



AMERICAN CLASSICS



RANDALL THOMPSON

Symphony No. 2

Samuel Adams: **Drift and Providence**

Samuel Barber: **Symphony No. 1**

National Orchestral Institute Philharmonic • James Ross



Randall Thompson (1899-1984) • Samuel Adams (b. 1985) • Samuel Barber (1910-81)

Orchestral Works

Randall Thompson (1899-1984): Symphony No. 2 (1931)

Randall Thompson is widely known as one of the most-performed American composers of choral music. He is notable for writing works that are eminently approachable to audiences and choirs alike. But while he is famous with singers, Thompson is a name with which many orchestral musicians are unfamiliar. He has gone largely unnoticed in the symphonic and orchestral landscape despite the fact that he wrote three symphonies with many of the same stylistic traits of more famous works by Aaron Copland, Howard Hanson, and Roy Harris.

His *Second Symphony* is an excellent example of what the composer was capable of when not composing for voices. It is easy to make comparisons between the work and some of Aaron Copland's most "American" sounding works, such as *Billy the Kid*, *Appalachian Spring*, and his *Third Symphony*. But in fact, Thompson's work was finished before Copland entered that phase of his compositional career. The sound in this symphony is representative of American orchestral writing during the first half of the twentieth century, but it is perhaps time to consider the work not as one that follows in the footsteps of others, but instead as something at the forefront of a movement.

According to Thompson, the *Second Symphony* "is based on no program, either literary or spiritual. It is not cyclical," and thus stands in sharp contrast to the Barber symphony on this album. Instead, the composer set out "to write four contrasting movements, separate and distinct, which together should convey a sense of balance and completeness."

The work begins with a bright syncopated fanfare that has echoes of jazz, the musical style that American composers were quickly assimilating into their more traditional works at the time. By the time Thompson was composing this symphony, jazz was no longer a taboo or something to be kept in the confines of speakeasies, but rather a bright, vibrant American style that was a quick signifier of a work's national character.

The second movement is a lush *Largo* that sounds as if it could have been featured in 1931's Oscar-winner for best picture, *Cimarron*. It is music that is at once sweeping in its Romanticism and intimate in its scope and instrumentation. In the final cadence of the second movement, just as the orchestra is ready to move on, a horn quietly interjects a "blue" note that seems out of place in the C major chord. This B-flat is partially another nod to the jazz idiom, but also a functional pitch that leads the orchestra into the following scherzo.

This third movement begins in an irregular meter that lends it a stilted, off-kilter feeling. The finale begins and ends with two *Vivace* sections that bracket an *Allegro* featuring a variant of the theme heard at the beginning of the movement. The final *Vivace* simultaneously employs the entire orchestra for the first time in the movement and brings the work to a close with a long sustained assertion of the movement's main theme.

Samuel Adams (b. 1985): Drift and Providence (2012)

To hear *Drift and Providence* is to hear the Pacific Ocean. Composer Samuel Adams says of his process that he "took recordings of the Pacific Ocean, transformed them digitally, and transcribed them for a number of instruments that are able, through a variety of means, to imitate the sound." The result is a work that pushes the orchestra to its sonic limits in both a metaphorical and literal sense.

Drift and Providence is divided largely into three sections: *Embarcadero*, *Divisadero*, and *Providence*. Between these are two interstitial sections, called *Drift I* and *Drift II*. The names of the first two sections refer at once to places in San Francisco and also more general ideas embraced by those Spanish words. An *embarcadero* is a pier or a point of departure and *divisadero* is a dividing line or point. *Providence*, then, is the third signpost of the work, a desired destination.

Of *Drift and Providence*, Adams says that the depiction of water in the work is not meant to be impressionistic, as in Claude Debussy's *La Mer*, but instead "the work aims to bridge the noises of the contemporary world with the sounds of the ocean." To achieve this Adams must rely on live digital processing of the orchestra.

Adams notes that most orchestral music occurs in the frequencies found between 60 and 4,000 hertz. The ocean, on the other hand, tends to make noise in frequencies below 60 hertz and above 5,000. In order to recreate this on stage, the sound of the orchestra must be literally pushed beyond its normal limits through a combination of extended orchestral techniques and electronic processing provided by the composer at his laptop.

But Adams is quick to point out that while this is a work that incorporates electronic elements, it is a piece that is first and foremost about the live orchestra itself. His goal in writing *Drift and Providence* was to capture the sound and feeling of the ocean "without compromising what a fantastic orchestra can do."

"When someone sees that an orchestral work is incorporating electronic elements, there is this assumption that the electronics will play a prominent role in the sound of the piece," Adams says. "I'm not so much into that. I like to think of the electronics as just one part of a larger tapestry: absolutely essential, as every other voice in the ensemble, but not at its forefront."

Adams encourages listeners not to spend their time trying to find the electronic elements in the work, but instead to focus on the "persona of the piece." *Drift and Providence* provides several "long periods where nothing is happening," says Adams, "and they are so interesting, because psychoacoustically there is this anticipation." These moments, psychological troughs in the work, lead to larger formal crests that occur throughout the piece.

Robert Lintott

A note from the composer: Drift and Providence

Drift and Providence is scored for large orchestra and digitally filtered percussion. The form is in five parts played without pause. The odd-numbered movements suggest archetypal musical signposts: *Embarcadero*, a point of departure; *Divisadero*, a point of furthest distance; and *Providence*, a safe place. The even-numbered movements, entitled *Drift I* and *Drift II*, follow a series of shifting harmonies and gradual increases in energy.

The sound world of *Drift and Providence* consists of two main elements. The first is a complex cloud of noise coaxed by the percussionist's scraping of metallic instruments: cowbells, automobile brake drums and sizzle cymbals. From this texture a sound designer isolates, amplifies and processes overtones in real time that, recombined into the rest of the ensemble, create a digital glow. The other element is an acoustic orchestration with many layers of density and activity: fast on the surface, slow in its depths, but constantly shifting in harmony and color, never static.

I began work sketching the work in the summer of 2011 and completed the score in February of the following year, splitting my time between Oakland, California, and Brooklyn, New York.

Samuel Adams

Samuel Barber (b. 1910-81): Symphony No. 1 (1936)

When Samuel Barber premiered his *First Symphony* in Rome in 1936, he was just 26 years old. The work's reception was mixed at best. "After the performance, I went out onstage a couple of times," the composer said in an interview with James Fasset, "and was greeted by about 50 percent applause and 50 percent hissing. I remember standing in the wings wondering whether I was supposed to go out again, and the old doorman said, 'Better not – the hissers win!'"

Another patron, an elderly Italian princess, was less charitable than even the hissing half of the audience. "That young man should have been strangled at birth!" Barber overheard her say. But the reception wasn't all bad, with at least one musician thinking very highly of the work. Walking about backstage after the final rehearsal for the piece, the composer was approached by a tuba player in the orchestra. "Maestro, I've been waiting for a tuba part like that for fifteen years!"

It seems that conductors elsewhere agreed with Barber when he chalked up the derision to the fact that "Italian audiences are not used to hearing much new music, and they're not at all shy about showing their feelings." Fewer than six weeks after the symphony's premiere, it was given its American debut in Cleveland and in the next year became the first American work to be performed at the Salzburg Festival.

While on its surface the *First Symphony* breaks from tradition by being in one movement, that one movement is broken into four sections, and thus subtly adheres to the norm. The opening *Allegro ma non troppo* section introduces three themes: the main, a more lyrical second, and the closing. Barber develops these briefly, but manages to subvert symphonic standards by omitting the

traditional recapitulation. Instead, he makes the three themes the foundations of his next three sections.

The first theme gets turned into a lively scherzo in which bright, pulsating strings quietly mark the beginning of the section before they are joined by the winds in a playful back-and-forth. The section builds to a blistering climax of pounded dissonant chords that is seemingly rescued by a triumphant fanfare, only to see that fanfare descend into the depths of the brass section (perhaps it was this writing that the Italian tuba player so loved).

The second theme becomes an oboe solo over gently-rocking muted strings in the third section, the *Andante tranquillo* that provides a tranquil reprieve after the fury of the previous section. The oboe eventually yields to plaintive strings, who are eventually joined by the rest of the orchestra in a grand lament.

Finally, the third theme from the opening becomes the basis for a *passacaglia* played by the cellos and basses. Over this repeated figure, the rest of the orchestra plays music that weaves together all three themes and thus, if only in spirit, provides the audience the recapitulation that had hitherto been missing.

Robert Lintott

Samuel Adams



Samuel Adams (b. 1985 in San Francisco) is a composer of acoustic and electroacoustic music. Adams has received commissions from Carnegie Hall, the San Francisco Symphony, the New World Symphony, pianist Emanuel Ax and the St. Lawrence String Quartet. In 2015 Adams was named a Mead Composer-in-Residence with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra (CSO). During his tenure with the CSO, Adams will create new works for the orchestra and co-curate the CSO's critically acclaimed MusicNOW series. A committed educator, Adams frequently engages in projects with young musicians. Adams grew up in the San Francisco Bay Area, where he studied composition and electroacoustic music at Stanford University while also active as a contrabassist in San Francisco. Adams received a master's degree in composition from the Yale School of Music.

National Orchestral Institute Philharmonic

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Lauren Pulcifer
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Grace Hartman
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Jinhyun Kim
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Mark Serkin
Lucas Song
Magali Toy
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John DiCarlo
Patrick Fowler
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James Peterson
Sam Shreves
Alan Wang

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Evan Fojtik
Meera Gudipati
Hilary Jones

OBOE

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Russell Hoffman
Casey Kearney
Camilla Yoder

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Silvio Guitian
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Angelo Quail

BASSOON

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Brennan Moran
Cornelia Sommer
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HORN

Andrew Bass
Timothy Bedard
Corin Drouillard
Christopher Frick
Taylor Peterson
Lucy Smith

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Wyeth Aleksei
Alec Blazek
Samuel Huss
Michael Terrasi

TROMBONE

Daniel Coffman
Guangwei Fan

BASS TROMBONE

Lisa Stoneham

TUBA

J. Aidan Zimmermann

PERCUSSION

Michelle Cozzi
Brad Davis
Laurin Friedland
Karl Ronneburg
Nehemiah Russell
Alana Wiesing

HARP

Alix Raspe

ELECTRONICS*

Samuel Adams

ORCHESTRA MANAGER

Kyle Schick

**Drift and Providence only*

National Orchestral Institute Philharmonic



The National Orchestral Institute Philharmonic at the University of Maryland's Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center is formed each June from the musicians of the National Orchestral Institute. These musicians of extraordinary talent are chosen through rigorous international auditions and coalesce into one of the most dynamic orchestras in the country. Focused on creating future musicians and leaders in the world of orchestras, its alumni now occupy important positions in virtually every major symphony orchestra in the United States. More about the National Orchestral Institute Philharmonic can be found online at www.noi.umd.edu

James Ross



James Ross is presently Professor and Director of Orchestral Activities at the University of Maryland, Associate Director of The Juilliard School conducting program, and Orchestra Director of the National Youth Orchestra USA through Carnegie Hall. He is also Music Director Designate of the Orquesta Simfónica del Vallés in Spain. Ross has served as Music Director of the Yale Symphony Orchestra, as Assistant Conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, and as William Christie's assistant to Les Arts Florissants. Conducting appearances include the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, the Utah Symphony, the Chicago Civic Orchestra, the National Symphony Orchestra at the Kennedy Center, to name a few. His principal conducting teachers were Kurt Masur, Otto-Werner Mueller, Seiji Ozawa and Leonard Bernstein. James Ross has also appeared as horn soloist with many renowned orchestras in the United States and Europe. He was Artistic Director of the National Orchestral Institute (NOI) from 2002-12 during which time his leadership served as an impetus for change in the orchestral landscape of the United States.

Randall
THOMPSON
(1899-1984)

Symphony No. 2 in E minor (1931) 28:51

- | | |
|------------------------|------|
| 1 I. Allegro | 8:17 |
| 2 II. Largo | 4:09 |
| 3 III. Vivace | 6:57 |
| 4 IV. Andante moderato | 9:28 |

Samuel
ADAMS
(b. 1985)

Drift and Providence (2012)* 18:59

- | | |
|-------------------|------|
| 5 I. Embarcadero | 4:59 |
| 6 II. Drift I | 3:56 |
| 7 III. Divisadero | 6:35 |
| 8 IV. Drift II | 2:12 |
| 9 V. Providence | 1:17 |

Samuel
BARBER
(1910-1981)

Symphony No. 1, Op. 9 (1936) 22:02

- | | |
|----------------------------|------|
| 10 Allegro ma non troppo – | 7:51 |
| 11 Allegro molto – | 4:37 |
| 12 Andante tranquillo | 9:34 |

**National Orchestral
Institute Philharmonic**

James Ross

***Samuel Adams, Electronics**

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Booklet notes: Robert Lintott and Samuel Adams
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AMERICAN CLASSICS

The second Naxos recording by the elite conservatory students of the National Orchestral Institute Philharmonic explores further examples of the breadth of American music. Randall Thompson, famed for his vocal works, is represented by his *Symphony No. 2* which, with its syncopation and echoes of jazz, helped to establish a bright, vibrant American style. After an inauspicious debut, Samuel Barber's tautly cyclical *Symphony No. 1* became the first American symphonic piece to be performed at the Salzburg Festival. Samuel Adams offers a contemporary voice in *Drift and Providence*, which spectacularly captures the sound of the Pacific Ocean by incorporating electronic elements.

www.naxos.com

Playing
Time:
69:52