

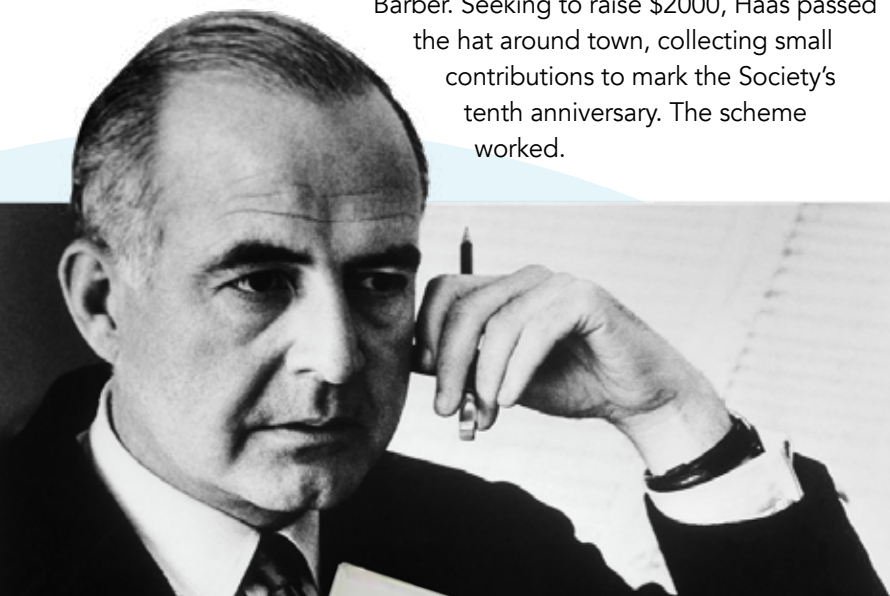
BARBER: *Summer Music*

Notes on the Program

By Noel Morris ©2020

It began as a scheme to build a buzz around the Chamber Music Society of Detroit.

Society founder Karl Haas (also a well-known radio personality) crowd-funded a new work by the famous composer Samuel Barber. Seeking to raise \$2000, Haas passed the hat around town, collecting small contributions to mark the Society's tenth anniversary. The scheme worked.



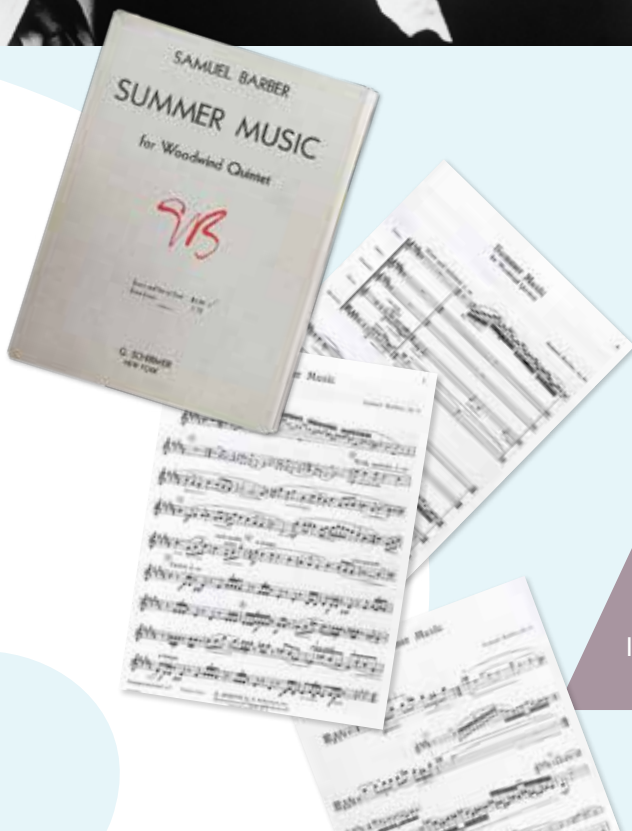
"My joy was being stopped in the street by people who had given me two bucks," said Haas. "When am I going to hear my piece?" they'd ask."

In the summer of 1954, Samuel Barber was staying at the seaside village of Blue Hill, Maine, and had hoped to work on his opera *Vanessa* (winner of the 1958 Pulitzer Prize). Plans changed when his librettist and life partner, Gian Carlo Menotti, was called back to New York. Barber stayed behind and wandered into a concert given by the New York Woodwind Quintet. With the Detroit project hanging over his head, he asked the players if they'd work with him, serving as a veritable laboratory for his new "sextet."

The following winter, Barber began attending the Quintet's rehearsals in Greenwich Village, and soaking in the sounds of the different instruments. As it happened, the Quintet was in the midst of its own experimentation: horn player John Barrows was leading the group through a series of exercises to chart their most awkward sonorities—those that, because of the properties of each instrument, were harder to blend.

Barber "listened avidly, made notes on Barrows' notes," wrote flutist Samuel Baron. Months later, Barber presented them with a woodwind quintet (not a sextet) using what Baron called their "favorite effects."

Summer Music was premiered by the Chamber Music Society of Detroit on March 20, 1956. The New York Woodwind Quintet played the piece in Carnegie Hall later that year.



BARBER: *Summer Music*

This is an ASO premiere.

Instrumentation: 1 flute, 1 oboe, 1 clarinet, 1 bassoon, 1 horn

TCHAIKOVSKY: Serenade for Strings

In the fall of 1880, Tchaikovsky worked on two compositions: one would become a staple of the American Fourth of July celebration; the other was his Serenade for Strings.

The [1812] Overture will be very loud, noisy," wrote Tchaikovsky. "But I wrote it without any warm feelings of love, and so it will probably be of no artistic worth."

It was typical for Tchaikovsky to voice a low opinion of his own works. But the Serenade for Strings is an exception: "I wrote [it] from inner compulsion. This is a piece from the heart and so, I venture to say, it does not lack artistic worth."

Interestingly, while the notes came to him with ease, the form of the piece was less specific. "I immediately began to feel cheerful, well and relaxed," he wrote. "Now here I am already with designs for a symphony or string quartet; I do not yet know which."

Of course, it was neither. He scored the piece for string orchestra.

It had been two years since Tchaikovsky had resigned from his teaching post at the Moscow Conservatory. In the months ahead, he focused on composition while spending time in the country, and traveling to Italy, France and Switzerland.

Toward the end of 1880, he returned to Moscow where a group of friends and students at the Conservatory surprised him with a private performance of his new Serenade for Strings. The public premiere took place almost a year later in St. Petersburg.



TCHAIKOVSKY: Serenade for Strings

First ASO Performance: **December 7, 1949** | Henry Sopkin, conductor

Most Recent Performance: **April, 21, 2012** | Roberto Abbado, conductor

MOZART: Piano Concerto No. 21

*As an 8-year-old,
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
entertained kings and
queens across Europe.*

Disarmingly modest, he would loll beside the harpsichord as his father, Leopold, spread a piece of cloth over the keys. The boy would then slip his fingers beneath the drapery and – without looking – play dazzling improvisations and complex scores on sight.



All along, the greatest ambition of Leopold Mozart was to see his son working in the service of a ranking nobleman—possibly a royal. Yet he'd unwittingly groomed the boy for life as a freelancer. Carting him from city to city, Leopold pushed young Wolfgang to jockey for projects from members of the nobility. Leveraging the mind-boggling talents of his son (and daughter), Leopold grew the family coffers well beyond his own earnings (as a court musician, Leopold was but a low-ranking servant).

Wolfgang became accustomed to moving in elite circles. And so it was, in 1781, he defied his father. He moved to Vienna, married without consent and eased into life as a celebrity.



Curiously, the younger Mozart's writing for the piano evolved alongside the instrument itself. Invented around 1700, the piano spread across Europe, offering the player a range of dynamics that hadn't been possible with the harpsichord. As Mozart explored this newfound expressivity, he single handedly developed the piano concerto into the large-scale genre as we know it today. And writing and performing piano concertos became his main source of income.

Mozart's life in Vienna was beyond hectic. He often performed in the evening while teaching ladies of the nobility by day. He and his wife, Constanze, were "central figures in the Viennese beau monde," according to biographer Maynard Solomon. "Glittering all-night parties were held in their apartment; they were to be seen at the masked balls and carnival festivities." At the same time, Mozart's catalogue of compositions continued to grow.

He logged the completion of the Piano Concerto No. 21 in C major on March 9, 1785. Leaving barely enough time for copyists to generate orchestra parts, Mozart premiered the concerto the following night.

MOZART: Piano Concerto No. 21

First ASO Performance: May 20, 1971 | Robert Shaw, conductor | Lili Kraus, piano

Instrumentation: 1 flute, 2 oboes, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani, strings