THE FORMATIVE YEARS: AN EXPLORATION OF THE EARLY TRAINING AND
SONG JUVENILIA OF SAMUEL BARBER

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In the art of song composition, American composer Samuel Barber was the perfect storm. Barber spent years studying under superb instruction and became adept as a pianist, singer, composer, and in literature and languages. The songs that Barber composed during those years of instruction, many of which have been posthumously published, are waypoints on his journey to compositional maturity. These early songs display his natural inclinations, his self-determination, his growth through trial and error, and the slow flowering of a musical vision, meticulously cultivated by the educational opportunities provided to him by his family and his many devoted mentors. Using existing well-known and recently uncovered biographical data, as well as both published and unpublished song juvenilia and mature songs, this dissertation examines the importance of Barber’s earliest musical and academic training in relationship to his development as a song composer.
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by

Derek T. Chester
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I sang my first Samuel Barber song at the age of eighteen. That is when this journey began. As I got to know Barber’s output and studied his life, I was amazed by how much his music spoke to the core of me. I dedicate my invasive studies of the nooks and crannies of his youth to the honor and memory of his musical genius.

I would also like to express my deep appreciation and gratitude to Barbara Heyman, for her life-long work in the field of Barber studies, and for her inspiration, support, and guidance. As the preeminent Barber scholar, her work has fueled my interests ever since I purchased her Samuel Barber biography during my undergraduate studies. It is a pleasure and an honor to have met and discussed the life and songs of Barber with the scholar who has helped fill me with a love and appreciation of this great composer.

I would also like to recognize my doctoral advisor and vocal professor during these past five years, Jennifer Lane, and my committee members and coaches, Dr. Elvia Puccinelli and Dr. Stephen Dubberly, for all their mentorship and patient guidance. I have learned and grown so much from their instruction during my doctoral journey. I would like to thank them for imparting their vast musical knowledge to the next generation of artists and teachers.

Finally, I must acknowledge the overwhelming support, love, and friendship of my amazing wife Laura. Over the last five years, I have built a professional performing career, completed doctoral studies, and helped raise two babies with her by my side. None of this would have been possible without her innumerable sacrifices.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Samuel Barber (1910-1981) is not widely regarded as an innovative composer of songs. His music is considered to be an extension of the Romantic era, blending Romantic sonorities and lyricism in traditional forms with certain elements of modernity. Like Brahms, Barber maintained his distance from shifting innovations in music and retained a musical language derived from earlier periods, demonstrating that this font of musical language had yet to be exhausted. Even though Barber was not particularly innovative, he did develop a personal style in his songs, leaving the question: what were Barber’s innate talents and what were the external exposures that worked together to form his personal voice as a song composer?

Composers develop and personalize their compositional characteristics through a combination of inborn ability and education. Exposure to various repertoire and instruction creates an amalgamation, distillation, and reproduction of musical and, even, life experiences. Composers meld this into something that history later recognizes as the composer’s “voice.” It is easy to label a well-known composer’s “voice” as original without acknowledging that he or she may have absorbed compositional techniques from lesser-known composers whose compositional output may lie outside the mainstream classical repertoire. It is also easy to assign a young composer’s influences to the repertoire of only the great composers taught in conservatories. Thus, the influence of a forgotten or lesser-known composer or harmony instructor may never receive proper recognition. After all, the young composer is extremely impressionable. When looking at composers’ juvenilia and early compositions, it is likely that they have had limited exposure to the vast amount of western music available. Therefore, the bulk of their experimental compositions are based on a certain degree of mimicry combined with
a natural sense of originality. That same combination often exists in the creative recesses of a composer’s compositional palette, even after they reach maturity.

Today, Rosario Scalero, Barber’s composition professor at Philadelphia’s Curtis Institute, is recognized as the teacher that molded Samuel Barber into one of the most popular classical composers of the 20th century. However, in order to arrive at a true picture of Barber’s development (especially his roots as a song composer) one must begin at the start of his exposure to music. Since songs are a marriage of music and text, it is logical that one must also examine Barber’s exposure to all things literary. Barber’s earliest contact with music and literature proved to be vital to the development of his tastes as a song composer. Song composition was one of the first genres in which Barber attempted to express himself. Barber’s musically inclined relatives and his first music instructors helped him to construct his earliest musical identity. These mentors took on the responsibility of molding and guiding the raw natural talent of this brightly gifted child.

Investigating Barber’s earliest song compositions and highlighting Barber’s interactions with his childhood influences allows for a more detailed account of his development as a song composer. Furthermore, a study of these early influences and characteristics that took root before the time of Barber’s work with Rosario Scalero illuminates the sources of many of the compositional choices in his mature songs. Barber’s earliest musical and literary influences are made manifest in his juvenile song output. In these songs one can observe Barber’s innate ability to successfully mimic and synthesize the conventional techniques of the 19th century Lieder tradition and the “sentimental” parlor song tradition of the early 20th century, an important stage in Barber’s path towards developing his own mature voice as a song composer. An
examination of the poetry that Barber chose to set (mostly from the British Isles) also reveals a trend that would follow in his more mature works.

Out of the approximately fifty solo songs composed between 1917 (Barber’s first extant song) and 1928 (the end of what I consider Barber’s “juvenilia song period”), only twenty have been edited and published by Barber’s exclusive publishing company, G. Schirmer, Inc.\(^1\) To date, eight of these songs, composed in 1927, have not been located. Only two songs were published in his lifetime, “The Daisies” and “With rue my heart is laden.” Both were written in 1927 and later published in 1936 as the first two selections of *Three Songs* (Op. 2). Eighteen additional songs have been published posthumously by G. Schirmer: two songs in 1994’s *Samuel Barber: Ten Early Songs*, two more in 2008’s *Samuel Barber: Ten Selected Songs*, and another seventeen songs in 2010’s *Samuel Barber: 65 Songs*.

With G. Schirmer’s recent 2010 publication, many of the more substantial early songs are now widely distributed and have become an important and easily accessible addition to the American art song repertoire. Beyond the musicological benefit of tracing the development of Barber’s song style through these little-known early songs, many will find them to be charming and aesthetically worthy of performance and study. These songs provide young students with an introduction to Barber’s musical language, preparing them for his more vocally advanced and musically complicated songs. Many of these early songs also hold artistic merit for professionals, as they did in Barber’s day when his aunt, Louise Homer, the celebrated Metropolitan Opera singer, performed some of them in recitals across the country.

Using existing well-known and recently uncovered biographical data, as well as both published and unpublished song juvenilia, this document examines the importance of Barber’s earliest musical and academic training in relationship to his development as a song composer. First, this paper discusses in detail Barber’s early education, paying specific attention to Barber’s musical mentors and teachers and their interactions with him. Next is an examination of Barber’s academic training, from high school through college. The last portion consists of a commentary on Barber’s compositional choices and his selection of poetry, drawing attention to the details of Barber’s early training. This commentary highlights the importance of the choices he makes in his earliest songs and their relation to his later output. Many of these early songs are now an easily accessible expansion of his familiar and beloved output, and contain ideas and material that he would use again later.
CHAPTER 2

WEST CHESTER

Family

Born on 9 March 1910 in West Chester, Pennsylvania, Samuel Osmond Barber II quickly proved himself a musical wunderkind, showing an uncommon maturity toward his musical calling at a very early age, as seen in this letter penned to his mother when he was nine years old:

NOTICE to Mother and nobody else
Dear Mother: I have written to tell you my worrying secret. Now don’t cry when you read it because it is neither yours nor my fault. I suppose I will have to tell it now, without any nonsense. To begin with I was not meant to be an athlet [sic]. I was meant to be a composer, and will be I’m sure. I’ll ask you one more thing.—Don’t ask me to try to forget this unpleasant thing and go play football.—Please—Sometimes I’ve been worrying about this so much that it makes me mad (not very),

Love,
Sam Barber II²

In his early songs, composed before his formal training in composition, Barber drew inspiration from the music he had been exposed to as a child in West Chester, Pennsylvania: the songs and piano music his mother played, the compositions of his uncle Sidney Homer, the songs he heard beautifully sung by Louise Homer, the keyboard and orchestral repertoire he studied, and the concerts he attended. Barber was raised in a house filled with both amateur and professional music. Barber’s primary musical exposure came from his mother Marguerite “Daisy” McLeod Beatty Barber (1881-1967), an amateur pianist and singer. Daisy instructed Barber in basic piano and filled the house with good music for both voice and piano. She came from a musical family in which she and her three sisters all learned to play piano. An amateur singer herself, Daisy often sang in the home and at church, but it was Louise (1871-1947), her

² Nathan Broder, Samuel Barber (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1985), 11.
sister, who would go on to have an international career as an operatic contralto. Barber admired his Aunt Louise, but his respect and adoration for Aunt Louise’s husband, American composer Sidney Homer (1864-1953), spurred Barber to stake out his vocational claim at the ripe age of nine.³

Barber started his official instruction in piano, organ, and harmony in West Chester. The Homers were the two most vitally influential figures guiding him. Sidney Homer is remembered today primarily for his song output, and Louise was perhaps the most celebrated American contralto of the early 20th century. The Homers were Samuel’s earliest and closest connection to the professional music world and were the first to truly recognize Barber’s full potential. A song composer himself, Sidney would naturally cast a great influence over Barber’s youthful song compositions. Louise regularly demonstrated the highest caliber of singing and song interpretation that Barber would experience in his youth. Barber grew up listening to her sing a great variety of vocal literature, including Sidney’s songs. Through those experiences, Sidney’s compositional techniques were imprinted on the impressionable young musician.⁴

It is important to note just how fond Barber was of Homer’s songs. His love of Homer’s songs went beyond loyalty and seems (according to Barber’s letters) to be most sincere. In a 1952 letter just a few months before his uncle’s death, Barber wrote to Homer that one of Homer’s songs, “The Sick Rose,” was mistaken as one of his own. Barber recalled, “No compliment has given me more pleasure: alas I wish that were true.”⁵

In 1943, Barber’s devotion led him to compile a group of seventeen of Homer’s songs. Barber thought these seventeen best exemplified Homer’s gifts. Barber’s desire to make

⁴ Ibid.
⁵ Heyman, Samuel Barber, 38.
Homer’s output more familiar is well expressed in the preface to the edition: “by furthering them, singers will be helping to build a tradition of American song-writing of higher standards and greater possibilities.”

Homer resisted the current experimental trends of the day, and mostly adhered to the ideals of the late Romantic period mixed with a spattering of Americana. His more adventurous nephew, Samuel, would follow loosely in those footsteps, something that would eventually lead to Barber’s international success and palatability during the rise of modernism and the avant-garde, particularly among those who rejected modern music.

During Barber’s early teens he avidly began to compose vocal music in the style of his uncle, despite a limited but growing understanding of harmony. In the summers, young Samuel often spent time with his aunt and uncle at Homeland in Bolton, New York, on Lake George. During this time Barber would present Homer with his juvenilia and Homer would critique it. They also spent time pouring over important scores including Bach inventions and other masterpieces. In his letters, Homer implored Barber not to use his songs as models, recommending that Barber instead find his own original spontaneity and develop his own style. Nevertheless, Barber’s early exposure to his uncle’s music and advice helped shape many compositional characteristics that Barber would use for the rest of his life. These examples of Barber’s earliest juvenilia, some with corrections suggested by his uncle Sidney, show just how serious the young Barber was about the prospects of becoming a composer, especially a composer of song.

In an earnest request for guidance from his uncle, Barber submitted “Gypsy Dance,” an arrangement for piano and violin of a selection from his unfinished operetta The Rose Tree (H-

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6 Sidney Homer, Seventeen Songs by Sidney Homer (G Schirmer, 1943).
7 Heyman, Samuel Barber, 17-18.
13), and his *Nursery Songs* (H-12) for Homer’s approval. Barber earnestly asked, “Do you think from these works of mine that I can become a composer? And if so, what should I do to further my musical career?” Homer wrote his reply in a 19 December 1922 letter of affirmation, encouragement, and endorsement that would greatly influence the young composer’s trajectory: “There is no doubt you have the making of a composer in you.” Homer’s well thought out reply went on to stress the importance of becoming familiarized “with only the finest music.” “Your whole life will be influenced by the forming of your taste in the next few years. Taste is formed by coming into close and intimate contact with the great works of the masters.” Homer encouraged Barber to attend as many concerts as he could in Philadelphia and stressed that he should always prepare himself by score study beforehand. He also offered to help Barber find the best possible composition teacher and insisted that he must become a master of a “practical instrument,” such as the piano. Homer continued with this sage advice: “You must not think that you can fool with music and get anywhere. Sooner or later you will have to do hard work, and you will make more rapid progress now than when you are older.” Barber was fortunate to have the guidance of such a savvy composer, and with the added support of his parents, he endeavored to follow all of Homer’s advice.

William Hatton Green

By the time Sidney Homer wrote that influential letter, Barber had been fastidiously studying piano for several years. In 1919 Barber’s parents had enrolled him in the piano studio of William Hatton Green, the best piano instructor West Chester had to offer. Prior to that, perhaps at the suggestion of Sidney Homer, and noting his affinity for music, Barber’s parents enrolled him briefly in cello lessons. However, Barber’s attachment to the piano prevailed

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8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
despite his mother’s abhorrence of male amateur pianists. Barber studied with Green for seven years until his enrollment as a piano student at the Curtis Institute of Music at the age of fourteen.

Green was an accomplished musician. He studied with various instructors, most notably in Vienna with Polish pianist, composer, and pedagogue, Theodor Leschetitzky. After his time in Europe, Green returned to the United States and had a successful touring career before settling down in West Chester to perform locally and set up a private studio. Under Green, Barber received a tremendous musical education and a secure technical start as a serious pianist. Green’s pupils were exposed to the great classics of the piano repertoire, an element of every solid musical education. This exposure would greatly inform Barber’s compositional language. Recital programs and existing piano sheet music between 1919 and 1923 reveal that Barber studied and performed works by Bach, Clementi, Beethoven, Heller, Tchaikovsky, Chopin, and Leo Ornstein. Long after the time of Barber’s study with Green, the two shared a close relationship. Green went on to follow Barber’s career with great interest, keeping a file filled with autographed pictures, correspondences, programs, and press clippings. This file was donated to the Curtis Institute after Green’s death.

Since Barber and Green had such a close student-teacher relationship, it is reasonable to assume that Barber sought out affirmation and guidance from Green regarding his composition. Green recognized greatness in Barber and fully supported his compositional efforts. As seen in programs from recitals during 1919, Green allowed Barber to perform his own piano compositions, “At Twilight” (H-9) and “Lullaby” (H-10), in a studio recital. A year later, in an

\[\text{References:}\]

10 Broder, 11.
7 April 1920 studio recital, Barber was allowed to reprise two of those pieces and added a performance of an early song entitled “Child and Mother”\textsuperscript{13} on a text by Eugene Field. Green likely gave Barber advice on music theory, and perhaps helped Barber iron out some errors in his writing. Barber’s colleague, Constant Vauclain, even went as far as saying that Green was “the greatest early influence on Sam” and that Green was “very helpful to him.”\textsuperscript{14}

After a few years of study with Green, Barber tried his hand at the pipe organ. According to a 13 April 1927 diary entry, Barber recalled playing his first service at the First Presbyterian Church in West Chester when he was only eleven years old.\textsuperscript{15} Though it is never explicitly stated, it is likely that Barber learned his way around the organ under the tutelage of his maternal aunt, Sarah (Beatty) Husted. “Auntie,” as Samuel called her, served as organist at the First Presbyterian Church during that time. Barber dedicated “Thy Will Be Done” (H-11a), his 1923 song for organ and voice, to her.

When he was thirteen, young Samuel accepted a job as organist at the Westminster Presbyterian Church in West Chester, holding the position for almost four years before he quit in April 1927 due to frustrations with an “awful organ and awful choirmaster.”\textsuperscript{16} Barber’s exposure to organ repertoire and organ technique during that time served as an excellent introduction to counterpoint and harmony, gave him special insight into the future composition exercises Rosario Scalero would assign to him at Curtis, and helped prepare him to write the compositions for organ that he composed throughout his life.

\textsuperscript{13}This song is not catalogued. Either it is not located or it is a reworking of a previously composed song.
\textsuperscript{14}Dickinson, 10.
\textsuperscript{16}Ibid., 48. From Barber’s personal diary entry for 13 April 13 1927.
Stanley T. Reiff

In Barber’s 1925 reapplication for admission to the Curtis Institute of Music, Barber mentions two official music teachers: seven years of piano with William Hatton Green, and two years of harmony with Stanley T. Reiff of Philadelphia, who until now has received no attention whatsoever in Barber scholarship. Barber’s lessons with Reiff likely took place in West Chester around 1923, probably around the time that Sidney Homer encouraged Barber to find a good composition teacher who was also a “practical composer.” Barber’s harmony instruction under Reiff’s tutelage was likely the result of Homer’s suggestion, as Reiff was indeed a practical, published composer as well as a collegiate theory and organ instructor.

Stanley Trotter Reiff (1881-1954) spent most of his life in Philadelphia. He served as organist at St. Andrew’s Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia and was a member of the American Organ Players Club and the American Guild of Organists. Reiff authored a 1907 textbook on elementary music theory entitled *Scales, Key Signatures and Related Keys*. At one point, Reiff held a position as professor of music theory at the Crozer Theological Seminary in Upland, Pennsylvania. His compositions were praised for their “originality of thematic material and consistent development.”

Reiff spent many years working in West Chester. The obituary notice in West Chester’s *Daily Local News* (8 February 1954) mentions that he served as organist and choirmaster at the Methodist Episcopal Church in West Chester from 1919 to 1931, was at one point the chorus master of the New Century Club of West Chester, and was a private lesson instructor at West Chester College.

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17 Letter, 19 December 1922 from a private collection of letters maintained by Katharine Homer Fryer.
18 *General Alumni Catalogue of the University of Pennsylvania*, 1917 ed. (Philadelphia, 1917), 194. According to this 1917 catalogue, Stanley Trotter Reiff received his BM in 1910 and his Certificate of Proficiency in Music in 1909. He is described as an organist, teacher, author of an elementary theory textbook, and a composer of secular and sacred works. Reiff was originally from Lansdowne, PA, six miles west of Philadelphia.
Chester State Normal School. According to an advertisement in Theodore Presser’s Magazine for musicians, music students, and music lovers, The Etude, Reiff also offered correspondence courses in harmony and counterpoint. Though it is not entirely improbable that Barber studied organ with Reiff, it is more likely that their lessons were restricted to harmony. Otherwise, Barber probably would have listed him as an instrumental teacher on his reapplication to Curtis, rather than only as a harmony instructor.

Barber’s mother was given a copy of Reiff’s published song for voice and organ, “Let Not Your Heart Be Troubled,” inscribed: “Marguerite B. Barber with the composer’s compliments.” Possessing a lovely voice, Daisy likely performed this song at the First Presbyterian Church where the Barbers faithfully attended. Reiff composed in an accessible, conservative style, using a great deal of the Victorian Romantic expression and emotion typically found in turn of the century British church music. Barber would adopt a similar style in many of his early works.

Except for Barber’s mention of it on his application, no records of Barber’s study with Reiff have yet come to light. It is not possible to know exactly what was covered in their lessons. However, it can be asserted that Reiff’s instruction would have certainly informed Barber’s composition during that period, especially as regards the rules of harmony. Perhaps more will come to light one day about Barber and Reiff’s work together, but it is certain that the two years of harmony studies Barber had with Reiff made an impact on Barber’s future compositional studies and played a large part in his having placed out of the basic harmony classes at Curtis. Their lessons could also have something to do with Barber’s ease of adaptation

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20The West Chester Normal School, 1922 ed. (West Chester, PA, 1922). His affiliation as organ teacher is mentioned in 1922 catalogue.
to the rigors of the Scalero composition studio, something his classmates would find extremely challenging.\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{21} The Curtis Institute. Oral history with Gian Carlo Menotti.
CHAPTER 3
BARBER AT CURTIS

Barber’s parents were persuaded to provide him with the best musical education possible, with the full support of his uncle and aunt. Barber worked dutifully on fulfilling Homer’s suggestions to further develop his compositional voice. He continued piano studies with William Hatton Green, harmony studies with Stanley T. Reiff, and made trips into Philadelphia to hear concerts and recitals. This study set the stage for Barber’s training at the Curits Institute of Music.

Mary Louise Curtis Bok (1876-1970), philanthropist and founder of the Curtis Institute of Music, wished to establish a place of musical study where students would “not only [learn] to sing or play, but also the history of music, the laws of its making, languages, ear-training and music appreciation.” Bok wanted to distinguish her school from the top conservatories of Europe by creating culturally educated graduates. To this end, Curtis also offered humanities courses, including foreign language and literature classes. The 1925-26 catalogue states this broad mission of the institute:

The distinctive quality of The Curtis Institute of Music lies in the belief of the founder that while music may be taught in all its branches by masters of the art, the student who would have received only this instruction would be ill-equipped to stand before the world as a well-grounded, thoroughly-trained musician.

The institute was to be extremely selective, interested in quality rather than quantity, which would be enforced through limited enrollment and strict standards of admission. It was under these terms that the institute was founded in 1924, endowed by Ms. Curtis Bok under the Curtis Foundation with John Grolle as its first director. The faculty was drawn from a group of

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22 Heyman, Samuel Barber, 34-35.
23 The Curtis Institute of Music, Course Catalogue, 1925-26.
remarkably talented pedagogues and performers. Academic courses were offered through collaboration with the University of Pennsylvania, using their faculty. The institute would have two separate divisions: the conservatory for advanced students, and the preparatory school for beginners and intermediate students.

At some point in the spring or early summer of 1924, likely with the help of an introductory letter by Homer, Barber and his father traveled to Philadelphia to interview and audition for a spot in Curtis’ inaugural class. He was deemed a candidate for admittance into the conservatory division, pending a formal audition that September. However, Barber was only fourteen years old and would also be starting his junior year at West Chester High School.

Curtis’ conservatory division’s normal course of study would be full-time, five days a week, and intended for those finished with their high school education. The Barbers insisted that Samuel finish his high school studies, but sought to negotiate part-time enrollment for him at Curtis. Barber’s father requested of Grolle that all of Samuel’s lessons be on Fridays, so that he could attend the Philadelphia Orchestra’s Friday matinee concerts. It was the first year of the institute and there had been no precedent or established rules of enrollment. However, Samuel was just the type of student the institute was hoping to enroll. Grolle, recognizing the importance of this opportunity for the budding musician, arranged things so as to minimize Samuel’s travels into Philadelphia.

During his first year, Barber was only considered for his merits as a pianist. His official interview and audition was held on September 26 at 10:30am. According to the 1924 catalogue, he would be required to fulfill the following audition requirements:

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24 The Curtis Institute, Student Records of Samuel Barber (1924-33). From a 24 July 1924 letter from Dr. S. Leroy Barber to John Grolle, director of Curtis.
25 Ibid. From a 29 July 1924 reply to Dr. S. Leroy Barber from John Grolle, director of Curtis.
Candidates must be able to play satisfactorily from memory all major and minor scales and arpeggios; selected studies from Czerny, Opus 740; Bach Three-Part Inventions; a movement of a Beethoven Sonata, or a composition of equal difficulty.26

Barber’s work with Green had prepared him adequately for this audition. If accepted, the typical full-time piano student at Curtis would have a full week of classes along with a weekly hour-long piano lesson:

**PIANO**

One hour lesson weekly.

**MUSICIANSHIP**

Approximately six hours of instruction weekly.

1. Ear Training.
2. Aural and Keyboard Harmony, Counter-point, Improvisation, Composition.
3. Elements of Music, Analysis, Form and Aesthetics.
4. Study of Repertoire — To insure correct principles for self-development and teaching through familiarity with a sufficient number of classic and modern compositions.
5. Ensemble playing.
6. Practical experience in teaching in one of the Preparatory Centers of the Institute for those who desire to receive the Teacher's Certificate.

In addition to the musical instruction, the course in piano includes the study of Musical History, the Principles of Psychology and Philosophy, as well as two additional academic courses. A satisfactory paper on these elective subjects is required for graduation.27

This full time schedule would be impossible for Barber until he completed his high school studies. Barber was accepted, and Grolle was true to his word in seeking out an alternate arrangement for Samuel. In a 30 September 1924 letter, Grolle’s secretary, Grace Spofford (who later became dean) replied to Samuel’s father:

I have arranged for your son to have Harmony with Miss. Haines on Friday, from ten to eleven o’clock, and Piano with Mr. Boyle on Friday from eleven to twelve o’clock; these lessons to begin Friday, October 17th.28

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26 The Curtis Institute, *Course Catalogue, 1924-25.*
27 Ibid.
28 The Curtis Institute, Student Records of Samuel Barber.
Barber would now have to seek permission from the West Chester School Board to miss Friday classes. Luckily, Samuel’s father, Roy Barber, happened to be president of that school board and passed a motion that allowed all musician students to leave school early on Fridays in order to travel to Philadelphia for lessons and concerts. This made it possible for Samuel to become, at the age of fourteen, a piano student in the Conservatory Division of the Curtis Institute of Music. This was a giant step toward fulfilling his Uncle Sidney’s suggested career plan.²⁹

As a part-time student, Barber’s tuition was set at $215 for his first year, less than the full-time student fees of $300. Barber was enrolled in harmony lessons with a Miss W. Beatrice Haines, an ear training and harmony instructor in the Preparatory division; however, these lessons never materialized – they were neither mentioned in his school records, nor in his listing of harmony studies on his 1925 reapplication to Curtis. It is possible that Barber’s second year of study with Reiff coincided with Barber’s first year at Curtis.

George Boyle

Barber would take the train from West Chester to Philadelphia every Friday morning for his weekly hour-long noontime piano lesson with George Boyle. This schedule commenced on Friday, 17 October. George Boyle was one of six piano teachers on faculty during Curtis’ inaugural year, along with Berthe Bert, Austin Conradi, David Saperton, Isabella Vengerova (Barber’s future teacher), and Josef Hofmann (who later became the director of the Curtis Institute).

George Frederick Boyle (1886-1948) was a Sydney-born, Australian-American pianist and composer who emigrated to the United States after an early career of extensive studying and

²⁹ Broder, Samuel Barber, 12.
performing in Australia and Europe. In Australia, Boyle studied initially with his parents and, briefly, with the important Australian pedagogue Sidney Moss. After his work with Moss, Boyle moved to Germany and studied for five years in Berlin with Ferruccio Busoni.\textsuperscript{30} Boyle composed over 100 pieces for the piano and over 50 songs, as well as several chamber and orchestral works.\textsuperscript{31} As a pedagogue, he would go on to work at three of America’s top music schools of the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century, first moving to America to take a post at the Peabody Conservatory of Music in Baltimore, where he was hired without audition, on Busoni’s recommendation, as head of the piano faculty.\textsuperscript{32}

Boyle’s performing and teaching career took him to Philadelphia in 1922, and around that time he joined the faculty of the Institute of Musical Art, now known as the Julliard School, where he taught until 1940. In 1924 he took a joint position as piano professor at the Curtis Institute, a position he would hold for only two years. Boyle’s early departure from Curtis was due to an unfortunate clash with Josef Hofmann, then head of the piano department, who was allegedly pilfering students from other professors’ studios. Boyle and his wife Pearl, who taught in Curtis’ Preparatory division, resigned from their posts to start their own private “Boyle Piano Studios” in Philadelphia.\textsuperscript{33}

Under Boyle, Barber would have world-class instruction, even though it would only last two years. Boyle taught students according to their individual needs, rather than using a blanket method employed by some schools of pedagogy. This allowed his students to develop naturally, rather than forcing a certain hand or wrist position. Boyle insisted on scale work, was an

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid, 54-60.
advocate of metronome work, and was a brilliant, published pedagogue with efficient technical ideals and the methods to execute them. In October 1924, at the time of his entrance to Curtis, Barber added Hanon’s *The Virtuoso Pianist* and Carl Faletten’s *Rhythmical Scale Exercises* to his personal sheet music collection. They were likely among Boyle’s required texts for technical studies.

During their two years of intense work, Barber was no doubt introduced to the compositions of Boyle. Boyle played several of his own works in solo and collaborative recitals throughout the 1924-25 academic year. Though it was unlikely that Barber attended any of those recitals, as they fell on weekdays other than Fridays, Boyle’s music was published by G. Schirmer and was readily available to Barber. However, many of the compositions were likely above Barber’s technical level at this stage of his development. At this time, Boyle was just entering his final compositional period, noted for being in the late-Romantic style, with compositional techniques and sonorities comparable to the works of Ravel, Debussy, and even late Rachmaninoff, using advanced harmonies and complex rhythms. It can be no coincidence that most of the composers Barber knew in his early life adhered to expanding late Romanticism rather than following the trends of the modernists who sought alternates to traditional harmony and form.

The academic calendar at Curtis allowed for about thirty lessons per year. Barber had twenty-nine lessons over the two terms of the 1924-1925 school year and received a grade of A for talent and application, and a grade of B+ for progress. The next year, Barber earned A’s in every category. Barber did not perform in any official student recitals during his first year at

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34 Ibid.
35 The Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, Pennsylvania. Personal sheet music belonging to Samuel Barber.
Curtis, but was deemed ready to play in public at the collegiate level by the end of his second year with Boyle, playing a Mozart piano concerto in A major during a Friday afternoon studio recital on 14 May 1926.37

According to the Curtis Institute’s records, Barber’s piano lessons were his only official connection to Curtis that first year. However, Barber’s Friday trips to Philadelphia would also provide him with a world of experience, allowing him to attend the two o’clock matinee concerts of the Philadelphia Orchestra under Leopold Stokowski, who conducted a large variety of repertoire with his orchestras. Thus Barber was exposed to modern works and to the classics by one of the country’s top orchestras, fulfilling his Uncle Sidney’s recommendation to expose himself to high-quality music and music-making. In the 1924-25 season alone, Barber may have heard symphonic masterpieces by Bach, Haydn, Mozart, Berlioz, Franck, Beethoven, Schubert, Tchaikovsky, Liszt, Dvořák, Vaughan Williams, Bruckner, Saint-Saëns, Mussorgsky, Prokofiev, Hindemith, Richard Strauss, special all-Wagner and all-Stravinsky programs, and the premier of Ornstein’s piano concerto played by the composer.38 Barber likely attended other professional chamber music concerts and recitals at Curtis and at other Philadelphia venues on those Fridays.

Rosario Scalero

Barber returned to Curtis part-time for the 1925-1926 school year while he simultaneously completed his senior year at West Chester High School. Barber requested to be allowed to continue his piano studies with Boyle, and petitioned to become a student of composition. Barber was admitted to the composition studio of Rosario Scalero, bumping his annual tuition up to $500, the same price as the full course of instruction during Curtis’ second

37 The Curtis Institute, Student Records of Samuel Barber and Recital Programs.
38 The Curtis Institute, Programs from the Philadelphia Orchestra. William Hatton Green had exposed Barber to Ornstein’s piano music.
year. Barber's lessons were once again set for Fridays, beginning with his 45-minute composition lesson with Scalero at 11:15, which was followed immediately by his piano lesson with Boyle at noon.³⁹

Rosario Scalero had a tremendous impact on the lives of his students, leaving a great legacy of successful composers. The 1926-27 Curtis Course Catalogue colorfully suggests the merits of studying with Scalero:

Mr. Rosario Scalero is the type of scholar which [sic] only Italy could produce. With a depth of learning and a love for the spirit of form and beauty and orderliness which are almost lost qualities today, he combines a genuine enthusiasm for teaching, and a power of creating in students the real craftsmanship's attitude toward their work. His students soon come under the spell of his personality and enjoy the quiet, slow, discriminating study of Counterpoint and Fugue, and Composition. Five of his students from The Curtis Institute of Music are spending the summer of 1926 in Mr. Scalero's summer home in the Italian Alps in order to be under his inspiring direction.⁴⁰

Scalero was born near Turin, Italy in 1870. Primarily trained as a concert violinist, he devoted his musicality to the art of teaching composition.⁴¹ The 1927-28 Course Catalogue advertised Scalero's pedigree as a keeper of the polyphonic tradition:

The doctrines of musical composition formulated by Palestrina have continued in an unbroken line down to the present day. The series of celebrated masters who have perpetuated the descent, and have maintained the traditions of form and style, include such names as Zelter, Mendelssohn, Joachim, Brahms, Nottebohm and Mandyczewski.⁴²

Scalero studied for seven years in Vienna with composer Eusebius Mandyczewski, friend of Brahms and musicologist, noted for his work on the first collection of the complete works of Schubert.⁴³ After his work with Mandyczewski and a brief performing career in Europe, Scalero worked at several music conservatories in Italy. Upon emigrating to America in

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³⁹ The Curtis Institute, Student Records of Samuel Barber.
⁴⁰ The Curtis Institute, Course Catalogue, 1926-27.
⁴² The Curtis Institute, Course Catalogue, 1927-28.
1919, he succeeded Ernest Bloch as chair of composition and theory at the Mannes School in New York, a post he held until 1928. Scalero joined the Curtis Institute’s composition department in 1925 and served until 1933, then again from 1935 to 1946. Among his notable students were Barber, Gian-Carlo Menotti, Nino Rota, Lukas Foss, Luigi Zaninelli, and briefly, Ned Rorem. Studying with Scalero at Curtis opened the possibility of studying with him in Italy during the summers. In May of 1926, Barber requested scholarship assistance in order to do just that during the summer of 1927, but did not make the trip until the summer of 1928. This was an opportunity for Scalero’s top students to study intensively and absorb the musical heritage and culture of Europe, something that would play a large part in Barber’s development.

If Barber was a raw talent before his studies with Scalero, he left Scalero’s tutelage with a superb technical grasp of the art and discipline of composition, and a mastery of counterpoint, form, and orchestration. Scalero’s 1933 student evaluation of Barber depicts him as a uniquely gifted musician with tremendous potential:

Sam Barber is a highly gifted pupil, rich in melodic invention, with a full command of the polyphonic style and preeminently an anti-academic spirit. His means of expression have not yet attained that degree of maturity which will characterize him later as a fully original artist; in other words he is still undergoing that evolutionary process of assimilation and assertion which is typical of the artists of all time. He is an indegatigable work, very ambitious and has lately learned to rely not only on sentiment but also on judgment. He will certainly develope into one of the most representative composers of America. In spite of his extreme youth, this is the remarkable record of his achievements attained during his studies at the Curtis Institute. He is to be considered a graduate student [a catalogue of nine of Barber’s school compositions overseen by Scalero follows].

Scalero’s pedagogy is preserved in his writings, the Curtis course catalogues and class records, and the accounts of his students. In an important article in the 1922 Musical Quarterly, Scalero reveals his pedagogical philosophy, calling for a widespread reform of the accepted

44 Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online, s.v. “Scalero, Rosario.”
45 The Curtis Institute, Student Records of Samuel Barber. Evaluations of Barber by Rosario Scalero 1924-1933 from the Curtis Archives.
pedagogical methods of the day, which placed little emphasis on composing with a horizontal contrapuntal approach, focusing more on the vertical harmonic approach. Scalero was an advocate of compositional instruction primarily through the art of polyphony, rather than the study of harmony itself. His method was “to give the student clear and accurate guidance through his studies in counterpoint,” but not through the study of treatises “excepting with regard to the series of exercises they propose.”

After students became capable of analyzing and imitating various compositional schools and individual composers’ styles of polyphonic composition, Scalero believed they would discover not only the artistic genius of the masters, but also the discipline required to write good counterpoint. It was only then that Scalero thought a student would “truly comprehend what the achievements of modern harmony signify […through] the achievements of instrumental music in the eighteenth century down to the masterworks of modern music.” In Scalero’s view, study of the music of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven teaches musical form. Beyond learning the techniques and possibilities of individual instruments in the modern orchestra, orchestration should be learned “through the eye first of all, and then through the ear.”

Scalero practiced what he preached. Accounts of his former students indicate that he was quite strict and that the work was often tedious. As a teacher, Ned Rorem found him to be rigid and too conservative, and left after only one year of study. Gian-Carlo Menotti’s recollections of Scalero reveal much about the man behind the pedagogy, as well as the pedagogy itself. In a 9 December 1981 interview, Menotti confirmed that Scalero was a very “severe” teacher, and

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47 Ibid., 492-93.
48 Ibid.
49 Ibid., 494.
that in one instance when Menotti was desperate, he persuaded Barber to write his motet assignment for him.

In an oral history conducted by the Curtis Institute, Menotti recalls his interactions with Scalero, remembering that Scalero never gave them any rules. In the beginning of their studies, after being assigned two-part fugue, Menotti recalls an example of Scalero’s severity after Menotti told him that he didn’t yet know how to write a fugue. “Are you stupid?” Scalero allegedly replied. “Do you read music? Do you know there’s somebody called Bach? Do you know he has written some fugues? Go home, look at them, play them, study them, and then write a fugue!” Menotti explained that he would bring back the work, and only then would Scalero teach: not through rules, but through correcting mistakes. Thus, his students would learn principally from their own mistakes. Menotti recalled other examples of Scalero’s severity, saying, “…he could be very, very cruel.” In the same interview, he recalled Scalero teaching him the importance of allowing music to breathe; that all great music was based on arsis and thesis. Menotti also remembers Scalero as being a good and inspiring teacher, even though he was never known as a great composer. Menotti recalls Scalero’s words to him:

You know Gian Carlo, I’m not here to teach you inspiration in how to write music. Only God can really give you that. I’m here to give you wings, and the only way I can. You can develop wings. I have to cut them all the time until it’s time for you to have large wings. When you are ready to fly, I’ll tell you. Then you get to the window, fly out, and then do what you want; but I want to give you very healthy wings…. I cannot give you the gift, but I can teach you how to receive the gift that God gives you.

Menotti also mentioned that Scalero disapproved of students composing before they were ready. Scalero didn’t want them wasting time practicing something they hadn’t yet learned. The

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51 The Curtis Institute, Oral history with Gian Carlo Menotti. Menotti also similarly recalled many of these accounts in various interviews with Barbara Heyman between 1982 and 1990.
52 Ibid.
1926 Curtis course catalogue confirms that students were discouraged from free composition before their instructors deemed them ready:

Intending composers will be required to show general competence in harmony and counterpoint, and (if necessary) to defer attempting original composition until a certain degree of proficiency in these subjects has been attained. Their later training will include a thorough practical study of counterpoint and fugue, also of the earlier schools of counterpoint as exemplified in Palestrina and his contemporaries. They will also be required to study the principal methods of design employed by the great composers, and to learn themselves how to construct according to those principles. As soon as this general technical competence has been attained (but not before) they will be encouraged to experiment freely in whatever direction they are inclined.\(^\text{53}\)

It was clear that Barber cared very much what Scalero thought of him. Barber’s diaries give us some insight into his successes and failures under Scalero, while also giving us a glimpse of a typical teenager’s feelings towards tedious schoolwork. One entry states: “A fine composition lesson with Scalero. I got two Φ – very unusual. They are his perfect marks, although he said I was the first student that ever set words as well [4 February 1927]!” Not all lessons went well though: “Awful composition lesson – how I hate the agony of technic [sic], which is after all, all that these darn Choral-preludes are. He repeated that catchy Refrain that I was one of his most talented students [18 March 1927].” Another entry states: “Mr. Scalero was wonderful to me—said my Chorales showed real promise but too homophonic [1 October 1926].” Barber struggled with the tedious nature of his work with Scalero and seemed to complain often in his diary about the assignments, but made sure to take note of Scalero’s compliments. He also expressed his frustration when he failed to impress Scalero: “Fine composition lesson on Canons – He said they are expressive and there is already something of Barber in them [6 January 1927]!” The very next day, he showed quite a different reaction:

\(^{53}\) The Curtis Institute, *Course Catalogue, 1926-27.*
“Scalero hated my canons and said not to waste time any more. I was terribly disappointed [7 January 1927].”

Barber trusted and respected Scalero and their work together had a tremendously positive result. According to Barber’s academic record, during his first year he met with Scalero privately for twenty-six 45-minute private lessons and received top marks: three A+’s in talent, application, and progress. Barber would go on to earn straight A’s in his lessons (most of them A+’s) in all eight years he studied with Scalero at Curtis.

During his second year at Curtis, in the first part of the spring term of 1926, Barber enrolled for a short time in a Monday night compositional survey class with successful composer and music journalist, Deems Taylor. In addition to his successes as a composer, Taylor was an active music critic who later praised Barber’s first piano concerto (now destroyed), calling it a “musical triumph.”

The record of class work in the Curtis Archives shows that Taylor’s class met once a week for two hours. The course is described as follows: “This course consisted of general discussion of orchestration and modern composition. Mr. Taylor criticized compositions of the students and occasionally brought some of his own compositions for analysis (Jurgen – just played by the New York Symphony, et cetera).” Barber’s folk-song setting “Au clair de la lune” (H-35) was written as an assignment for Taylor’s class. In order to participate in this class, Barber would have to travel to Philadelphia on Monday afternoons after school. This proved to be too inconvenient and Barber requested to drop the class only a few weeks into the beginning of the second term. Dean Grace Spofford accepted his request to drop in a 19 February 1926

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54 Heyman, A Thematic Catalogue. All diary entries are taken from various entries in Heyman’s A Thematic Catalogue.
55 Chester Daily Local News, 1 October 1931.
56 The Curtis Institute, Record of Class Work from the Dean’s Reports 1925-26.
letter saying: ‘It will be perfectly satisfactory for you to drop Mr. Taylor’s class. I can realize how very difficult it must be for you to come to the school on Monday evenings.”

Isabelle Vengerova

Barber graduated from West Chester High School in June of 1926, allowing him to enter Curtis for the full course during the 1926-27 term. Barber proved himself to be an ambitious and hard working student, continuing his studies in composition and piano while adding the full course of academic and music classes. However, Barber’s widespread interests, innate musicality, and natural golden baritone voice earned him the approval of the Curtis administration and vocal faculty to add a third major in voice, bringing his tuition up an additional $200 to a total of $700 for the year. But first, with the resigning of George Boyle, Barber was to be assigned to a new piano teacher. In an April 1926 memorandum, Barber was officially notified that Mr. George Boyle would not be returning to Curtis that fall, and that he would be required to play for Mr. Josef Hoffman, the head of the piano division at Curtis, in order to be placed into another studio. Barber’s evaluation was examined by Hoffman, Mr. David Saperton, assistant-head of the piano division, and Mrs. Mary Louise Curtis Bok. Barber played Mozart and received a rather bland evaluation, with comments ranging from his tone quality being too hard at times to his having only fair or average attributes and an exaggerated interpretation. He was placed in the studio of Isabelle Vengerova, with whom he would study during his next five years at Curtis.

Isabelle Afanasyevna Vengerova was born in Minsk and studied at the Vienna Conservatory with Joseph Dachs before embarking upon a two-year private course with Theodor Leschetitzky. Leschetitzky’s pedagogical line is traceable back to Beethoven through Carl

57 The Curtis Institute, Student Records of Samuel Barber.  
58 Ibid.
Czerny. Barber’s first teacher, William Hatton Green, also belonged to the same pedagogical pedigree, having also studied with Leschetitzky. After further studies with Anna Essipova at the Imperial Conservatory in St. Petersburg, Vengerova maintained a short performing career as a chamber and solo artist in the USSR and a professorship at the St. Petersburg Conservatory until 1920. After moving to the United States, she became one of the founding teachers of the Curtis Institute in 1924. After 1933 she also held a position at the Mannes School, teaching at both schools until her death in 1956.  

Vengerova’s pedagogical methods have endured to the present, preserved by her students, primarily Robert Schick in his publication, *The Vengerova System of Piano Playing*. Schick compiled the method book from his scrupulous notes collected during his decade-long study with Vengerova. The method contains a brief biographical chapter discussing her personality and relationships with her students. The body of the method contains chapters concerning hand positions, pedaling, posture, accents, tone, and fingering— all things that Barber and Vengerova drilled using Vengerova’s method of “variety with an underlying unity.”

Vengerova required her students to be intimately familiar with all of their repertoire and to play it by memory at their first lesson. The music was to be first played without any sense of interpretation or expression, so that the musicality would later be expressed organically through what had already been technically mastered. A former student, Vitaly Neuman, recalled:

> Nuances, articulation, phrasing, and other particulars, she maintained, should derive from a deep emotional feeling and understanding of the style and should not be mechanically

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60 Schick, viii.

attached to the notes, following a teacher’s instruction or the editor’s indications in the music.\textsuperscript{62}

Though grading is extremely subjective, it is interesting to note that Barber earned his lowest grades from Vengerova in their first year together, when he eared a B in talent, a C+ in application and a B- in progress. After that, Barber’s marks would progressively improve year after year. During his last two years with Vengerova, he earned A’s and A+’s, displaying his improvement in skill and adaptation to Vengerova’s requirements, while also serving as a testament for Vengerova’s famed “psychological insight that brought out the best in each pupil.”\textsuperscript{63}

As seen in his first audition after his two years with Boyle, Barber didn’t fully impress everyone with his piano skills. This would be seen again in David Saperton’s comments regarding Barber’s jury for reentrance on 29 April 1927: “Pianistically young and not important and cannot be considered on this basis/ Could be given consideration in composition which he says he is equally interested in/ Studying now with Scalero, also voice with Gogorza (seems to have good voice)/ His possibilities altogether in view of his age (17) have by no means been exhausted.” He also noted Barber’s personality as “negative.” Vengerova had seen more potential in Barber; her sole comment on the readmission jury he played for her the next day: “Accepted ☑.”\textsuperscript{64}

Barber’s recital programs from their time together reveal that he did not perform in a recital that first year. The following year, he performed three works by Brahms, the A minor “Intermezzo” from Op. 118, the A major “Intermezzo” from Op. 76, and the longer “Rhapsody” in B minor from Op. 79. The next year Barber would play two more works by Brahms in a

\textsuperscript{62} Schick, 108.
\textsuperscript{63} Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online, s.v. “Vengerova, Isabelle.”
\textsuperscript{64} The Curtis Institute. Student Records of Samuel Barber. Comments are taken from jury and audition sheets.
Vengerova studio recital, the “Intermezzo” and “Capriccio” from Op. 116, as well as Ravel’s *Sonatine*. All of the repertoire Barber studied during his formative years proved to be influential in forming his musical identity, particularly the music of Brahms, whom Barber adored. Barber finished his studies with Vengerova after the 1930-1931 school year, continuing only his composition lessons.  

Emilio De Gogorza

Barber’s early interest in song was evident in his juvenile writing for voice and in his admiration of Louise Homer’s art. Apparently, good voices ran in the family. Just like his mother, Samuel’s sister Sara had a beautiful singing voice that was “…marked by sweetness and clearness” and, “…her manner was unaffected and altogether charming.” Barber wrote most of his earliest songs either for Sara or for himself. Samuel showed bright promise as a singer as well. By the age of 16, he had developed a beautiful baritone voice ready for formal training. On 5 January 1927, Barber made his formal audition to be eligible for a voice concentration. He was admitted into the studio of Emilio de Gogorza.

De Gogorza was born in Brooklyn, but spent most of his youth in Spain, France, and England singing as a boy soprano before returning to the United States to study. He made a career in the United States as an interpreter of concert and recital repertoire, his bad eyesight keeping him from the operatic stage. De Gogorza was one of the earliest classical recording artists, leaving behind his vocal legacy in many gramophone recordings from the 1910’s and 1920’s.  

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65 Barber also went on to teach piano students at Curtis for two years until his official student work ended in 1933.
The 1926-1927 Curtis course catalogue praised De Gogorza as a teacher and the institute’s fortune in acquiring him:

The Curtis Institute of Music holds itself more than fortunate in securing the services of Emilio de Gogorza. This eminent singer had always refused to associate himself with any school, but finding conditions in The Curtis Institute congenial and to his liking, he accepted the post offered to him. He has demonstrated himself to be another great artist who brings to his teaching the enthusiasm and ardor which characterize him as a singer. Thoroughly sound in the mechanics of singing—his own singing shows that beyond cavil—an admirably complete musician, as a teacher his success equals his brilliant achievements as an artist.68

The Curtis Institute was extremely selective of all its applicants, including vocalists. Below is what was expected of singers who wished to be admitted:

Candidates should possess an excellent voice in good condition; an accurate musical instinct, sense of rhythm, and a good ear. An elementary knowledge of theory, intervals, keys, scales and the elements of music and some knowledge of piano are most desirable. In general, an applicant should not be over twenty-three years.

For Artist Students a higher degree of development is required: an evenly developed voice, uninjured; timbre of voice agreeable and expressive; steady breath control as evidenced in smooth scales; agreeable diction in foreign languages; interpretative ability. In addition to these qualities, the artist student should be a fluent sight-reader, have sincerity and warmth in dramatic and lyric expression, and should possess a fair knowledge of a portion of the following composers’ songs and oratorios: Parisotti, Handel, Schubert, Schumann, Franz, Brahms, Strauss, Tschaikowsky, Rachmaninoff, Fauré, Debussy, Duparc. The artist student should also know arias from the operas of the following composers: Mozart, Bizet, Saint-Saëns, Puccini and Wagner.69

De Gogorza saw great vocal potential in Barber, remarking in his examination for admission that Barber had a “fine musical organization.” In terms of tone quality, considering that young Barber was only 16 at the time, de Gogorza writes, “embryo but a voice in there.” He also remarked that Barber’s intonation and rhythm were “perfect,” his interpretation “very

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68 The Curtis Institute, Course Catalogue, 1926-27.
69 Ibid.
intelligent,” his memory “excellent,” his diction “good,” his musicianship “A-1,” his intelligence “of the first order,” and his personality “charming.”

Barber studied voice with de Gogorza every term until the 1930-1931 school year, when Barber (for an unknown reason) withdrew from lessons for part of the term. He was reinstated in March of 1931, but didn’t continue study voice at Curtis for the rest of his time there. Incidentally, Barber stopped his piano studies after that year as well, continuing only lessons in composition and campanology during his last two years at Curtis (1931-1933). Barber would eventually return to voice studies, studying Lieder with John Braun in Vienna in 1934, and taking a few lessons with Giacomo Benvenuti, a specialist in early Italian Baroque repertoire—a repertoire that Barber thought worthy of revival.

Upon his return to the states, Barber intended to keep himself financially afloat with the occasional singing job. Throughout the 1930’s he gave several voice recitals and was briefly featured over the radio in a weekly NBC song recital. Hearing Barber, Charles O’Donnell, head of the artistic and repertory division of RCA, agreed to let him sing on a proposed RCA recording of his own Dover Beach (Op. 3, 1931) for strings and baritone. The 1935 recording captures the beauty and elegance of Barber’s voice, characterized by an attractive, light baritone with a rapid vibrato, a truly Italianate sense of legato, and an extremely sweet head register.

By the 1940’s Barber abandoned his aspirations to be a professional singer, though he continued to enjoy singing as an amateur. At one point, Barber recalled that he seriously considered a joint career in singing and composing, but he eventually would adhere to his uncle

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70 The Curtis Institute, Student Records of Samuel Barber.
71 Heyman, Samuel Barber, 102-103.
72 Ibid., 105, 107.
73 Samuel Barber, Samuel Barber: Premiere Recordings, Dover Beach (Op 3), Samuel Barber, baritone, Pearl CD, 1999.
74 Heyman, Samuel Barber, 109.
Sidney Homer’s advice not to be distracted from composition. In an interview with Emily Coleman, Barber joked about his discarded aspirations to be a singer: “In order to be a good singer, you must be either extremely intelligent or extremely stupid, and as I didn’t fit into either of these categories, I became a composer instead.”

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CHAPTER 4
OTHER COURSES OF STUDY

Good art song composers are noted for their choice of poetry and ability to set it; thus, it is important to examine Barber’s liberal arts education, particularly his literary and foreign language training. Though it is impossible to discern a direct connection between all of Barber’s courses of study and his song composition skills, it is important to examine all possible influences during this formative period to gain as clear a picture as possible. Barber’s vast exposure to the literary arts, both during his childhood and during his time at Curtis, helped to mold his literary tastes, an aspect directly connected to his success as a song composer.

Soon after Barber started at West Chester High School, he was given the opportunity to play for the head of the Peabody Conservatory of Music, Harold Randolph. Randolph recommended that Barber withdraw from West Chester High School and focus full-time on his education as a composer. As discussed earlier, Roy Barber, a practical man and president of the West Chester School Board, insisted that his son continue his high school studies, but made it possible for him to travel to Curtis every Friday to ensure that he simultaneously received a world-class conservatory level training. Full-time music study would have to wait.

Barber was enrolled in the general studies track at West Chester High School, which also offered educational tracks in the classics, commercial studies, industrial arts, and household arts. His high school courses included one course each in math, science, and physical education, several history and social science courses, three years of French, and four years of English and Latin.

77 Heyman, Samuel Barber, 32.
Although generally a B student, during his first year of part-time study at Curtis, Barber’s high school grades dipped. He earned a C in both Latin and History, possibly the result of his new distractions: conservatory training, and missing nearly a day of classes every week. During his last year at West Chester, he improved, earning A’s in Latin and French, and B’s in Social Science and English.\(^78\)

The 1926 High School Commencement Edition of West Chester High School’s magazine *The Garnet and White* contains an entry for each student next to his or her senior photograph.\(^79\) Barber’s photograph shows a sixteen-year-old with a boyish face framed by round spectacles and hair parted down the middle. His entry included a favorite quote, a list of achievements, and a brief biography. His quote is from Alexander Pope’s *An Essay on Criticism*:

> Music resembles poetry: in each  
> Are nameless graces which no methods teach,  
> And which a master-hand alone can reach.\(^80\)

Barber’s listed achievements show that he was more active and involved than the average student:

Health Crusade I; Spelling Contest, I, II, III, IV; Class Literary Editor, GARNET AND WHITE, I; President of Music Club, II; Accompanist for Chapel and Choruses, I, II, III, IV; Class Ring Committee, III; Winner First Prize Local News Contest, III; Winner First Prize Junior Essay Contest, III; Dramatic Club, III, IV; President, IV; D. Webster Meredith PrizeSpeaking Contest, IV; Honorable Mention Lincoln Essay Contest, IV; Aeneadæ,\(^81\) IV; French Club, IV; Winner First Prize Senior Essay Contest, IV; Composed Words and Music of W.C.H.S. “Alma Mater; Class Poem, IV.

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\(^{78}\) The Curtis Institute. Student Records of Samuel Barber. This information is taken from a certified record of Barber’s high school work, which can be found in the Curtis Archives. Due to grade inflation, subjectivity, and non-standardization of grading, it is impossible to compare Barber’s academic performance to today’s standards, but Barber’s academic performance could give some insight, though mostly speculative, into Barber’s interests and application.

\(^{79}\) Chester County Historical Society. Archived copies of West Chester High School’s magazine, *The Garnet and White*.


\(^{81}\) The Aeneadæ was West Chester High’s Classical Club, which published a periodical literary magazine.
The biographical entry shows how Barber’s classmates remembered him and his future goals:

Since his Freshman year, whenever an interesting program was desired, Sam was called upon to preside at the piano. He was not content to play compositions of others, but entranced his audience by playing many compositions of his own. He is not only accomplished at music, but in the Latin or French classes, whenever [sic] a difficult passage is reached, we turn to “Sam” who translates this for us in a manner that shows us the beauty of the languages. Sam is continuing his career in music and we know that in a few years he will show to the world what we now know he is capable of.

After graduating from High School, Barber entered the full course at Curtis. The institute’s coursework was designed to meet the fundamental needs of the music student, including training in rhythm, aesthetic expression, ear training, harmony, analysis, and general culture. Though certain classes were required for specific major fields of study, it was Curtis’ policy in 1926 that there were no standard required courses of study. Each student’s path was individually tailored to suit the needs of that particular student.

Barber must have satisfied his ear training and harmony requirements, or that training was covered in his composition lessons, because his records show no enrollment in those types of courses. As a triple major, Barber would have to enroll in special major-related musical courses to fulfill all of his requirements. As a singing concentration student, Barber was required to take choir, which he did only once for credit during the 1926-1927 school year. He would also be required to take platform deportment and several diction classes, a course that he was inclined to skip regularly.

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82 One of those programs that Barber participated in was a school production of Arthur Bergh’s 1924 operetta “In Arcady.” Barber played piano in the pit orchestra.

83 The Curtis Institute, Student Records of Samuel Barber. Barber’s attendance record shows that he was absent 11 out of 23 classes in his Italian Diction course and absent 8 out of 24 classes in his English Diction course, earning a D in the first term examination and a C- for the first term general grade, his lowest grades during his time at Curtis. During his second term, he brought his grades back up to B’s. Barber never dared miss Scalero’s Instrumentation course the next year, with a perfect attendance of 28 classes.
His composition requirements included two instrumentation courses and an “Elements of Music” course, all taught by Scalero, covering the ranges, transpositions, techniques, and possibilities of orchestral instruments. The only piano course that Barber took during the 1930-1931 academic year was a course entitled “Class Lessons” with Vengerova. Other music-related classes in which Barber participated include several terms of Chamber Music, a dance class, and a course in Eurhythmics. Attendance at faculty recitals was required of every student, and counted towards credits for graduation.

Aside from music courses, the institute offered general academic courses in languages, literature, fine arts, history, and psychology, in order to offer the students “under a minimum time schedule, the collegiate background and understanding of cultural values essential to the true development of an artist.” In its early years, the institute also offered a weekly lecture series in the comparative arts, tracing the development of all the arts throughout various historical periods. Barber attended these lectures from 1926 to 1929.

Unless given special permission, students were to take two academic courses each year. This requirement would drop to one in 1928. Barber’s academic interests at Curtis seemed to be divided into two periods: literature studies from 1926-1928 and foreign language studies from 1929-1933. Barber’s choice of academic classes during his first years at Curtis reflected his primary academic interest, the literary arts. He took four literature courses and a course in English Composition. Of all of Barber’s humanities studies, it was his work in the literary arts, the love of which began at a very early age, that undoubtedly proved to be a tremendous influence on his song writing.

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84 The Curtis Institute, Course Catalogue 1926-1927. “This course includes general training in the technique of movement: time, pulsation, impulse, relaxation, tending to an awakening and development of the rhythmic consciousness and the sense of form.”

85 Ibid.
In a culturally conservative town such as West Chester, the Barber family was somewhat of an anomaly, thanks to the more progressive cultural influence of the Beattys, Barber’s maternal relatives. Barber’s home was a nurturing environment for a young child interested in the arts. Barber’s childhood cook, Annie Sullivan Brosius Noble, wrote the libretto to Barber’s juvenile opera concept, *The Rose Tree*. It is clear from the writing that Noble was well versed in Irish poetry, and it is likely that she might have fed Barber’s cultural interest in the literature of his Scottish-Irish ancestors. She may have been influential in kindling Barber’s particular interest in Irish literature, a love that he would carry for the rest of his life, as evidenced by his settings of many Irish poets. Barber’s affinity for literature would be on display during his high school years: he was his class’ editor for the *Garnet and White* his freshman year, garnered several top prizes in essay competitions, wrote the words (and music) to his school’s “Alma Mater,” and wrote his class’ poem.

During his first full-time year at Curtis (1924-25), Barber took three literature-related courses: The Development of the English Novel and Advanced English Composition, both with Dr. William Page Harbeson, and a French Literature course with Marie Emma Bourdin-Bacher. Harbeson and Bourdin-Bacher, like most of Curtis’ academic department, were faculty of the University of Pennsylvania engaged by the Curtis Institute to provide instruction in the liberal arts. Information about these courses, including the textbooks used and the final examinations given, is detailed in the Dean’s Annual Reports. These details provide insight into the academic environment into which Barber was immersed at Curtis.

Harbeson’s course on the English Novel consisted of detailed examinations of six different novels, including works by Sir Walter Scott, Charles Dickens, and William Thackeray.

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87 Ibid., 22-22.
88 The Curtis Institute, Dean’s Annual Reports.
Barber earned an A for both terms. The English Composition Course consisted of Barber writing weekly “themes” on various topics, focusing on the improvement of writing skills. Barber continued to prove himself an adept writer, earning A+’s on both term examinations and an A for the course. In addition to the three novels Barber was required to read for his first term in his English Novel course, he was required to read a French novel in his French Literature course and give a written account of it. The second term of the French Literature course covered 19th century French poetry and theater.

The following year, Barber enrolled in another course in English Literature with Dr. Harbeson. This course consisted mostly of readings and discussions of poetry, with particular attention given to the diction of their recitation and interpretation. As the majority of Barber’s song-text settings come from the British Isles, this course may be viewed as a very important influence on Barber. For the final examination, students were to identify the author of four selected poems and discuss the poet’s particularities of style. Students were required to be on intimate terms with the styles and works of the great poets, a skill that would always be with Barber when considering texts to set. Again, Barber would earn an A for his work with Harbeson.

Barber was also enrolled in a Comparative Literature course during the 1927-1928 year with Elbert Lenrow, an English instructor at the University of Pennsylvania. The first semester of the course, for which Barber earned a C+, consisted of one or two plays assigned each week for outside reading, and other plays to be discussed in class in consideration of their historical period and the literary movement to which they belonged. The second semester’s work, for which Barber earned a B, would perhaps have a greater impact on Barber’s future text setting skills. The work included outside study, in-class discussion, and critiques of poetry found in the
anthologies compiled by American poet and editor, Louis Untermeyer: *Modern British Poetry* and *Modern American Poetry*. Most of the poets in the anthologies were widely known and by no means obscure. Even as a teenager, given his early fascination with poetry, Barber had already set poems by many of the poets featured in Untermeyer’s anthology, including Eugene Field, Jessie Rittenhouse, Laurence Binyon, A. E. Housman, Fiona MacLeod, Alfred Noyes, Robert Louis Stevenson, and Untermeyer himself.

It is possible that Barber first came across James Joyce’s “I Hear an Army” from Untermeyer’s *Modern British Poetry* collection. Barber would go on to set that poem to music in 1936, and a total of seven Joyce poems in his lifetime. Other poets found in Untermeyer’s anthologies that Barber would eventually set include: William H. Davies, Robert Graves, James Stephens, J. M. Synge, William Butler Yeats, Emily Dickinson, and Robert Frost. It is likely that Barber was exposed to some of these poets for the first time in Lenrow’s course. Since these were well-known and beloved poets, it is no surprise that Barber chose to set them.

In 1929, fueled by a love for European languages, and in consideration of the practicality of being multilingual in such a culturally diverse field, Barber shifted his academic focus toward foreign languages. His high school commencement biographical excerpt noted his particular affinity for Latin, which he took during all four years of high school, and French, which he took for three years. Barber was fluent in French and would absorb Italian through his association with Gian Carlo Menotti. From 1929 until 1933, Barber further expanded his language skills with three semesters of classroom German, four semesters of independent German study, and one semester of classroom Spanish.

A letter from institute director Josef Hoffman, dated 10 May 1933, notified Barber that he had officially completed his studies at Curtis. Barber would not be “retained after the expiration
of the current school year,” as Hoffman deemed him ready to “embark upon an artistic career.”

Barber received his Bachelor of Music degree from Curtis at a commencement ceremony held in Casimir Hall on 22 May 1934. However, his knowledge and love of music, literature, and languages would continue to grow throughout the rest of his life.
CHAPTER 5
SELECTED SONG COMPOSITIONS BEFORE CURTIS

In many of Barber’s unpublished songs, and in most of his posthumously published songs, one can see the beginnings of what the world has come to expect from Barber in this genre: clarity that encourages declamation of the text, long lyrical lines, large intervallic leaps, melodic chromaticism, modal ambiguity, quartal and quintal harmonies, classic forms, intuitive counterpoint, and colorful harmonic shifts. Though Rosario Scalero is regarded as the teacher that led Barber to his compositional maturity, when considering Barber’s development as a song composer, it is important to pay attention to his earliest teachers and academic interests. Now that his early musical and scholarly training has been laid out in detail, one may examine the synthesis of this training, particularly regarding the evolution of Barber’s song style.

Earliest Efforts

Barber’s earliest manuscripts are for voice and piano and for solo piano. These can be found at the Library of Congress in a volume entitled “Sam Barber/Manuscripts/1917-1927.” The music contains simplistic childlike melodies over a supporting accompaniment, and shows a basic understanding of simple forms such as strophic, AB, and ABA. In some songs, the B sections are in a different meter than the A sections. Barber’s early interest in setting poetry to music demonstrates the influence of his song-composing uncle, Sidney Homer. Barber, an intelligent and resourceful child, had heard enough of his uncle’s songs to be able to identify what makes a song successful. Most of these juvenile songs are settings of children’s poems and, as noted above, written to be sung by himself or his little sister Sara.89 Most of the piano

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89 Heyman, Samuel Barber, 10.
compositions are also song-like in quality, with a simple melody supported by a basic chordal accompaniment.

Some of these early compositions display adventurous harmonies and dissonances. “War Song” (H-6, 1918), for example, employs a purposeful clash of C in the lowest octaves of the piano, with a C♯, and later, an E♭ against an E♭ in the B section, both effects assisting in the tonal depiction of war. The more substantial song “Why Not?” (H-4, Example 1) employs a simple piano introduction, simple obbligato flourishes, octave leaps and long sustained tones in the voice part, and a tonic to mediant modulation from F major to A major in the antecedent of the A section, though it quickly reverts to F in the B section.

Barber’s earliest “collection” of songs was settings of nursery rhymes that he entitled “Mother Goose Rhymes Set to Music” (H-12, 1918-1922), or in a later fair copy version, *Nursery Songs*, Opus VII, dedicated to his sister Sara. In this collection, one sees Barber’s close imitation of his uncle Sidney’s nursery rhyme medley written a few years earlier, in 1919, and recorded by Louise in several versions: first in January 1921 as “Mother Goose Rhymes” with solo piano accompaniment, and then again in June of 1921 as “Mother Goose Songs” in a chamber orchestra version. Both are available today in modern releases of Homer’s historical recordings with Victor Records. Barber’s collection consists of seven short, strophic or through-composed songs written between 1918 and 1922, featuring simple accompaniments and melodies, similar to Homer’s but with much more immature constructions.

Samuel and Sara first performed them on 15 March 1923 in Coatesville, Pennsylvania, and a few days later at West Chester First Presbyterian Church on March 24. The fair copy version of “Nursery Songs” found in the Library of Congress manuscript collection is in lower keys, suitable for Barber’s own voice, with higher key suggestions penciled in, indicating that Barber likely transposed them to higher, more comfortable keys when Sara sang them. There are several harmonic and notation errors throughout, which Homer brought to his attention. Barber kept the errors in his fair copy, noting that they were composed before he learned the “tiresome rules of harmony.”

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91 This quote is taken from his preface to *Nursery Songs* (H-12), found at the Library of Congress in a leather bound collection of his early manuscripts. Barber writes in the preface: “From old manuscripts and music books I have collected and copied my Mother Goose Songs. “The Old Man From Jamaica”, “The Rockaby Lady,” and “I Love Little Pussy” have been composed comparatively recently (1922), but the others are much earlier compositions. The mistakes in notation, the harmonic [sic] errors, the poor constructions, -they have not been omitted. They are as I first wrote them, before I knew the tiresome rules of harmony. The ranges are indeed unique. They suit my own low voice, with an occasional high note beyond my range purely for effect. And now I leave you, to sing and play these little child-songs. [Signed] Samuel O. Barber II / Apr. 8, 1923.”
During that same time, around 1920, Barber began to compose an operetta, *The Rose Tree* (H-13, incomplete). The libretto was by Annie Brosius Sullivan Noble, the Barber family’s Irish cook. As previously noted, Noble likely shared Irish poetry with Barber, establishing his appreciation for it at a very early age. The operetta was incomplete, ending after act one, when Noble, according to a later interview with Barber, “ran out of ideas.” The manuscripts that exist today at the Chester County Historical Society contain a hand-written libretto, a typed libretto with some hand-written additions, and music for most of the first act including an overture, choruses, arias, and duets. Barber performed a piano arrangement of his own “Gypsy Dance” at the same March 15 recital in Coatesville at which the *Nursery Songs* were premiered, and repeated it, as well as several other orchestral selections from *The Rose Tree* in the West Chester recital on March 24.

“Thy Will Be Done” (1923, H-11b)

Though Barber composed several pieces for organ throughout his life, the only works for solo voice and organ were “The Wanderer” (H-11a, 1920) and its rearranged final version, “Thy Will Be Done” (H-11b, 1923). Both are currently unpublished, with manuscripts located at the Chester County Historical Society. Barber wrote this preface in the fair copy version:

This sacred solo is really a revised edition of “The Wanderer” composed in 1920 when I was ten or eleven years old. The words are from the “New York Herald” in a little volume of newspaper poetry—“The Uplands of God” published by Randolph, N.Y. It was first sung by Mrs. Fred Dutt when I was organist at the Westminster Church in 1923. It is dedicated to Auntie. (Mrs. Husted).  
[signed] Samuel O Barber 2nd March 4th, 1924

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93 Chester County Historical Society. Samuel Barber Collection. The preface page follows a cover page, with the title “THY WILL BE DONE/A SACRED SOLO/by/SAMUEL O. BARBER” followed by a hand-drawn image of a pipe organ.
Oh tired wandering feet;
That in life's path have trod,
So far away from Him come back
Poor weary child [soul] to God.

Oh wayward aching heart that seeks to gain
A respite here from life's deep thorns and from its pain
Why strive for that which here ye will not find?
God only dear gives perfect rest [peace] to heart and mind.

Oh longing tearful eyes remember He wept too
And that though [tho’] others grieve and He cares for you!
If thou wilt say as Jesus did, in dark Gethsemane,
“Thy will be done!” thy Father, child, will send His perfect peace to thee.94

The text is a simple devotional poem perfectly suitable for a church anthem or solo. As is often the case in his songs, Barber made some minor adaptations to the text. “Thy Will Be Done” is in F major and in 6/8 time, in contrast to the original C major and 3/4 time of “The Wanderer.” It was likely transposed from the original to suit Mrs. Dutt’s soprano. Barber evokes a Mendelssohn-like sacred style and employs a number of octave leaps, which he uses in several songs written around that time, including “Why Not” (H-4) and several selections out of his “Nursery Songs” (H-12). A new feature he employs is ascending and descending chromatic lines marked by circle of fifth progressions, as he experiments with modulations from the tonic to the lowered submediant, displaying his early understanding of basic harmony. The melody comes back in the lower key of D♭ major for the middle section before returning to F major and the original material. The song climaxes to a fff high A with dramatic inversions of F major chords reaching the higher registers of the organ. A four-measure interlude follows, reminiscent of Arthur Sullivan, transitioning to the final statement of the opening melody (Example 2). A duple time “postlude” in the organ part ends the song with a ii65/V/I progression that features an

94Anson D. F. Randolph, The Uplands of God and Other Religious Poems. (New York: A.D.F. Randolph, 1883). Throughout this document, the crossed-out words are words omitted by Barber, the words in brackets are Barber’s substitution for the words printed before the brackets. The italicized words are Barber’s own additions.
starkly dissonant G♭ passing tone, an uncharacteristic-to-the-song ending and seemingly juvenile and adventurous use of dissonance (Example 3).

Example 2: “Thy Will Be Done” (H-11B), mm. 47-52.

Example 3: “Thy Will Be Done (H-11B), mm. 57-61.

“An Old Song” (H-15)

Around the age of 11, following a few years of lessons with Green, Barber composed “An Old Song” (H-15) and “Hunting Song” (H-16), both in 12/8 time. “An Old Song” was published in manuscript form in G. Schirmer’s Samuel Barber: 65 Songs (2010). “Hunting
“An Old Song” features a poem by English poet Charles Kingsley entitled “The Old, Old Song.” Even his earliest song settings reflect Barber’s love for literature from the British Isles. In this youthful composition, Barber attempts to use contrasting sections to depict the different affects implied by the tone of the poem, a youthful experiment in form that doesn’t appear in the rest of his song output. The poem is a song sung by one of the characters of Kingsley’s children’s novel, The Water-Babies, published in 1863, and has been set to music by many lesser-known composers. Barber states in the manuscript that the song was “composed a long time ago- in 1921, aged 11.” The fair copy version shows more mature penmanship and notation, signifying that he recopied it when he was older.

When all the world is young, lad,
And all the trees are green;
And every goose a swan, lad,
And every lass a queen;
Then hey for boot and horse, lad,
And round the world away!
Young blood must have its course, lad,
And every dog his day.

When all the world is old, lad,
And all the trees are brown;
And all the sport [past] is stale, lad,
And all the wheels [leaves] run down;
Creep home, and take your place there,
The spent and maimed among;
God grant you find one face there,
You loved when all was young.96

Barber took a few poetic liberties, replacing a few words with his own. In the second stanza, likely in an attempt to take the tree reference further, Barber writes over the word “sport”

95 In other publications it is entitled “Young and Old.”
in his fair copy with what looks like the word “past,” and replaces the word “wheels” with “leaves.” Barber sets the first stanza briskly, in an *allegro vivace* 12/8 in the style of an old Scottish or Irish jig, a nod towards his Scotch-Irish heritage and a musical personification of the lively spirit of youth (Example 4). The melody is also similar to the German folk song "Im Lauterbach hab'ich mein' Strumpf verlorn," which is more widely recognized today as the melody to the children’s song “Oh Where, O Where has My Little Dog Gone.”

Example 4: “An Old Song” (H-15), mm. 5-6.

In the A-section, there is an instance of an early use of rolled block chords on the downbeats and upbeats (Example 4). The rolled chord is a figure used often by Barber in the accompaniments of his songs, usually in the opening measures, to assist with clarity and text declamation, or to set up a *recitando* style. Barber uses this technique early in his *Nursery Songs*, and later in “My Fairyland,” “Love’s Caution,” “Peace,” and with variation in “Who Carries Corn and Crown” and “A Nun Takes the Veil.”
Barber underlines the words “every dog his day” at the end of the A-section with the directions to sing them emphatically. The second stanza switches to an *adagio con espressione* 3/4 time, personifying old age with solemnity and slowness.

**Piano Works**

Between the ages of eleven and fourteen, Barber composed more music for piano than voice, including his *Themes* (H-17), “Petite Berceuse” (H-19), *Three Sketches for Pianoforte* (H-20), and “Fantasie for Two Pianos” (H-21). His Uncle Sidney praised “Fantasie,” Barber’s first attempt at an extended motivic sonata form. Heyman suggests that Homer recognized Barber’s “grasp of the use of tonal and thematic structure as an effective unifying principle of design.”

This work signifies Barber’s study of long forms, but no doubt helped advance his concepts of motivic development and unifying devices. These advances in his technique would eventually find their way into his songs.

Through his studies with William Hatton Green, Barber was exposed to the music of modernist composer Leo Ornstein. In a 25 May 1921 recital, Barber played Leo Ornstein’s “Humoresque” from his *Nine Miniatures* (SO 72). In a 23 March 1923 recital he would play the first movement from the same opus, the “Berceuse.” Ornstein’s “Berceuse” would highly influence Barber’s own “Petite Berceuse” (H-19) for piano, composed during that same time. Barbara Heyman states that Barber’s “Petite Berceuse” “marks a leap forward in the young composer’s maturation, using a greater variety of harmonic language.”

She goes on to compare Barber’s use of tonic to submediant harmonic motion, and parallel tenth and thirteenth motion in “Petit Berceuse” with Debussy’s “En Bateau” from *Petite Suite* composed from 1886 to 1889.

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98 Ibid., 32.
Though extremely similar to the Debussy in terms of harmonic territory (the shift from tonic to submediant), the harmonic influence likely came from Ornstein’s *Berceuse*, which contains the same intervallic gesture in the bass line (a fifth leap followed by a leap to the tenth) repeated throughout. Barber shifts harmonies from the tonic to the submediant and lowered submediant, a relationship that Barber and Debussy often explored (Example 5, next page).

Though Ornstein’s *Nine Miniatures* are more musically conservative than the modernist, less tonal output that he is known for, it is interesting to note Barber’s earliest exposure to and experimentation with this type of harmonic and melodic treatment, since he would go on to use them throughout his career, especially in his songs. In retrospect, one can see that Ornstein and Barber drew from similar tonal and melodic wells. Though Ornstein was far more adventurous than Barber, there are some striking similarities in the harmonic, rhythmic, and melodic elements of their later piano works, such as the use of pentatonicism and open quartal and quintal harmonies, in both the melody and in supporting material. Of course, many 20th century composers adopted these techniques, but some distinct similarities exist between specific pieces, such as Ornstein’s *Solitude* and *A morning in the woods*, and Barber’s *Nocturne*. Perhaps Barber’s compositions influenced Ornstein in some ways, as Ornstein outlived Barber by over twenty years. Measures of Ornstein’s “Tarantelle” (SO 155, 1960) do show some striking melodic similarities to the opening theme of the second movement of Barber’s Piano Sonata (Op. 26, 1949), composed eleven years earlier (Example 6, page 53).
Example 5: Barber’s “Petite Berceuse” (H-19), mm. 1-3; Orstein’s “Berceuse” (SO 72, No. 1), mm. 1-8; and Debussy’s “En Bateau” (L 64 No. 1), mm. 1-3.
Example 6: Second Movement from Barber’s Piano Sonata (Op. 26 No. 2), mm. 1-4 (top); Ornstein’s “Tarantelle” (SO 155), mm. 13-15.

Barber would later have had the opportunity to hear Ornstein play his own piano concerto during the Philadelphia Orchestra’s 1924-25 season. Ornstein lived in Philadelphia during the time that Barber was there, taught at the Philadelphia Music Academy, and eventually opened his own Ornstein School of Music. It is unclear if the two men ever actually met or interacted.⁹⁹

“My Fairyland” (H-22)

“My Fairyland” shows that Barber’s ability to capture the essence of a poem had greatly improved. The text is by Robert Thomas Kerlin, a West Chester poet. Robert and his wife, Adaline, were great supporters of Barber’s musical growth. Barber wrote his “Fantasie for Two

Pianos” (H-21) at the request of Adaline, who was an accomplished pianist in West Chester.

Robert served as head of the English Department at West Chester State Teacher’s College in the 1920’s. A political socialist and former minister, Kerlin is known for his compilations and advocacy of African-American poetry as well as for losing several academic posts, including his post in West Chester, because of his outspoken political and social stances. Kerlin may have introduced Barber to the poetry of Langston Hughes, whose work Barber would go on to set a few years later. Barber’s setting is dedicated to Kerlin and Gertrude Schmidt, soprano, who championed this and many other early Barber songs, often with Samuel at the piano.

Tomorrow! Oh sweet tomorrow!
Tomorrow is my fairyland!
Sadly, I think of Yesterday,
A barren rock-[wreck-] strewn stretch of sand,
Beneath low skies of grey.

Tomorrow! Oh divine Tomorrow!
I shall be brave and true [wise] tomorrow!
Weakness and failure marred Today!
My strength was sapped by pain and sorrow!
I stumbled in the way!

Tomorrow, God! Oh, sweet Tomorrow!
Untouched and pure that new world lies!
Thy world, and mine, a golden strand!
A golden dawn in cloudless skies!
Tomorrow is my Fairyland!

“My Fairyland” offers a great deal more complexity and musical substance than his previous songs. Barber uses motivic and harmonic material throughout as unifying devices. The setting begins in a declamatory style, in F major, over rolled block chords that enhance the clarity of the text. The harmonies beneath the vocal melody draw attention to the use of the flattened sixth scale degree (in this case, D♭) (Example 7). Barber exploits this throughout the

100 Heyman, Samuel Barber, 26, 31.
102 Heyman, A Thematic Catalogue, 37.
song though sometimes he spells it in sharps as an augmented fifth. The accompaniment shifts in measure 6, to steady eighth notes, first using only two voices, and then growing to full chords as the dynamic increases, with doublings spanning several octaves in the piano.

Example 7: “My Fairyland” (H-22), mm. 1-8.

The declaration of “Tomorrow” in the next stanza is set $fff$ appassionato and up a minor sixth, repeating initial rhythmic and melodic gestures. Next Barber repeats the gestures down a half step on the text “I shall be brave and wise Tomorrow,” ending on an $A_b$ augmented chord that resolves to $A_b$ major. Again, Barber is playing with the flattened sixth scale degree, in this case, the augmented fifth. In measure 18, the tone changes as Barber paints the word
“weakness.” Barber marks the dynamic down to piano and changes his block chords to arpeggios with six measures of A♭ major. In relation to the opening, this is the lowered mediant, a late Romantic modulation and a progression that occurs often in both French impressionistic music and the English music influenced by it. As mentioned earlier, Barber would go on to use this type of harmonic progression quite often in his songs. In measure 19, the piano imitates the opening vocal motive, a popular unifying device used by many song composers, something no doubt already recognized by the then fourteen-year-old composer.

The third stanza returns to the song’s opening material in F major, this time marked andante religioso, over rolled chords and a progression that again shifts between modes in the manner of Vaughan Williams, once again to the lowered mediant. Measure 30 returns to F major, immediately followed by another measure-long instance of an augmented chord, this time F-augmented, raising the C to a C♯. After the singer’s “A golden dawn in cloudless skies,” the piano rapturously echoes with accented full chords, reminiscent of the popular “tin pan alley” style of the day. Barber then sets the three syllables of the last statement of “tomorrow” together with low octaves in the piano. The piano shifts to full chords on “my fairyland” as the voice ascends in a measure of climax marked molto meno mosso e maesto [sic], leading to an optional high A in the vocal line. The piano’s closing measures end in sentimental triumph and optimism. “My Fairyland” seems to wed many features of early 20th century sentimental songs to elements found in Schumann’s art songs.  

Barber would continue to explore these techniques when he matriculated at Curtis a short time later.

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Barber finished composing *Two Poems of the Wind* (H-23) on 16 October 1924, one day before his first lesson with George Boyle. The two songs “Little Children of the Wind” and “Longing” are settings of Scottish poet William Sharp, who often wrote under the female pseudonym of Fiona MacLeod. Sharp, like William Butler Yeats, was a member of the “Celtic Revival” and a member of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, a magic, secret society that shaped the face of western occultism in the 20th century.\(^{104}\) It has not been ascertained by this author exactly how Barber came across these poems, but, as previously mentioned, Barber’s love of poetry from the British Isles was established from a young age. Barber may have been aware of Charles Griffes’ *Three Poems by Fiona MacLeod* (Op. 11, 1918). The first poem comes from the 1901 publication *From the Hills of Dream: Threnodies, Songs and Other Poems*.

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I hear the little children of the wind
Crying solitary in the lonely places:
I have not seen their faces
But I have seen the leaves eddying [ebbying] behind,
The little tremulous leaves of the wind!\(^{105}\)
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In the collection of nature essays, *Where the Forest Murmurs*, Sharp (writing as Macleod) writes more about these children of the wind in a parable about Jesus, doves, and ravens. According to the essay “The Children of the Wind and The Clan of Peace” from *Where

\(^{104}\) *Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism in Great Britain and Ireland* (Gent: Academia Press, 2009), s.v. “Pagan Review.”

the Forest Murmurs, the children of the wind are ravens. The “ravens” are the dark counterpart to “doves,” the clan of peace.\textsuperscript{106}

This short song demonstrates a piquant melancholy that would come to be considered characteristic of much of Barber’s compositional output. The melody throughout is plaintive and simple. There is no initial key signature, and Barber instantly sets up a mysterious quality to the song with a series of diminished seventh chords pulsating under a mournful melodic line with the words “I hear the little children of the wind.” Uneasiness is created by the short Eb\textsuperscript{M7} chord in measure 4, which is left hanging and unresolved. A sorrowful, unaccompanied vocal line follows on the text “Crying solitary in lonely places” (Example 8, next page). It is only then, with the D chord in measure 6, that the entire introduction has any resolution, retrospectively giving the Eb\textsuperscript{M7} chord an altered Neapolitan-like function.

Barber shifts starkly in measure 7 to an Ab major chord followed by an E minor chord. Again, as in “My Fairyland” and “Petite Berceuse,” one sees Barber attracted to shifts between modes and unrelated keys, in this case imparting an impressionistic feel. A C\# is added to the E minor chord in measure 8, resounding the same half-diminished seventh chord that opens the piece. Here the accompaniment changes to descending and ascending arpeggios, depicting the wind scattering the leaves. The arpeggios shift to a C\textsuperscript{7} chord in measure 9, a chord that resolves down with half-step motion in the bass to B major in measure 10, similar to the resolution in measure 6. Given the impressionist nature and harmonic scantiness of this song, it seems that Barber used these progressions more for their color than their function. Barber seems attracted to the sonority of the descending half-step resolution in the bass line that characterizes Phrygian cadences, root position Neapolitan chords, and augmented sixth chords. Barber’s use of these

chords might have similar aural characteristics, but their spelling and their voice leading and resolution (or lack thereof) indicates that they are merely being used as cadential-like “color” chords rather than functional pre-dominants or modulation pivot chords. The final two bars are written in E♭, a strange and clumsy shift to be sung lento and tenderly with a very basic I-vi-V7/V-V7-I progression that seems to come out of nowhere (Example 9, next page).

Example 8: “The Children of the Wind” (H-23, No. 1), mm. 3-6.
Example 9: “The Children of the Wind” (H-23, No. 1), mm. 9-12.

Were it not for the strange ending, this short song would be wholly impressionistic, with harmonic motion that is more colorful than functional. As it stands, the last two bars, which seem like they belong to another song, represent choices that might be made by an eccentric or immature composer. Barber was by no means eccentric and it is unlikely that he was attempting to be so. Perhaps this was an attempt to depict the uncertainty or fickleness of the wind.

The second song, “Longing,” contrasts greatly with the first, recalling a sentimental style more typical of the songs of Sidney Homer. In fact, Louise Homer owned a well-worn copy of this song, and it was encored in her 4 June 1927 performance of it. Barber recalls in his dairy
entry from the same day: “Never have I heard Aunt Louise sing better… My songs made a hit and Longing had to be repeated. I fear my bows were rather awkward.”107

The text, also taken from Sharp’s (Macleod’s) *From the Hills of Dream*, is less esoteric than “Little Children of the Wind,” and has an appropriately longing tone and a Scottish, metrical lilt that Barber sets in a 6/8 meter.

O would I were the cool wind that’s blowing from the sea,
Each loneliest valley I would search till I should come to thee.

In the dew on the grass is your name, dear, i’ the leaf on the tree—
O would I were the cool wind that’s blowing from the sea.

O would I were the cool wind that’s blowing far from me—
The grey silence, the grey waves, the grey wastes of the sea.108

“Longing” demonstrates a cohesive form, particularly due to the repetition of “O would I were the cool wind,” and Barber’s treatment of it as a type of refrain. A four-measure introduction is identical to the piano part in measures 5-8. The voice is predominantly doubled in the piano part with some exceptions, including the return of the A material in measure 21, marked “much slower.” Once again, here Barber uses his characteristic rolled-chord technique, previously employed in sections of “An Old Song” and “My Fairyland,” to bring variety to the “refrain.” Barber marks these rolled chords in measures 25 and 26 with sentimental fermatas on the words “silence,” “waves,” and “sea.” In measure 29, the opening refrain returns. The antecedent phrase is similar to measures 5-8, but the melody in the consequent phrase is adjusted to add a more emphatic F# appoggiatura gesture on the word “valley,” a whole step higher than the original gesture. A slight melodic and tonal adjustment closes the song in G♭, rather than the dominant, as in measure 12. Harmonically, Barber uses many major seventh, major ninths, and

the occasional Neapolitan-like seventh chord resolutions (as in found in the previous song), which give an almost jazzy feel to his lilting folk-like melody.

There are, perhaps coincidentally, several striking similarities between Barber’s “Longing” and the “Allegretto” movement of his *Excursions* (Op. 20, No. 3) that he would write twenty years later (Example 10).

Example 10: “Longing” (H-23, No. 2), mm. 1-4 (top); “Allegretto” from *Excursions* (Op. 20, No. 3), mm. 1-4 (bottom).

In addition to sharing the same key of G♭ major, they both use seventh and ninth sonorities with folk-like melodies, giving them a distinctly “American” feel. At least for the Opus 20, “American” was exactly what Barber was aiming for. Barber once commented that he wrote *Excursions* to prove to his critics that he could indeed write American music, using
theme similar to the cowboy song “The Streets of Laredo” in the “Allegretto” movement (Example 10, previous page).¹⁰⁹

“A Slumber Song of the Madonna” (H-25)

Barber likely wrote “A Slumber Song of the Madonna” (H-25) in January of 1925, during the winter break of his junior year of high school (his first year at Curtis). He had no doubt been exposed to some world-class music during that school year while on his weekly trips into Philadelphia, and in his new piano studies with George Boyle, a conservatory-level instructor. It seems to display a successful level of characterization and text-setting not shown in his early compositional output. No other early song of Samuel Barber reaches the emotional profundity that he achieves in this two-minute, heart-wrenching lullaby. Here, at the age of fourteen, Barber shows that he can capture an intense emotion and magnify it through his music, a skill that launched him to worldwide success. He would eventually master and exploit this skill in his most beloved mature works, demonstrating tragedy and sadness in Adagio for Strings (Op. 11) and First Essay for Orchestra (Op. 12), and blissful recollection in Knoxville (Op. 24).

The text is by Alfred Noyes, found in Forty Singing Seamen and Other Poems as the first poem in a beautifully crafted seven-poem cycle entitled Slumber Songs of the Madonna, written in 1907.

Sleep, little baby, I love thee.
Sleep, little king, I am bending above thee.
How should I know what to sing
Here in my arms as I swing [sing] thee to sleep?
Hushaby low,
Rockaby so,
Kings may have wonderful jewels to bring,
Mother has only a kiss for her king!
Why should my singing so make me to weep?
Only I know that I love thee, I love thee,

¹⁰⁹ Heyman, A Thematic Catalogue, 255.
Love thee, my little one, sleep.\footnote{110} 

Barber truly seems to capture the essence of this poem. He sets it as a triple-metered lullaby with a simple, soothing melody and accompaniment characterized by repeated notes. The song begins with initial instructions for both performers to play and sing piano and \textit{peacefully but never lightly}. The form is modified strophic and begins with a mysteriously intimate four-measure introduction with only the right hand of the piano, starting in F minor and progressing to the major dominant C, yet lacking the fullness of the fifth of the chord. The progression descends while holding on to the C in the top voice of the piano throughout, setting up a sort of reciting tone when the voice enters on that same C. When the voice enters, the piano repeats the same progression from the introduction, this time with added bass chords. The harmony of measure 8 changes to the mediant, rather than the dominant, allowing the vocal line to sequence the melody down a third, over a tender suspension in measure 9. The song swells in measure 15, offering the first glimpse of Mary overcome by her own emotions. Mary regains her composure and returns delicately to her song in measure 17, but this time the A♭ tonality (rather than the opening F minor) gives the melody a more secure, less mysterious feel. The first verse closes with a “bluesy,” altered-diminished cadence in A♭ over an A♭ pedal in measure 23.

Barber’s use of altered chords over a pedal is something that is seen often in his early works, such as in the opening of “My Fairyand” (Example 7) and in the last bars of “Thy Will Be Done” (Example 3). In measure 23, Barber uses a curious enharmonic spelling of what is essentially a vii\(^{o}4\#3\) over a pedal A♭ (Example 11, next page).\footnote{111}

\footnote{110 Alfred Noyes, \textit{Forty Singing Seamen, and Other Poems} (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1930), 148.}

\footnote{111 Barber struggled with the spelling of this chord between the early source, owned by Louise Homer, and the later fair copy source now at the Library of Congress. The chord seems to be an altered vii chord in the key of A♭, specifically vii\(^{o}4\#3\) over an A♭ pedal. Given that this chord can be spelled a variety of ways, Barber seemed to go with something easy to read. Later in the piece, he spells the same chord with a C# instead of a D♭.}
Example 11: “A Slumber Song of the Madonna” (H-25), mm. 22-26.

The second verse starts back in F minor with no introduction, this time marked louder with a slightly faster tempo. The first eight measures are identical to those of the first verse. In measure 33, Barber once again shifts the tone of Mary’s lullaby from a gentle song to her baby to an outward rush of personal love. This time, however, it is fully expressed. Here, Barber convincingly depicts an outpouring of emotion on the text “Why should my singing so make me to weep” with a *poco a poco crescendo* over four bars with ascending sixteenth notes outlining the chord progression in the bass. The phrase climaxes with a *fortissimo* E♭ on the word “weep,” the highest point of the song. A *subito pianissimo* entrance at measure 37 is marked to be sung *fervently* by the singer: “Only I know that I love thee, I love thee.” Here Barber takes the singer from exclamation of Mary’s emotions, back toward a tender love song to her young baby. The repetition of the text “I love thee” is beautifully emphasized by a descending minor seventh portamento in the vocal line and ascending rolled C♯ half-diminished chords, the same pedal-cadence chord that created the “bluesy” resolution to A♭ major at the end of the first verse. This time Barber spells the D♭ enharmonically as C♯ (Example 12, next page).

The chord lingers on a delicate pianissimo in the highest range yet for the piano, and the resulting effect is sustained through the subsequent bar of rest. An A♭ resolution is expected,
but Barber takes the song back to the F minor instead, as if Mary suddenly remembers the melody she was singing to her baby, reiterating the opening strains of the song in a short six measure tag.

Both “A Slumber Song” and “The Crucifixion” from *Hermit Songs* (Op. 29) deal with emotional responses of the Virgin Mary to her son. They also share other similarities. Both grow from utter simplicity and the sparest of textures into intense expressions of emotion: the former depicting love, and the latter, grief. Both begin and end with the material heard in the opening bars, and exhibit a uniquely mysterious and gripping tone in both accompaniment and vocal line.

Example 12: “A Slumber Song of the Madonna” (H-25), mm. 37-47.
Though the song is successful in its interpretation of the poetry, and elicits an emotional response through its inherent beauty, there is a clumsy youthfulness at times to some of the register leaps, enharmonic chord spellings, and voicing of the chords in the piano part. “A Slumber Song” was beloved by Louise Homer, who performed it, as well as several of Barber’s more substantial songs, on a recital tour. The song met with such great success that it was often repeated. In 1927, she also performed it with Barber at the organ rather than at the piano.

“La Nuit” (H-28)

“La nuit” (H-28) was composed in January 1925, around the same time as “A Slumber Song.” It is Barber’s earliest extant setting of French poetry, and it is a curious example of experimentation in his early output. French was the only non-English language that he set in his voice and piano songs, not including Joyce’s pseudo-Latin words in “Nuvoletta” (op. 45). Barber’s love of foreign languages can be seen from an early age. As mentioned in chapter 4, his language studies began in high school and continued throughout his years at Curtis. The curious nature of this song affords a window into Barber’s creative process at this stage of his development.

According to Heyman (and confirmed by this author) no biographical information has been found about the poet, Alfred Meurath. There are several peculiarities in the manuscript concerning the French text. The word douleur is misspelled doleur and several of the articles and prepositions are incorrect (la instead of du in line 4 and la instead of le in line 8). These

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113 Heyman, *A Thematic Catalogue*, 44.
114 In the manuscript, Barber penciled in two other words: abyssse under the word l’abime, which is missing the usual circumflex over the i, and a faded, penciled-in word under the word ronge, which appears to read “surround” in English. It appears to be in Barber’s script, but does not have the italic slant of the French text. The penciled-in words cannot be alternates, as they would ruin the rhyme scheme (songe/ronge, abîme/sublime), and in the case of “surround,” the scansion and consistency of language would be disrupted. These words are likely
mistakes, and the lack of biographical material for Alfred Meurath, may suggest that Barber himself wrote the poem under the pseudonym of Meurath. Barber was known for his excellent creative writing; he won multiple awards for essays in high school, and wrote his class’ poem. He would likely have been proficient enough in both French and its literature and idioms to write this poem. Of course this poet may have existed, despite failed attempts to locate information about him. Or perhaps a colleague of Barber’s at Curtis or West Chester High School composed the poem under the pseudonym.

La nuit c’est l’heure du songe
Des rêves, et de l’amour.
De la doleur [sic] qui nous ronge,
Et la fin de maux de la [sic] jour,
La nuit c’est le noir et l’ombre,
C’est l’heure du doux repos,
Pour l’homme qui dort dans l’ombre,
Les paupières et la [sic] coeur clos.
La nuit c’est le grand silence,
La solitude et l’ennui;
Troubles en notre conscience,
Car elle songe la nuit.
Et songe a de tristes choses,
Car la dans l’ombre est l’abîme [sic]!
Heureux, l’homme qui repose
Et dort dans la nuit sublime!

The night is the time of reverie,
Of dreams, and of love,
Of the pain that eats at us,
And the end of the ills of the day.
The night is black and shadow
It is the time for sweet repose,
For the man who sleeps in the shade
The eyelids and the heart closed.
The night is the great silence
The loneliness and boredom;
Troubles in our conscience,
Because it thinks in the night.
And think of sad things,
For there in the dark is an abyss!
Blessed is the man who rests
And sleeps in the night sublime.

In “La nuit,” Barber most often does not set the final French mute e in the typical manner of French mélodies, which is to give them their own syllable and pitch. In his next French setting, “Au clair de la lune” (H-35), composed for Deem Taylor’s class the following year, and in his later Mélodies passagères (Op. 27), he sets the mute e in a typical lyric French manner. In

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115 Heyman, Samuel Barber, 32.
“La nuit,” *songe, rêves, ronge*, etc. are all set as one-syllable words. Barber only sets the mute *e* the few times that it appears in plural nouns or adjectives such as *troubles* and *tristes*. As to why he chose to set these words in such a fashion, perhaps he desired the song to be sung in a more colloquial, conversational manner. Or he may have expected a trained singer to automatically add the schwa as a shadow vowel. Alternately, it is possible that the fourteen-year-old Barber was not entirely familiar with the traditions of sung lyric French, or that he was aware of other *mélodies* that do not set the mutes, such as Ravel’s *Histoires naturelles*. However, unlike Barber, Ravel most often set the mute *e* on its own note tied to the previous syllable.

Once again, Barber chooses the key of F minor. Melodically, the song expresses a great variety of styles and colors. The vocal melody, typically for Barber, conveys a somber and melancholy tone, achieved by exoticism and modalism typically found in impressionistic French *mélodies*. Lowered scale degrees, particularly the 2nd and the already diatonically lowered 6th, help to create this sense of modalism. Barber draws particular attention to the altered scale degrees by using leaps of sixths and sevenths, a melodic contour that shows his early interest in angular leaps for the voice.

The accompaniment to “La nuit” is peculiar and occasionally quirky, something seen in many of Barber’s early songs. The piano part begins with an open fifth, instantly establishing a quality of modal ambiguity until the voice enters on the minor third. The accompaniment in the opening and closing sections consists mostly of block chords in measure or half-measure harmonic motion. The melody is doubled in the A-section, as well as when the material returns in measure 31. Snippets of a counter-melody occur in the second half of measure 1, and are transposed up a third in measure 35. Barber was flirting with this technique at that time, an approach that would develop into beautiful counterpoint during his study with Scalero.
The texture then changes in measure 11 to repeated eighth note block chords that sequence upward to G major for four measures, and return downward by circle of fifths, a motion he explores earlier in “Thy Will Be Done.” At first he uses altered secondary dominants in measure 11 and 13, (lowering the fifth and the third of the chord, creating a half-diminished sonority), extending the exotic sonorities already in play. The sequence reverses as the harmonies normalize, reverting to traditional secondary dominants rather than altered ones, in measure 15 and 17. These sonorities resolve to their respective chords through the circle of fifths. Barber then cadences with a double deception. One expects a resolution to A♭ major (the relative major), after the E♭ dominant seventh chord in measure 18, a continuation of the circle of fifths progression. Barber decides to cadence in G, altering the E♭ dominant seventh chord gradually into a French augmented sixth chord, perhaps as an homage to the language of the poem. Barber resolves the chord directly and jarringly to G major, completely skipping the expected dominant D major (Example 13, next page). It is unclear if Barber intended this resolution to be deceptive, knowing what the proper resolution of the chord should be, but chose not to resolve it as expected. It is possible, as suggested earlier in the commentary on “Little Children of the Wind,” that Barber was more interested in the color than he was in the chord’s functionality as a predominant or a pivot chord.

Either way, it seems to be an example of a young composer attempting to challenge traditional harmony without fully destroying its functionality, a characteristic that would remain an important aspect of Barber’s compositional style. The manuscript shows that Barber later changed his mind about this transition. He crossed it out lightly in pencil, and changed the treatment of the E♭ dominant seventh chord by resolving it as a ♭II7 of V in G minor, the key of the quasi-recitative section that follows.
Measure 20 is marked quasi recitative [sic] e con dolore. The recitative style is something that Barber uses fairly often throughout his vocal output, as heard in the more conversational parts of his operas and in many songs, including “My Fairyland,” “Children of the Wind,” “St. Ita’s Vision” from the *Hermit Songs* (Op. 29), and “Solitary Hotel” from *Despite and Still* (Op. 41). This time, the recitative section is set sparsely with only a single bass note in the piano. In the transition back to the initial material, Barber adds a second voice at a perfect fifth, creating a series of blatant parallel fifths. Barber must have later changed his mind about this odd transition as it is crossed out in pencil in the manuscript (Example 14, next page) and replaced with an alternative C major chord which transitions back to F minor.\textsuperscript{117}

\textsuperscript{117} Barber, *65 Songs*. In the published edition, editor Richard Walters does acknowledge Barber’s penciled-in changes in the manuscript accompaniment. The song is published in its original form.
Example 14: “La nuit” (H-28), mm. 27-29, a penciled rejection of the parallel fifth transition in the Holograph, 1925 (Library of Congress).

At the *tempo primo*, Barber brings back the initial material, this time doubling the melody in the bass and adding high chords in the treble. Barber then uses the melodic leap of the major sixth and its downward chromatic resolution to sequence the melody up a major third before closing the song with a tender diminuendo motion to the resolution in the relative key of A♭ major.

“La nuit” reveals a nascent experimental and quirky side of Samuel Barber’s compositional voice. It remains a work of interest, and would be a charming addition to a program featuring songs composed in languages other than the composer’s primary language, or a program featuring music dealing with themes of night or solitude.

“Music, When Soft Voices Die” (H-32)

Barber’s exposure to the poetry of the British Isles was vast; it is no wonder that he chose to set one of Percy Bysshe Shelley’s most beloved poems, “To---,” most commonly referred to by its first line “Music, When Soft Voices Die.” This short but important work is one of the
most frequently set poems in English Romantic literature. It was first published by his wife, Mary Shelley, in a 1824 volume entitled *Posthumous Poems of Percy Bysshe Shelley*.\(^{118}\)

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Music, when soft voices die,
Vibrates in the memory;
Odours, when sweet violets sicken,
Live within the sense they quicken.

Rose leaves, when the rose is dead,
Are heap’d for the belovèd’s bed;
And so thy thoughts, when thou art gone,
Love itself shall slumber on.
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The Romantic subject matter and graceful counterpoint of rhyme and rhythm give the poem a natural lyrical quality. The poem consists of two quatrains with rhyming couplets (the first couplet only rhymes with the old pronunciation, or “eye rhyme”). Shelley uses death imagery with four subjects: a song, violets, roses, and a person. In each case, the memory of an object lives on, even after the object passes. The poem’s melancholy tone reflects Barber’s own personality, often described as melancholy, even from a very early age. This character trait shines through in much of his output.

This F major song is through-composed and short. Barber’s earliest version of “Music, When Soft Voices Die” is an untidy, quickly-penned, working manuscript located at the Chester County Historical Society. In this early version, he toys with a five-measure introduction in the key of C minor. In the later, fair copy manuscript (currently housed at the Library of Congress) he casts aside that idea, favoring a one-measure, syncopated chordal introduction. The music is sentimental in nature: simple, clear, gentle, and exhibiting beautiful voice leading. It is in the same vain as the Songs of Sidney Homer, particularly the song “Dearest” (Op. 24). Barber’s

harmonies grow into each other through passing tones and 9-8 and 4-3 suspensions in the accompaniment (Example 15), and once in the voice part at measure 9.


The harmonies are simple, with special attention paid to harmonies built on the supertonic (ii). The melody suits the meter of the poetry rather well, bringing emphasis to the important words and stressed syllables. Starting at measure 11, Barber writes an ascending scale from G to F♯, with some chromatic alterations in measures 12 and 13 that are certainly Homer-esque. The lower appoggiatura and rising chord inversions in measure 13 are particularly typical of the parlor music of the day, a gesture that today’s ears might find overly sentimental or
schmaltzy. The scale reverses at the high F of measure 14, marked *fortissimo*, and descends diatonically all the way down to the low F. Barber writes a passing minor plagal gesture over the V\(^7\) pedal beautifully coloring the word “slumber,” bringing the song to a peaceful close. Barber doesn’t say anything profound with this song, but does seem to capture a gentle beauty that matches the poem well. In his fair copy, Barber follows the F major song with a version transposed down to E\(\flat\).

“Fantasy in Purple” (H-34)

In the summer of 1925, before his second year at Curtis, Barber composed a handful of works, most of which are now available in posthumous publications by Schirmer. These include a solo organ piece, “To Longwood Gardens” (H-29), a character piece for piano, “Poison Ivy” (H-30-1), a possible song, “Main Street,”\(^ {119} \) a set of two songs titled, *Two Songs of Youth* (H-33), the song “Music When Soft Voices Die” (H-28) and, lastly, a setting of Langston Hughes’ poem, “Fantasy in Purple” (H-34).

Beat the drums of tragedy for me.
Beat the drums of tragedy and death.
And let the choir sing a stormy song
To drown the rattle of my dying breath.
Beat the drums of tragedy for me
And let the white violins whirl thin and slow,
But blow one blaring trumpet note of sun to go with me
To the darkness where I go.\(^ {120} \)

Barber either came across Langston Hughes’ poem soon after it was first published in the September 1925 issue of *Vanity Fair*, or through his acquaintance with West Chester State’s Professor Robert Kerlin. Kerlin, an advocate and compiler of African American Poetry, was a

\(^{119}\) “Main Street” has a piano part underneath an unmarked staff featuring a melodic line, likely intended for voice though no words are present.

judge in the 1926 literary contest sponsored by *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life*, an academic journal in which the poem “Fantasy in Purple” was later published.\(^{121}\) The literary contest was an important vehicle for the writers of The Harlem Renaissance in the 1920’s.\(^{122}\)

The speaker of the poem is pleading for a cacophony of sounds to usher him into death. Steven Carl Tracy, author of *A Historical Guide to Langston Hughes*, remarks, “Hughes’s poetry during this period is youthfully romantic. In the elevated lyric “Fantasy in Purple,” the African drum of tragedy becomes a metaphor for humanism and survival.”\(^{123}\) Jahn Ramazani offers more in his book *Poetry of Mourning*, suggesting that the poem de-racializes death and comments on the nature of being.\(^{124}\) Ramazani points out the use of the extravagant color purple in the title, and the request for a large array of racially indeterminate sounds: drums, choir, violins, and trumpet. The request for the solitary trumpet seems a plea for at least one person to recognize the subject’s passage into death.

In this song, the young Barber endeavors to truly embody the poetry in his music, through obvious word painting and musical depictions of all the different instruments. The song is set for a medium-range voice, in the curious key of \(E_b\) minor. The majority of Barber’s early works show his preference for writing in flats. It begins with a far off, distant drum that he characterizes by rhythmic and accented *pianissimo* octave \(E_b\)’s in the lowest octaves of the piano (Example 16, next page).

\(^{121}\) Ibid., 55.  
Example 16: “Fantasy in Purple” (H-34), mm. 1-3, depicting Barber’s representation of drums.

The drums grow louder until the *forte* entrance of the voice over a ringing Eb minor chord in the piano. The “wailing” quality and repeated notes of the vocal line are reminiscent of mournful, minor-keyed Negro spirituals. The voice enters on the fifth of the chord with a tragic (literally marked *tragically*), bluesy minor third interval to the word “tragedy” as the piano strikes D♭ minor 7, a tribal-sounding chordal juxtaposition due to the parallel fifths. The seventh chord then resolves up to Eb minor in the same manner that it was approached. Next, Barber descends chromatically in the lower two voices of the piano chords, counterpointed by a descending sequence of minor thirds in the vocal line, and is doubled by the top voice of the piano, realizing major and minor passing sonorities. This gesture is similar to the opening piano motive of “Solitary Hotel” (Op.41, No.4) (although in this case, the chromatic line is created by interplay between the inner voices and is not present in the bass line) (Example 17, next page).

Barber colors the choir’s “stormy song” with pulsating bass-clef chords in the right hand, over ringing pedals in the lowest octaves. He writes a three measure piano interlude, which includes a rather odd, insistently pulsing F♭ major chord (F♭, A♭, C♭) over octave Eb’s in the
bass. The F♭ major chord resolves to an augmented B♭ dominant 9 chord, which cadences back to E♭ minor in measure 14.

Example 17: “Fantasy in Purple” (H-34), mm. 4-6 (top) and “Solitary Hotel” (Op. 41, No. 4), mm. 1-2 (bottom).

The opening progression returns yet again as the voice repeats “Beat the drums of tragedy for me,” this time marked fff with grace-note flourishes from the lowest octaves of the keyboard to high, widely spaced chords, a phrase that traverses most of the keyboard in a melodramatic flourish (Example 18, next page).
Barber depicts the “white violins” *subito piano*, with descending arpeggio chords that start with four thirty-second notes in the right hand, down to triplet sixteenths in the left (Example 19, next page). The voice outlines a diminished seventh chord up to the *ppp* on the word “slow.” The piano writing in measure 18 is characteristic of his more mature works, with odd intervals and mixed modes featuring a rhythmical slowing of the violins from thirty-second notes to sixteenth-note triplets, to eighth-note triplets, then finally to eighth-notes. Now Barber allows the sun to come out with a major-chord statement of the opening motive before the trumpets sound their fanfare *con forza* on a C♭ major chord in the piano part of measure 20 (Example 20, next page). Barber sounds the initial vocal line again to close the song, this time on a low E♭ before the song cadences in A♭ major. The last statement of the voice demonstrates Barber’s inclination, as in “A Slumber Song of the Madonna,” to bookend his songs with the same vocal motive (Example 20, next page).
Example 19 and 20: “Fantasy in Purple” (H-34), m. 17 and mm. 20-22, Barber’s depiction of violins (top) and trumpets (bottom).

It is easy to criticize the song as being too melodramatic, employing overtly predicable text painting. Nevertheless, it is an example of Barber’s progress, containing many compositional features that eventually become commonplace in his music: descriptive text painting in the piano part, enunciating text on repeated notes, plaintive chromatic harmonies, mixing of modes, and repeated use of a small motive—as in the vocal line’s opening minor third. Given Barber’s penchant for melancholy and the minor mode, the minor third interval itself is frequent in his melodic lines. Barber also uses this minor third much to the same effect in the
opening melody of “The Queen’s Face on the Summery Coin” (Op. 18, No. 1) as he does in “Fantasy in Purple.” In many cases he uses the minor third to depict loneliness or solitude, such as in “Sleep Now” (Op. 10, No. 2), “Solitary Hotel” (Op. 41, No. 4), “The Desire for Hermitage” (Op. 29, No. 10), and in the quasi recitative section of “La nuit” (H-28).
CHAPTER 7

SELECTED SONG COMPOSITIONS AT CURTIS (1926-1928)

Barber started his composition studies with Scalero at Curtis in the fall of 1925. It is important to remember that Scalero did not approve of his beginner students composing on their own, so it is likely that Barber never brought his personal, non-assigned compositions to Scalero. If he did, they were likely turned away. Scalero did not mention any compositions previous to 1928 on Barber’s student evaluation, and it is likely that he did not deem him ready to compose until the 1928-29 school year, when Barber’s *Prelude and Fugue for Organ* (H-53) and *Sonata for Violin and Piano* (H-57) were played at official Curtis recitals.\(^{125}\) In the song compositions from 1925-1928, Scalero’s influence on Barber is difficult to measure, but his technical maturation is evident. It is likely that the first song to which Scalero paid any attention was “The Shepherd to His Love and the Nymph’s Reply” (H-56). Heyman mentions H-56 was “…an assignment from Scalero to demonstrate a-b form in major and minor mode.”\(^{126}\) All of Barber’s other song compositions from this time served as a creative outlet, as he was often frustrated by the tedious nature of his compositional exercises with Scalero. Songs were a way for Barber to combine his love for poetry with his love for music, and a chance to create without the heavy and critical restraints of his master. However, Barber wasn’t treading water. Whether he knew it or not, the skills imparted by Scalero were finding their way into his songs, and he was learning much through the experience of trial and error.

“Thy Love” (H-39)

During his first term with Scalero, not one song or piano piece exists until “Au clair de la lune” (H-35), written for Deems Taylor’s composition class, a class Barber dropped after only a

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\(^{125}\) The Curtis Institute, Faculty Records of Rosario Scalero.

\(^{126}\) Heyman, *A Thematic Catalogue*, 103.
few weeks. His song “Watchers” (H-38), beloved by his Aunt Louise, his school’s “Alma Mater” (H-37), and his song “Man” (H-38) were all composed during the opening months of 1926. “Thy Love” (H-39) was finished on April 7, just weeks before an April 25 “All-Barber” recital at the Barber residence on 107 South Church Street in West Chester. Many of Barber’s early songs had their premier that night, either by Gertrud K. Schmidt, soprano, or Lilian McD. Brinton, mezzo-soprano.

“Thy Love” is an adaptation of a sonnet by Elizabeth Barret Browning, poet and wife of the Victorian poet Robert Browning. It was published in 1950 as number fourteen in *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, the same collection that boasts the ever-famous sonnet “How do I love thee? Let me count the ways” (No. 43). The poems are deeply personal and mirror her growing relationship with Robert. She had them published under the guise of translations of Portuguese poems in order to refrain from airing her private affairs.127

If thou must [wouldst] love me, let it be for nought [naught]
Except for love's sake only. Do not say,
"I love her for her smile—her look—her way
Of speaking gently,—for a trick of thought
That falls in well with mine, and certes brought
A sense of pleasant ease on such a day"—
For these things in themselves, Beloved, may
Be changed, or change for thee— and love, so wrought,
May be unwrought so. Neither love me for
Thine own dear pity's wiping my cheeks dry:
A creature might forget to weep, who bore
Thy comfort long, and lose thy love thereby!
But love me for love's sake, that evermore
Thou mayst love on, through love's eternity.128

To suit his needs, Barber often changed his texts, but never so drastically as he does in this song. Barber’s version completely ceases to be a sonnet and was likely truncated out of the

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desire to expedite the delivery of the message of the poem, thus shortening the length of the song.

“Thy Love” clearly reflects a direct influence from the Romantic Lieder of the mid-19th century. Here Barber shows that he recognizes what makes a song “tick,” taking features that have made successful art songs cohesive and memorable and synthesizing them. This song features a syncopated piano part with counter-melodies between the phrases, reminiscent of "Intermezzo" from Robert Schumann’s Eichendorff Liederkreis (op. 39 no. 2) (Example 21).

The influence of Schumann can also be seen in the descending bass line and chord progression, which bears some resemblance to “Ich grolle nicht” from Dichterliebe (Op. 48, No. 7) (Example 22, next page). Whether Barber was directly influenced by these songs or not, it is clear from this composition that he had studied the songs of Schumann and his lieder-writing contemporaries, either on his own or with one of his teachers.

Example 21: “Intermezzo” from Schumann Liederkreis (Op. 39, No. 2), mm. 1-4;
Examples 22 and 23: “Ich grolle nicht” from Schumann’s *Dichterliebe* (Op. 48, No. 7), mm. 5-9 (top); and Barber’s “Thy Love” (H-39), mm. 1-6 (bottom).

After a one-measure syncopated introduction, the voice enters. The descending bass line begins in measure 2 on Eb, and works its way down by four whole steps every half note until
measure 4 where it changes to two half steps followed by a whole step (Example 23, previous page). The first two whole steps sound expected, and one might think that one was listening to a song by Schumann himself, but the third and fourth progressions crush that certainty. After a Schumann-esque counter-melody in measure 5, Barber sequences the descending whole tones and melody up a whole step, starting in F minor. The consequent phrase adjusts in measure 8 with a half step motion up to F and an octave leap between the syllables of the word “speaking,” with an Eb appoggiatura gesture down to D on the word “gently.”

Again, Barber fills the gap between vocal phrases with the countermelody, this time in octaves. Next, Barber takes the vocal line in a melody outlining descending half steps on each downbeat until the fermata in measure 13, with the greatest dissonance happening on the word “these” on the down beat of measure 10. There, Barber writes a bass C against a B minor chord. After the piano countermelody ends with a fermata in the voice, Barber brings back the musical material from measures 2 and 3, but moves only a half step to B♭ instead of B♭♭ in the second half of measure 15. This helps propel the phrase forward to a high point in measure 17 where Barber indicates “much slower.” The piano and voice move in contrary motion, with another tin pan ally finish in measure 18 toward the final cadence. The song also seems to share some similarities with Homer’s “Autumn” (Op. 10), notably the descending bass line and a few harmonic shifts, particularly the melodic focus towards the lowered 6th scale degree.

“An Earnest Suit to His Unkind Mistress Not to Forsake Him” (H-32 No.2)

The summer of 1926, immediately following Barber’s graduation from high school, proved productive for the young composer. He composed a short piano piece dedicated to a friend and neighbor of the Homers, “To Aunt Mamie on her Birthday” (H-40), his Three Essays
for solo piano (H-41), and a rather complex song for both singer and pianist, “Ask Me to Rest” (H-42). The fall of 1926 would also prove to be a very busy time for the new high-school graduate. He entered full-time classes at Curtis, added a new voice concentration, continued and intensified his studies with Scalero, and began work with his new piano teacher, Vengerova. Barber still managed to write two charming songs during that period, “An Earnest Suit to His Unkind Mistress Not to Forsake Him” and “Hey Nonny No!,” both in late November. Together with “Lady When I Behold the Roses,” composed February of the previous year, they make up his cycle *Three Songs: The Words from Old England* (H-43), dedicated to his Aunt Louise Homer.

“An Earnest Suit” is a setting of Tudor poet, Sir Thomas Wyatt. Wyatt was a diplomat and poet in the court of Henry VIII. He was rumored to be in love with Anne Boleyn and was arrested for allegedly having an affair with her.\(^{129}\) His literary achievements weren’t fully recognized until his works were published after his death.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{And wilt thou leave me thus!} \\
\text{Say nay, say nay, for shame!} \\
\text{--To save thee from the blame} \\
\text{Of all my grief and grame.} \\
\text{And wilt thou leave me thus?} \\
\text{Say nay! say nay!} \\
\text{And wilt thou leave me thus,} \\
\text{That [Who] hath loved thee so long} \\
\text{In wealth and woe among:} \\
\text{And is thy heart so strong} \\
\text{As for to leave me thus?} \\
\text{Say nay! say nay!} \\
\text{And wilt thou leave me thus,} \\
\text{That [who] hath given thee my heart} \\
\text{Never for to depart} \\
\text{Neither for pain nor smart:}
\end{align*}
\]

And wilt thou leave me thus?
Say nay! say nay!

And wilt thou leave me thus,
And have no more pitye [pity]
Of [On] him that loveth thee?
Alas, thy cruelty!
And wilt thou leave me thus?
Say nay! say nay!130

Barber makes only the few changes listed above to this poem. His setting matches the era of the poetry, written in the style of a Renaissance lute song. It also shows technical progress in Barber’s compositional skills, particularly in counterpoint, a result of his work with Scalero. Barber’s studies with Scalero included 16th century polyphony, possibly including part-songs by John Dowland, Thomas Campion, and their contemporaries. Elements of their music are present in this song, and it is evident that Barber is trying incorporate Renaissance gestures in order to match the time period and tone of the poetry.

The song is set in E minor with a three bar piano introduction. Again, Barber writes a descending ground bass line, an element frequently used in early music: A, G, F♯, E, D♯, C♯, B, repeating it a total of three times (Example 24, page 90). On the third repeat, the E is omitted, the voice line takes the D♯, and the C♯ is lowered to C♮. The tempo picks up for the second stanza, which Barber writes in 6/4 with a walking bass line joined by a doubled voice line in parallel tenths with the bass, and an added third line of counterpoint between the two, very much like the writing of a Dowland lute song.

At measure 17, the bass and melody now work in contrary motion toward the fermata, with the third voice filling in. Barber then writes an almost faux-bourdon, four-part texture with parallel thirds and sixths in the right hand. Contrary motion once again leads the vocal line, with

supporting parallel harmonic motion in the bass line, toward the fermata in measure 19. Barber seems to take extra precautions in his part writing in order to avoid errors, as if practicing his new techniques. The third stanza is set in an attractive, loosely imitative canon reminiscent of Renaissance lute music, starting with the voice, followed by the right hand of the piano, and then the left (Example 25, next page). The 6/8 meter is offset by the text underlay in measures 24 and 25, and also by the 3/4 groupings in measure 24. The fourth stanza begins with the initial melody, now starting in the piano at measure 33 with the descending bass line from the first stanza. Barber indicates that the melody be well marked in the piano. The vocal line follows a small counter-melody. In measure 41, a four-bar piano interlude starts with a descending ground bass pattern; this time Barber varies it with a D♭ and a C♯. The voice sings its last “And wilt thou leave me thus” with the final D♭ on “thus,” clashing sharply with the D♯ in the piano. Barber writes yet another melodramatic ending, with the fff to pp dimnuendo as the voice repeats “say nay” three times, descending the distance of a major eleventh from the top to the bottom of the staff.

Barber was proud of this composition, writing in his 16 November 1926 diary entry that it was “…much to [his] satisfaction.”131 The song allowed Barber to flex his technical muscles, while letting his personality shine through with several interesting intervals and voice leadings. “Lady, when I behold the roses,” the first song of the cycle, is a simple, brief song set quasi recitativo, characterized by sustained block chords in the piano and descending thirds in the vocal line. “Hey Nonny No!” is a light, cheerful ending to the set, to be sung “with boisterous good-humor.” It features a very active piano part, perhaps to show off Barber’s growing piano technique.

131 Heyman, A Thematic Catalogue, 70.
Example 24: “An Earnest Suit to His Unkind Mistress Not to Forsake Him” (H-32, No. 2), mm. 1-8, featuring a descending ground bass starting at measure 4.

Example 25: “An Earnest Suit to His Unkind Mistress Not to Forsake Him” (H-32, No. 2), mm. 21-27, featuring three part imitative counterpoint.
Barber’s 12 February 1927 dairy entry states: “Wrote my new song ‘Mother, I Cannot Mind My Wheel’ in a grand rush – the melody in less than 5 minutes and the acc. in a half hour.” The poem is by Walter Savage Landor.

Mother, I cannot mind my wheel;  
My fingers ache, my lips are dry:  
O, if you felt the pain I feel!  
But O, who ever felt as I?

No longer could I doubt him true—  
All other men may use deceit;  
He always said my eyes were blue,  
And often swore my lips were sweet.

Landor based the poem on a short text by Sappho, a Greek lyric poet who lived circa 600 BCE. Though most of Sappho’s poetry is lost, many fragments still exist, including the fragment number 90 in the ionic a minore meter:

\[
\begin{align*}
\gamma\lambda\upsilon\kappa\iota\alpha\;\mu\alpha\tau\epsilon\rho, & \; \omicron\sigma\tau\iota\iota \; \delta\upsilon\nu\mu\alpha\mu\alpha \; \kappa\rho\acute{\epsilon}\kappa\eta\nu \; \tau\omicron\iota \; \iota\sigma\omicron\nu \; \\
\pi\omicron\theta\omicron\; \delta\acute{\mu}m\iota\sigma\sigma\alpha \; \pi\acute{i}d\delta\omicron \; \beta\rho\acute{\alpha}\acute{\iota}n \; \acute{d}i \; \acute{\alpha}f\acute{r}o\acute{d}\acute{\iota}t\acute{a}n
\end{align*}
\]

Sweet Mother, I cannot weave my web, broken as I am by longing for a boy, at soft Aphrodite's will.

Landor initially published the first stanza in 1806 as a lone epitaph translation in *Simonedia*, his collection based on lyric Greek poetry. The rest of the poem was published in 1846. The fact that Barber set this poem in a modal manner suggests that Barber was aware

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134 It is interesting to note that Barber sets his song in A minor as well.
137 Dyke and Craig, 273.
that Landon’s poem was based on a Sappho fragment. Barber never took Greek, but surely was exposed to ancient Greek poetry in his various literature classes.

That Barber should finish this song so quickly is no surprise. He created an ostinato and simple melody and adjusted them to work together. The haunting ostinato is this song’s most impressive feature, possibly inspired by Schubert’s “Gretchen am Sprinnrade” (Op. 2, D.118). This ostinato simultaneously harkens back to ancient Greek modes and serves as a powerful device to create a sad, bleak tone while depicting the constant spinning of the spinning wheel (Example 26, next page).

The lack of the third scale degree in the ostinato (the note that determines whether the mode is major or minor) truly gives the piece an ancient, modal feel. Other interesting features of the ostinato include the pattern’s initial half step from the fifth to sixth scale degrees, the use of alternation between single notes and dyads (augmented fourths, perfect fourths, and perfect fifths), and the leaps that are created to achieve them. These characteristics foreshadow Barber’s later compositional choices when he tries to evoke antiquity. He uses these types of ostinatos and accompanying figures often, particularly in his Hermit Songs (Examples 27-30).

Example 26: “Mother, I Cannot Mind My Wheel” (H-44), mm. 1-4
Examples 27, and 28: Barber’s *Hermit Songs* (Op. 29) “At St. Patrick’s Purgatory” (No.1), mm. 1-3 (above); and “The Heavenly Banquet” (No. 4), mm. 1-3 (below); showing ostinato and ostinato-like accompanying figures.
Examples 29 and 30: Barber’s *Hermit Songs* (Op. 29), “Sea Snatch” (No. 6), mm. 1-5 (above); and “The Desire for Hermitage” (No. 10) mm. 19-21 (below), showing ostinato and ostinato-like accompanying figures.

The ostinato occurs continuously, adjusting to fit the harmonies implied by the vocal line, and is set over a repetitive A-pedal in the bass that does not change until measure 31 on the word “deceit.” The unaccompanied section in measures 37 to 41 creates a haunting effect, allowing the exposed singer great freedom of expression within the descending Phrygian scale, again highlighting the half step between the E and F at the end of the scale. The piece ends with the open fifth, another compositional feature Barber often uses in *Hermit Songs* to give them an
ancient feel. The minimalistic and modal nature of this song makes it stand apart from the rest of Barber’s early output, but clearly points forward to Barber’s later works.

The Lost Songs (H-50b and H-51 a-f), “The Daisies” (H-52), and “With Rue My Heart is Laden” (H-55)

(Op. 2. Nos. 1 and 2)

During the spring term of 1927, Barber composed many exercises for Scalero including rounds, chorale preludes, fugues, and cannons. Most of these survive today, a testament to Barber’s achievements under Scalero’s tutelage. During that summer, Barber was hired with three other Curtis students to supply musical entertainment to a club in Rogers Rock, New York, on the north end of Lake George, close to the Homers’ home at Bolton Landing. Barber also enjoyed the benefit of spending more time than usual with his aunt and uncle.

Barber wrote many songs that summer, several of them sung by his aunt. Unfortunately, eight of these songs remain lost. In Barber’s Thematic Catalogue, Heyman categorizes these lost songs as H-50b and H-51 a through f: “When I am Dead My Dearest,” on a poem by Christina Rossetti, and “Dance,” “An Evening Falls,” “The Piper,” “Shame,” “The Watcher,” “The End of the Road,” and one more setting of unknown title, all on poems by James Stephens. That summer, Barber also composed the earliest version of “The Daisies” (Op 2. No. 1, H-52), his first published song, again a James Stephens setting. A diary entry mentions that Barber was also working on a Housman setting that summer, likely an early version of “With Rue My Heart is Laden” (Op. 2 No. 2, H-55), which Barber doesn’t date as completed until January 25, 1927.

The early version of “The Daisies” contains several variances, including a shortened chordal introduction (rather than scalar) and some whole-tone descending tenths in measures 6-9

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138 Homer set songs by both of these poets and may have introduced them to Barber.
139 Heyman, A Thematic Catalogue, 100.
and 14-15. Barber used a descending whole tone scale in “Thy love,” and in the first three descending tones of the “An Earnest Suit” ground bass line. The parallel whole-tone movement, though more in line with some of the quirky traits of Barber’s earlier songs, truly changes the feel of “The Daisies,” and may seem out of place, especially if one is familiar with the published version of 1936. Heyman suggests that Barber likely changed the whole tone motion to diatonic motion upon the suggestion of Scalero, who, at the request of Barber, gave the song a final review before its publication.  

“There’s Nae Lark” (H-54)

On 27 October 1927, Barber wrote one of the last songs that remain from his teenage years: “There’s nae Lark” (H-34), a beautifully crafted setting of a sincere lyric by Algernon Charles Swinburne.

There's nae lark loves the lift, my dear,  
There's nae ship loves the sea,  
There's nae bee loves the heather-bells,  
That loves as I love thee, my love,  
That loves as I love thee.

The whin shines fair upon the fell,  
The blithe broom on the lea:  
The muirside wind is merry at heart;  
It's a' for love of ['o] thee, my love,  
It's a' for love of ['o] thee.  

The poem is a song from Swinburne’s play *The Sisters: a tragedy*, and is sung by Mabel, one of the sisters. The play was published in 1892, and the poem was later published separately under the title “A Lyric.” G. Schirmer’s editions of this song incorrectly substitute the words “light” and “hills” for Barber’s original “lift” and “bells,” perhaps a misreading of Barber’s

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140 Ibid., 97.
manuscript. Both “lift” and bells” are found in all published editions of the poem and Barber’s own manuscript.

In this song, Barber composes a lovely melody full of tenderness and sincerity that matches the poem extremely well. Barber sets the song strophically, with a small introduction and interlude between the two verses. The piano part features another ostinato-type pattern consisting of a descending broken chord followed by a large leap to a non-chord tone that resolves downward. The effect created causes the higher notes to ring out like a birdcall (Example 31).

Example 31: “There’s Nae Lark” (H-54), mm. 1-4.

The harmonies are conventional, and the melody is characterized by long suspensions and beautifully prepared large ascending leaps (of a minor ninth, an octave, or a major sixth). The interlude mimics a shortened version of the initial melody. The piano part of the second verse, which is marked un poco più mosso plays the same basic part, but Barber initially voices it up an octave, with occasional dips down to the original range. In measure 25, where the first verse leaps up a major sixth, the second verse jumps up a full octave on the word “thee,” leaping
back down a tenth on “my love” (Example 29). These upper register leaps must be approached with tenderness in order not to disturb the mood. In general, the song shows a restraint and discipline in Barber’s compositional language, likely resulting from his work with Scalero. It is a safer, more conservative song than the ones that precede it, but it exhibits a certain elegance that is unmatched.

Example 32: “There’s Nae Lark” (H-54), mm. 24-25, featuring a descending 10\textsuperscript{th} leap down in the vocal line.
CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

Though the fruits of Barber’s compositional studies with Scalero are more recognizable in his mature songs, it can be seen that Scalero directed Barber down a specific tonal path early on, predisposing him to explore modern harmony through the eyes of the ages. This was partly due to Scalero’s high regard for the mastery of counterpoint. It is also interesting to note that when Scalero finally deemed Barber ready to compose, Barber’s song output diminished greatly. In January of 1928, Barber put some finishing touches on “With Rue My Heart is Laden,” and wrote one song-form assignment for Scalero “The Shepherd to his Love and the Nymph’s Reply” (H-56) in February. After that, however, there are no existing songs for solo piano and voice until “Serenader” (H-70) in 1934. A few sketches and ideas exist in his sketchbook, but Barber worked primarily on larger forms, including orchestral works, a piano concerto (now destroyed), chamber works (including Dover Beach, Op. 3), sonatas, and several choral pieces.

At this point, Barber’s song-composing skills were incubating while he progressed technically in other genres. Though Barber didn’t write any songs during this period, his technical advances in composition would later manifest in the songs written after his work with Scalero. The world is fortunate that Barber returned to his first calling as a song crafter. Barber composed more than forty additional songs after his graduation from Curtis, most of which were published during his lifetime and are known and loved today as prime examples of superior American song literature.

In the art of song composition, Samuel Barber was the perfect storm. He spent years studying under superb instruction and became adept at piano, singing, composition, literature, and languages. It is interesting to follow these threads in light of the developments in his song-
writing style. In Barber’s mature works, a little spark of that eager, experimenting child-composer still shows itself, and now that Barber’s early development has been laid out, perhaps more similarities will come to light.

As Barber grew as a musician and scholar his song compositions gradually became less awkward. He eagerly absorbed everything that would improve him as a musician and composer, and his songs grew in elegance and profundity. Sidney Homer’s influence is strongest in the earliest songs, when Barber had fewer influences in his life. The effects of his study with Green, Boyle, and Vengerova can be seen in the maturation of the piano writing and growth of his musicality. Emilio De Gogorza’s influence may be seen in Barber’s assimilation of vocal repertoire and technique. Barber’s literary studies refined his taste and understanding of poetry, which would affect all of his future song settings. Lastly, Rosario Scalero’s exacting pedagogy would technically transform Barber’s song composition, not only during his years of study with Scalero (1925-1933) but also in the songs that followed that study.

With the advent of G. Schirmer’s posthumous publications, Barber’s extant song compositions from 1924 to 1928, including eight songs not discussed above, are now easily accessible. Although the artistic merit of these juvenile songs varies quite a bit, they are all perfectly suitable for didactic use in voice studios for students of all levels. Some will be found to be more successful in performance than others, particularly those that received multiple performances during Barber’s lifetime. The historical analysis and commentary provided in this document offer insight into the contextualization of Barber’s entire output and should prove to be a valuable resource for performers and admirers of his music. In the realm of Barber studies, there are many areas that warrant future research. Further exploration of the early songs from
Barber’s youth (those not discussed here), as well as a foray into his composition assignments and instrumental juvenilia would be merited.\textsuperscript{142}

It is easy to say that Barber was affected by his external influences. Everyone is. In Barber’s case, the juvenilia reveal progress that can be understood logically within the context of his educational experiences, progress that might not be measurable otherwise. This study argues that his juvenile compositions are more than mere curiosities. These early songs can be seen as waypoints on Barber’s journey to compositional maturity. They display his natural inclinations, his self-determination, his growth through trial and error, and the slow flowering of a musical vision, meticulously cultivated by the educational opportunities provided to him by his family and his many devoted mentors.

\textsuperscript{142} Heyman, \textit{A Thematic Catalogue}. All catalogued songs and instrumental works, including those not discussed in this dissertation are listed in the appendix, and are further discussed in Heyman’s \textit{A Thematic Catalogue}. 
APPENDIX

COMPLETE LIST OF THE EARLY SOLO SONGS OF SAMUEL BARBER
APPENDIX

COMPLETE LIST OF THE EARLY SOLO SONGS OF SAMUEL BARBER

Unpublished Songs (1907-1924)\(^{143}\)

   Words by Eugene Field
   Key: B♭ major

H-4. “Why Not?” (composed 1917)
   Words by Kitty Parsons
   Key: F major

   Words by Eugene Field
   Key: G minor

H-11a. “Thy Will Be Done” (composed 1924)
   Text anonymous, Compiled by Anson D.F. Randolph
   Key: F major

   Text is Anonymous, Compiled by Anson D.F. Randolph
   Key: C major

      (composed ca. 1918-1922)
   Words for Nursery rhymes, anonymous; “The Rockaby Lady,” by Eugene Field; “Two Old Men” by Edward Lear
   High Key: optional high keys are listed in pencil under the titles
   Low Key: Various
   a. “Jack and Jill”
   b. “God Bless You! (Christmas is Coming)”
   c. “I Love Little Pussy”
   d. “Old Man from Jamaica”
   e. “Tom, Tom the Piper’s Sons”
   f. “Rockaby Lady”
   g. “I Do Not Like Thee, Dr. Fell”

H-14. “Prayer” (composed 28 June 1921)
   Words anonymous

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\(^{143}\) The information provided is taken from the manuscript sources, Heyman’s *A Thematic Catalogue*, and the G. Schirmer editions of Barber’s published vocal music. The locations of these manuscripts are noted in *A Thematic Catalogue*.
Key: C major

Words by Charles Kingsley
Key: G major

H-16. “Hunting Song” (composed ca. 1921)
Words by John Bennett
Key: E♭ major

Words by Robert T. Kerlin
Key: F major

Words by the composer
Key: E♭ major

Words dictated to composer by a White Mountain Guide
Key: D♭ major

Posthumously Published Songs from the Curtis Years

H-23. Two Poems of the Wind

1. “Little Children of the Wind” (composed 13 October 1924, published 2010)
Words by Fiona Macleod (William Sharp)
Key: E♭ major

2. “Longing” (composed 16 October 1924, published 2010)
Words by Fiona Macleod (William Sharp)
High key: G♭ major (original key)
Low key: E♭ major

H-25. “A Slumber Song of the Madonna” (composed January 1925, Published 1994)
Words by Alfred Noyes
Key: F minor/Ab major

144 All songs are published by G. Schirmer, Inc. unless otherwise noted. If they exist in high and low versions, the original key is notated.
H-28. “La nuit” (composed January 1925, Published 2010)
   Words by Alfred Meurath
   High key: F minor/A♭ major (original key)
   Low key: C♯ minor/E major

H-32. “Music, When Soft Voices Die” (composed August 1925,
   published 2010)
   Words by Percy Bysshe Shelley
   High key: F major (original key)
   Low key: D major

H-33. Two Songs of Youth

   1. “Invocation to Youth” (composed August 1925, published 2010)
      Words by Laurence Binyon
      High key: D major
      Low key: C major (original key)

   2. “I Never Thought That Youth Would Go” (composed July 1925,
      published 2010)
      Words by Jessie B. Rittenhouse
      High key: G♭ major (original key)
      Low key: D major

H-34. “Fantasy in Purple” (composed 10 September 1925, published 2010)
   Words by Langston Hughes
   High key: F minor/B♭ major
   Low key: E♭ minor/ A♭ major (original key)

   Words anonymous (French folk song)
   High key: B major
   Low key: A major (original key)

   Words attributed to Dean Cornwell
   Key: A minor

H-37. “Alma Mater” (Published June 1926 in the West Chester High Year Book)
   Words anonymous
   Key: C major

H-38. “Man” (composed 1 April 1926, published 2010)
   Words by Humbert Wolfe
   High key: A minor (original key)
Low key: F♯ minor

Words by Elizabeth Barrett Browning
High key: E♭ major (original key)
Low key: C major

H-42. “Ask Me to Rest” (composed July 1926, published 2010)
Words by Edward Hicks Streeter Terry
High key: A minor (original key)
Low key: F♯ minor

H-43. Three Songs: The Words from Old England

1. “Lady, When I Behold the Roses” (composed February 1925, published 2010)
Words anonymous
High key: G major
Low key: E major (original key)

2. “An Earnest Suit to His Unkind Mistress Not to Forsake Him” (composed 16 November 1926, published 2010)
Words by Thomas Wyatt
High key: G minor
Low key: E minor (original key)

Words anonymous (16th century)
High key: D major
Low key: C major (original key)

H-44. “Mother, I Cannot Mind My Wheel” (composed 12 February 1927, published 2008)
Words by Walter Savage Landor
High key: A minor (original key)
Low key: F♯ minor

Words by James Stephens
High key: F major (original key)
Low key: D major

H-54. “There’s Nae Lark” (composed 29 October 1927, published 1994)
Words by Algernon Charles Swinburne
High key: G major
Low key: E♭ major (original key)

H-55. “With Rue My Heart is Laden” Op. 2. No. 2 (composed 30 June 1927; published in 1936)
Words by A.E. Housman
High key: D minor
Low key: B minor (original key)

H-56. The Shepherd to His Love and the Nymphs Reply (composed 16 February 1928; unpublished composition assignment)

1. “The Shepherd to His Love”
   Words by Christopher Marlowe
   Key: E major

2. “The Nymph’s Reply”
   Words by Sir Walter Raleigh
   Key: E minor

Missing Manuscripts

H-50a. “Only of Thee and Me” (composed 25 April 25 1927)
   Words by Louis Untermeyer

H-50b. “When I am Dead, My Dearest” (composed 12 June 1927)
   Words by Christina Rossetti

H-51. The Stephens Songs (composed Summer of 1927)
   Words by James Stephens
   a. “Dance”
   b. “An Evening Falls”
   c. “The Piper”
   d. “Shame”
   e. “The Watcher”
   f. “The End of the Road”
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Discography
