

Quad City Symphony Orchestra
PROGRAM NOTES
Masterworks I: The New World

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DUDLEY BUCK (1839-1909)
*Festival Overture on the American
National Air*

Instrumentation: Piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, two percussion, and strings.

Premiere: July 4, 1879, Manhattan Beach, Coney Island, New York.

QCSO Performance History: The QCSO has performed Buck's *Festival Overture* only once before, at the 2008 Riverfront Pops. That year's performance featured the music of film composer John Williams.

To Anacreon in Heav'n, where he sat in full Glee,
A few Sons of Harmony sent a Petition,
That he their Inspirer and Patron would be;
When this answer arriv'd from the Jolly Old Grecian
"Voice, Fiddle, and Flute, no longer be mute,
I'll lend you my Name and inspire you to boot,
And, besides I'll instruct you, like me, to intertwine
The Myrtle of Venus with Bacchus's Vine."

Song of the Anacreontic Society
(ca. 1773)

Were you a white collar professional in London during the second half of the eighteenth century, and you were also a music-lover, you might have counted yourself as a member of the famed Anacreontic Society. Named after an ancient Greek poet, this rowdy bunch of music aficionados met bi-weekly in a tavern for drinking, dining,

singing, and to sponsor public performances by leading musicians of the day. The group welcomed many distinguished visitors, including Franz Josef Haydn in 1791.

Around the time of the Anacreontic Society's founding, the British Empire held 24 colonies in North America; by the time the Society disbanded in 1792, that number of colonies had been reduced by 13. These colonies, of course, had united outside British rule under a single "star-spangled banner." As is well-known, the sight of the American flag during the War of 1812 inspired Francis Scott Key to write the poem "Defence of Fort M'Henry", which would become the text of the National Anthem. But less well-known is the fact that Key wrote his text to the tune of the "Song of the Anacreontic Society", written by John Stafford Smith and performed at its meetings in London decades before. So, the next time you have difficulty reaching the upper notes of "The Star-Spangled Banner", think of the boisterous gentlemen of the Anacreontic Society drunkenly belting their theme song every other Wednesday night.

A number of composers have written creative arrangements of the tune of "The Star-Spangled Banner". Igor Stravinsky's rather ponderous version was uncharacteristically conventional, though that didn't save him from the fierce scrutiny of Boston law

enforcement, who accused him of violating a local statute against improper arrangements of the National Anthem. More recently, violinist and composer Jessie Montgomery wrote *Banner* (performed last season by the QCSO on Masterworks I), brilliantly rearranging fragments of the song to depict both the hope and the contradictions that the anthem has long represented. American composer-organist Dudley Buck made two contributions to the genre, first in the solo organ work *Concert Variations on "The Star-Spangled Banner"* (1868) and later in *Festival Overture on the American National Air* (1879) for orchestra.



Dudley Buck
(Wikimedia Commons)

Born in Hartford, Connecticut in 1839, Buck trained at the Leipzig Conservatory with highly-influential piano pedagogue Louis Plaidy, whose international studio also included the Norwegian Edvard Grieg, the Czech Leos Janacek, and the British Arthur Sullivan. Though Buck's music is rarely performed today, he was highly-celebrated during his lifetime as a conductor (assisting Theodore Thomas in directing what would become the New York Philharmonic), organist (holding prominent posts in Hartford, Chicago, Boston, and New York), and composer (particularly of cantatas, often on patriotic themes). Originally performed at a Fourth of July celebration on Coney Island, the printed program for the premiere of *Festival Overture* included the following designation: "Audience requested to join in a single verse, at a signal from the conductor."

Festival Overture Listening Guide

- ♪ **MELODY:** Buck uses two main melodies throughout this overture, one of them being the tune of "The Star-Spangled Banner". The other melody begins the work: an original melody with lots of quick grace-note flourishes and militaristic dotted rhythms.
- ♪ **HARMONY:** In the first full presentations of the National Anthem tune, Buck includes some rather unusual harmonies. Popular melodies are perfect opportunities for composers to experiment with unique chord progressions, since the tune is otherwise very familiar to most audiences.
- ♪ **FORM:** After the opening statement of his original melody and the initial verse of the Anthem, Buck takes small motives from either melody and rearranges them in various ways. Two things to ask during these passages are whether you recognize a motive from the National Anthem, and whether the chords feel stable or unstable. But at the end, you'll have no doubt on either question: in Buck's high patriotic style, the final presentation of the National Anthem tune is the overture's grandest and most stable moment.

SAMUEL BARBER (1910-1981) Piano Concerto, Op. 38

Instrumentation: Piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, timpani, percussion, harp, solo piano, and strings.

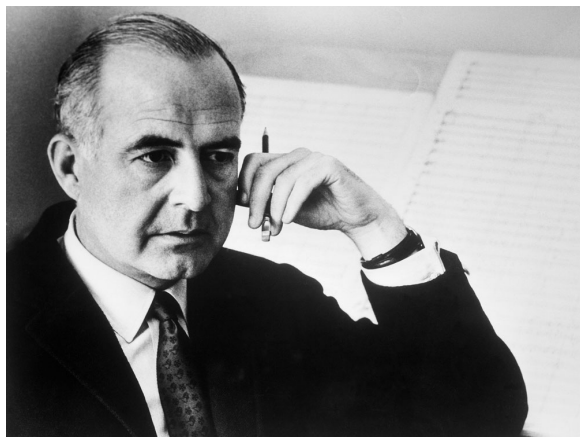
Premiere: John Browning, solo piano, Boston Symphony Orchestra, Erich Leinsdorf,

conductor. September 24, 1962, Philharmonic Hall, Lincoln Center, New York City.

QCSO Performance History: Barber's piano concerto has been performed by the QCSO only once before, at 2000 Masterworks concerts featuring John Browning (the same pianist who played the world premiere nearly 40 years prior) with conductor Donald Schleicher.

In contrast to the migration of many of his contemporaries away from the concerns of ordinary audiences and traditionally-trained performers, Samuel Barber consistently wrote with careful attention to how his music would be received by those who sang, played, and heard it. The result of this artistic disposition is a wide body of accessible and widely-loved works, and a colorful repository of anecdotes about the many collaborative decisions and compromises Barber made with musicians of varying temperaments.

Such stories are particularly associated with Barber's three completed solo concertos, all of which were written with a particular performer in mind. In the case of his violin concerto, written while Barber was still a student at the Curtis Institute in the late 1930s, the relationship between composer and soloist was highly fraught. Written for fellow Curtis student Iso Briselli, the work was eventually



Samuel Barber (Bettmann/Corbis)

rejected by Briselli (apparently at the advice of his his teacher), and resentment from Briselli's descendants over the debacle persists even to today. The cello concerto, written for Russian emigree Raya Garbousova seven years later, was apparently a more gratifying collaboration, although the resulting work, highly challenging for performer and listener alike, never entered the active repertory.

But in Barber's final completed concerto, he succeeded at finding both a worthy collaborator and a lasting audience. Premiered in 1962, the work was written to accentuate the gifts of its first soloist, then up-and-coming American pianist John Browning, who premiered it to great acclaim. Although Barber's concerto became an important part of Browning's repertoire – his illustrious career even brought him to the Quad Cities in 2000 to perform the work – he otherwise rarely collaborated with living composers, maintaining rather a reputation as an interpreter of baroque and classical works.

Indeed, though Barber and Browning seem to have held each other in high esteem, many of the interventions that led Barber to modify the work came not from the soloist but from other performers. Most famously, Barber resisted advice that passages of the closing movement were unplayable, perhaps remembering the uselessness of similar advice concerning his violin concerto. It required the testimony of none other than Vladimir Horowitz to convince Barber otherwise. And Browning himself recounted that Barber had originally written a whispering segue between the first and second movements, only to begrudgingly submit to the suggestion of conductor Erich Leinsdorf that a bigger conclusion to the first movement was more suitable.

So, while many other composers were staking out high-modernist claims in the halls of major universities or attempting to redefine the art of music entirely between apartments in Greenwich Village, Samuel Barber was busy with the constant give-and-take of collaboration with working musicians that had been the task of nearly all composers in prior centuries. Though the works produced by such a process occasionally earned Barber the scorn of some critics eager for artistic novelty, in the end his approach has earned him the respect of many performers and the devotion of a lasting audience.

Barber Piano Concerto
Listening Guide

First movement: Allegro appassionato

♫ **MELODY:** The piano begins the concerto alone, with a series of stark melodies played in octaves. Because these melodies have unusual leaps and few chords to provide context, it can be difficult to hear them in a traditional key.

♫ **TEXTURE:** Interactions between the piano and orchestra are widely varied throughout the work; notice how Barber's most lush orchestral moments often don't include a part for the solo piano, and some of the piano's most technically complex passages include little or no accompaniment.

♫ **ORCHESTRATION:** Throughout this movement, Barber makes frequent use of the woodwinds as soloists. There are a number of brass solos too, most of them sounding somewhat edgy due to the use of mutes.

Second movement: Canzone: Moderato

♫ **ORCHESTRATION:** The ghostly opening of the second movement has a unique orchestral texture; tones on the harp are gently echoed by the other

instruments; perhaps Barber is reconstructing the sound of the piano without the piano. Not to be beat at its own game, the piano enters with a gentle sweep and effortlessly overtakes the texture.

♫ **FORM:** Barber titles this movement "canzone", indicating a kind of Italian song or ballad. The form designation was a favorite of Barber's, showing up in various pieces throughout his career, including in the surviving "Canzonetta" of his unfinished oboe concerto.

Third movement: Allegro molto

♫ **TEXTURE:** About two-thirds through the last movement, Barber includes a quiet passage with a highly unusual orchestration; various percussion instruments and shimmering strings surround the solo piano. This mysterious section gradually succumbs to a repetitive bass note and builds into a forceful, almost belligerent finale.

ANTONIN DVORAK (1841-1904)
Symphony No. 9 in E minor, Op. 95
"From the New World"

Instrumentation: Two flutes (second flute doubling piccolo), two oboes (second doubling English horn), two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, and strings.

Premiere: New York Philharmonic Society. December 16, 1893, Carnegie Hall, New York City.

QCSO Performance History: The QCSO has programmed the *New World* Symphony in its entirety a total of eight times. Its first full performance of the work was at a 1920 run-out concert at the University of Iowa led by founding music director Ludwig Becker, who also led a compete Masterworks performance in 1921.

Becker frequently programmed excerpts of the work (1917, 1925, 1926, 1932), usually but not always the Largo movement. Frank Kendrie likewise led a performance of only the Largo and the Finale in 1934. Oscar Anderson conducted the entire work twice (1941, 1948), James Dixon three times (1966, 1976, 1984, the latter performance being broadcast on Iowa Public Radio), and Mark Russell Smith once in 2014.

From the Quad Cities, drive north about three hours, cross a little bridge over the Turkey River, and you'll find yourself in the little village of Spillville, Iowa, population 367. Spillville has been a haven for Czech immigrants since its founding in 1860; in 1893, somewhat homesick and seeking a respite from his post as director of the National Conservatory of Music in New York City, composer Antonin Dvorak spent the summer here. With his family he lived in the building that is now the uniquely quirky Bily Clocks Museum, and attended daily Mass at the picturesque parish of St. Wenceslaus. And, as he had done for all of his professional life, he worked ardently and relentlessly, composing new works of extraordinary technical and expressive power.

Among the several works Dvorak finished during his summer in Iowa, by far the most important is his ninth symphony, aptly subtitled "From the New World." The work was a phenomenal success at its world premiere the following December in New York, and ever since has occupied a unique and important place in the symphonic literature, most especially in the United States, the nation which inspired it.

What was it about America that Dvorak felt deserved such a monumental tribute? His distinctly American musical interests seem to

have fallen into two areas: the music of Native Americans, and African-American spirituals. We know that, while in Iowa, he attended at least one exhibition of Native American dance and song, responding with great enthusiasm. Likewise, he learned a number of spirituals from his Black conservatory student Harry T. Burleigh, with whom he developed a deep and lasting friendship. Burleigh even reported that Dvorak expected that the future of American classical music would be built on the foundation of the rich repertoire of spirituals.

The most obvious moment where Dvorak nods toward the tradition of Black Americans is the well-loved melody which opens the second movement. Although it sounds like a spiritual, the melody is actually Dvorak's own; the familiar text "Goin' Home" was added later by another student, William Arms Fisher. Likewise the rhythms and melodies meant to evoke Native American dance and song in the third movement are also Dvorak's invention rather than direct



Dvorak with his family in New York City, ca. 1893
(Wikimedia Commons)

borrowings. In this sense, Dvorak himself was demonstrating that a kind of American classical music could be built not simply on pre-existing melodies, but on the unique essence that these homegrown genres radiate. Dvorak's work is thus in continuity with that of later composers, including George Gershwin, Aaron Copland, Leonard Bernstein, Gunther Schuller, and William Bolcom, who all used music from American vernacular traditions in their concert works.

New World Symphony Listening Guide

First movement: Adagio – Allegro molto

♫ **FORM:** Conventionally, the first movement of a symphony is fast; what's always interesting to see is whether the composer begins with a slow introduction or not. Dvorak chooses to; follow carefully to see the creative way he transitions from the slow introduction to the movement's main body

♫ **RHYTHM:** Listen for rhythms, particularly in some of the later melodies, that include syncopation, which perhaps Dvorak borrowed from ragtime or some other American popular music.

Second movement: Largo

♫ **HARMONY:** Before the iconic English horn melody begins, Dvorak includes a highly unusual chord progression. Each change of chord seems to take us to a completely different key, but taken together, this chain of harmonies ushers us mystically into the richly-colored key of D-flat major.

♫ **ORCHESTRATION:** The Largo melody of the *New World Symphony* is the English horn's biggest moment ever. The English horn is a larger and lower

version of the oboe with a bulb-like bell, and is usually played by the second or third oboe player.

Third movement: Scherzo: Molto vivace – Poco sostenuto

♫ **FORM:** Most "Dance" movements of symphonies are in a broad ABA form, with a "B" section (or "Trio") that is often more relaxed or simpler than the main passage. In this scherzo, Dvorak includes two such contrasting passages to the fiery, frequently-recurring main theme.

Fourth movement: Finale: Allegro con fuoco

♫ **INSTRUMENTATION:** Much of this grand and expansive movement is written for the entire orchestra, although there are several moments that resemble the intimacy of chamber music, particularly in the poetic clarinet solos.

♫ **MELODY:** Listen for the faint recollection of the Largo theme during a quiet interlude.

♫ **HARMONY:** Minor-key symphonies often end in what's called the parallel major: Beethoven did this most famously in his Symphony No. 5, ending his C minor symphony in C major. Dvorak does the same here, ending his E minor symphony with huge E major chords. But listen carefully to the final chord, which has a kind of sunset effect on the otherwise triumphant ending.