a solid year, causing him to compose his own music "on the side." Menotti explains that when he began studies at Curtis he was very weak in counterpoint because his Milanese training had focused only on harmony.

†Herbert Kupferberg, *Those Fabulous Philadelphians: The Life and Times of a Great Orchestra* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1969, pp. 51–54), describes the Friday matinee audiences of the Philadelphia Orchestra as almost exclusively composed of middle-aged matrons and elderly women—"Old Philadelphians"—who had lunched at elite clubs before arriving at the concert and often sat and knitted while the music was being played, rustling papers and talking during performances. They were so conservative and undemonstrative in their appreciation of the music that Orville Bullitt, president of the board of directors in 1938, once publicly scolded the ladies for their tepid responsiveness by encouraging them to "let loose at the end of a performance or shout 'bravo' " if they felt like it. Leopold Stokowski, who had been conductor of the orchestra since 1912, was determined to "shape up" the audience and from the podium quite frequently delivered "spontaneous" public admonishments to the "old ladies rushing out at side doors with packages in their hands."

‡A score of Mozart's Symphony No. 41 at the Chester County Historical Society bears the stamp "Prop of S.O.B., 2nd" and a handwritten inscription, "from Uncle Sid Homer."

the young Leopold Stokowski, whose fervent demeanor provided Philadelphians with spirited performances and repertoire that they had not experienced from the Germanic conductors who preceded him. Although when he arrived in Philadelphia in 1913 Stokowski was not yet the innovative conductor he became in his mature years and his taste, as reflected in choice of programs, was still catholic and largely German-oriented, by the time Barber attended his concerts he had introduced Philadelphians to more Russian and French music than had previously been programmed at the Academy of Music. Moreover, he literally put Philadelphia on the musical map with such important United States premieres as Mahler's Eighth Symphony, Schoenberg's *Kammersymphonie,* Scriabin's *Divine Poem,* and Richard Strauss's *Alpine Symphony,* all presented during the 1916 season.

From a program among his memorabilia at the Chester County Historical Society, we know that Barber attended a conservatively oriented Friday afternoon concert on 29 February 1924 that included Respighi's *Sinfonia drammatica,* Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto in G major, and Borodin's *Polevetski Dances.** But on 30 January 1925, when Stravinsky first conducted the Philadelphia Orchestra in a program entirely of his own works, Barber was among the audience that heard *Fireworks,* the *Scherzo fantastique,* the *Petrouchka Suite,* the *Firebird Suite,* and the *Song of the Nightingale.*† Thus, with the onset of his formal musical education at the Curtis Institute of Music, the student musician had the opportunity for expansion of his musical horizons through exposure to contemporary, as well as standard, orchestral repertoire performed by one of the leading orchestras in the country.

Sidney Homer continued to guide his nephew during this period. A letter he sent to Barber during his first year at the Curtis Institute implies the extent to which Homer's songs, especially, were admired by the student. It reveals Homer as a selfless mentor and illuminates the artistic principles he set forth to the younger composer—principles that shaped Barber's music throughout his career:

> Of course I want you to know all my songs, but as for using them as models that is a different matter. If you write naturally and spontaneously, you will develop a style of your own, without being conscious of it. It is the unconscious charm that is so elusive and valuable, in art, as in Life. . . .
>
> Everything depends, now, on the development of your taste and the

* Program in the Barber collection, Chester County Historical Society. An inscription in a notebook kept by Barber before he began studies at the Curtis Institute reads: "At the Philadelphia Orchestra—Stokowski, April 21, 1924. Played the calliope that morning" (Chester County Historical Society).

† Barber, "Fadographs," p.2. After the concert, Barber rode in a taxi with Stravinsky to a reception at the Bellevue Hotel. The program is cited in Kupferberg, *Those Fabulous Philadelphians,* p. 61. Barber was a student at the Curtis Institute when Stravinsky conducted a fully staged performance of *Le Sacre du printemps* in Philadelphia on 11 April 1930, the first time it was danced in this country.

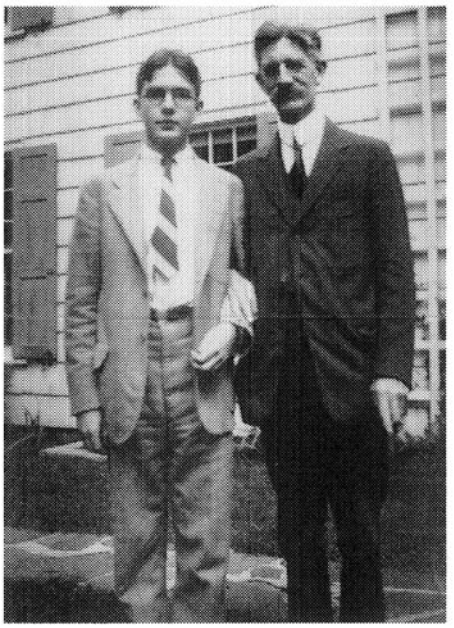
> refinement of your sensibilities. If you think of music from the point of view of sensationalism and publicity, your work will show it. If you learn to love the poetic under-current and the subtleties of beauty and spirituality which have been expressed in music, your work will show it just as much. The wonderful thing about art is that a man can conceal nothing; it reveals him as naked and unadorned. . . . Sincerity and beauty seem to stand the test, but love for mankind and willingness to serve humbly seem to fill the world with joy.*

Spontaneity and *sincerity,* then, are the key words in Homer's message to his nephew. Two years later, in another letter to Barber, Homer stresses time as the test of quality, and sincerity of feeling as a primary artistic value:

> Your letter warmed up all the little inside cockles of my heart. I am not going to tell you that you are all wrong and that you ought not to love my songs. Here's hoping that you are right in every way and that you will still continue to love them when you are as old as I am. If they are as good as you say they are, this will surely happen. The beautiful thing about art is that quality never fades out. If it is there, it is there to stay, and that is what makes the effort, the patience, persistence, infinite care and scrupulous conscientiousness worth while. . . . The intense desire to tell the truth . . . and to create something which would be an inspiration and an incentive to others, is what has led to the heart-breaking, almost appalling labor on the part of those who honestly felt that they had something to say. . . . Everyone who joins the society in this place pledges himself to just one thing, sincerity. He tries to put into form his real feelings, not feelings he wishes he had. Pretense has no place here.[5]

During his first two years at Curtis Institute, even before beginning studies in composition with Scalero, Barber's creative output was considerable. The imaginative titles of his instrumental pieces (all for piano) and humorous performance instructions scattered through the scores promise more cheekiness than they fulfill, however. Examples are two pieces under the title "Fresh from West Chester (some jazzings)" written the summer after his first year at the institute: the first, "Poison Ivy, a country dance

* 12 November 1924. To the end of his uncle's life, Barber professed that Homer's songs were paradigms of the genre. Even after he composed *Mélodies passagères* and as he began *Hermit Songs*—both closer in style to twentieth-century French art songs than to turn-of-the-century American songs—Barber wrote to Homer with affection: "The edition of your songs, bound in leather, which was given to me years ago . . . was coming apart and . . . looking rather shabby, so I had them bound anew, and included the later songs, which are not in the original volumes. They are in bright red, right next to the Bach Gesellschaft on my shelves, and can be quickly spotted. To prepare them for the binder gave me an added excuse to play them through again, and discover new beauties and play them for new addicts. I played *The Sick Rose* for a very fine musician friend of mine, and asked him to guess who it was by. After a long time, he said that it must be ME. No compliment has given me more pleasure; alas, I wish that were true" (letter, 3 February 1952, from Mount Kisco).



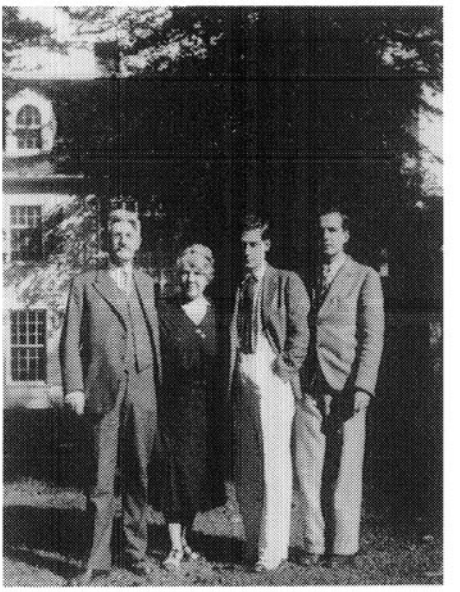
(Left) Sam Barber and Sidney Homer, Lake George, 1924. *(Right)* Barber at age fifteen. Inscription reads "To Mr. Green—always my teacher and friend." *(William Hatton Green Collection, Curtis Institute of Music Library)*

that isn't /Accredited to, and blamed on T. T. Garborinsky," has provocative tempo markings—"As a dog wags his tail," "sock it," "with itching," and "bad memories." The second, "Let's Sit it out, I'd rather watch, a walls," contains such Ivesian instructions as "flirtatiously—molto koketto," "slower, vulgarly, commonly," "shockingly," and "with gushing." A postscript to this set reads "Soon to be released—'Curtis Institute Blues'—the piece that makes people Pray." *

After his second year at the institute, during Barber's sixteenth summer he wrote three "Essays" for piano, their titles foreshadowing the unique orchestral form of his mature years.† Each exploits a single theme ad infinitum—indeed, Essay III introduces its theme with instructions to be played "con moto . . . with monotonous emphasis throughout"—and reflects Barber's continuing interest in colorful, expressive instructions (m. 61 of the second Essay, for example, should be executed "like a very hot summer night"). These are no mere etudes, for the dolorous tone sustained

* To the best of my knowledge, Barber had not seen any of Ives's scores at the time he wrote these pieces.

† These pieces are located in the Library of Congress, Music Division, in the 1984 bequest of the Estate of Samuel Barber, Box 3, in Manuscripts of Sam Barber, 1917–1927 [pp. 153–69].



Sidney and Louise Homer, Gian Carlo Menotti, and Sam Barber at Homeland, Bolton, New York, 1934. *(Curtis Institute of Music Library)*

throughout presages the style of Barber's works written in the early thirties (Two Interludes, for piano; the Cello Sonata; and *Dover Beach,* for example).

At the Curtis Institute Barber was revered by his fellow students, who were dazzled by the versatility of his talents. That he had not one major, but three, and was outstanding in each, astonished them. Some thought him to be, as did Rose Bampton, "extraordinary," others reported him to be a genius.* Of the many talented students at the institute, he was, in Menotti's words, "the star."† His intellectual gifts extended to academic subjects as well: he was well read and accomplished in foreign languages, and, as his letters from this period demonstrate, he wrote with superior

*Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations from, and information attributed to, Rose Bampton in this book are from the author's interview with Bampton on 17 August 1983 in New York. Menotti recalled that when he arrived at the Curtis Institute he learned that Barber was "the absolute idol of the Curtis Institute of Music . . . considered a genius in all three courses" (quoted in Gruen, *Menotti,* p. 20). It was not uncommon in my interviews with his classmates to hear superlatives used in describing the young composer: "extraordinary," "genius," "gifted." Orlando Cole, for example, reported that during his student days at Curtis Institute Barber's name was substituted for that of Brahms as one of the legendary three "B's." (Author's interviews with Orlando Cole, 21 April 1982; Iso Briselli, 11 May 1982; Behrend; and Bampton.)

†Interview with Peter Dickinson, BBC, 23 January 1982. For this "Barber Retrospective," broadcast on the first anniversary of his death, Dickinson also interviewed John Browning, Aaron Copland, H. Wiley Hitchcock, Leontyne Price, William Schuman, Virgil Thomson, and Charles Turner.

ability (receiving an A+ in advanced English composition and A's in English literature).

Though considered aristocratic by his peers, Barber nevertheless was graced with qualities of affability and wit that gained him enormous social acceptance. In spite of Broder's portrayal of the young Barber as shy, withdrawn, and moody, he was, according to his friends from that period, witty and "fun to be with."*

Barber's friends say he possessed a kind of charisma that made each person in his circle feel central to his attention.† This appealing quality was recognized by administrators of Curtis Institute as well, as evidenced by a writer in *Overtones* who in 1936 referred to his "vivid appreciation of beauty, quick perception and keen reactions, the depth of his feeling, and the happy spirit permeating all this, the very qualities that endeared him to his teachers and fellow students."[6] These attractive qualities made it possible for Barber to obtain, throughout his life, intense loyalty from artists who performed his music, many of whom basked in the aura of his friendship as well.

Yet he was selective. He chose as his friends intelligent and gifted artists, respecting their talent and their opinions and suggestions about his work. He would not tolerate less than excellence in himself or others, nor would he tolerate—as he later wrote to one of his classmates—"businessmen and politicians in music, sensationalism, banality, and shoddiness";[7] throughout his life he avoided those musicians he believed displayed these qualities. His wry sense of humor and lemony wit were sometimes mistaken for arrogance, snobbery, and elitism; but those who knew him best perceived this as covering up a deep-rooted shyness in a person who was, after all, really quite humble.‡

One of Barber's most significant attributes during his student years—a talent that was to ensure his early successes—was his ability to draw toward himself gifted musicians who recognized the quality of his music and thus coveted the opportunity to perform his works. Those students at the Curtis Institute who carried his art to the public, in New York, Florida, and

* Bampton, Behrend, and Cole, interviews with the author; Menotti, interview with Peter Dickinson, BBC broadcast, 23 January 1982. Bampton echoed the opinion of her peers when she remarked that Barber was "of a wonderful nature"; in Gruen (*Menotti*, p. 21), Menotti depicts him as "very funny and charming, with a wonderful sense of humor that could set people laughing for hours." Katharine Fryer said about her cousin that he had a unique "Beatty sense of humor" and a love of the ridiculous that made it impossible not to have a good time with him (interview with the author, 9 February 1990).

† Bampton and Behrend, interviews with the author. This personal trait apparently was sustained by Barber throughout his life, as Martina Arroyo, Eleanor Steber, John Browning, and other performers suggested in interviews with the author.

‡ During the latter part of his career, when he withdrew into depression and bitterness, the loyalty of his friends was a source of sustenance. The breadth of his circle is documented by a guest book recording visitors to his New York apartment, 1976–81 (shown to the author by Valentin Herranz).

London as well as in Philadelphia, included notably Rose Bampton, Benjamin de Loache, Jeanne Behrend, and the members of the Swastika Quartet—Gama Gilbert, Benjamin Sharlip, Max Aronoff, and Orlando Cole.* These were the fellow students who saw Barber win his first prizes, confirming what they knew to be his destiny as an internationally renowned composer.

At Curtis Institute, too, began the profound friendship between Gian Carlo Menotti and Barber, a friendship that led to one of the most remarkably productive personal and professional collaborations in contemporary musical life. Menotti told how, when he arrived at the Curtis Institute in fall of 1928, they met:

> I arrived and I spoke very little English. The very first person I met in the school was Sam Barber. He was the only pupil there who spoke fluent French and some Italian.† And so of course we became friends immediately and became friends for life. He was extremely well read and had traveled, and he was very spoiled because not only was he good-looking, but he had many talents. He had a beautiful baritone voice . . . also he was an extraordinary pianist, and of course a star composer. So he was one of the favored pupils of the conservatory.[8]

Menotti recalled further:

> I remember on the night we became friends he made fun of me because I came from Milano and my musical education consisted mainly of opera and the usual classics—Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Clementi, Mendelssohn. But we didn't know anything about Brahms. Brahms, Debussy, and Ravel were never played at my home or at concerts in Milano. . . . Brahms in Italy was considered a very academic and boring composer. And my friendship with Sam developed under the wings of Brahms's music.[9]

It was through Barber's lovely baritone voice, too, that Menotti heard for the first time many of Schubert's songs—"a revelation," he said, "which influenced my music for ever after."[10]

*The student quartet took its name from the residence of Mary and Edward Bok in Merion, Pennsylvania, where their first concerts were given. The house had been called "Swastika" in the early years of the century by the Boks' friend Rudyard Kipling, in recollection of a drawing of that ancient American Indian symbol made by Kipling's father (*Overtones*, 1 October 1974, p. 84). In the early thirties, when the symbol was adopted by the Nazis, the Boks changed the name of their house and destroyed all household items marked with the swastika. The quartet changed its name to the Curtis Quartet in 1932, when Gilbert resigned to pursue a career in journalism and Jascha Brodsky replaced him as first violinist. Cole, called "Landy" by Barber, was the son of a violinist who played with the Philadelphia Orchestra. Like Barber, Cole entered the Curtis Institute of Music its charter year. A student of Felix Salmond, the distinguished English cellist who had premiered Edward Elgar's Cello Concerto under Elgar's direction in 1919, Cole premiered two works of Barber's in the thirties—*Dover Beach* and the Sonata for Violoncello and Piano, whose evolution he witnessed at almost every step to its completion.

†In fact, Barber's Italian was minimal at that time. He became fluent through his friendship with Menotti and subsequently through their travels together in Europe.