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Barber Violin Concerto



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Music Concerto for Violin and Orchestra, Op. 14 (1941) by Samuel Barber



Choreography Peter Martins

Premiere May 12, 1988, New York City Ballet, American Music Festival, New York State Theater

Original Cast Merrill Ashley, Adam Lüders, Kate Johnson, David Parsons

Average Length 25 min.

Barber Violin Concerto contrasts classical composure and modern sensibility. It is a work in three movements for two couples performed in a series of mixed and matched pas de deux. All are dressed in white with the classical dancers performing in point shoes and ballet slippers while the modern dancers are typically barefoot. The first two movements are sensuously melodic and passionately inquisitive. The work's third movement, a fast-moving scherzo, provides the opportunity for a rousing comedic chase that brings the work to its breathless conclusion. Samuel Barber (1910-1981) won the Prix de Rome and twice was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in Music. He studied piano and conducting as well as singing, and began composing while still a child. Throughout his career, Barber remained a highly lyrical, essentially conservative composer who dealt in unashamedly personal expression. His harmonic language was basically that of the late 19th century. Virgil Thomson has described the composer as a producer of "elegant neo-romanticism," but in his discipline and use of traditional forms, Barber could also be considered something of a classicist. The Violin Concerto, with its angular lines and diatonic dissonance in the last movement, demonstrated that Barber had broadened his scope of artistic choices by incorporating elements more in common with contemporary idioms.

"CLASSICISM IS ENDURING BECAUSE IT IS IMPERSONAL."

— George Balanchine

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