ONE MOVEMENT SYMPHONIES

BARBER SIBELIUS SCRIABIN





MICHAEL STERN SYMPHONY

A 'PROF' JOHNSON RECORDING



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SAMUEL BARBER First Symphony (In One Movement), Op. 9 (1936)

Samuel Barber was born on March 9, 1910 in West Chester, Pennsylvania. His father was a physician and his mother a sister of the famous American contralto, Louise Homer. From the time he was six years old, Barber's musical gifts were

apparent, and at the age of 13 he was accepted as one of the first students to attend the newly established Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia. There he studied with Rosario Scalero (composition), Isabelle Vengerova (piano), and Emilio de Gogorza (voice). Although he began composing at the age of seven, he undertook it seriously at 18. Recognition of his gifts as a composer came quickly. In 1933 the Philadelphia Orchestra played his Overture to *The School for Scandal* and in 1935 the New York Philharmonic presented his *Music for a Scene from Shelley*. Both early compositions won considerable acclaim. Between 1935 and 1937 Barber was awarded the Prix de Rome and the Pulitzer Prize.

He achieved overnight fame on November 5, 1938 when Arturo Toscanini conducted the NBC Symphony Orchestra in Barber's *Essay for Orchestra No. 1* and *Adagio for Strings*. The *Adagio* became one of the most popular American works of serious music, and through some lurid aberration of circumstance, it also became a favorite selection at state funerals and as background for death scenes in movies. During World War II, Barber served in the Army Air Corps. He composed his Second Symphony on a commission from the Air Force. He wrote three operas (*Vanessa* received the 1958 Pulitzer prize), two ballets (*Medea* and *Souvenirs*), three Essays for orchestra, two symphonies, concertos for violin, piano and cello, many vocal works, and chamber, piano and choral music. His music has been called "romantic;" however, his technical idiom is decidedly modern. His melodies are broadly songful; his harmonies are opulent; his orchestration is resplendent with color. David Ewen stated, "As Barber's talent ripened, he added poetic feeling to his lyricism. And, towards the end of his life there was a growing intensity and strength of idiom in his writing. But his lyricism always remained on a high plane of eloquence; and the emotional factor never was sacrificed." Samuel Osmond Barber II died on 23 January 1981 in New York after a series of sporadic hospitalizations and a stroke.

Writing the obituary for the New York Times, Donald Henahan stated: "Throughout his career, Samuel Barber was hounded by success. Probably no other American composer enjoyed such early, persistent and such long lasting acclaim...One reason for the acceptance won by Mr. Barber's music —apart from its undeniable craft and thorough professionalism—was its deepseated conservatism, which audiences could find congenial even at first hearing. Although he often dealt in pungent dissonances and complex rhythms, like most of his 20th-century contemporaries, there was a lyrical quality even to his strictly instrumental pieces that from the first established him as a neo-Romantic..." Barber's Symphony No. 1, which is in one compact movement, was written during the winter of 1935-36, while the composer was in Rome. It received its first performance in that city by the Augusteo Orchestra, under the direction of Bernardino Molinari, on December 13, 1936, and was first performed in the United States the following month by Artur Rodzinski and the Cleveland Orchestra. Rodzinski brought it further honor by presenting it as the only American work at the Salzburg Festival in the summer of 1937. Since then it has been played by most of the world's foremost orchestras. The symphony was dedicated to Gian-Carlo Menotti.

Barber provides his own program notes: "The form of my Symphony in One Movement is a synthetic treatment of the four-movement classical symphony. It is based on three themes of the initial Allegro non troppo, which retain throughout the work their fundamental character. The Allegro opens with the usual exposition of a main theme, a more lyrical second theme, and a closing theme. After a brief development of the three themes, instead of the customary recapitulation, the first theme, in diminution (that is, with the time values of the notes shortened, so that the theme appears in a quicker tempo), forms the basis of a scherzo section, Vivace. The second theme (oboe over muted strings) then appears in augmentation (that is, with the time values of the notes lengthened, so that the theme appears in a slower tempo), in an extended Andante tranquillo. An intense crescendo introduces the finale, which is a short passacaglia based on the first theme (introduced by the violoncelli and contrabassi), over which, together with figures from other themes, the closing theme is woven, thus serving as a recapitulation for the entire symphony."



Symphonie Nr. 7

8



JEAN SIBELIUS Symphony No. 7 in C major, Op. 105 (1924)

"He writes music first of all to free himself of what is in his heart and brain," writes Philip Hale of Sibelius. He was Finland's most personal, as well as most national composer. Jean Julius Christian Sibelius was born in the interior of Finland,

Tavastelius, on December 8, 1865, where his father was a regimental doctor, his mother a music-loving descendant of a family of soldiers, clergy and government representatives. As a boy he showed a great talent for music. At 9 he began taking piano lessons, and at 15 he began taking violin lessons from a military bandmaster of the town. While attending Helsinki University as a law student, Sibelius took special courses at the Conservatory of Music. In 1885 the young university student chose music over jurisprudence. Under the watchful guidance of Martin Wegelius and Ferruccio Busoni, Sibelius blossomed. At the end of 1889, with a scholarship and government grant, Sibelius left Finland to study in Berlin. He studied with Albert Becker (counterpoint and fugue) and Robert Fuchs (composition and instrumentation). In Vienna, he later took master classes from Karl Goldmark and met Johannes Brahms in 1890.

When Sibelius returned to Finland in 1892, Finland was undergoing an acute attack of nationalism, brought on by some high-handed

suppression of Finnish privileges by the Russian government. Feeling ran high, and Sibelius joined several patriotic groups. He also became convinced that it was his duty to express his love for Finland in his music. The result was a five-part symphonic poem for large orchestra, chorus, and soloists, Kullervo, based upon an old national hero tale. It seemed to voice just what the Finnish patriots were feeling, aroused the greatest enthusiasm and made its composer famous. After Kullervo followed En Saga, the Karelia Suite, and in 1894, that supreme expression of national feeling, Finlandia. With the appearance of one more major work, the Lemminkäinen Suite, Sibelius's position as the musical spokesperson of Finland was so definitely recognized that the government voted to give him an annual grant of money for life, which would permit him to devote himself to composition. Sibelius became not only Finland's spokesman but also her ambassador, traveling on concert tours to all the leading countries of Europe. In 1914 he came to the United States. World War I brought many changes—Finland declared independence from Russia, and while Red and White Guards fought in Finland, Sibelius diligently worked on his music, producing several of his great symphonies. In 1935 the whole world of music joined in celebration of his 70th birthday. Finland declared a national holiday. At the time in Paris, London, Berlin, Rome, New York, Boston, and Philadelphia, orchestras all played Sibelius programs. Perhaps the greatest tribute came from America, where a poll among radio listeners for favorite symphonic music revealed the name Jean Sibelius first choice among all living composers!

In 1939 the Helsinki Conservatory was renamed the Sibelius Academy. After World War II, Finland issued stamps bearing his likeness for his 80th birthday. Nicolas Slonimsky wrote: "Artistically, Sibelius attained the status of greatness rarely vouchsafed to a living musician; several important contemporary composers paid homage by acknowledging their debt of inspiration to him, Ralph Vaughan Williams among them." In all of his orchestral music Sibelius gave expression to the soul of his country without ever utilizing any of its folk music. H.H. Mischa-Leon points out that, in his symphonies, Sibelius's "method of thematic development is particularly original. As a general rule, his symphonic movements are built up from fragmentary groups of notes, which grow and expand until the climax is reached with the complete presentation of the theme in its full splendor." Ernest Newman described his Seventh Symphony as one of his greatest works, because "it represents the utmost in his development as a thinker, in the blending of form and expression." Sibelius passed away at his home in Järvenpää on September 20, 1957.

Biographer Ernest Newman said about Sibelius's music, "It hangs together throughout by a logic of its own." This is certainly true of the Symphony No. 7 in C major. Sibelius conducted the first performance of the work in Stockholm on March 24, 1924. At that premiere the work was entitled *Fantasia sinfonica No. 1*, a "symphonic fantasy." Upon publication in 1925 the title became "Symphony No. 7 (in one movement)." There is a natural quality in this work, a quality which seems to have nothing to do with artifice or design. It seems to spring and flower, with all the beauty and freedom and absence of logic that we usually find in Nature's own work. There are no "movements." There are to be sure passages of sustained mood and tempo, but there is no formal division, no formal working out of thematic material, no deliberate contrast or balance of themes, tonalities, rhythms or tempi. In form

it is more tone poem than symphony, or perhaps a synthesis of both. When Serge Koussevitzky performed the work with the BBC Symphony Orchestra, the following notes were provided: "The entire work is episodic in character ...A mysterious muttering of the tympani begins the music, and the strings move through an ascending scale to a strong chord in the winds; a chord that presently disintegrates into wild dissonance. Flutes and bassoons project, in a tone-color accentuated by the harmonic intervals of fourths and thirds, a subject which for a space is contagious in the orchestra, and finally there is a phrase for the violins which is presently subjected to considerable development. Oboes and bassoons in one choir, and strings in another, now present a series of antiphonal phrases. The whole color-range of the orchestra is explored for the projection of a long series of new, but very brief, musical episodes, and after a minor climax there is a majestic declamation by trombone, solo. Here there is some change of mood, and presently a musical, if not a formal division of the work. The ascending scale noted at the beginning of the music reappears, and is developed now, as it was not before, to quite some length. Still later there is another mood-change, roughly corresponding to a scherzo; on a relaxation of the pace, we encounter once more the motif previously heard from the trombone, solo. There is a gradual broadening of tempo and lightening of mood, with a succession of sweeping and soaring melodies that build steadily toward a final climax. Some reference to previous thematic material, particularly to the trombone solo passage, can be observed-though usually there are changes of tonality that alter the color and spirit of the material. There are moments of stress and moments of calm, and a superbly moving climax at the end."

ALEXANDER SCRIABIN Le poème de l'extase (The Poem of Ecstasy), Op. 54 (1905-1908)

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Alexander Scriabin was a musical visionary, a genius, and an individualist with a strong artistic voice. He was born in Moscow on January 6, 1872, the son of an accomplished pianist. He began music studies with Safonov, Taneyev, and Arensky (all also Sergei Rachmaninoff's teachers). In 1891 the Moscow Conservatory awarded Scriabin their highest honor, a Gold Medal (in piano playing). During this period, he began composing exquisite piano miniatures which re-

vealed such talent that they attracted the attention of the foremost publisher in Russia—Belaieff, who decided to sponsor the young musician. He gave him a handsome contract for his compositions, and subsidized a tour for him as piano virtuoso in programs of his own works. The tour proved an emphatic success, and he was greeted everywhere with triumph and praise. *La Libre Critique* in Paris spoke of him as "a new exquisite nature, equally great as composer and pianist; an enlightened philosopher, all nerve and holy flame."

From 1898 to 1904, Scriabin was professor at the Moscow Conservatory. But teaching proved a painful chore to him, and he abandoned it for composition and piano recitals. In 1906 he toured the United States with great success. During this time period his compositions were undergoing a radical metamorphosis, largely due to his increasing interest in mysticism and philosophy. His last three symphonic works all bear subtitles: "The Divine Poem," "The Poem of Ecstasy" and "Prometheus: The Poem of Fire."

Musical colleague and biographer Leonid Sabaneyev wrote: "Scriabin's experimentation has made him one of the all-important precursors of modern music...During his last period, to which belong his symphonic tone poems and his last piano sonatas, Scriabin's style reached an extraordinary exquisiteness and refinement, his harmony a rare complexity along with a saturation of psychological content. Side by side with this, we observe a dissolution of rhythm, a reduction of melody to the minimum, a severance of the musical web and line which turns into a series of spasmodic exclamations, and destroys the impression of unity and wholeness." Probably the predominating characteristic of Scriabin's music is the mysticism which courses through it in an uninterrupted stream. According to Boris de Schloezer, "One idea inspired his work and gives it being. The whole of his activities, from the First Symphony onwards, constitutes a series of attempts to achieve the embodiment of that idea. The unique work towards which his symphonies and sonatas are but sketches or fragments, he used to call 'The Mystery.' It was to be a liturgy constituting a synthesis of all arts and in which the whole of humanity and nature would take part. In his mind, art was but a means of achieving a higher form of life-a purely romantic conception. The vast metaphysical and religious system created by him is analogous to Indian mysticism. It is symbolized in L'Acte Préalable, a cantata which was to serve as an introduction to 'The Mystery,' but which we possess the text only, and a few musical fragments," unfortunately left unfinished when Scriabin died in Moscow on April 27, 1915.

With the exception of Scriabin's extraordinary piano works, his most famous work is his inspired *The Poem of Ecstasy* for orchestra: "A piece of

wonderful beauty," comments Arthur Eaglefield Hull, "full of rich themes, well developed and combined with mastery of counterpoint and modern harmony of a hue of which the like has not been heard before. It is musically logical, full of contrast, design and color. At times the texture is quite simple; at other moments, of great complexity. Altogether it is a work of great originality and high poesy—an epoch-making work in the handling of modern harmony."

Scriabin wrote five symphonies. Of these the Fourth, The Poem of Ecstasy, and the Fifth, Prometheus, are often called tone-poems. The Poem of Ecstasy was premiered in New York at a concert by the Russian Symphony Society, on December 10, 1908, conducted by Modest Altschuler. Whenever Leopold Stokowski conducted the work (he was also the first to record the work), the following program notes were provided: "The Poem of Ecstasy sets forth as its fundamental message the Joy of Creative Activity. The composer has sought to express the emotional side of his philosophy of life. There is a Prologue, which has two motives. The first, Andante, assigned to the flute, symbolizes Strife After the Ideal. The second, Lento, played by the clarinet, the Ego theme, represents the gradual Awakening of the Soul. These two motives, exquisitely blended and interwoven, lead to another subject introduced by the flute in clear sharp tones. This subject marks the beginning of the Sonata form, which identifies the work as a symphony. It immediately includes the two motives of the Prologue and conveys the idea of the spirit in flight, soaring ever higher and higher in an effort to find itself. A second subject, Lento, is in two partsthe upper, a violin solo of exquisite tenderness typical of Human Love; the lower, in serous character, stated by the English horn. Suddenly a commanding trumpet theme (third subject) summons the Will to rise-and the creative

force climbs in a series of ascending fourths to vertiginous heights. There follow expressions of dreamy charm...climaxes that reach frenzied peaks of passion...moments of tragic emotions and deepest despair, with only a hint at previous happiness. The three subjects are repeated and richly developed and culminate in an ecstasy of swift flight. The trumpet theme grows triumphantly majestic, resolving itself finally into an *Epilogue* of immensity and grandeur."

> -Program Notes Edited and Compiled by Marina and Victor Ledin

MICHAEL STERN — Music Director



Music Director Michael Stern is in his 16th season with the Kansas City Symphony, hailed for its remarkable artistic ascent, original programming, organizational development and stability, as well as the extraordinary growth of its varied audiences since his tenure began. Since 2008, Stern and the orchestra have collaborated with GRAMMY[®] Award-winning Reference Recordings for an ongoing series of highly praised CDs.

Stern is also the founding artistic director and principal conductor of the IRIS Orchestra in Germantown, Tennessee. Now in its second decade, audiences and critics alike applaud this unique group for its virtuosity and programming as well as its commitment to commissioning and recording new works by American composers. Stern has led orchestras throughout Europe and Asia, including

the London and NHK (Tokyo) symphony orchestras, the Hungarian and Vienna radio symphony orchestras, the Helsinki, Israel, London, Moscow and Royal Stockholm philharmonic orchestras, Orchestre de Paris and National Symphony of Taiwan, among many others. In North America, Stern has conducted the Atlanta, Baltimore, Chicago, Cincinnati, Houston, Indianapolis, National (Washington, D.C.), Montreal, Pittsburgh, St. Louis, Seattle and Toronto symphony orchestras, the Cleveland and Philadelphia orchestras, and the New York Philharmonic. He also appears regularly at the Aspen Music Festival and has served on the faculty of the American Academy of Conducting at Aspen.

Passionately committed to education, Stern works with students at the Curtis Institute and a number of festivals, including the National Repertory Orchestra, National Orchestral Institute, Round Top and others. Stern received his music degree from the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, where his major teacher was the noted conductor and scholar Max Rudolf. Stern coedited the third edition of Rudolf's famous textbook, "The Grammar of Conducting," and edited a new volume of Rudolf's collected writings and correspondence. He is a 1981 graduate of Harvard University, where he earned a degree in American history.



KANSAS CITY SYMPHONY

The Kansas City Symphony has a vision to transform hearts, minds and its community through the power of symphonic music. Founded by R. Crosby Kemper, Jr., in 1982, the Symphony has established itself as a major force in the cultural life of the community. Praised for performances of uncompromising standard, the orchestra is the largest in the region and holds a national reputation under the artistic leadership of Music Director Michael Stern.

The Symphony serves a metropolitan population of 2.1 million. The orchestra's 80 full-time musicians are area residents and vital contributors to the artistic life of Kansas City, as are the 160 members of the Symphony Chorus, a volunteer ensemble led by multi-GRAMMY® Award-winning conductor Charles Bruffy. With a vibrant schedule of more than 130 concerts in a 42-week season, the Symphony reaches more than 1 million people annually through concerts, events, recordings and media broadcasts, including more than 60,000 children and adults in a wide variety of education programs. The Symphony also performs as the resident orchestra for the Lyric Opera of Kansas City and the Kansas City Ballet.

LEADERSHIP and FINANCIAL STRENGTH

Through the leadership of Executive Director Daniel Beckley, Board Chair Patrick McCown and an engaged board of directors, the Symphony has charted a course to unprecedented financial stability, a growing audience, an expanding donor base, and deeper connections throughout the region. The Symphony's annual operating budget has grown to more than \$19 million from a budget of \$1.5 million in its first season. Gifts from the board, local foundations and members of the community have created an endowment in excess of \$100 million.

In addition, the orchestra benefits from the dedicated efforts of its volunteer associations. The Symphony's four auxiliaries, with total membership of nearly 500, raise more than \$1 million annually, making them some of the most successful orchestra volunteer forces in the nation.

RECORDINGS and BROADCASTS

The Symphony has released seven previous recordings on the Reference Recordings label—"Shakespeare's Tempest," the GRAMMY® Award-winning "Britten's Orchestra," an Elgar/Vaughan Williams project, "Miraculous Metamorphoses," an all-Saint-Saëns CD featuring the magnificent "Organ" Symphony, the music of contemporary American composer Adam Schoenberg (nominated for two GRAMMY® Awards), and most recently, Holst's *The Planets*. The Symphony's concerts with internationally celebrated mezzo-soprano Joyce DiDonato were featured on the national PBS Summer Arts Series in July 2012. The GRAMMY® Award-nominated audio recording of the complete performance may be downloaded from Apple Music.

In addition, the Symphony has taped three nationally broadcast PBS television specials and performed on National Public Radio, including on the prestigious SymphonyCast series. Highlights of Classical Series performances are broadcast Thursdays at 8 p.m. and Sundays at 4 p.m. on Classical KC, 91.9 FM. With a strong base of organizational stability, aspirational standards and a desire to serve its community, the Kansas City Symphony seeks to model a new standard of excellence for the 21st-century American orchestra.

For more information, visit kcsymphony.org.

KANSAS CITY SYMPHONY Michael Stern, *Music Director* Aram Demirjian, *Associate Conductor, David T. <u>Beals III Chair</u>*

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‡ On Leave of Absence ^ Substitute Musician Recorded: June 24 and 25, 2016 Helzberg Hall, Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts Kansas City, Missouri

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Special thanks to the Kansas City Symphony, Danny Beckley, Executive Director 2019—present; Frank Byrne, Executive Director 2002-2019; Emma Kail, General Manager; Rebecca Martin, Director of Artistic Operations; Tim Forsythe, Production Manager; Kate Breytspraak and Victoria Patrick, Managers of Artist Relations; Justin White, Personnel Manager And the staff of the Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts, Kansas City, Missouri Keith O. Johnson is one of the founders of Reference Recordings, and has recorded and released over 140 titles for the label, spanning the genres of classical, jazz, world and blues music. He and Sean Royce Martin have recorded as a team for RR projects since 2007.

The RR Sound comes from Johnson's singular methods and equipment, almost all hand-built or extensively modified by him. His microphone techniques range from purist to complex, depending



on the musical forces and the performing space involved. Sean Martin adds his skills to ensure that RR stays up to date with the latest technological advances.

Johnson received the GRAMMY[®] for Best Surround Sound Album in 2011. To date, he has received thirteen additional nominations for Best Engineered Album, Classical, as well as a host of other industry awards and nominations, including the prestigious Audio Engineering Society *Silver Medal Award* in 2008. (Given in recognition of outstanding development or achievement in the field of audio engineering, other recipients of the *Silver Award* include: Ray Dolby, Paul Klipsch, Robert Moog, and Willi Studer.)

Martin, in addition to his work with RR, works on scoring at Skywalker Sound and for SF Bay Area artists in his own studio. He has received four GRAMMY® nominations for Best Engineered Album, Classical and mastered pianist Nadia Shpachenko's GRAMMY® award-winning album "The Poetry Of Places."

ONE MOVEMENT SYMPHONIES

BARBER

1 First Symphony (In One Movement), Op. 9 (1936) 20:58

SIBELIUS

2 Symphony No. 7 in C major, Op. 105 (1924) 22:38

SCRIABIN

3 Le poème de l'extase (The Poem of Ecstasy), Op. 54 (1905-1908) 18:52

Total Time 62:28

MICHAEL STERN



REFERENCE RECORDINGS RR-149