

Search for the American Sound:
Samuel Barber's
Knoxville: Summer of 1915

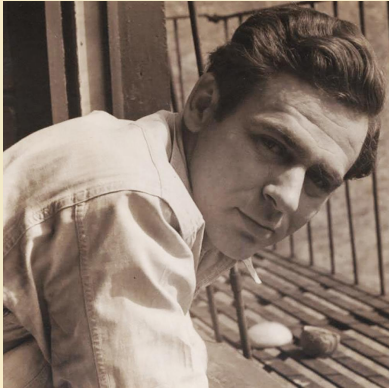
Op. 24
for Voice and Orchestra, with text by James Agee (“A Death in the Family”)



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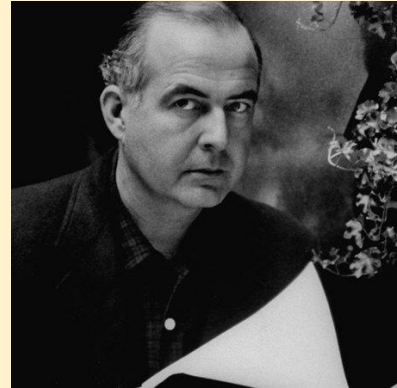
Research Question:

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?



James Agee

Slide 2



Samuel Barber

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

Agee, James. 2009. *A Death in The Family*. Edited by Steve Earle. London: Penguin Books.

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Barbara Docherty (1989) Syllogism and symbol: Britten, Tippett and English Text, *Contemporary Music Review*, 5:1, 37-63, DOI: [10.1080/07494468900640531](https://doi.org/10.1080/07494468900640531)

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Taylor, Benedict. "Nostalgia and Cultural Memory in Barber's Knoxville: Summer of 1915: JM JM." *The Journal of Musicology* 25, no. 3 (Summer, 2008): 211-229. doi:<http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.valpo.edu/10.1525/jm.2008.25.3.211>.
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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 mosso $\text{♩} = 58$

Fl. I **pp**

Cl. **pp** *legato*

Harp **pp**

Voice **p**

It has be-come that time of eve-ning when peo-ple sit on their por-ches,

Andante, un poco mosso $\text{♩} = 58$

VI. I **pp**

VI. II **pp**

Vla. **pp** *pizz.* **p**

Vcl. **pp** *pizz.* **p**

Bass **pp** *pizz.* **pp**

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.**