



Samuel Barber: The Composer and His Music

By Barbara B. Heyman

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Samuel Barber (1910-1981) was one of the most important and honored American composers of the twentieth century. Writing in a great variety of musical forms--symphonies, concertos, operas, vocal music, and chamber music--he infused his works with poetic lyricism and gave tonal language and forms new vitality. His rich legacy includes such famous compositions as the *Adagio for Strings*, the orchestral song *Knoxville: Summer of 1915*, three concertos, and his two operas, the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Vanessa* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, a commissioned work that opened the new Metropolitan Opera House at Lincoln Center. Generously documented by letters, sketchbooks, original musical manuscripts, and interviews with friends, colleagues and performers with whom he worked, this is the first book to cover Barber's entire career and all of his compositions. The biographical material on Barber is closely interspersed with a discussion of his music, displaying Barber's creative processes at work from his early student compositions to his mature masterpieces. Heyman also provides the social context in which this major composer grew: his education, how he built his career, the evolving musical tastes of American audiences, his relationship to musical giants like Serge Koussevitzky, and the role of radio in the promotion of his music. A testament to the significance of the new Romanticism, *Samuel Barber* stands as a model biography of an important American musical figure.

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Editorial Review

From Library Journal

Eleven years after his death, the American composer Barber is the subject of a large-scale biography, the first since 1955 (Nathan Broder, *Samuel Barber*, LJ 12/15/54). Based on the author's Ph.D. dissertation, this exhaustively documented study makes extensive use of original sources, including correspondence, manuscripts, and interviews. Unfortunately, the material is quite poorly organized. The biographical narrative is constantly disrupted by lengthy, discursive discussions of Barber's compositions. Treating the "life" and "works" separately (cf. Eric W. White's *Stravinsky: A Critical Survey*, Greenwood, 1979, or Maynard Solomon's *Beethoven*, LJ 11/15/77) would have been much clearer and more user-friendly. Despite these major problems, this book is recommended for large music collections because it represents such thorough research. For others, the article on Barber in the *New Grove Dictionary of American Music* will suffice.

- *Eugene Gaub, Villa Maria Coll., Buffalo, N.Y.*

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Review

"For the reader interested in a particular repertory, Heyman's approach is perfect....Heyman's book provides choral musicians a valuable resource for the study and performance of Barber's music."--*Choral Journal*

"Would that every American composer might be as well served as is Samuel Barber by Barbara Heyman, whose book will, as critic Michael Steinberg observed, 'be the foundation of all Barber scholarship forever.'...A bold claim, but one borne out by a careful reading of Heyman's text."--*Choice*

"We can be grateful for Barbara Heyman's exhaustive assemblage of fact and opinion."--*Yale Review*

"So striking and sound in its discussion of his works that it gives a hefty boost to Barber scholarship and suggests a model for other such studies....A clear, rich, and accessible pool of indispensable information....The book, like the composer, emerges as a boon and a triumph."--*Institute for Studies in American Music Newsletter*

"Barbara Heyman has worked diligently and intelligently to produce a book which will be the foundation of all Barber scholarship forever, to which all writers on American music will be turning constantly and for which we shall be immensely grateful. I was completely absorbed in the reading of it."--*Michael Steinberg, San Francisco Symphony and Minnesota Orchestra*

"[A] comprehensive study. [Heyman] has brought to bear a formidable knowledge of Barber's music and its genesis, together with a sympathetic appreciation of his life, to produce a portrait which, in factual terms at least, may be considered definitive."--*Music and Letters*

"[Heyman] brings together a great amount of detail and documentation that makes this book a necessary point of reference."--*The Musical Times*

"Here is a cornucopia of data on the works of Samuel Barber....Through diligent investigation of and liberal quotations from letters, interviews, programs, reviews, books, articles, marginalia, and private tapes and

films, Barbara Heyman gives us all manner of details about the background, performances, recordings, and reception of all Barber's compositions....The detail is virtually staggering....The abundance of interesting photographs and the presence of so many intelligently selected musical examples from manuscripts and published scores is laudable....This book will be consulted for many generations because of its marvelous, original data on Barber's works."--American Music

About the Author

Barbara B. Heyman, a pianist, editor, and musicologist, has written and lectured extensively on Samuel Barber. She lives in New York City.

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