Notes on the Program by Ken Meltzer

The School for Scandal, Overture, Opus 5 (1931)

Samuel Barber was born in West Chester, Pennsylvania, on March 9, 1910, and died in New York on January 23, 1981.

The first performance of The School for Scandal, Overture took place at the Robin Hood Dell in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on August 30, 1933, with Alexander Smallens conducting the Philadelphia Orchestra.

Instrumentation: The School for Scandal, Overture is scored for piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, celeste, harp and strings.

Duration: 8 minutes

Samuel Barber was a 21-year-old student at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia when he composed his Overture to The School for Scandal. The title refers to English author Richard Brinsley Sheridan's 1777 comic play. Barber noted that the Overture was not intended as a curtain raiser for performances of Sheridan's work. Rather, he composed the piece "as a musical reflection of the play's spirit.

Although composed at the very outset of Samuel Barber's career, The School for Scandal, Overture features the melodic inspiration, colorful orchestration and unerring sense of momentum that remained hallmarks of the American composer's work. These qualities have assured The School for Scandal, Overture's continued presence in the concert repertoire.

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Concerto for Piano and Orchestra: In Truth (2013)

Lucas Richman was born in Los Angeles, California, on January 31, 1964. These are the world premiere performances.

Instrumentation: In addition to the solo piano, Concerto for Piano and Orchestra: In Truth is scored for piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion and strings.

Duration: 25 minutes

Lucas Richman's Concerto for Piano and Orchestra: In Truth reflects upon truths perceived, truths accepted and truths verified, with the piano soloist serving as a protagonist who alternates between abiding by society's universal “truths” and railing against those who create new “truths” so as to avoid personal culpability.

The first movement, To One's Own, utilizes four primary elements as its musical basis, beginning with a four-note motif (E-F-E-F) derived from the Hebrew translation of the word 'truth': EMET. The English version of ‘truth’ transcribed to a five-note motif (F-D-G-F-A) which, when combined with the Hebrew translation, morphed into an extended motif heard in various permutations throughout the full work (E-F-D-G-E-F-A). After a short fanfare and articulation of this main combined motif, the orchestra introduces the third element, a rhythmic declamation of the Latin phrase, "Veritas vos Liberabit" ("The Truth shall set you free"). This rhythm becomes a driving force for much of the movement, underscoring the soloist’s journey, only stopping when encountering the fourth primary element of the movement, an instrumental version of a spiritual Indonesian chant which serves as the movement’s secondary theme.

The second movement, To One's Own, begins with a cadenza for the pianist, picking up on the dilemmas proposed in the first movement and applying them to the world at large. The cadenza builds to an articulation of the ‘EMET’ motif, soon thereafter transformed into a caustically rhythmic fast movement in 10/8 time. The ‘truth’ motifs are continuously forced to face a musical mirror, a gesture which guides the listener through the climax and resolution of the movement and directly into the second movement.

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It is the prevailing thought behind the quote of “Strengthen the Bond” that guides the progression of the third and final movement, To One's Spirit: with a life of sincerity, honesty and grace, one might then ascend to learn and understand the meaning and value of truth on a higher level. The extended ‘truth’ motif becomes the basis for an instrumental setting of a line from Psalm 145: “Karov Adonai l'chol kore'av, l'chol asher yikra-uhu ve-emet” (“The Lord is near to all who call to Him—to all who call to Him in truth”). In yet another variation, the piano declaims the ‘truth’ motif with a harmonization that lifts gradually higher and higher, eventually coming back full circle to a proper balance between the outer self and the inner spirit.
Concerto for Piano and Orchestra: In Truth is dedicated to Jeffrey Biegel with great admiration and appreciation. The work was commissioned by a consortium of orchestras, led by the Knoxville Symphony Orchestra, host of the work's world premiere performances this weekend, October 17 and 18, 2013.

(Program Notes by the Composer)

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Mississippi Suite (1925)

Ferde Grofé was born in New York City on March 27, 1892, and died in Santa Monica, California, on April 3, 1972.

The first performance of the Mississippi Suite took place at the Hippodrome Theater in New York City in 1925, with Paul Whiteman conducting his Orchestra.

Instrumentation: The Mississippi Suite is scored for piccolo, two flutes, three oboes, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, harp, celeste and strings.

Duration: 12 minutes

A son of two musicians, the American composer, arranger and pianist Ferde Grofé enjoyed a long, rich and versatile musical career. For several years, Grofé was the chief arranger for the prominent American bandleader, Paul Whiteman. In that capacity, Grofé created the original jazz band version of George Gershwin's Rhapsody in Blue. Gershwin was the piano soloist and Whiteman the conductor in Rhapsody in Blue's February 12, 1924 premiere in New York. Grofé also created the full orchestra arrangement of Rhapsody in Blue, the version most often performed today. Grofé composed his Mississippi Suite in 1925. Paul Whiteman and his Orchestra premiered the work later that year at the Hippodrome Theater in New York City. The orchestral work, in four movements, celebrates aspects of the great American river. The first movement (Father of Waters) depicts the northernmost part of the Mississippi, and the Native Americans who named it. The second movement, Huckleberry Finn, was inspired by Mark Twain's mischievous hero. Old Creole provides lyrical contrast. The finale, Mardi Gras, transports the listener to the New Orleans carnival.

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An American in Paris (1928)

George Gershwin was born in Brooklyn, New York, on September 26, 1898, and died in Hollywood, California, on July 11, 1937.


Instrumentation: An American in Paris is scored for piccolo, three flutes, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, alto saxophone, tenor saxophone, baritone saxophone, two bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, celeste and strings.

Duration: 16 minutes

In March of 1928, George Gershwin departed New York for Europe, and trips to Paris, London, and Vienna. Prior to that time, Gershwin received a commission from conductor Walter Damrosch and the New York Symphony Society (later, the New York Philharmonic-Symphony Society) for a new orchestral work. Gershwin returned to New York in June, where he completed An American in Paris a month before the work's premiere. Walter Damrosch conducted the Carnegie Hall concert, which took place on December 13, 1928.

In describing his An American in Paris, Gershwin observed: “This new piece, really a rhapsodic ballet, is written very freely and is the most modern music I’ve yet attempted.” An American in Paris opens with music depicting the protagonist strolling throughout Paris (Gershwin went to great time and expense to find authentic French taxi horns for inclusion in the work's premiere). Later, according to Gershwin; “Our American friend perhaps after strolling into a café and having a couple of drinks, has succumbed to a spasm of homesickness.” But finally, “the homesick American, having left the café and reached the open air, has disowned his spell of the blues and once again is an alert spectator of Parisian life. At the conclusion, the street noises and French atmosphere are triumphant.”