

Program Notes

North America boasts some of the most diverse terrain out of any continent, resulting in the landscape of the United States being just as diverse as its people. The country's different regions each gave rise to the origin of a variety of dialects, colloquialisms, traditions, foods, and music. This concert, featuring the American composers Robert Paterson, Leonard Bernstein, Aaron Copland, and Samuel Barber, is a prime showcase of how they often look to the land, the cultural climate, and favorite literary works as inspiration(s) for their works.



Robert Paterson

Robert Paterson, who is originally from Buffalo, NY, grew up surrounded by the lush greenery in the New England states. Commissioned by the Vermont Symphony, **Dark Mountains** was inspired by the terrain and the unique atmospheres it creates in Vermont. He writes:

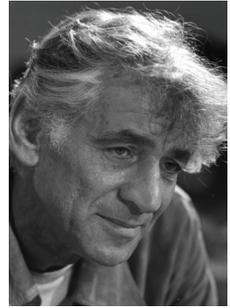
“Vermont is famous for its green mountains, but I often find myself taking long drives through the mountains on overcast days or even at night, when the mountains lose color and become gray

silhouettes. Many roads in Vermont are so dark, particularly in the Northeast Kingdom, that you need to use headlights, even during the day. *Dark Mountains* is meant to portray the beauty and grandeur of the mountains and the peacefulness of the open roads, but also the darkness and occasional treacherous passes one may encounter during the evening hours. The piece is in three connected sections. The first section portrays the calmness and austerity of a quiet evening. The second is inspired by a fast drive down winding country roads, with twists and turns, frequent tempo changes and shifting gears. The final section evokes the feeling of looking at the nighttime sky with moonlight shining through the trees and the sounds of nature in the distance.

This piece is commissioned by and dedicated to the Vermont Symphony Orchestra and Jaime Laredo, and was originally written for the Made in Vermont Music Festival.”

Leonard Bernstein remains one of the titans of American music as well as one of the world's most beloved conductors. During his lifetime, he championed American music and advocated for world peace through music. Bernstein was born in Lawrence, MA, and studied piano at Harvard University. His studies continued at the Curtis Institute where, in addition to piano, he also studied conducting and orchestration. After studying

conducting at the Boston Symphony's summer festival in Tanglewood, where he later served as assistant to Serge Koussivitzky, he headed the orchestral and conducting departments after Koussivitzky's death. His first post as music director came with the New York City Symphony, in 1945, and in 1958 Bernstein assumed the post as music director of the New York Philharmonic.



Leonard Bernstein

West Side Story is perhaps the best example of the New York that Bernstein knew; one that saw cultural clashes during a time of postwar urban expansion.

While part of the inspiration for the musical came from New York itself, the story came from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliette*. Many of his works exhibit influences of American styles as well as situational inspiration, but a greater influence was literature. In much the same way that *West Side Story* was inspired by ones of Shakespeare's greatest tales, **Serenade** was based on Plato's Symposium.

Bernstein described the work's movements as follows:

I. Phaedrus; Pausanias (Lento; Allegro marcato). Phaedrus opens the symposium with a lyrical oration in praise of Eros, the god of love. (Fugato, begun by the solo violin.) Pausanias continues by describing the duality of the lover as compared with the beloved. This is expressed in a classical sonata-allegro, based on the material of the opening fugato.

[The second theme of this sonata movement incorporates disjunct grace-note figures and dissonant intervals in the elegant solo violin part.]

II. Aristophanes (Allegretto). Aristophanes does not play the role of clown in this dialogue, but instead that of the bedtime-storyteller, invoking the fairy-tale mythology of love. The atmosphere is one of quiet charm.

[Aristophanes sees love as satisfying a basic human need. Much of the musical material derives from the grace-note theme of the first movement. The middle section of this movement incorporates a melody for the lower strings (marked "singing") played in close canon.]

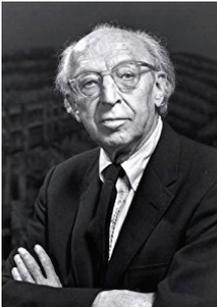
III. Eryximachus (Presto). The physician speaks of bodily harmony as a scientific model for the workings of love-patterns. This is an extremely short fugato-scherzo, born of a blend of mystery and humor.

[This section contains music that corresponds thematically to the canon of the previous movement, Aristophanes]

IV. Agathon (Adagio). Perhaps the most moving speech of the dialogue, Agathon's panegyric embraces all aspects of love's powers, charms and functions. This movement is a simple three-part song.

V. Socrates; Alcibiades (Molto tenuto; Allegro molto vivace). Socrates describes his visit to the seer Diotima, quoting her speech on the demonology of love. Love as a daemon is Socrates' image for the profundity of love; and his seniority adds to the feeling of didactic soberness in an otherwise pleasant and convivial after-dinner discussion. This is a slow introduction of greater weight than any of the preceding movements, and serves as a highly developed reprise of the middle section of the Agathon movement, thus suggesting a hidden sonata-form. The famous interruption by Alcibiades and his band of drunken revelers ushers in the Allegro, which is an extended rondo ranging in spirit from agitation through jig-like dance music to joyful celebration. If there is a hint of jazz in the celebration, I hope it will not be taken as anachronistic Greek party-music, but rather the natural expression of a contemporary American composer imbued with the spirit of that timeless dinner party.

[Speaking through the voice of Diotima, Socrates proposes the notion that the most virtuous form of love is the love for wisdom (philosophy).]



Copland

Aaron Copland, who heavily influenced Bernstein, contributed greatly to what is considered a quintessential “American sound” in orchestral music. His **Appalachian Spring** remains one of the best-known works as well as one of the most important ballets of the twentieth century. In it, Copland utilizes the Shaker melody *Simple Gifts*, expanding upon and embellishing it with variations that build to the work's climax. Originally written for an ensemble of only 13 instruments, Copland later arranged the piece into the suite for full orchestra,

which is most often performed today.

The ballet depicts the lives of a newlywed farm couple in nineteenth century Pennsylvania. It portrays a man and woman contemplating their life together, a preacher delivering a sermon, an older pioneer woman overseeing the events and imparting her wisdom, and finally the vision of the couple who will endure hardships but take solace in each other's support. Both the music and narrative convey a sense of endless optimism, referencing the ebullience, which a farmer might feel in finding a wellspring – the spring alluded to in the title, as opposed to the season.

Copland described each of the eight sections of the orchestral suite as such:

1. Very slowly. Introduction of the characters, one by one, in a suffused light.
2. Fast/*Allegro*. Sudden burst of unison strings in A major arpeggios

starts the action. A sentiment both elated and religious gives the keynote to this scene.

3. Moderate/*Moderato*. Duo for the Bride and her Intended – scene of tenderness and passion.

4. Quite fast. The Revivalist and his flock. Folksy feeling – suggestions of square dances and country fiddlers.

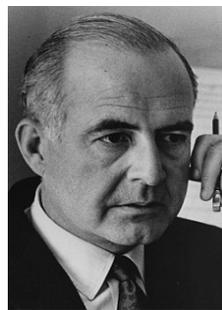
5. Still faster/*Subito Allegro*. Solo dance of the Bride – presentiment of motherhood. Extremes of joy and fear and wonder.

6. Very slowly (as at first). Transition scene to music reminiscent of the introduction.

7. Calm and flowing/*Doppio Movimento*. Scenes of daily activity for the Bride and her Farmer husband. There are five variations on a Shaker theme. The theme, sung by a solo clarinet, was taken from a collection of Shaker melodies compiled by Edward D. Andrews, and published under the title “The Gift to Be Simple.” The melody borrowed and used almost literally is called “Simple Gifts.”

8. Moderate. Coda/*Moderato* - Coda. The Bride takes her place among her neighbors. At the end the couple are left “quiet and strong in their new house.” Muted strings intone a hushed prayer-like chorale passage. The close is reminiscent of the opening music.

Samuel Barber is another great American composer of the twentieth century. He was born in West Chester, PA, into a well-to-do family that lived in the U.S. since the Revolutionary War, and had several relatives who possessed great musical talent. Barber became interested in music at an early age, and began composing as early as 7 years old. At 14, he began studying at the Curtis Institute, where he excelled in composition, voice, and piano. It was at Curtis where he met Gian Carlo Menotti, a classmate who became his partner in life and music.



Barber

Barber's musical style is marked by, if nothing else, diversity and versatility. A great deal of his pieces drew inspiration from times in his life, his own experiences, and literature. He easily wrote art songs, operas, piano and orchestral works, many of which had highly contrasting styles. This stylistic variance is most evident in Barber's two ballets: *Souvenirs* and *Medea*. The second ballet, originally entitled *The Serpent Heart*, was renamed to *Cave of the Heart*, and finally *Medea*. The concert piece, *Medea's Dance of Vengeance* underwent structural and titular revisions, much like the ballet. Originally written as a seven-movement concert piece, Barber reduced the suite to a single movement work, using what

he felt were the strongest portions. The work is based on Medea, a figure from Greek mythology, whose passiveness and jealousy drove her to murder her own children to spite her husband, Jason, who abandoned her. In the score, Barber wrote that neither he nor Martha Graham, the ballet's commissioner, intended the work to be a literal representation of the story's characters. He stated that the figures

“served rather to project psychological states of jealousy and vengeance which are timeless. The choreography and music were conceived, as it were, on two time levels, the ancient-mythical and the contemporary. Medea and Jason first appear as godlike, superhuman figures of the Greek tragedy. As the tension and conflict between them increase, they step out of their legendary roles from time to time and become the modern man and woman, caught in the nets of jealousy and destructive love; and at the end reassume their mythic quality. In both the dancing and the music, archaic and contemporary idioms are used. Medea, in her final scene after the dénouement, becomes once more the descendant of the sun.”