Concert audiences know Samuel Barber for his large-scale orchestral works—the Overture to *The School for Scandal*, the violin and cello concertos, *Knoxville: Summer of 1915*, the symphonies, and the three *Essays*. His chamber music œuvre is small, but some of these works remain favorites in the repertoire. String players revere the String Quartet in B Minor, *Dover Beach*, and the Cello Sonata. And wind players know that Barber’s penchant for writing solos for flute, clarinet, and oboe (his signature instrument) in orchestral works also expresses itself in such small-scale works as *Summer Music*, *Capricorn Concerto*, and the 1959 Elegy for Flute and Piano.

In recent years I have been assembling a complete thematic catalog of Barber’s works, and in the process have come across some early, unpublished ensemble works that few are familiar with. Among these, the most important is certainly the third movement of Barber’s Sonata in F minor for Violin and Piano, rediscovered in 2006. Masquerading under the title page *Sonata for Violoncello and Piano*, the music turned up in the estate of the Pennsylvania artist Tom Bostell, who had been a boarder in the Barber family’s West Chester, Pennsylvania, home. When asked to view the 17 pages of manuscript, I recognized the first three pages as those that were missing from the autograph manuscript of the Cello Sonata at the Library of Congress. The next pages presented clues that led to a eureka moment. The inscription *III, Allegro agitato*; the date at the end, “November 8, 1928,” in Barber’s hand; the key of F minor and a sudden awareness that the

Some of the composer’s best-known works for small ensemble, written in his youth, entered the repertoire early and remained there.

by Barbara Heyman

*All published works are available from Barber’s sole publisher, G. Schirmer, Inc. Unless indicated otherwise, the unpublished works are at the Library of Congress, Music Division.*
solo instrument could only be a violin, affirmed, much to my delight, that the third movement of the “lost” violin sonata had been found!

Among 20th-century composers, Barber was a conservator; he knew just how far to go without disrupting the continuity with tradition. On the last page of a sketchbook he kept during the 1930s, he wrote:

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.

These are Franz Liszt’s words, but I think they are Samuel Barber’s credo. He felt no need to rebel against conventional practices of form, tonality, and lyricism. Yet the personal voice that pervades his music is very much of his time. His rise to fame was meteoric. His early works, written in the 1930s and ’40s, entered the repertory soon after he wrote them. In the mid-20th century, his music—a long with Copland’s—was the most frequently performed of American composers of his generation in Europe and the Americas. Now, as we approach the Barber centennial in 2010, the composer’s work has gained new significance within the current trend of “New Romanticism.” In our high-tech, postmodern age, we still program Barber and Copland (and Verdi and Puccini). We take renewed pleasure in Sibelius, Rachmaninoff, Tchaikovsky, and Mahler, and we are attracted to the—at times—unabashedly romantic music of such contemporaries as John Corigliano, Ned Rorem, Lee Hoiby, Peter Lieberson, and Ellen Taaffe Zwilich, as well as that of a new crop of younger composers.
Barber's lasting appeal, I believe, lies in his ability to successfully fuse the harmonic language of the late 19th century with elements of 20th-century modernism without compromising lyricism. Melody is central. From his earliest years, the composer expressed himself through song. “Writing songs was the natural thing to do,” Barber once said, and his facility in this genre continued through his life. Moreover, virtually all of his instrumental music is vocally inspired. A baritone, he considered becoming a singer in his thirties; and he occasionally performed his own music and sang lieder on the radio. His recording of Dover Beach is legendary.

Barber worked closely with artists. “Performers have always helped me,” he acknowledged in 1971. By his middle years, his early tendency to collaborate with instrumentalists had become standard operating procedure: so that he might tailor a work to the strengths of particular artists and to the possibilities of their instruments, he would invite performers to visit him before beginning a commission and have them play large portions of their repertoire. The chamber works are testimony to the effectiveness of this compositional process.

Following is an overview of Barber’s published and unpublished works for two to six players, and one work for a chamber orchestra of eight.

**Works for Stringed Instruments**

**Serenade for String Quartet (or String Orchestra), Op. 1**
Barber wrote the three-movement Serenade in his nineteenth year, after less than two years of study with Rosario Scalero at the Curtis Institute of Music; yet the piece reveals a refined technique. The Romantic harmonies and dance rhythms are as unselfconsciously expressed in this work as they are in the young Hugo Wolf’s *Italianische Serenade*, which may very well have been the model Barber had in mind. Two characteristics of Barber’s mature style are strong in the Serenade: a fondness for combining duple and triple rhythms (as hemiolas, or as two beats against three) and expressive shifts between major and minor.

In 1943, Barber added a bass part and sixteen measures of new material for the orchestral version, which was conducted and recorded by Alfred Wallenstein.

**Sonata for Violoncello and Piano, Op. 6**
The inscription on Orlando Cole’s copy of the Cello Sonata reads: “to Orlando/physician at the birth of this Sonata/in appreciation of his help and interest/Samuel Barber.” Barber had begun work on the piece during the summer of 1932; and when the fall term began at Curtis, he met weekly with Cole, his classmate, to go over new material. The cellist played these sections and offered suggestions, usually about notation, that were incorporated into the score. Thus Barber familiarized himself, as was to become his custom, with the idioms and virtuosic scope of a particular instrument, as well as with the strengths and predilections of the performer who would give the premiere. This practice guaranteed a good performance and increased the chances of a positive critical reception. An early critic declared of the sonata: “The composer never forgets that the instrument he was writing for was intended for...”

---

**Dover Beach, Op. 3, for baritone or mezzo-soprano and string quartet**
A penetrating sense of melancholy can be found almost everywhere in Barber’s work. Among the songs, the most compelling example is his setting of Matthew Arnold’s poem “Dover Beach,” which epitomizes the sense of loss that accompanied Victorian scientific rationalism and skepticism. Barber’s song may well have represented the young composer’s own disillusionment with a world that had once seemed “so various, so beautiful, so new,” a post-religious world in which the only solace lies in human love and mutual fidelity.

The voice and instruments of Dover Beach are related through points of imitation that coincide with beginnings of text lines and the alternating contrapuntal and homophonic fabric, suggesting a quasi-motet style, probably related to Barber’s interest in late 16th-century Italian vocal music at the time. A striking feature is its evocation of visual images. In the opening—“The sea is calm tonight”—voice and violin float languorously over a shimmering, slow tremolo of bare open fifths and fourths in the lower strings, suggestive of the gentle lapping of waves. In the central section, the restlessness expressed in the poem is heightened musically through abrupt chromatic and enharmonic modulations to keys remote from the D-minor tonality.

*Dover Beach* is usually sung by a man and was originally notated for baritone; however, the mezzo-soprano Rose Bampton was the only singer in the 1930s whom Barber asked to perform it when he did not sing it himself. Some fifty years later, his comment about performing the piece is instructive: “The difficulty with *Dover Beach* is that nobody is boss—not the singer, not the string quartet. It’s chamber music.”
to sing, and he gives it ample opportunity to do so.” The piano is an equal partner to the cello, as would be expected from a composer whose skill as a pianist was virtuosic.

Barber’s admiration for Brahms is apparent in the Cello Sonata. The affinity between its turbulent opening and Brahms’s F-major sonata is unmistakable, as are the Brahmsian features of the thematic material in the first movement and the lyrical second theme. Yet Barber’s personal style is not submerged; while the sonata is Romantic in spirit, its complex and challenging rhythmic structure—with many shifts between duple and triple meter, as well as conflicting rhythms for the cello and piano at brutally rapid tempos—demonstrates the work’s strong foothold in the 20th-century cello literature.

Barber gave the first performances with Cole at the Art Alliance in Philadelphia and the League of Composers concert in New York, March 5, 1933. Major artists—Felix Salmond, Luigi Silva (with Barber), and Piatigorsky—all played the work in the ‘30s and ‘40s, not only because of its artistic merit, but probably also because until 1948 it was the only cello sonata in the repertory written by an American composer.

“How difficult it is! It seems to me that because we have so assiduously forced our personalities on Music—on Music, who never asked for them!—we have lost elegance; and if we cannot recapture elegance, the quartet form has escaped us forever. It is a struggle.”

String Quartet in B Minor, Op. 11

In May 1936, while on a fellowship in Europe, Barber wrote to Cole, “I have vague quartetish rumblings in my innards, and need a bit of celestial Ex-Lax to restore my equilibrium; there is nothing to do but get at it, and I will send the excrements to you by registered mail by mid-August.” From May to November, Barber and his companion Gian Carlo Menotti lived in a game- warden’s cottage in the little village of St. Wolfgang, Austria, high up in the mountains near a forest overlooking a lake. That summer was described by Barber as “perfection” and by Menotti as the kind of summer when “you have to stop in the middle of the day and say to yourself, ‘This is too wonderful!’” Nevertheless, progress was slow, perhaps partly because Barber was haunted by ghosts of past masters—at that time he was particularly enamored with the instrumentation of Wagner’s Siegfried Idyll. He wrote to Rosario Scalero, “How difficult it is! It seems to me that because we have so assiduously forced our personalities on Music—on Music, who never asked for them!—we have lost elegance; and if we cannot recapture elegance, the quartet form has escaped us forever. It is a struggle.” In September, with uncanny prescience about a work that in its orchestral arrangement—the Adagio for Strings—would be considered one of the sublime masterpieces of the 20th century, Barber wrote again to Cole, “I have just finished the slow movement of my quartet today—it’s a knockout!”

The Pro Arte Quartet premiered the work at Villa Aurelia, the American Academy in Rome, on December 14, 1936. Although the original last movement was ready in time for the performance, Barber was so uneasy about it that he immediately set about revising it.

The three movements of the original version are in conventional forms: the first, a sonata, the second a song, and the third a sonata rondo, each based on different, contrasting materials. The Allegro’s energetic unison presentation of the primary theme at the outset seems to evoke the spirit—if not the shape—of Beethoven’s Op. 18, No. 1, or of Op. 95. A second, chorale-like theme is followed by a more lyrical section. The development is continuous, pervading the movement.

The discarded third movement, the manuscript parts of which are in the library at Curtis Institute, centers on a cheerful rondo in F-sharp major, 6/8 alla breve—introduced by an andante mosso, un poco agitato section in B minor. Of sprightly character, it is four times longer than the revised ending, a seemingly unbalanced conclusion to the dramatically taut first movement and the elegiac second.

In the revised quartet that we know today, Barber substituted new material for the last 52 measures of the first movement and transferred the excised passage to the end of the quartet as the basis of the “new” third movement, thereby creating a more cohesive, cyclical form. This finale, not labeled as such, follows the Adagio without pause, suggesting that Barber intended for the quartet to be considered a two-movement work.

Ensemble adaptations of Adagio for Strings, from Op. 11

In 1938 Arturo Toscanini requested a new work from Barber for his newly established NBC Symphony Orchestra. Barber added a bass part to the second movement of the B-Minor String Quartet and arranged it for string orchestra, creating what is without a doubt the most famous of his works. Many arrangements followed, at least four of which were approved by Barber. In addition to the choral and organ arrangements by William Strickland, there are the clarinet choir arrangement by Lucien Caillet and the woodwind choir version of John O’Reilly.

For Keyboard

Souvenirs, Op. 28, 1952 Piano, 4-hands; or two-pianos

Although Souvenirs is probably best known as a work for solo piano and as a ballet choreographed by Todd Bolender, the suite was originally composed as a piano duet for Charles Turner and Barber himself; subsequently it was arranged for two pianos by
Arthur Gold and Robert Fizdale. Comprising six movements—Waltz, Schottische, Pas de Deux, Two-Step, Hesitation Tango, and Galop—the work evoked, according to Barber “a divertissement in a setting reminiscent of the Palm Court of the Hotel Plaza in New York, the year about 1914, epoch of the first tangos; ‘Souvenirs’—remembered with affection, not in irony or with tongue in cheek, but in amused tenderness.”

For Wind Ensemble

*Summer Music, Op. 21, 1944*

One continuous, rhapsodic movement, *Summer Music* stands apart from other woodwind compositions of its period, which tend to be in three or four movements of traditional, formal design. The music is quiet and contemplative, while incorporating a few elements of the wit and chatter of the French school of woodwind writing but without its stridency. Although the piece was commissioned by the Detroit Chamber Music Society and premiered by the section principals of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, Barber had composed the work with the New York Woodwind Quintet in mind. Impressed with the latter’s performance at Blue Hill, Maine, in 1954, Barber asked French horn player John Barrows and flutist Samuel Baron if he might sit in on the quintet’s rehearsals and whether they would be willing to play sections of his own work as it evolved. At these rehearsals, Barber heard a series of études that Barrows had designed focusing on the quintet’s “worst” chords—those in which good tone production and intonation are achieved only with great difficulty but that result in especially effective sonorities. Barber wrote some passages—in particular five choralelike measures that Baron refers to in his journal as the ensemble’s “favorite” chords—that reflect the influence of Barrows’s studies. The flute’s D-flat is most unsympathetic to execute, but coincidentally is the enharmonic equivalent of the same breathy note used by Debussy for the magical opening of *Prelude to Afternoon of a Faun*; on the oboe, D-flat tends to be squawky; similarly, G-flat is a stubbornly resistant note that challenges the bassoonist. The resulting demanding passage, followed by a *subito piano* on another difficult chord, has the effect of stopping the motion altogether. Barber’s continued attendance at the NYWQ’s rehearsals allowed the players to suggest adjustments that facilitated performance.

Because of the quintet’s indolent mood and abrupt ending, which falls undramatically upon the ear, *Summer Music* is perhaps best positioned in the middle of the first half of a program, or as the first work after an intermission. Barber had his own ideas about its performance: “Do not play it too slowly,” he warned. “It’s supposed to be *evocative* of summer—summer meaning languid, not [clapping hands loudly] killing mosquitoes.”

*Canzone for Flute (or Violin) and Piano, Op. 38A*

Although better known as the second movement of Barber’s Piano Concerto, the *Canzone* in fact began life independently as *Elegy for Flute and Piano*, written for and dedicated to Manfred Ibel, a 21-year-old German art student and amateur flute player whom Barber had met in Munich during the summer of 1958, while his opera Vanessa was in rehearsal for the Salzburg Festival. Drawn to each other by a “mutual affinity for the spirit of German Romanticism and culture,” music, literature, and hiking, the two shared a house on Martha’s Vineyard the following summer; and it was then that Barber wrote the *Elegy*, in a sense a wordless Lied, tenderly and mournfully romantic. So that Ibel would be able to play the piece with piano accompaniment when he returned to visit his family in Germany, Barber made a “music-minus-one” recording, playing the piano part himself, and sent it to his friend as a Christmas present.

*Chamber Orchestra (Eight Instruments)*

*Capricorn Concerto, Op. 21, 1944*

For flute, oboe, trumpet (in C; alternately, a B-flat trumpet may be used, and is indispensable in the 2nd movement); two violins, viola, cello and contrabass.

The title *Capricorn Concerto* was as a tribute to Barber and Menotti’s home—so named because it received maximum sunshine in winter. In Mount Kisco, New York, the house was purchased in 1943 with the help of Barber’s early patron Mary Curtis Bok, founder of the Curtis Institute. Designed earlier by the Swiss architect William Lescaze (and possibly his first residential
effort in America), Capricorn met the special requirements of two composers—each had a studio large enough for a grand piano and far enough away from each other so that neither would be hearing double when both were at work. The chamber work was written while Barber was assigned to the Office of War Information, where his special status allowed him to compose at will and maintain the office’s recording sessions for overseas broadcasts.

Slightly Baroque à la Brandenburg Concerto, *Capricorn Concerto* is neither tonal nor atonal, as the use of chords with added tones and other coloristic devices often obscure the harmony at any given moment. Rhythmically, too, the piece represents a new direction for Barber: frequent and sudden shifts from divisions of two to three (in the first and third movements) and between eight, twelve, five, and nine (in the second movement) suggest the nervous, dance-generated rhythmic syncopations of Copland’s orchestral music. Moreover, one cannot fail to note the strong influence of Stravinsky, especially with regard to the timbres and textures, the rhythmic freedom, and the treatment of solo wind instruments. A trumpet fanfare featured in the third movement seems to allude to the rhythmic opening of Stravinsky’s *Ebony Concerto*, as well as to the spirit of *L’Histoire du Soldat*. But beyond surface influences, the treatment of musical ideas and the ideas themselves always retain the stamp of Barber’s personality.

### Unpublished Works

**Fantasie for Two Pianos [Sonata in the Modern Form], 1920–1924**

Seventeen pages of the Fantasie are at the Library of Congress, Music Division, in a bound volume of Barber’s earliest works, 1917–1927. The title page, with its florid inscription, indicates the work should be played *con bravura*. The origin of the work is best described in the 14-year-old Barber’s own words, found in a typescript pasted on the back of the title page and dated September 23, 1924:

…The Fantasie was composed, rather completed on Feb. 15, 1924 because of a request by Mrs. Kerlin [the wife of Robert T. Kerlin, a professor at West Chester State Teacher’s College, one of whose poems (“My Fairy Land”) Barber set. Barber often played four-hand music with 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 some time before, but I was at a loss to find a B-flat section and so let the 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.

I wrote the second part out one Sunday morning, and Mrs. Kerlin and I played it that afternoon on Mr. Green’s [William Hatton Green, Barber’s 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 28, 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!

**For String Instruments**

**Gypsy Dance, from The Rose Tree, for Violin and Piano, 1922**

Barber’s first opera, *The Rose Tree*, was composed about 1920, with a libretto by the Barbers’ Irish cook, Annie Brosius Sullivan Noble. The story of the opera was recounted many years later by Barber:

*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….The hero’s part was for me. I was a contralto then! Somehow, after the first act, Annie ran out of ideas and the opera went no further.*

The independent violin piece was probably composed in 1922, as documented by a letter Barber wrote to Sidney Homer, his uncle and mentor. The manuscripts of the opera and the “Gypsy Dance” are at the Library of Congress, Music Division.

**Sonata in F minor for Violin and Piano (1928), third movement only**

Late in December 1927 Barber began work on a violin sonata, completing it November 1928. The first
movement drew praise from George Antheil and Oskar Adler, a celebrated violinist, who had given it a reading in Europe during the summer of 1928. In the fall, as his work progressed, Barber showed parts of the sonata to his classmate, Gama Gilbert, who, with Barber at the piano, gave the first performance at the Curtis Institute of Music Sixth Students’ Concert program, 10 December 1928. The sonata won the Joseph H. Bearns prize in 1929, garnering the 19-year-old composer an award of $1,200 from Columbia University. In spite of the accolades, Barber apparently had doubts about the work’s merit; he did not include it on a self-created “Works List,” from the 1970s; and until recently it was believed to be lost or, worse, destroyed by the young composer. This is the movement found in 2006 and which I identified, as described above. The manuscript is at the Library of Congress.

Typical of Barber’s works of this period, the opening impassioned sweeping gestures betray the strong influence of Brahms. The piano part, with shifting meters and wide stretches, is challenging yet pianistic. The violin writing is idiomatically lyrical, as would be expected from Barber’s close collaboration with his violinist classmate. In terms of formal design, dramatic sensibility, and variety of material, the movement has credibility as a standalone piece. There are three contrasting sections: the first, loosely a sonata–rondo form with two returns of the first theme (ABA); a central section in a slower tempo, meno mosso, which concludes with eight measures of piano solo; and the third section, tempo primo, which reverses the order of themes. A coda brings the piece to a dramatic conclusion.

Commemorative March, for piano, violin, and cello, 1941

The March was composed during the spring of 1941 for Barber’s sister’s wedding, which took place in the composer’s apartment at 166 East 96th Street in New York City. A three-page holograph score and the parts are at the Library of Congress, Music Division. The inscription on the score reads: “Composed for Susie’s (my sister’s) wedding in my New York apartment.”

Song for a New House, for voice, piano, and flute with ad libitum cadenza, 1940

“Song for a New House” was composed for Mary Curtis Bok on the occasion of her move to 1816 Delancey Street, Philadelphia, on 17 April 1940. The text is drawn from Puck’s and Oberon’s speeches in Shakespeare’s A Midsummer Night’s Dream, Act V, scene i.

I am sent with broom before
To sweep the dust behind the door
Through this house give glimm’ring light
By the dead and drowsy fire

Now until the break of day
Through this house each fairy stray
And each sev’ral chamber bless

Through this palace with sweet peace
Ever shall in safety rest
And the owner of it blest.

The appeal of the trio lies in its graceful musical lines and balanced ensemble writing that would be gratifying for relatively experienced players.

String Quartet in E major, second movement only

Toward the end of 1947, Barber accepted a commission from Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge to write another string quartet. A letter to Sidney Homer expressed the composer’s “delight and... trepiditude” about the genre: “I’ve never been able to manage string quartet writing very well, but will make a study of Haydn and Beethoven, Op 18. I want not to push the limits of the string quartet, which even Beethoven did toward the end, so everyone pushed them still more.”

Because his work on the piano sonata took so much longer than he expected, Barber eventually “crawled out of the quartet commission.” That he had begun work is documented by 17 pages of manuscript of a single movement, II, which I encourage a string quartet to explore.