

November 21, 2026

7:30 pm

“Gershwin with Michelle Cann”

Armed Forces Salute

Arr. Bob Lowden (1920 - 1998)

Adagio for Strings

Samuel Barber (1910 - 1981)

Symphony No. 1, in One Movement, Op. 9

Samuel Barber (1910 - 1981)

- I. Allegro ma non troppo
- II. Allegro molto
- III. Andante tranquillo
- IV. Con moto

INTERMISSION

Piano Concerto in F Major

George Gershwin (1898 - 1937)

- I. Allegro
- II. Adagio – Andante con moto
- III. Allegro agitato

Michelle Cann, Piano

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Armed Forces Salute

Arr. Bob Lowden (b. Camden, New Jersey, July 23, 1920; d. Medford, New Jersey, October 30, 1998)

To honor our veterans of the Armed Forces for Veterans Day, we feature a piece that's a favorite: *Armed Forces Salute*, arranged by Bob Lowden. This is a wonderful medley of service songs including *The Caisson Song* (Army), *Semper Paratus* (Coast Guard), *The Marines' Hymn*, *The Air Force Song*, and *Anchor's Aweigh* (Navy). The short melodic tunes are easy to spot at the beginning of the piece, including phrases from *Columbia*, *the Gem of the Ocean*, and *America the Beautiful*. We also hear *When Johnny Comes Marching Home*.

Robert William “Bob” Lowden, an internationally known arranger and composer, was one of the best-known modern-day arrangers for orchestra, bands, and jazz bands. His works encompass professional orchestras, film, and recordings, and he was a major contributor of musical arrangements for America's college and high school performers. Appropriately, during World War II, he served as a trombonist in the Military Music Chapel of the 322nd United States Army in Fort Dix.



Robert Lowden

Adagio for Strings

Samuel Barber (b. West Chester, Pennsylvania, March 9, 1910; d. New York City, New York, January 23, 1981)

Adagio for Strings is a most beautiful work by Samuel Barber arranged for string orchestra from the second movement of his *String Quartet, Op. 11*. Barber finished the arrangement in 1936, the same year that he wrote the quartet. Just close your eyes and listen to the gorgeous music!

It was performed for the first time on November 5, 1938, by Arturo Toscanini conducting the NBC Symphony Orchestra in a radio broadcast from NBC Studio 8H. Samuel Chotzinoff, noted music critic and NBC official, writes in his book, *Toscanini: An Intimate Portrait* about the Maestro's work with the

NBC Symphony Orchestra: "Never before had the men of the orchestra been so close to their adored Maestro. It was a beautiful performance."

It happened this way: Harvey Sachs writes in his book, *Toscanini: Musician of Conscience*, "Barber had a Toscanini connection. He was a nephew of the mezzo-soprano Louis Homer, one of Maestro's principal singers at the Metropolitan Opera. In January 1938, Barber sent an orchestrated version of the *Adagio for Strings* to Toscanini. The conductor returned the score without comment, which annoyed Barber. Toscanini later sent word that he was planning to perform the piece and had returned it simply because he had already memorized it!"

On November 5, 1938, a selected audience was invited to Studio 8H in Rockefeller Center to watch Toscanini conduct the first performance; it was broadcast on radio and recorded. *The New York Times'* music critic, Olin Downes, praised the piece.

Downes wrote that the piece is very simple at climaxes but reasoned that the simple chords create significance for the piece. Downes went on to write, "That is because we have here honest music, by an honest musician, not striving for pretentious effect, not behaving as a writer would who, having a clear, short, popular word handy for his purpose, got the dictionary and fished out a long one."

Over the period of April 16–19, 1942, the piece had public performances by the Philadelphia Orchestra conducted by Eugene Ormandy at Carnegie Hall. Like the original 1938 performance, these were broadcast on radio and recorded.

Barber also wrote *Agnus Dei*, a choral adaptation of *Adagio for Strings* in 1967.

As part of a musical retrospective in 2000, National Public Radio (NPR) named *Adagio for Strings* one of the 100 most important American musical works of the 20th century, calling it "standard repertoire for today's orchestras, and Barber's best-known work."

About Barber's Career and Life

Samuel Osmond Barber II was a composer, pianist, conductor, baritone, and music educator, and one of the most celebrated American composers of the mid-20th century. He studied composition at the Curtis Institute of Music and more than 25 years with his uncle, the composer Sidney Homer.

Barber was adept at both instrumental and vocal music. His works became successful on the international stage, and many of his compositions enjoyed rapid adoption into the classical performance canon. His *Adagio for Strings*, which we are hearing tonight has earned a permanent place in the orchestral concert repertory, as has that work's adaptation for chorus, *Agnus Dei*.

Barber died from cancer in 1981. At the time of Barber's death, nearly all his compositions had been recorded. Many of his works were commissioned by and first performed by such noted groups and artists as the Boston Symphony Orchestra; the Philadelphia Orchestra; the New York Philharmonic; the Metropolitan Opera; pianist Vladimir Horowitz; singers Eleanor Steber, Raya Garbousova, John Browning, Leontyne Price, and Pierre Bernac; pianist Francis Poulenc; and German baritone and conductor Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau.

Barber was born in West Chester, Pennsylvania, the son of Marguerite McLeod and Samuel Le Roy Barber. He was born into an educated and distinguished American family. His father was a physician;

his mother was a pianist of English Scottish-Irish descent whose family had lived in the United States since the time of the American Revolutionary War.

His maternal aunt, Louise Homer, was a leading contralto at the Metropolitan Opera (as mentioned earlier) and sang under Toscanini. His uncle, Sidney Homer, was a composer of American art songs. Louise Homer is known to have influenced Barber's interest in voice. Through his aunt, Barber was introduced to many great singers and songs.

A child prodigy, Barber became profoundly interested in music at a very young age, and it was apparent that he had great musical talent and ability. He began studying the piano at the age of six and at age seven composed his first work!

Despite Barber's interest in music, his family wanted him to become a typical extroverted, athletic American boy. This meant they encouraged him to play football, but he was not interested in sports. At the age of 10, Barber wrote his first operetta, and at the age of 12 he became an organist at a local church.

At the age of 14, Barber entered the youth artist program at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, where he ultimately spent ten years developing his talents as a triple prodigy in composition, voice, and piano. During his initial studies at Curtis, he simultaneously attended and graduated from West Chester High School, during which time he composed the school's song, *Alma Mater*, which remains in use.

Following his graduation from high school in 1928, he entered the adult professional program at Curtis from which he graduated in 1934. At Curtis he studied piano, composition with Rosario Scalero, conducting with Fritz Reiner (former conductor of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra) and voice with Emilio de Gogorza.

Kenneth Morgan writes in his book, *Fritz Reiner: Maestro and Martinet*, "Interestingly, Reiner followed the careers of his successful pupils with interest and conducted music by Barber, Leonard Bernstein, and Lukas Foss in his concerts." Morgan continues, "In Chicago, Reiner conducted the world premiere of Barber's *Souvenirs*. He also conducted Barber's *Medea's Meditation and Dance of Vengeance* and *Prayers of Kierkegaard*."

During his last year at Curtis, Barber became a favorite of the conservatory's founder, Mary Louise Curtis Bok. It was through Mrs. Bok that Barber was introduced to his lifelong publishers, the Schirmer family.



Samuel Barber

Symphony No. 1, in One Movement, Op. 9

Samuel Barber (b. West Chester, Pennsylvania, March 9, 1910; d. New York City, New York, January 23, 1981)

- I. Allegro ma non troppo**
- II. Allegro molto**
- III. Andante tranquillo**
- IV. Con moto**

The instrumentation is as follows: Two flutes, piccolo, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, one tuba, timpani percussion including bass drum and cymbals, harp, and strings.

Samuel Barber's *First Symphony (in One Movement)*, as the printed score has its title, *Opus 9*, was completed on February 24, 1936, and first performed by the Philharmonic Augusteo Orchestra in Rome under the baton of Bernardino Molinari on December 13th the same year.

Barber started composing his symphony in August 1935 and completed the work at the Anabel Taylor Foundation in Roquebrune in the French Riviera. It was dedicated to his long-time companion Gian Carlo Menotti.

It received its American premiere by the Cleveland Orchestra, conducted by Rudolf Ringwall, on January 21 and 23, 1937, and it was performed three times on March 24 of the same year at Carnegie Hall, played by the New York Philharmonic–Symphony Orchestra under the direction of Artur Rodziński. Rodziński was a strong promoter of Barber's work, and he also conducted the Vienna Philharmonic's performance of the symphony at the opening concert of the 1937 Salzburg Festival. It was the first performance of a symphonic work by an American composer at the festival. The symphony is also featured on the first LP recording produced by the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra in 1974 under the direction of Kenneth Schermerhorn.

In the program notes for the New York premiere Samuel Barber explained:

*The form of my **Symphony in One Movement** is a synthetic treatment of the four-movement classical symphony. It is based on three themes of the initial Allegro non troppo, which retain throughout the work their fundamental character. The Allegro ma non troppo opens with the usual exposition of a main theme, a more lyrical second theme, and a closing theme. After a brief development of the three themes, instead of the customary recapitulation, the first theme in diminution forms the basis of a scherzo section (vivace). The second theme (oboe over muted strings) then appears in augmentation, in an extended Andante tranquillo. An intense crescendo introduces the finale, which is a short passacaglia based on the first theme (introduced by violoncelli and contrabassi), over which, together with figures from other themes, the closing theme is woven, thus serving as a recapitulation for the entire symphony.*

Barber made some revisions to the work in 1942–43. The revised version was first performed February 18, 1944 by the Philadelphia Orchestra conducted by Bruno Walter, who also conducted the New York Philharmonic in the work the following month and recorded it with the orchestra for Columbia Records in January, 1945.

INTERMISSION

Piano Concerto in F Major

George Gershwin (b. New York City, New York, September 26, 1898; d. Los Angeles, California, July 11, 1937)

- I. **Allegro**
- II. **Adagio – Andante con moto**
- III. **Allegro agitato**

Michelle Cann, Piano

The instrumentation is as follows: Two flutes, piccolo two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion (bass drum, glockenspiel, xylophone, triangle, snare drum, woodblock, whip, cymbals, triangle, gong, and strings.

George Gershwin, born in New York City (Brooklyn) and named Jacob Gershwine, was an American composer and pianist whose compositions spanned jazz, popular, and classical music. He is best known for works including *Rhapsody in Blue*, *An American in Paris*, and the opera *Porgy and Bess*.

He changed the spelling of his surname to "Gershwin" around the time he became a professional musician; other family members followed suit.

With his one foot in Carnegie Hall (classical vibe), and the other on Broadway (jazz show vibe), we are going to hear his *Piano Concerto in F Major* tonight.

Walter Rimler writes in his book *George Gershwin: An Intimate Portrait* that George was the second of four children; his older brother (the first born) was Ira. The two ultimately worked very closely together composing various works.

Young George started piano lessons before he was ten years old when his parents purchased a piano. He had a fine teacher who gave him a firm foundation in standard music, adds Rimler. His next piano teacher emphasized the fundamentals of music theory including musical form, harmony, counterpoint, and orchestration. Gershwin later took courses in orchestration and music history at Columbia University. He also took additional piano studies with Rubin Goldmark, a pupil of composer Antonín Dvořák in New York City. "Yet, Gershwin very much wanted to be an American composer," writes Rimler.

About the Piano Concerto

Edward Jablonski writes in his book *Gershwin: A Biography*, "Early in 1925 Walter Damrosch, the genial and venerable conductor of the New York Symphony Society, had approached the New York Symphony Society's president, Harry Harkness Flagler, with the suggestion that they commission a Gershwin piano concerto. The young composer was then regularly in the news, his comings and goings noted, and his rhapsody and songs ubiquitous. George Gershwin was 'good box office.'"

Damrosch, having received permission from the board of directors, followed through!

Gershwin appeared in Carnegie Hall in the dual role of pianist and composer in the world premiere of his *Concerto in F Major*. Gershwin was commissioned for the full-scale piano concerto for the New York Symphony Society, to be orchestrated by Gershwin. "The contract stated that Gershwin would be the soloist with appearances in New York City, Washington, Philadelphia and Baltimore," writes David Ewen in his book *George Gershwin: His Journey to Greatness*.

The first movement was written in July, the second in August, and the third in September, much of the work being done at the Chautauqua Institution in New York surrounded by the beautifully forested area. This offered seclusion for Gershwin at Chautauqua; his quarters were declared off-limits to everyone until 4 p.m. daily.

"The official premiere took place on the afternoon of December 3, 1925, at Carnegie Hall with the New York Symphony Orchestra, and with the composer as soloist," adds Ewen.

Gershwin received many compliments including one from composer Irving Berlin who wrote, "I am rooting hard for the success and glory you so richly deserve."

Author Jablonski notes in his book *Gershwin: A Biography*, "Prokofiev was impressed with Gershwin's gift as a composer and especially as a pianist and predicted he'd go far if he left 'dollars and dinners' alone."

New York music critic Samuel Chotzinoff wrote, "He alone of all those writing the music of today, expresses us. He is in the present. George Gershwin is an instinctive artist who has the talent for the right material, and he starts out with that a lifelong study of counterpoint and fugue."

The English composer and orchestrator William Walton commented that he adored Gershwin's orchestration of the concerto.

Arnold Schoenberg, one of the most influential composers at the time, praised Gershwin's concerto in a posthumous tribute in 1938.

Jeremy Siepmann writes in his book, *The Piano: The Complete Illustrated Guide to the World's Most Popular Musical Instrument*, "Gershwin's *Concerto in F* is still the most played of all American concertos. This concerto combines jazzy material with a style of piano writing clearly rooted in the world of Liszt, Chopin, and Tchaikovsky. It is a virtuoso work of considerable difficulty."

On February 11, 1937, Gershwin performed his *Piano Concerto in F* in a special concert of his music with the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra under the direction of French maestro Pierre Monteux. He passed away soon after. Gershwin never recorded the concerto.

What to Listen For

"The very opening of the first movement (Allegro) is eight measures of mood setting and atmosphere building," writes Ewen. "Then three ideas emerge: the first is racy given by the bassoon, the second is a wistful melody in the piano, and the third is a slow, sensual waltz for the strings with treatment by the piano."

“The second movement (Andante con moto) is an extended song, with the shimmering haze of a Debussy melody and is heard in muted trumpet set against the harmonies of three clarinets,” writes Ewen. “A transition in the solo violin leads to a piano cadenza which is a new melody, the heart of the movement. The movement ends with a return of the muted trumpet and the same atmosphere of mystery.”

“The final movement (Allegro agitato) is in sharp contrast, erupting with an outburst of rhythms and orchestral color. A climax is reached with a stirring restatement of the strings, and the work ends with a brief coda.”

“The rich palette of Gershwin’s orchestration requires the full symphony orchestra [listed above] together with a bass drum, snare drum, cymbals, ‘Charleston stick,’ xylophone, and bells,” writes Ewen. “Gershwin does not use any saxophones.”



George Gershwin