



Grant Park Music Festival

Seventy-fifth Season

Grant Park Orchestra and Chorus

Carlos Kalmar, *Principal Conductor*

Christopher Bell, *Chorus Director*

Seventh Program: American Music from the 1930's

Friday, June 26, 2009 at 6:30 p.m.

Saturday, June 27, 2009 at 7:30 p.m.

Harris Theater for Music and Dance

GRANT PARK ORCHESTRA

Carlos Kalmar, *Conductor*

Tim Samuelson, City of Chicago Cultural Historian, *Narrator*

BARBER Overture to *The School for Scandal*, Op. 5

SOWERBY *The Prairie*, A Poem for Orchestra after Carl Sandburg

STILL Afro-American Symphony (Symphony No. 1)

Longing: Moderato assai

Sorrow: Adagio

Humor: Animato

Aspiration: Lento, con risoluzione — Vivace

INTERMISSION

GERSHWIN Overture to *Of Thee I Sing*

CARPENTER *Sea Drift*, Symphonic Poem

AN HISTORICAL OVERVIEW BY TIM SAMUELSON,
CITY OF CHICAGO CULTURAL HISTORIAN

SCHUMAN American Festival Overture

CARLOS KALMAR's biography can be found on page B2.



TIM SAMUELSON, Cultural Historian for the City of Chicago, has been instrumental in celebrating and protecting Chicago's past for more than twenty-five years. He is highly regarded for his stewardship of the cultural and architectural history of the city at the Commission on Chicago Landmarks and the Chicago Historical Society. But Mr. Samuelson's work on behalf of Chicago's cultural treasures does not stop at his office door. He has volunteered his time to work on the restoration of such landmark structures as Union Station, Chess Records, and the Pilgrim Baptist Church. What's more, Mr. Samuelson

led the fight to save historic Bronzeville in the 1970's and pushed for its landmark designation. He continues to work with the Landmark Commission as an advocate for the preservation of buildings that represent diverse aspects of the city's cultural history. He possesses a wealth of knowledge about Chicago's neighborhoods, the people, the stores, the factories, the labor history. He loves to disperse this history by presenting Chicago Neighborhood Tours and by organizing exhibitions that portray subjects relating to popular culture and architecture in an accessible way. As he himself says, "The goal is to get people excited about history, especially those who never imagined they would be."

**OVERTURE TO *THE SCHOOL FOR SCANDAL*, OP. 5 (1931)****Samuel Barber (1910-1981)**

Barber's Overture calls for piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, celesta, harp and strings. The performance time is eight minutes. The Grant Park Orchestra first performed this work on August 15, 1948, Nicolai Malko conducting.

Barber's *School for Scandal* was not written for a particular production of Sheridan's play and does not attempt to portray its specific characters or actions, but rather conveys the comedy's sprightly nature. The *Overture* follows traditional sonata form. It opens with an arresting summons from the winds as prelude to the main theme, a wide-ranging melody, begun by violins, that accumulates energy as it unfolds. The solo oboe sings the haunting second subject above rich harmonies in the strings. An undulating theme from the clarinet closes the exposition. The brief development recalls the introductory gesture and the main theme before it reaches a climax of rushing scales in the strings. The recapitulation follows the events of the exposition, but the lovely second theme is here entrusted to the English horn.

PRAIRIE, A POEM FOR ORCHESTRA AFTER CARL SANDBURG**(1929)****Leo Sowerby (1895-1968)**

Prairie calls for piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, celesta and strings. The performance time is seventeen minutes. This is the work's first performance by the Grant Park Orchestra.



Composer, teacher and church musician Leo Sowerby was born in Grand Rapids, Michigan on May 1, 1895. By the time that his family moved to Chicago fourteen years later, he had shown genuine talent as a pianist and begun to compose and teach himself to play organ. In Chicago, he studied piano with Percy Grainger and theory with Arthur Olaf Andersen; the Chicago Symphony premiered his Violin Concerto No. 1 in 1913. Chicago Symphony premieres of the Piano Concerto and the Cello Concerto followed before Sowerby left to serve as a military bandmaster during World War I. He earned a degree from the American Conservatory soon after returning to Chicago following the war. In 1920, he became the first composer to be awarded an American Prix de Rome; he lived at the American Academy in Rome until 1924. Back in Chicago in 1925, Sowerby joined the faculty of the American Conservatory and two years later became organist and choirmaster of the Episcopal Cathedral of St. James. He served in both posts until 1962, when he moved to Washington, D.C. to become the founding director of the College of Church Musicians at the National Cathedral. Sowerby was honored with election to the National Institute of Arts and Letters in 1935 and a Pulitzer Prize in 1946; he was the first American to be made a Fellow of the Royal School of Church Music in London (1957).

When Carl Sandburg, the Galesburg, Illinois-born poet and biographer of Lincoln, was compiling his *American Songbag* in 1927, he turned to a number of composers for "musical settings, for counsel and guidance ... technical skill and musical expertise." Leo Sowerby provided settings for sixteen of the nearly 300 traditional American songs that Sandburg had selected, and in his preface to the collection, Sandburg wrote admiringly of the young composer's understanding of "The Folks, the common human stream that has counted immensely in the history of music." Two years later, Sowerby wrote a "Poem for Orchestra after Carl Sandburg" that he titled *Prairie*, after a poem in *Cornhuskers*, Sandburg's Pulitzer Prize-winning 1918 collection of verse. Sowerby prefaced his score with an excerpt from the poem whose sights and moods he tried to evoke in his composition: *Have you seen a red sunset drip over one of my cornfields, the shore of night stars, the wave lines of dawn up a wheat valley? Have you heard my threshing crews yelling in the chaff of a straw-pile and the running wheat of the wagon boards, my cornhuskers, my harvest hands hauling crops, singing dreams of women, worlds, horizons?*



AFRO-AMERICAN SYMPHONY (SYMPHONY NO. 1) (1930)

William Grant Still (1895-1978)

Still's Afro-American Symphony is scored for piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, English horn, three clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, celesta, harp, banjo and strings. The performance time is 23 minutes. This work was first performed by the Grant Park Orchestra on August 13, 1937, Hans Lange conducting.

William Grant Still, whom Nicolas Slonimsky in his authoritative *Baker's Biographical Dictionary of Musicians* called “The Dean of Afro-American Composers,” was born in Woodville, Mississippi on May 11, 1895. His father, the town bandmaster and a music teacher at Alabama A&M, died when the boy was an infant, and the family moved to Little Rock, Arkansas, where his mother, a graduate of Atlanta University, taught high school. In Little Rock, she married a man who was an opera buff, and he introduced young William to the great voices of the day on records and encouraged his interest in playing the violin. At sixteen, Still matriculated as a medical student at Wilberforce University in Ohio, but he soon switched to music. He taught himself to play the reed instruments, and left school to perform in dance bands in the Columbus area and work for a brief period as an arranger for the great blues writer W.C. Handy. He returned to Wilberforce, graduated in 1915, married later that year, and then resumed playing in dance and theater orchestras.

In 1917, Still entered Oberlin College, but he interrupted his studies the following year to serve in the Navy during World War I, first as a mess attendant and later as a violinist in officers' clubs. He went back to Oberlin after his service duty, and stayed there until 1921, when he moved to New York to join the orchestra of the Noble Sissle–Eubie Blake revue *Shuffle Along* as an oboist. While on tour in Boston with the show, Still studied with George Chadwick, then President of the New England Conservatory, who was so impressed with his talent that he provided his lessons free of charge. Back in New York, Still studied with Edgard Varèse, and ran the Black Swan Recording Company for a period in the mid-1920s. He tried composing in Varèse's modernistic idiom, but soon abandoned that dissonant style in favor of a more traditional manner.

Still's work was recognized as early as 1928, when he received the Harmon Award for the most significant contribution to black culture in America. His *Afro-American Symphony* of 1930 was premiered by Howard Hanson and the Rochester Philharmonic (the first such work by a black composer played by a leading American orchestra), and it was heard thereafter in performances in Europe and South America. Unable to make a living from his concert compositions, however, Still worked as an arranger and orchestrator of music for radio, for Broadway shows, and for Paul Whiteman, Artie Shaw and other popular bandleaders. A 1934 Guggenheim Fellowship allowed him to cut back on his commercial activities and write his first opera, *Blue Steel*, which incorporated jazz and spirituals. He continued to compose large-scale orchestral, instrumental and vocal works in his distinctive idiom during the following years, and, after moving to Los Angeles in 1934, he supplemented that activity by arranging music for films (including Frank Capra's 1937 *Lost Horizon*) and later for television (*Perry Mason*, *Gunsmoke*).

Still received many awards for his work: seven honorary degrees; commissions from CBS, New York World's Fair, League of Composers, Cleveland Orchestra and other important cultural organizations; the Phi Beta Sigma Award; a citation from ASCAP noting his “extraordinary contributions” to music and his “greatness, both as an artist and as a human being”; and the Freedom Foundation Award. Not only was his music performed by most of the major American orchestras, but he was also the first black musician to conduct one of those ensembles (the Los Angeles Philharmonic, at Hollywood Bowl in 1936) and a major symphony in a southern state (the New Orleans Philharmonic in 1955).

Still's *Afro-American Symphony* is one of the landmarks of 20th-century music, though less as a racial artifact — when Howard Hanson conducted the work's premiere with the Rochester Philharmonic on October 29, 1931, it became the first symphony by a black composer played by a major American orchestra — than as a masterful piece of music that speaks eloquently of its creator,

its era and its national roots. The *Afro-American Symphony* is music that could have been written nowhere but in this country during the Jazz Age by a musician perfectly attuned to America's voice and spirit. "I knew I wanted to write a symphony," Still explained. "I knew that it had to be an *American* work; and I wanted to demonstrate how the blues, so often considered a lowly expression, could be elevated to the highest musical level." The work follows the standard symphonic plan — large sonata form, *Adagio*, scherzo, uplifting finale — whose moods Still summarized in the movements' titles: *Longing*, *Sorrow*, *Humor* and *Aspiration*. The composer inscribed two further thoughts of his own in the score — "With humble thanks to God, the source of inspiration" and "He who develops his God-given gifts with view to aiding humanity, manifests truth" — and appended evocative verses by the Ohio-born African-American poet Paul Laurence Dunbar (1872-1906) to each of the four movements:

All my life long twell de night has pas'
 Let de wo'k come ez it will,
 So dat I fin' you, my honey, at last,
 Somewhaih des ovah de hill.

It's moughty tiahsome laying' 'roun'
 Dis sorrer-laden earfly groun',
 An' oftentimes I thinks, thinks I
 'Twould be a sweet t'ing des to die
 An' go 'long home.

An' we'll shout ouah halleluyahs,
 On dat mighty reck'nin' day.

Be proud, my Race, in mind and soul.
 Thy name is writ on Glory's scroll
 In characters of fire.
 High mid the clouds of Fame's bright sky
 Thy banner's blazoned folds now fly,
 And truth shall lift them higher.

OVERTURE TO OF THEE I SING (1931)

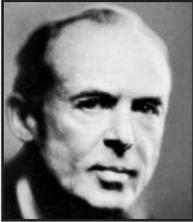
George Gershwin (1898-1937)

The concert arrangement of the Overture to Of Thee I Sing calls for three flutes, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, harp, piano and strings. The performance time is five minutes. This is the work's first performance by the Grant Park Orchestra.



George and Ira Gershwin first attempted political satire in one of their musical comedies with *Strike Up the Band* of 1927. George S. Kaufman's book, however, a barbed story about the United States and Switzerland going to war over a trade dispute involving cheese that pilloried militarism, American big business, politics, international relations and "Babbitry," the self-satisfied attitude with conventional middle-class ideas and ideals and material success of the title character of a popular 1922 novel by Sinclair Lewis, found little favor among theater-goers, and *Strike Up the Band* closed after just two weeks. In 1931, Kaufman sent the Gershwins a draft for another send-up of American politics, this one titled *Of Thee I Sing*. The story concerns bachelor Presidential candidate John P. Wintergreen, whose party has no discernible platform and so decides to run on the issue of LOVE. As a campaign gimmick, Wintergreen agrees to marry the winner of a beauty contest staged by his manager after proposing to her in every state in the union. Complications arise when Wintergreen falls in love with Mary Turner, one of his campaign workers, and he refuses to marry Diana Devereux, winner of the beauty contest. With Mary campaigning at his side, Wintergreen wins in a landslide. Diana sues for breach of contract, and induces the government of

France (which she claims as her ancestral home) to declare war on the United States. Impeachment proceedings in the Senate against Wintergreen are cut short when Mary reveals that she is pregnant. The situation is resolved by the bumbling Vice-President, Alexander Throttlebottom, who agrees to marry Diana. Despite the show's farcical plot, the Gershwins created a sophisticated score for *Of Thee I Sing* that tightly integrated story, words and music in a manner with little precedent in the popular American musical theater. After a try-out in Boston, *Of Thee I Sing* opened at the Music Box Theater in New York on December 26, 1931. Though the show played at the height of the Great Depression, it ran longer than any other of George and Ira's musicals on Broadway — 441 performances — and was the first American musical comedy to have its book published without the music. It was also the first musical whose book and lyrics were honored with a Pulitzer Prize.



SEA DRIFT, SYMPHONIC POEM (1933)

John Alden Carpenter (1876-1951)

Sea Drift calls for two flutes, oboe, English horn, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, celesta, harp, piano and strings. The performance time is fourteen minutes. This is the work's first performance by the Grant Park Orchestra.

“The role of music and art is to nourish and sustain people. We must express our ideas and our ideals. It is the role of music and the arts to be the medium for this expression. I recommend ... a return to art as the solution to today's problems. It speaks to the best that is in us. These troubled times are not a healthy period for the creator. Artists cannot be afraid of today and afraid for tomorrow, but must express themselves freely.” These timely words of encouragement, and caution, were spoken by a successful business executive, the vice-president of a thriving Chicago supplier to the transportation and shipping industries — and one of America's leading composers of the early 20th century: John Alden Carpenter.

Carpenter was born on February 28, 1876 in Park Ridge, Illinois into one of Chicago's most prominent families: he had his given names from his direct ancestor, John Alden of Pilgrim fame. His father was president of a prosperous company that he eventually joined; his mother was a talented singer, trained in Paris, from whom he received his first musical instruction. He studied piano with Amy Fay (who recounted her lessons with Liszt in a charming memoir) and theory with William Seeboeck before entering Harvard University in 1893 as a composition student of John Knowles Paine. Carpenter showed such promise at Harvard (including writing the music for two Hasty Pudding productions) that Paine tried to convince him to pursue a career as a professional composer, but to no avail since Carpenter was drafted into the family business and returned home after his graduation in 1897.

Despite his responsibilities at Geo. B. Carpenter & Co. — he served as vice-president from 1909 until his retirement almost thirty years later — Carpenter refused to abandon music. He composed some songs and chamber pieces after settling again in Chicago, and spent three months in 1906 studying in Italy with his musical idol, Edward Elgar. He followed that studious interlude with further training in Chicago with the noted German-born theorist Bernhard Ziehn, and began composing in earnest in 1911 with his Violin Sonata, which was premiered in New York by Mischa Elman. Carpenter established his reputation with his first orchestral work, the delightful *Adventures in a Perambulator*, premiered in Chicago in March 1915. In the early 1920s, he adopted jazz idioms for the ballets *Krazy Kat* (based on George Herriman's popular comic strip) and *Skyscrapers* and the *Jazz Orchestra Pieces* (for Paul Whiteman, famous as the godfather of Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*). By the late 1920s, Carpenter's jazz phase had run its course, and the works of his remaining years follow more traditional paths: a string quartet, two symphonies, a violin concerto, choral and orchestral compositions inspired by Whitman, Shakespeare and George Washington. Carpenter was held in high regard during his lifetime, and his music was performed frequently and prominently. He was recognized with membership in the National Institute of Arts and Letters and the American Academy of Arts and Letters, honorary degrees from Harvard, Northwestern and the University of Wisconsin, and Knighthood in the French Legion of Honor; on his 75th birthday, two months before he died in Chicago on April 26, 1951, the National Arts Foundation promoted

performances of his music at special concerts in America, Australia and Europe.

Carpenter's atmospheric tone poem *Sea Drift* (1933) takes its inspiration and title from the group of eleven poems that comprise one of the most powerful segments of Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*. The English Impressionist Frederick Delius had composed a work for chorus and orchestra in 1903 based on passages from *Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking* from *Sea Drift*, in which Whitman tells of a lonely boy's observation of, and reaction to, two mating sea-birds and their sundering. In writing of Delius' *Sea Drift*, the English composer Philip Heseltine (perhaps better known under his *nom-de-plume*, Peter Warlock) captured the mood of the poem and the music in a way that also seems reflected in Carpenter's evocative work: "In this music we seem to hear the very quintessence of all the sorrow and unrest that man can feel because of love. It is the veritable drama of love and death, an image of the mystery of separation. The spirit, distracted by doubt, rises in impassioned protest against the unheeding stars; but, confronted at every turn by darkness and silence, it sinks down into a sort of numbness and endurance, and, when all that it has loved and hoped for seems to have fallen away, it rises again to recreate the past, to clothe it in a vesture of imperishable reality."



AMERICAN FESTIVAL OVERTURE (1939)

William Schuman (1910-1992)

The American Festival Overture calls for piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion and strings. The performance time is nine minutes. This is the work's first performance by the Grant Park Orchestra.

William Schuman, born in New York City in 1910, was one of this country's most distinguished composers and educators. As a teenager, his interest was in jazz and popular music, but he turned to concert music before leaving high school. Following study at Columbia University and with Roy Harris, he joined the faculty of Sarah Lawrence College in Bronxville, New York in 1935. The *American Festival Overture* of 1939 was the earliest of his works to gain popular notice, and he became one of the leading artistic figures of his generation during the ensuing five years, receiving the first Pulitzer Prize for classical music, in 1943, for *A Free Song*. In 1945, he left Sarah Lawrence to assume the dual responsibilities of Director of Publications for G. Schirmer, Inc. and President of the Juilliard School of Music in New York. At Juilliard, where he remained for eighteen years, his tenure was notable for the establishment of the renowned Juilliard Quartet and for the thorough overhaul of the teaching of theory. This latter achievement arose from his philosophy of basing instruction directly on the experiences of listening and creating music rather than on any rigid pedagogical system, and it influenced the curricula of many music schools throughout the country. From 1962 to 1969, Schuman served as President of Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, a period that saw the virtual completion of that influential complex. William Schuman was among this country's most prominent spokesmen and advisors for the arts as consultant to, among many others, CBS, the Rockefeller Foundation, Broadcast Music, Inc. and the MacDowell Colony, while remaining active as a composer. Thanks to a strict and methodical work schedule, he produced an enormous amount of music for a man of so many parts: ten symphonies; concerted works for piano, violin, horn, cello and viola; five ballets and an opera; several independent pieces for concert band and for orchestra (including the well-known *New England Triptych*, after music by the American Revolutionary War-era composer William Billings); two dozen choral works; and numerous chamber scores.

Schuman first created a stir within the American musical community with his Symphony No. 2 of 1937. The work was premiered in New York on May 25, 1938 by the WPA Greenwich Village Orchestra and conductor Edgar Schenkman, and among those in the audience was Aaron Copland, whose position as a leader of American music had been solidified by the nationally broadcast American premiere of his *El Salon Mécico* by Sir Adrian Boult and the NBC Symphony only ten days before. The following month, Copland published an article in *Modern Music* that declared, "Schuman is, so far as I am concerned, the musical find of the year." He brought the Second Symphony to the attention of Serge Koussevitzky, music director of the Boston Symphony and one

of the most influential champions of modern music of his generation, and the piece was heard at Symphony Hall in Boston on February 17, 1939. In appreciation, Schuman promised to write a new work for Koussevitzky, and during a summer retreat on Martha's Vineyard, he completed the *American Festival Overture* in fulfillment of his pledge. Under the auspices of ASCAP (American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers), Koussevitzky was organizing a festival "in honor of the American composer" for the following October, and he accepted Schuman's new composition to open the second concert, which took place on October 6th. The *Overture*, tuneful, rhythmically buoyant and harmonically uncluttered, represented a change of stylistic direction from Schuman's tightly packed, dissonant earlier compositions (he subsequently withdrew the first two symphonies), and it proved to be immediately popular. By the end of the year, he had been awarded the first of his two Guggenheim Fellowships, and was busily engaged in creating the succession of expertly crafted compositions upon which his reputation was to be founded.

The composer provided the following information for the premiere of the *American Festival Overture*. "The first three notes of this piece will be recognized by some listeners as the 'call to play' of boyhood days. In New York City, it is yelled on the syllables 'Wee-Awk-Eee' to get the gang together for a game or a festive occasion of some sort. This call naturally suggested itself for a piece of music being composed for a very festive occasion. From this, it should not be inferred that the *Overture* is program music. In fact, the idea for the music came to my mind before the origin of the theme was recalled. The development of this bit of 'folk material,' then, is along purely musical lines. The first section of the work is concerned with the material discussed above and the ideas growing out of it. This music leads to a transition section and the subsequent announcement by the violas of a fugue subject. The entire middle section is given over to this fugue. The orchestration is at first for strings alone, later for woodwinds alone and, finally, as the fugue is brought to fruition, by the strings and woodwinds in combination. This climax leads to the final section of the work, which consists of the opening materials paraphrased and the introduction of new subsidiary ideas. The tempo of the work is fast."

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