

## Concerto for Violin and Orchestra, Op. 14

SAMUEL BARBER

B: March 9, 1910, West Chester, Pennsylvania

D: January 23, 1981, New York, New York

*Barber's Violin Concerto was first performed by Albert Spalding, who played it with Eugene Ormandy and the Philadelphia Orchestra, February 7 and 8, 1941.*

*Scored for two flutes (second doubling piccolo), two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, timpani, snare drum, piano and strings (approx. 25 minutes).*

The concerto is written in the best traditions Barber championed. It is lyrical, conservative in style and fastidiously orchestrated. The first movement is in a quite standard sonata form, opening with a transparent, long-spun solo violin theme that various commentators have likened (perhaps inappropriately) to a theme by Mozart. When this has run its course, the clarinet takes up a puckish second theme, then the violin returns with a rhythmically active theme, marked by numerous bounding-bow passages. The first two themes are rigorously developed before the first theme returns in a major orchestral climax, signaling the recapitulation.

A smoothly rising oboe melody at the beginning of the slow movement imparts an oriental flavor to the music. As this gradually fades away, it is joined by a horn theme that again becomes important at the end of the movement. In the meantime, the solo violin dominates the freely designed central section of the movement in what amounts to the closest thing to a cadenza heard anywhere in the concerto. The solo violin then takes up the oboe theme and the horn theme, bringing the movement to a close.

The perpetual-motion finale is not only a *tour de force* for the solo violin, but for the orchestra as well. It is a fleet, light-footed movement cast in a rondo form and while much of its dazzling character is meant to show off the solo violin, the challenges to orchestra members are equally formidable.

The Detroit Symphony Orchestra last performed Barber's Violin Concerto on Nov. 20, 2004 with Itzhak Perlman conducting and Gloria Schmidt as the soloist.

DSO SHOP @ THE MAX RECOMMENDS:

Barber, Violin Concerto, James Ehnes, violin, Bramwell Tovey conducting the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra, CBC 5241.