

Program Notes
Clancy Newman & Natalie Zhu
October 4, 2020 | 3:00 PM

Samuel Barber (1910-1981)

Sonata for Cello and Piano in C minor, Op. 6

The music of American composer Samuel Barber is most widely known from the use of his *Adagio for Strings* in the 1986 anti-war film *Platoon*. His songs and instrumental works, however, are equally popular in the programs of the world's leading concert artists and ensembles. Barber's *Piano Sonata*, for example, was performed more than once in the piano semifinals of the prestigious Tchaikovsky International Music Competition in Moscow earlier this year. But the enduring popularity of Barber's music should be no surprise, given its vocally-inspired lyricism and its sympathy with the Romantic-era aesthetic that still lies at the heart of the modern concert repertoire.

Barber's Cello Sonata was written in 1932 when the composer was still studying at the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia and Brahms in particular looms large as an influence on its compositional style. Among its Brahmsian features are its high-serious tone and emotional intensity, its employment of cross-rhythms, and its luxuriant use of the rich low range of the keyboard. Among its modern features, however, are its frequent changes in meter and the angularity of many of its melodies.

Notes by Sheku and Isata Kanneh-Mason

Lukas Foss (1922-2009)

Capriccio

Lukas Foss composed a Duo for cello and piano in 1941, at the age of 18, and shortly after the success of his *Prairie*, the Sandburg cantata for which he received the New York Music Critics' Circle Award in 1944, he turned to this instrumentation again. He composed his *Capriccio* for the celebrated cellist Gregor Piatigorsky in 1946 under a commission from the Koussevitzky Music Foundation. Piatigorsky, who edited the cello part for publication, gave the premiere at Tanglewood the following year, with Foss at the piano, and several years later they made the first recording of the piece. The *Capriccio* has remained one of Foss's most frequently performed works for nearly 50 years, and the composer has remained as fond of it as the many cellists who have assured its place in the repertoire. Even now, Foss observes, "I like its combination of Bach, humor and American characteristics."

Notes by Richard Freed

Kenji Bunch (b. 1973)

Broken Music for cello and piano (2002), III: Broken Verse

The word "broken" is rich in meaning both within and beyond musical terms. With this work I wanted to include as many possibilities for the word as I could think of....

Broken Verse suggests both the occasional failure of words as a viable form of expression, as well as a song that is somehow struck and can't progress past the opening verse. In this movement I quote an old traditional New England country tune, the Westphalia Waltz. Until its final ghostlike appearance, this waltz is interpolated into an irregular meter, rendering it undanceable and in effect, broken.....

This work was commissioned by the Walter W. Naumburg Foundation for cellist Clancy Newman, for whom it is my great honor to write music.

Notes by Kenji Bunch, 2002

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Cello Sonata No. 1 in E minor, Op. 38

Brahms loved chamber music in all forms, and wrote piano parts for himself to play.....One of his supporters at the *Singakademie* was the famous vocal coach and *Lieder* composer Josef Gänsbacher (1829-1911), who was also an amateur cellist. In appreciation, Brahms dedicated a cello sonata he was working on to Gänsbacher, who was flattered and delighted, and when Brahms visited him, insisted on playing through the piece with the composer, giving rise to a possibly apocryphal but often repeated and utterly characteristic story. In their progress through the piece, Brahms began playing very loudly, causing Gänsbacher to complain that he could not hear himself. "Lucky you," Brahms replied to the overwhelmed amateur, and proceeded to play even louder....

"The young Brahms was hard, almost to harshness; he loved blunt expression and sudden contrasts, and avoided concessions to mere comprehensibility," as Karl Geiringer wrote, and there are certainly no concessions here, to either performers or listeners....

Notes by John Henken