

A silhouette of a woman wearing a cowboy hat, standing on a horse. She is facing right, with her hands on her hips. The background is a warm, golden sunset with a large sun partially obscured by a cloud. The overall mood is serene and evocative of the American West.

THE ROSE OF SONORA

Daniel Hege,
WSO Music Director & Conductor

SATURDAY, APRIL 9 | 7:30 PM
SUNDAY, APRIL 10 | 3:00 PM

PROGRAM NOTES

CENTURY II CONCERT HALL

JOHN WILLIAMS

Born February 8, 1932 in Flushing, Queens, New York

The Cowboys Overture (10')

Last performed by the Wichita Symphony on April 22, 2017. Daniel Hege conducted.

From a two-note motive warning of a shark in the water to a brilliant fanfare announcing a space fantasy, the music of John Williams has become deeply embedded in the hearts and ears of audiences around the world. Still active at ninety years, Williams is probably the best known and most popular among living composers. His music is a gateway into the orchestral sound rooted in the late-19th century symphonies and mid-20th century Hollywood film scores and continues to inspire a younger generation of composers.

Williams' list of movies for which he composed scores numbers about 125, in addition to music for some twenty-five television shows, fanfares for the Olympics, NBC, and other celebratory occasions, and many concertos and works composed for the symphonic repertoire. As the most celebrated Hollywood composer, Williams' honors include fifty-two Academy Award nominations with five Oscars, twenty-five Grammy Awards from seventy-one nominations, three Emmy Awards, and four Golden Globe Awards from twenty-five nominations. He is also the recipient of the Kennedy Center Honors (2004), several honorary doctorates, and many other awards and recognitions over his long career.

With early studies and work as a jazz pianist, Williams studied composition in Los Angeles with Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, a European émigré who discovered new opportunities with Hollywood film studios. Following service in the U.S. Air Force, Williams set his sights on a career as a concert pianist entering the legendary piano studio of Rosina Lhévinne at the Juilliard School in 1955. After surmising his career chances as a pianist against studio peers like Robert Browning and Van Cliburn, Williams decided that his career was better suited to music composition. Williams ended up in Los Angeles, where he honed his skills as an orchestrator, studio pianist, and session musician.

Williams' feature film score debut came in 1958 with music for a B-movie titled *Daddy-O*. He received his first Academy Award nomination for *Valley of the Dolls* in 1967 (Best Scoring of Music – Adaptation or Treatment). He won his first Oscar in 1971 for Best Scoring: Adaptation and Original Song Score for *Fiddler on the Roof*.

The Cowboys, starring John Wayne and directed by Mark Rydell, appeared in 1972, a year in which Williams received two Academy Award nominations for *The Poseidon Adventure* and *Images*. *Cowboys* was Williams' second score for a Rydell film following his Academy-Award nominated score for *The Reivers* (1969).

The Cowboys Overture (10')

continued

Cowboys is a coming-of-age movie in which an aging rancher (John Wayne) takes on a team of inexperienced teenage drovers for one final cattle drive from Montana. The drive produces challenges like weather, horse thieves, and death that force young men to grow up in a hurry.

The music Williams composed for *The Cowboys* is a big orchestral score in the tradition of scores for Hollywood Westerns written by Jerome Moross for *The Big Country* (1958), Elmer Bernstein for *The Magnificent Seven* (1966), and Williams' earlier Americana-hued score for *The Reivers*.

Symphony and film geeks enjoy playing a parlor game that attempts to link Williams' music to its influential source, whether it be music by Tchaikovsky, Wagner, Gustav Holst, Arron Copland, Erich Korngold, or others. As with any great composer, Williams adapts his sources and assimilates the style into his unique voice.

We hear many of Williams' signature characteristics in *The Cowboys*: vigorous rhythmic elements to convey horseback riding and calf-roping on the Great Plains, colorful orchestration with a distinctive use of brass and winds – in particular, note the soaring horn theme, and melodic qualities easily associated with Americana folk music. Music for *The Reivers* and *The Cowboys* caught Stephen Spielberg's attention and admiration, leading Spielberg to hire Williams for their first collaboration on *The Sugarland Express* (1974). The rest is history!

The Cowboys Overture that we hear this weekend consists of music from the film that John Williams adapted for a concert performance by the Boston Pops in 1980.

GEORGE S. CLINTON

Born June 17, 1947 in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

THE ROSE OF SONORA: a concerto in five scenes ('30)

Scene 1: Escape

Scene 2: Love and Freedom

Scene 3: Ambush

Scene 4: Death and Healing

Scene 5: Vengeance

These concerts mark the first performances by the Wichita Symphony.

Holly Mulcahy and George S. Clinton provided the following program notes from the website RoseofSonora.com.

From the soloist

My first memory of music came from the movies. Whether it was a daddy-daughter date night in theaters or sitting at home with my family in Colorado on a snowy Sunday afternoon watching an old Western with a big bowl of salted popcorn, the movie soundtracks were my first entry into the world of appreciating music.

I've secretly loved Western film music for years, but finally outed myself on Facebook in 2017 when I posted, "If there was an epic western soundtrack style violin concerto, I'd be all over it." Posting that made me feel like I was sharing a side of me I wasn't sure I wanted people to know. But I did it anyway and figured nobody would care or respond. The response surprised me!

The comments started rolling in as people were agreeing, commenting, and echoing my thoughts! I felt maybe there was something to this concept. I contacted Hollywood film composer and friend, George S. Clinton, to see if he had any interest in writing a Western-style violin concerto.

George and I spoke by phone several times, and we discussed and planned what kind of concerto this should be. We shared our observations of various concertos and concert pieces, and we talked about classical music and today's audiences and concert atmospheres.

When George shared his idea of a story arc about a wild west outlaw woman compiled from real outlaw women, I knew we had something unique and very much needed. Not only was it a story that captivates, it gave me what was missing from just about every Western movie I've watched: A strong female lead.

THE ROSE OF SONORA: a concerto in five scenes

continued

From the composer

The Rose of Sonora is, first and foremost, a violin concerto. It is composed in five scenes (movements) for solo violin, symphony orchestra, and male chorus, but, per Holly's request, in the style of an epic Western film score. One of the features of the solo violin part is the merging of traditional fiddle technique with classic violin technique, giving the main character, Rose, her voice.

As a film composer I am used to composing to a story. After researching the lives of outlaw women of the old west, including some with ties to Wichita (Big Nose Kate, Rose Dunn, Belle Siddons, Squirrel Tooth Alice, etc.) I decided to create my own story and heroine, "The Rose of Sonora." Each of the five scenes tells part of her story.

I believe that listening to music can create images in our minds for most of us, and I decided to use that as a way of presenting the concerto. Rather than a passive listening experience, it will be an interactive one.

Before each scene being performed, a description of what is happening in that scene will be projected on a screen above the orchestra or read by a narrator. Inspired by the scene descriptions and the music they are hearing, by the end of the concerto, each member of the audience will have created his or her own mental movie of The Rose of Sonora.

Scenes

Scene 1 - Escape

The full moon has turned the Sonora desert an eerie blue. Rose rides quietly into town and makes her way to the jail house. She quickly subdues the guard and frees Jed from his cell. Together at last, they ride off into the night, the ill-gotten gold stashed in her saddlebags.

Scene 2 - Love and Freedom

They make their way to their idyllic mountain hide-out where they share the love and freedom denied them for so long.

Scene 3 - Ambush

The members of their old gang have tracked them down and sneak up on the cabin. Rose senses something is wrong, but before she can react, they attack in a sudden flash of gunfire. Jed is fatally wounded, and Rose is left for dead as the killers ride out into the night with the saddlebags of gold.

THE ROSE OF SONORA: a concerto in five scenes

continued

Scene 4- Death and Healing

The pain of her own wounds can not compare to the pain of losing Jed. She holds his lifeless body in her arms, gently kisses him, and weeps.

Scene 5- Vengeance

Rose buries Jed beside the cabin. She places a single yellow rose on his grave, loads her guns, saddles her horse, and sets out to find his killers. Showing no mercy, Rose hunts them down, out-riding and out-shooting them all. In a final act of vengeance, she shouts Jed's name, grabs the saddlebags of gold, and triumphantly rides off into the red Sonora sunset.

SAMUEL BARBER

Born March 9, 1910 in West Chester, PA.

Died March 26, 1982 in Vienna

Adagio for Strings

Last performed by the Wichita Symphony on November 19 and 20, 2005. Andrew Sewell conducted.

It was a remarkable opportunity. With the encouragement of family and friends, Samuel Barber sent off two scores for the consideration of Arturo Toscanini, who was the leading conductor and musical tastemaker of the day in America. A staunch conservative noted for his interpretations of Beethoven and Italian opera, Toscanini rarely paid attention to contemporary music, let alone works by American composers. Barber nervously took his chance and sent two recently completed works, an *Essay* for orchestra and an *Adagio* for strings.

With disappointment, Barber received the scores back from Toscanini, who offered no comments, criticisms, or suggestions. Imagine the turn of events when Barber learned through his partner and fellow composer, Gian-Carlo Menotti, that Toscanini had agreed to perform not one but both works!

As the orchestra tuned and the audience assembled in Studio 8H (now the home of *Saturday Night Live*) in the Radio City Building at Rockefeller Center, millions more across the nation settled in next to their radios on Saturday, November 5, 1938, for the regularly scheduled broadcast of the Symphony of the National Broadcasting Company conducted by Toscanini. The orchestra, comprised of many leading orchestral musicians of the day, was created a year earlier by RCA's chief executive David Sarnoff to serve the public's "best interests" for experiencing cultural programming. These radio broadcasts played an important role in shaping America's interests in classical music well into the 1960s, when the orchestra operated as the Symphony of the Air.

In his review of the concert, music critic Olin Downes wrote glowingly about the *Adagio* in the *New York Times*, indicating that the work was "the product of a musically creative nature...who leaves nothing undone to achieve something as perfect in mass and detail as his craftsmanship permits." The broadcast, remembered years later by cellist Alfred Wallenstein as one of Toscanini's greatest performances, launched Barber's career in the public eye. Barber became one of the foremost American composers of the mid-20th century with subsequent works.

Adagio for Strings began life as the slow movement of a string quartet. Vacationing with Menotti during the summer of 1936 by idyllic Lake Wolfgang in the Salzkammergut near Salzburg, Austria, Barber worked on his string quartet, completing the slow movement on September 19, 1936. He announced its completion in a letter and called the movement "a knockout." Recognizing the music's potential, he subsequently arranged it for an entire string orchestra and sent the score to Toscanini in 1938.

Adagio for Strings

continued

Barber had taken an interest in early music, and the *Adagio for Strings* reflects the inspiration from those studies. In its simplicity, the music resembles Gregorian chant and employs Renaissance techniques for polyphonic writing.

The music is marked “*Molto Adagio espr. Cantando*” (very slow and singing expressively). The violins take the melody at the outset in a passage that one writer describes as “like a hesitant climbing of stairs.” The melody takes on the form of an arch, reaching a high point before falling back on a descending scale. The violins repeat the phrase, striving to achieve a higher pinnacle. The other strings quietly accompany with long, sustained tones. The music seems to hover, unrestricted by metrical bar lines. Occasionally, Barber changes the music’s meter to achieve the free-flowing, chant-like effect.

Eventually, the violas take up the melody. The violins and violas sing a mournful duet with dissonances resolving between the lines. The accompaniment remains sustained but occasionally injects an upward leap that contributes to the longer ascending arch. It becomes the cellos’ turn to take up the melody, and as the upper strings press higher with louder dynamics, the intensity of the music increases. The music reaches its apogee with the entire string orchestra crying out in fortissimo. An abrupt, elongated pause interrupted by very soft chords follows this poignant outburst. The opening melody returns with the violins and violas in unison an octave apart. The music fades away on an unresolved harmony. It is perhaps the ultimate unanswered question.

Consider the work for a moment in the context of its time. During the summer of 1936, tensions were already high with the saber-rattling coming from Nazi Germany. With the Great Depression a recent memory, would that initial radio audience have understood this music to reflect profound loss?

Toscanini included the *Adagio for Strings* on tours of England and later South America, where it became the first work ever heard composed by a North American composer. These performances established the work’s popularity, and the work ignited discussion and debate about what defined American music. For some, Barber’s music was considered reactionary and not in step with the modern trends of the time. Barber never conformed to modernist tendencies and remains viewed today as a post-romantic composer. While Barber enjoyed many successes throughout his career and almost always received premieres by noted soloists and ensembles, the *Adagio for Strings*, sometimes to Barber’s discontent, remained his most popular work.

For the public today, Barber’s *Adagio for Strings* is among the most familiar and frequently performed works by an American composer. Its somber mood lends itself to remembrance, and it is known as America’s “national funeral music.” It was performed at the funeral of Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1945 and again for John Fitzgerald Kennedy in 1963. Performances continue for funerals and

Adagio for Strings

continued

Memorial Day remembrances. Arrangements by others of *Adagio* exist for woodwind choir, clarinet choir, piano, and organ. Barber made a beautiful arrangement in 1967 for a capella choir set to the text of the Latin *Agnus Dei* (Lamb of God).

The *Adagio* acquired life in television and film, where it served as a notable catharsis in the 1986 Academy Award-winning film, *Platoon*, and heard on *The Simpsons* and *South Park*. The work became a vehicle for “techno-trance” arrangements by William Orbit (2000), DJ Tiesto (2003), and others. These uses might have Barber rolling over in his grave, but you can pull them up on YouTube and make your own judgment.

The *Adagio for Strings* lasts between seven and eight minutes.

AARON COPLAND

Born November 14, 1900 in Brooklyn, NY

Died December 2, 1990 in Peekskill, NY

Rodeo – Four Dance Episodes (20')

1. Buckaroo Holiday
2. Corral Nocturne
3. Saturday Night Waltz
4. Hoe-Down

Last performed by the Wichita Symphony on November 19 and 20, 2005. Andrew Sewell conducted.

The audience settling into their seats on the autumnal evening of October 16, 1942, at the old Metropolitan Opera House on 39th Street and Broadway in New York City, would be excused for wanting a performance of distracting entertainment. For less than a year, the nation had been at war, and all reports indicated this would be a long and costly struggle. The Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo, successors to Diaghilev's Ballets Russes, were ready to accommodate.

The Ballet, already hunkering down in New York City to wait out the war and led by Sergei Ivanovitch Denham, was presenting a new ballet by the young and largely unknown American dancer Agnes de Mille (1905 – 1993). With a pedigree of her own as the daughter and niece of William and Cecil de Mille, two tycoons of the Hollywood motion picture industry, Agnes attracted attention as an avant-garde dancer who combined elements of traditional ballet with popular and modern dance.

For her new work, de Mille envisioned a ranch in southwest Texas. Upon being asked who she wanted for a composer, she immediately said, "Aaron Copland," with whom she had a passing acquaintance since the 1930s. By 1942, Copland was already considered the leading American composer sought after by young aspiring composers like Leonard Bernstein at the summer retreat of Tanglewood. After meeting with de Mille, Copland, with another western-themed ballet, *Billy the Kid*, already to his credit, accepted the \$1,000 commission.

De Mille conceived the ballet in two parts with the working title of "The Courting at Burnt Ranch." In Part One, people wander around the corrals during the intermission of a rodeo. Girls flirt with the cowboys, and the rodeo resumes. At twilight, a cowgirl sits outside and muses upon the spaciousness of the land and sky of the prairie. In Part 2, a dance takes place at night. A waltz commences and eventually moves outside, where a vigorous hoe-down breaks out.

De Mille commented on the nature of the ballet: "The theme of the ballet is quite basic. It deals with the problem that has confronted all American women, from earliest pioneer times...how to get a suitable man."¹ That might raise eyebrows today, and some feminists eventually denounced the ballet; but in wartime America with young men leaving for the armed services, it was a relevant subject.

Rodeo – Four Dance Episodes

continued

Sol Hurok (1888 – 1974), the impresario charged with promoting the concert, thought the original title was too long and urged something shorter. Hence the title, *Rodeo*, was applied with the pronunciation of *ro-DAY-oh* to lend a bit of marketing clout.

As the third work on the program, the ballet, complete with choreography evoking how cowboys walk and ride broncos, was a smash hit. De Mille danced the part of the cowgirl. There were twenty-two curtain calls with Copland joining the dancers onstage. Irving Kolodin, reviewing the performance for the *New York Sun*, wrote, “The Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo awoke to find itself with a genuine American ballet today, and is it surprised!” Writing later for the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Claudia Cassidy called *Rodeo* “a shining little masterpiece.” Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein, who were in the audience on opening night, immediately invited de Mille to join them on a new collaborative venture titled *Oklahoma*. *Rodeo* went on to enjoy seventy-nine performances during the 1942 – 1952 season.

A year later, Copland expanded the orchestration from a pit orchestra to that of a full orchestra, giving the pianist a significant part. Preserving all but five minutes of the ballet, he retitled the music *Rodeo: Four Dance Episodes*. Arthur Fiedler and the Boston Pops premiered the new suite on May 28, 1943. This version became more popular than the ballet itself and is the version we hear at the Wichita Symphony this weekend.

Copland’s music during the 1930s and 1940s became synonymous with what we call “the American sound.” Works like *Billy the Kid*, *Lincoln Portrait*, *Rodeo*, and *Appalachian Spring*, each imbued with popular elements, influenced many composers, particularly those seeking to create a sense of Americana in film scores. With its melodic contours and rhythmic vitality, Copland’s music evokes the American landscape. During the mid-20th century, his music captures a sense of the Great Plains; later, as his style becomes more angular, the shapes of the urban skyline.

The Americanism of *Rodeo* contains direct and assimilated references to American folk music. We hear quotes like “I Ride an Old Paint in the *Saturday Night Waltz* movement.” In *Hoe-Down*, fiddle tunes like “Bonaparte’s Retreat,” “Tip, Toe, Pretty Betty Martin,” and others appear. The titles may be long-forgotten by contemporary audiences, but the sense of place and time remains.

Hoe-Down exists in a life of its own. The rock group Emerson, Lake, and Palmer created a notable arrangement of *Hoe-Down* on their *Trilogy Album* (1972). Bela Fleck and the Flecktones recorded their version on the 2000 album *Outbound*. Many will remember the use of *Hoe-Down* in Wendy’s 1990s commercial for fast-food hamburgers, “Where’s the Beef.”

The composer and music critic Arthur Berger (1912 – 2003) described Copland’s *Hoe-Down* as “virtually photographic.” That description is apt for the entire work. In that spirit, we welcome

Rodeo – Four Dance Episodes

continued

multimedia artist and photographer Nicholas Bardonney of Westwater Arts to this weekend's concerts. Bardonney will choreograph his photography of an American rodeo on three large screens above the orchestra, taking us inside the action with shifting panoramic images.

¹ Quoted in Howard Pollack, Aaron Copland: The Life and Work of an Uncommon Man, (NY: Henry Holt and Co., Inc., 1999), p. 365.