



24.01.2018

Samuel BARBER (1910-1981)

To Longwood Gardens (1925) [7:27]

Three Chorale Preludes (1927) [9:58]

Partite diverse sopra Straf' mich nicht in deinen Zorn I (1927) [4:09]

Partite diverse sopra Straf' mich nicht in deinen Zorn II (1927) [5:50]

Prelude and Fugue in B minor (1927) [7:30]

Suite for Carillon (1932) [7:06]

Chorale for a new Organ (1936) [2:44]

Adagio for Strings op. 11 (1937, rev. 1945) [8:59]

Wondrous Love: Variations on a shape-note hymn op. 34 (1958) [7:54]

Chorale Prelude on 'Silent Night' from 'Die Natali' op. 37 (1960) [3:21]

Rudolf Innig (organ)

rec. 2016, Heilig-Kreuz Church, Detmold, Germany

MDG 9172010-6 SACD [65:04]

In looking at Samuel Barber's list of works by opus number one finds only a single work for solo organ, the Variations on a Shape Note Tune Op. 34. A listener might be surprised therefore by a whole disc of Barber organ works. Barber's other organ works were only brought together in one volume in 2010 and Rudolf Innig has taken the contents of this volume as well as personally obtaining several of Barber's student works and recorded a whole disc for an instrument few people associate with Barber.

Like many composers, Barber played the organ in a local church when young. His organ-playing career was short-lived-after a few months he was released because of his playing in some of the hymns. However, he maintained his interest in the organ and at the age of 15 produced a programmatic work *To Longwood Gardens*. This is a genial description of a walk through the beautiful gardens located about an hour outside Philadelphia, near Barber's home in West Chester. Longwood Gardens is as renowned for its organ recitals as for its horticultural beauties and the Longwood recitals were an important part of Barber's musical education. The opening theme is developed to describe Barber's feelings on entering the Gardens, followed by a middle section describing an almost mystical reaction to the Gardens themselves, and a jaunty, but uplifting exit. A charming piece and one that already demonstrates Barber's command of technique and structure.

Barber entered the renowned Curtis Institute of Music the next year and his student works also demonstrate the above-mentioned facility with structural issues. The Three Chorale Preludes are student works but they demonstrate a clarity that one would associate with a mature composer and the third Prelude has an element of genuine sadness. The two Partitas show an unexpected facility with organ coloring that makes one wish Barber had written more organ music. Slightly later in date is the Prelude and Fugue which shows Barber venturing out from formal constraints and demonstrating both harmonic tension and genuine feeling.

For a few years while Barber was a student at Curtis the Institute offered a course in campanology (bell-ringing) and Barber dutifully took lessons at the Bok Singing Tower in Florida. In 1932 Barber wrote a Suite for Carillon, later arranged for organ. Although still a student at Curtis, Barber had already written one or two of the works by which he is remembered and so the Suite must be considered as more than a student work.

The opening Adagio has the distinct Barber sound of the 1930s: searching and mysterious, and with a beautiful conclusion. The Scherzetto shows Barber's lighter side, reminiscent of the last movement of his Suite for Strings Op. 1 of 1928 but also looking forward to the Overture to the School for Scandal Op. 5. In the third movement a little of the Bach from the earlier Curtis pieces can be heard but also a forecast of the orchestral works of the mid to late 1930s. The Finale is the only movement that makes one long to hear this work on a carillon, with an imaginative use of a pealing motif over the main theme. The suite is a short work, but one that should be better known.

Barber's short career as church organist was did not stop one of his successors at the Westminster Church in West Chester from commissioning a short piece from him in the mid-30s. The Chorale for a New Organ is very celebratory in tone with reminiscences of the hymns Barber would have played at Westminster Church combined with individual inflections. Another little piece that should be better known.

The Adagio for Strings can best be described as ubiquitous and lately has become almost as well known in a choral version as in the one for string orchestra. The conductor and organist William Strickland made an organ transcription only a year or two after the original's composition but it was only published in 1949 after revisions by Barber and Strickland. While the transcription is competent, there are several moments where the organ cannot match the strings of the original.

The Variations on a Shape-Note Hymn can be considered his most important work for the instrument. It was written to fulfill a promise to an organist friend in Michigan for the inauguration of a new instrument. Barber chose the tune for the hymn *What Wondrous Love is This, Oh My Soul* from the 1835 Southern Harmony Hymn Book. Note: Shape-Notes are form of notation used in hymn books in the southern parts of the United States from 1801 into the twentieth century. Barber presents the modally-inflected theme and follows with four variations, each illustrative of the text of the original hymn. The first variation is in five-parts and treats the original tune with great imagination and has a wonderful flow similar to *Vanessa* and the Nocturne of this same period. Variation Two has the theme in the bass with canonic elements above. In the third variation the theme is in the right hand accompanied by graceful figuration in the left (this variation is in fact designated *with grace*). The last variation is the most striking, with the structural complexity both increasing and taking second place to an all-pervading sadness. These elements put this comparatively short work among the composer's most heart-felt later works.

As we have seen Barber was writing chorale preludes as a student at Curtis and he was still writing them in 1960 in the form of *Die Natali* (Christmastide) Op. 37, a cycle of chorale preludes on Christmas carols for large orchestra. A year later Barber decided to arrange the "Silent Night" section for organ as a "commission by myself". He did a very good job; in some ways the organ version is more effective than the orchestral original.

Rudolf Innig may be best known to listeners for his 12-discs of the complete organ music of Rheinberger, but he has also recorded music by composers as varied as Messaien, Nowowiejski, Lachner, Schumann, and Horatio Parker. On this disc his registrations are totally authentic and make the organ in the Heilig-Kreuz Church in Detmold sound like one in New England. Innig has a strong feeling for Barber's phrasing and his use of organ color. Innig also has a sure dynamic sense, especially evident in the Suite for Carillon. While his Adagio for Strings is too slow, most of the other pieces sound exactly right. Sound quality is full and deep. Given that most of these works are unavailable elsewhere and with Innig's sensitivity to the repertoire this disc is a must for organ fans. Since Innig is interested in American organ music, can one ask for a disc of organ music by Foote and Chadwick?

William Kreindler