

Quincy Symphony Orchestra

April 17, 2010

PROGRAM NOTES

Compiled by Dr. Lavern Wagner

Overture to *Candide*Leonard Bernstein (1918-1990)

As a composer, Leonard Bernstein was equally at home in the concert hall and the musical theater. He wrote works for each venue which combined stylistic traits from both traditions. Despite drawing fierce criticism for this stand, he proudly persisted in his efforts to marry the high and the low, the light and the serious. Premiered in 1956, the musical *Candide* was one of his greatest successes in this mission--and also one of his biggest flops.

Nearly two hundred years separate Voltaire's novel *Candide* from the musical by Bernstein and Lillian Hellman, and by 1956 the concept of "the best of all possible worlds" had become particularly elusive. Though it inspired some of Bernstein's wisest and wittiest music. *Candide* ran for only seventy-three performances--a serious failure by Broadway standards. Still, the original cast album became a cult recording, and over the years a number of believers--including Stephen Sondheim--persisted in attempts to rewrite, redecorate, and revive the show, sometimes as an operetta, sometimes as grand opera

The brilliant overture, virtually alone among *Candide's* many numbers, is frequently performed. It remains one of the most affecting of Bernstein's creations—a charming and sassy curtain raiser based on two of the show's best tunes, "Oh Happy We" and Cunegonde's jewel song, "Glitter and Be Gay." It is delightful evidence of Bernstein's belief that "man's capacity for laughter is nobler than his divine gift of suffering."

Adagio for Strings, Op. 11 Samuel Barber (1910-1981)

Born in Westchester, PA, Samuel Barber began composing music when he was only seven. At age fourteen he entered the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia as a member of its first class in 1924. The founder of Curtis, Mary Louise Curtis Bok, became one of Barber's primary benefactors. At first, Barber considered a career as an operatic baritone, but during his years at Curtis his compositional skill became amply evident. He won the Bearn's prize of Columbia University for travel to Italy twice, in 1928 and in 1933.

One of the works he composed while in Italy was a string quartet. The second movement was later transcribed for orchestra and entitled *Adagio for Strings*. Arturo Toscanini first performed the work in New York in 1938 with the Orchestra of the National Broadcasting Company. Toscanini recorded the *Adagio*, and it has become Barber's most popular and most frequently performed piece.

The *Adagio for Strings* is Barber's totally personal expression of emotion, firmly rooted in the romantic style of the 19th century. In fact, Barber has been classified as a neo-romantic composer. The distinctive, lush sound of the *Adagio* results especially

from the use of five flats in the key signature, which means that the string instruments almost never use any of their brilliant open strings. Further, the almost exclusive stepwise movement of the melodic lines enhances the smooth, mellifluous, romantic ambience exuded by the composition. Barber liked *Adagio* so much that in the late 1960's he set it as a choral work using the text of the Agnus Dei.

Essay for Orchestra, Opus 12Samuel Barber

Samuel Barber's father was a medical doctor, but he came from a musical family on the maternal side. His mother's sister, Louise Homer, was a contralto soloist, famous as an oratorio singer and a member of the Metropolitan Opera in New York. Sidney Homer, her husband, was well-known as a composer of songs, and Samuel received encouragement and good advice from this uncle.

As a child Barber had instruction in playing the piano and cello. At the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, Barber studied piano, composition and singing. Near the end of a European sojourn as winner of the Rome Prize, 1935-1937, Barber composed the *Essay for Orchestra*. He submitted the score, along with the *Adagio for Strings*, to Arturo Toscanini who conducted the first performance of both works November 5, 1938 on a concert of the NBC Orchestra.

The *Essay* begins with a broad, yet lyrical section, *andante sostenuto*, 4/4 time; followed by an *allegro molto*, 3/4 time, which has a scherzo character. A brief return to the *andante* concludes the composition.

Chichester Psalms Leonard Bernstein

Leonard Bernstein, known to millions for his *West Side Story* and *Candide*, is not in any way limited to compositions of this genre. The *Chichester Psalms* prove conclusively his ability to compose sacred works of unquestioned merit. Written for the summer music festival at the Cathedral of Chichester in Sussex, England, in 1965, the Psalms were the first work by Bernstein since the completion of his *Kaddish Symphony* of 1963, also a work for chorus and orchestra, and also in Hebrew. The opening chorale, from Psalm 108, is a majestic introtit which one finds again at the end of the first movement and at the start and end of the second movement. It leads directly into a joyful dancelike setting of Psalm 100, in a fast and constant 7/4 meter. The second movement begins with a lyric, almost naïve solo based on Psalm 23 by a boy alto, followed at length by a sudden interruption from the men's choir, "Why do the nations rage?" from Psalm 2. As the violence moves into the distance but continues softly, Psalm 23 returns to quiet the menace of Psalm 2.

The third movement is introduced by a long orchestral meditation. The peacefully flowing melodies which follow prepare for a warm and comforting ending with a single unison Amen quietly bringing the Psalms to a close.

New England TriptychWilliam Schuman (1910-1992)

William Schuman, head of the Julliard School of Music and president of the New York Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, provided the following notes in the printed score.

William Billings (1746-1800) is a major figure in the history of American music. The works of this dynamic composer capture the spirit of sinewy ruggedness, deep religiosity and patriotic fervor that we associate with the Revolutionary period. I am not alone among American composers who feel an identity with Billings and it is this sense of identity which accounts for my use of his music as a point of departure. These pieces do not constitute a “fantasy” on themes of Billings, nor “variations” on his themes, but rather a fusion of styles and musical language.

I. *Be Glad Then, America.* A timpani solo begins the short introduction which is developed predominantly in the strings. This music is suggestive of the “Hallelujah” heard at the end of the piece. Trombones and trumpets begin the main section, a free and varied setting of the words, “Be Glad Then, America, Shout and Rejoice.” The timpani, again solo, leads to a middle fugal section stemming from the words “And Ye Shall Be Satisfied.” The music gains momentum and combined themes lead to a climax. There follows a free adaptation of the “Hallelujah” music which concludes this section and a final reference to the “Shout and Rejoice” music.

II. *When Jesus Wept.* The setting of the text is in the form of a round. Here, Billings’ music is used in its original form, as well as in new settings with contrapuntal embellishments and melodic extensions.

III. *Chester.* This music, composed as a church hymn, was subsequently adopted by the Continental Army as a marching song and enjoyed great popularity. The orchestral piece derives from the spirit both of the hymn and the marching song.

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