

## Alan Gilbert on This Program

Tonight's program is built around two iconic roles that Deborah Voigt has made her own: the dramatic — or even melodramatic — heroine in Barber's *Andromache's Farewell* and a very different character in one of the most ravishing scenes in opera, the Final Scene from Richard Strauss's *Salome*. To this we added Wagner's aria "Dich, teure Halle" from *Tannhäuser*, which is a bit of an anomaly, but it is such a great piece!

Around these centerpiece works, we are performing other exciting pieces in which the Orchestra itself is the star: Barber's *Overture to The School for Scandal*, Wagner's Overture to *Tannhäuser*, and some instrumental passages from *Salome*, including the sensuous Dance of the Seven Veils. I decided to break thinks up a bit by interweaving the vocal and purely instrumental works to best set off Debbie's vocal virtuosity against the Orchestra's instrumental mastery.

My goal in assembling these works to create tonight's program was to give you a wonderful start to the 2011–12 season. It's a joy to begin my third season as Music Director of this incredible orchestra, and I look forward to continuing to share our musical journey with you.



# Notes on the Program

By James M. Keller, Program Annotator  
The Leni and Peter May Chair

## ***Overture to The School for Scandal, Op. 5*** ***Andromache's Farewell, for Soprano and Orchestra***

### **Samuel Barber**

Samuel Barber was fortunate to be born into a family that recognized his musical gifts. Although his parents were not professional musicians, his aunt, the contralto Louise Homer, was a mainstay at The Metropolitan Opera, and her husband, Sidney Homer, was well known as a composer of what some might dismiss as parlor songs.

At The Curtis Institute of Music, Barber studied piano (with Isabelle Vengerova), composition (with Rosario Scalero), and voice (with the baritone Emilio de Gorgorza, who was a colleague of Barber's aunt at The Met). He was 21 years old and still a student when he began his ***Overture to The School for Scandal***.

Although musical training was clearly at the center of the Curtis curriculum, students also were expected to take courses in other fields, and Barber concentrated on languages and literature for his electives. His love for

literature would continue through his life, and he would attach literary allusions to many of his symphonic pieces – even those that were not in any sense programmatic. This habit began with his very first orchestral composition, the *Overture to The School for Scandal*. Barber insisted that, although his piece was not intended as incidental music for a production of Richard Brinsley Sheridan's play, it was nonetheless conceived "as a musical reflection of the play's *spirit*."

Anyone familiar with Sheridan's 1777 comedy of manners will readily concur that it has a distinctive spirit, and a most agreeable one. Let us dip at random into its irresistible pages:

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### **In Short**

**Born:** March 9, 1910, in West Chester, Pennsylvania

**Died:** January 23, 1981, in New York City

**Works composed and premiered:** *Overture to The School for Scandal*: composed during the summer of 1931; premiered August 30, 1933, at Robin Hood Dell in Philadelphia, with Alexander Smallens conducting The Philadelphia Orchestra

*Andromache's Farewell*: composed 1962, on commission from the New York Philharmonic in celebration of its opening season at Lincoln Center; premiered April 4, 1963, at Philharmonic (now Avery Fisher) Hall, Thomas Schippers, conductor, Martina Arroyo, soloist; the text, by the American poet John Patrick Creagh, is based on Euripides

**New York Philharmonic premieres and most recent performances:**

*Overture to The School for Scandal*: first performed March 30, 1938, John Barbirolli, conductor; most recently performed March 4, 2009, on tour in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, Lorin Maazel, conductor

*Andromache's Farewell*: most recently performed on April 15, 2000, Kurt Masur, conductor, Deborah Voigt, soloist

**Estimated durations:** *Overture to The School for Scandal*: ca. 9 minutes; *Andromache's Farewell*: ca. 12 minutes

## Avuncular Counsel

Barber was distressed by Fritz Reiner's lack of interest in conducting *Overture to The School for Scandal* at The Curtis Institute of Music, which might have provided a step up for Barber's music in forums abroad. His uncle, Sidney Homer, offered sage and encouraging advice to the composer in a letter:

You will have to give up speculating as to why men like R—— act as they do. You will never know why, so you may as well ignore it and forget it. Things have a way of righting themselves if (a big if!) we do the work. A good composition wins many battles, as you have found. You say you can't go abroad, and the Overture says you can! The next work may say you can be heard in Paris or Vienna, and so on ad infinitum ... What is a man without his works? Great, perhaps, but puerile. ... Beethoven and Brahms planned their works years ahead. They heard few performances and this affected them just not at all.

Every other week the two traveled to a nearby town for composition lessons with Scalero, under whose watchful eye this piece was essentially completed by the time Barber returned to classes at Curtis that fall. The conservatory's orchestra director, Fritz Reiner, couldn't summon up any interest in it, so Barber's *Overture* went unperformed until August 1933, when it was premiered by The Philadelphia Orchestra in an outdoor summer concert. Four months earlier the piece had won Barber a \$1,200 composition prize that enabled him to return for another summer in Italy; an unfortunate by-product of the prize was that he therefore missed the work's premiere. By the 1950s the piece had become a staple of the orchestral repertoire, though not before undergoing a fair amount of criticism for not sounding sufficiently American.

Doubtless the *Overture*'s language adheres more tightly to the European mainstream of its time than, say, to the wide-open-spaces sounds of Aaron Copland or Roy Harris. Still, it is odd, as Barber's biographer Barbara B. Heyman points out, that

the musical climate was such at this time that if a young American composer had achieved as much recognition as Barber — he had by then won two Pulitzer traveling fellowships and a Prix de Rome — but was not part of the mainstream's quest for a national identity, he was considered an anomaly and thus not representative of "American" music.

Today we may hear this *Overture* as more "American" than its first audiences did. But, in fact, it earns its keep thanks to its universality, its skillful reflection of the same spirit of intrigue and quicksilver banter that has kept Sheridan's play afloat for 234 years.

Rowley: Oh! Sir Peter, your servant: how is it with you, sir?

Sir Peter Teazle: Very bad, Master Rowley, very bad. I meet with nothing but crosses and vexations. ...

Rowley: Nay, I'm sure, Sir Peter, your lady can't be the cause of your uneasiness.

Sir Peter: Why, has any body told you she was dead?

Rowley: Come, come, Sir Peter, you love her, notwithstanding your tempers don't exactly agree.

Sir Peter: But the fault is entirely hers, Master Rowley. I am, myself, the sweetest-tempered man alive, and hate a teasing temper; and so I tell her a hundred times a day.

Rowley: Indeed!

Sir Peter: Ay; and what is very extraordinary, in all our disputes she is always in the wrong!

Barber commenced work on his *Overture* during the summer of 1931, which he was spending in Cadegliano, Italy, with his fellow Curtis student and romantic partner Gian Carlo Menotti.

Barber's tonal language remained conservative at a time when doing so practically guaranteed

a measure of enmity from the modernist phalanx of the musical scene, which was becoming increasingly enamored of complexity. But even if he was viewed as out of step with musical progress, Barber commanded respect. When it came time for commissions to be extended for works to be premiered during the opening week of Lincoln Center, in late September 1962, Barber's name was prominent on the list, and his Piano Concerto was the result.

But the Piano Concerto was not the only new work of Barber's that the Philharmonic's audience would hear that season. Six and a half months later, on April 4, 1963, the Orchestra introduced a very different work.

***Andromache's Farewell*** belongs to a little-used genre: it is essentially a vocal scena, or perhaps a compact solo cantata, and its ancestors include such pieces as Haydn's *Arianna a Naxos*, Beethoven's *Ah! Perfido*, and Berlioz's *La Mort de Cléopâtre*. Like those works, it's more than just a concert aria, yet it's less than a full-fledged stage work. It calls for no serious trappings of set or costume, but instead focuses on the intense

psychological drama of a single character's momentary situation.

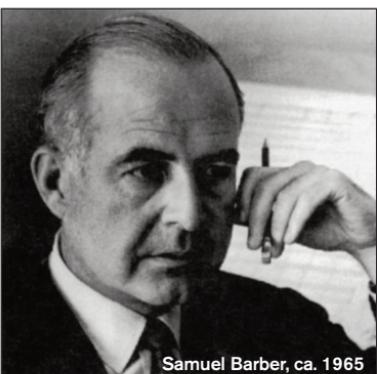
For many of us moderns, the figures of ancient Greek history (mixing sometimes with mythology) seem irretrievably distant. We view them as marble busts that maintain mute dignity in silent museum corridors, or as the players in stylized tableaux imagined by later painters from a time that, for the most part, is also not ours. How remote — at first glance — seems Andromache of ancient Troy, whose tale is told by Euripides in *The Trojan Women*, and by several other authors of Classical antiquity (and in somewhat altered form by Jean Racine in his powerful tragedy *Andromache* of 1667).

Part of a large family, Andromache was the daughter of King Eëtion and the devoted wife of Prince Hector of Troy. She warned her husband in vain against getting involved in the Trojan War. As the war took over their lives, her royal father and her seven brothers were slain by the marauding Achilles, and her mother was kidnapped and held for a huge ransom. Troy fell to its enemies and the happiness Andromache had once known crumbled with it. Her own son,

## Writing to Strength

Barber provides a vivid musical underpinning for this condensed drama of ***Andromache's Farewell***, underscoring the sense of dignity that the title character displays throughout. A stentorian voice would be required for the effect he wanted — a dramatic, or at least spinto, soprano of fully operatic temperament. This he found in Martina Arroyo, who said that certain of the movement's details were crafted specifically to her strengths, including sudden, hard-to-negotiate shifts from *piano* to *forte*. Arroyo reported to Barber's biographer Barbara B. Heyman:

Without the drama the piece is nothing. ... The same voice must sing tenderly and beautifully at one moment, talking to a little child directly, and then at the next turn, curse Helen, sustaining the dramatic impact over the full orchestra, over the big orchestral sound. Shift from dramatic outburst, pull back and spin off the high note, then crescendo on it while staying in control throughout ... that is the technical challenge ... but, at the same time, to become deeply involved with the character — a mother saying goodbye to her son, the wrench of it — and still not lose control technically so that you can't sing.



Samuel Barber, ca. 1965

Astyanax, was slain by the Greeks, and she was swept off to be the slave and concubine of Achilles's son Neoptolemus, to whom she bore three sons. Life in this new family was terrifying: Neoptolemus's jealous wife (Hermione) threatened to murder her, and doubtless would have if Neoptolemus's aged grandfather hadn't stepped in to protect her. After Neoptolemus's death (or upon his marriage, according to a dissenting source), poor Andromache, who had remained faithful in spirit all these years to her first husband, Hector, was passed off to Helenus, Hector's younger brother. They, too, had a son. But it was with Pergamus, one of the sons she bore while a concubine to Neoptolemus, that Andromache ended her days, having accompanied him on the military expeditions through which he conquered Teuthrania and founded Pergamum.

As we ponder the stories of these characters' lives, we begin to understand why the Greek Classics have remained relevant as millennium yields to millennium. War continues, and it ravages the lives of individuals and the

aspirations of families with utter predictability. Before we write off Andromache's sad tale as the stuff of distant legend, we should remember more recent headlines and wonder if her story might not have been repeated closer to our own time, at least in essence, in the Balkans, in Angola, in Sudan, in Afghanistan.

**Instrumentation:** The *Overture to the School for Scandal* calls for two flutes and piccolo, two oboes and English horn, two clarinets and bass clarinet, two bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, triangle, bass drum, cymbals, orchestra bells, celesta, harp, and strings; *Andromache's Farewell* employs two flutes and piccolo, two oboes and English horn, two clarinets and bass clarinet, two bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, cymbal, tam-tam, bass drum, snare drum, tenor drum, xylophone, antique cymbal, tambourine, anvil, whip, wood block, harp, celesta, and strings, in addition to the solo soprano singer.

## In the Composer's Words

Barber's score for *Andromache's Farewell* bears a printed introduction (not meant to be declaimed in performance) that clarifies at which point of the heroine's ordeal we encounter her:

Scene: an open space before Troy, which has just been captured by the Greeks. All Trojan men have been killed or have fled and the women and children are held captives. Each Trojan woman has been allotted to a Greek warrior and the ships are now ready to take them into exile. Andromache, widow of Hector, Prince of Troy, has been given as a slave-wife to the son of Achilles. She has just been told that she cannot take her little son with her in the ship. For it has been decreed by the Greeks that a hero's son must not be allowed to live and that he is to be hurled over the battlements of Troy. She bids him farewell. In the background the city is slowly burning. It is just before dawn.

Euripides's depiction of Andromache at this moment is powerful, and John Patrick Creagh's English rendering transmits the stew of her emotions: grief over the imminent loss of her son and the dashing of future hopes; regret over the life that has led to this pass; despair over being unable to protect her child; horror at the fate that awaits him; tenderness in the moments that remain; fury at the Greeks for their heartlessness, and at the deity Helen for allowing hate in the world; resignation at her helplessness; limitless despair.



Farewell of Andromache and Hector by Anton Losenko, 1773