Americanism in Knoxville: Summer of 1915

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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?
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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*

It has become that time of even-\*ing when people sit on their porches,
Cultural and Historical Background of *Knoxville: Summer of 1915*

Streetcar at Gay & Union in Knoxville, TN 1915

Slide 7
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.*