Search for the American Sound:

Samuel Barber’s

*Knoxville: Summer of 1915*

Op. 24

for Voice and Orchestra, with text by James Agee (“A Death in the Family”)

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Research Question:

How do existing definitions of American sound help us better understand Barber’s *Knoxville* [text by James Agee] as a key musical work that captures the distinct quality of the American life and experience?
Methods: Music Analysis and Historical Context

Music Analysis
- Defining “American Sound”
- Rhapsodic Episodes
- Structure of the Score

Historical Context
- Contextualizing the Score
- Nostalgia and Cultural Memory
- Understanding the Prose
Literature Review


American Sound

Copeland Americanism

- Jazzy polyrhythms and irregular meters
- The vigot and angularity of some melodies
- The lean and bare textures and the favored extremes of closely knit harmonies and widely spaced sonorities
- The distinctly brittle piano writing and brassy and percussive orchestrations

Rhapsody (genre)

- Freedom
- One movement work
- Episodic
- Free-flowing Structure
- Contrasting Tonality
- Sense of improvisation
Musical Analysis of *Knoxville: Summer of 1915*

Andante, un poco meno \( \frac{3}{8} \)

Fl. [1]

E. 1

Cl. \( \text{pp \ legato} \)

Harp \( \text{pp} \)

Vl. 1 [1]

Vl. II

It has become that time of evening when people sit on their porches,
Cultural and Historical Background of Knoxville: Summer of 1915
Conclusion

The compositional techniques found in *Knoxville: Summer of 1915*, paint a picture of a uniquely American life delivered through the lens of two men - one a musician, one a poet - of a time before the 20th Century thrust them into adulthood.

As we consider the musical motives that transcend throughout this work, I encourage you to Consider of a piece or song in which the sound, the text, and the historical context, evoke a nationalist view of an era or philosophy in American life.