

## American Flute Masterpieces - Notes on the Composers

### Eldin Burton: Sonatina for flute and piano

A native of Fitzgerald, Georgia, Eldin Burton studied piano and composition at the Atlanta Conservatory and Juilliard School of Music. *Sonatina for flute and piano* is Burton's best-known work and is adapted from a work for solo piano written for a composition class at Juilliard. Burton dedicated his composition to a fellow Juilliard student, the noted flutist Samuel Baron, who debuted the performance in 1947 in New York City. *Sonatina* won the composition contest of the New York Flute Club in 1948 and as a first prize Burton was awarded a publishing contract for his composition with G. Schirmer Inc. Burton went on to work for G Schirmer Inc. and later retired in Sarasota, Florida.

*Sonatina for flute and piano* is a three-movement work with a conservative, yet unique approach to melody, harmony and rhythm. The first *Allegretto grazioso* movement dances gracefully with its agile tempo and song-like melody, lyrically toying with scales and arpeggios against a rich harmonic structure. *Andantino Sognando*, with its playful and quirky passages, is at some moments bold and at others, inquisitive; a sublime contrast to the lively and humorous triple-metered third movement, *Allegro giocoso quasi fandango*, that begins with lightly spirited burst of energy and races off in interesting and animated directions.

### Samuel Barber: Canzone (from Piano Concerto, 2nd Movement)

Samuel Barber (1910-1981), born in West Chester, Pennsylvania, is renowned as one of America's most prolific twentieth-century Romantic composers. At the zenith of his career, Barber was respected and honoured both at home and abroad.

Throughout his career, Barber occasionally developed personal attachments to certain melodies and would revisit them in different compositions; such is the case with *Canzone (from Piano Concerto, 2nd movement)*. *Canzone* was originally a gift for Manfred Ibel, a German flautist whom Barber befriended in 1959. At the time, Barber gave it the title *Elegy for Flute and Piano*, though it was never published or catalogued as such. Two years later, Barber changed the title in his own records to *Canzone for Manfred*.

While composing *Canzone for Manfred*, Barber was commissioned by his publishing company, G. Schirmer, Inc., to compose a piano concerto to celebrate the company's upcoming 100 year anniversary. Using *Canzone* as the basis for the second movement of the piano concerto, Barber completed the three-movement work two weeks before its premiere in 1962 and chose to retain the flute as the main protagonist in the movement. In 1963 Barber received a Pulitzer Prize in music for his *Piano Concerto* and one year later received the Music Critics Circle Award.

*Canzone, (from Piano Concerto, 2nd Movement)* is a portrait of bittersweet nostalgia. The flute narrative maintains its original elegiac sentiment and transitions through episodes of malaise and uncertainty, concluding in a peaceful resolution.

### Lowell Liebermann: Sonata for Flute and Piano, Op.23:

Born in New York City, Lowell Liebermann is one of America's most frequently performed and recorded living composers. With over 100 compositions in various genres, Liebermann's work is known to be

technically challenging, however it is his artistry, musicianship and virtuosity that appeal to audiences and musicians alike.

Liebermann composed *Sonata for flute and piano, Op.23* in 1987 as a commissioned piece by the Spoleto Festival in Charleston, South Carolina. The work, performed at the festival in 1988, was dedicated to flautist Paula Robison who premiered it alongside pianist Jean-Yves Thibaudet. Liebermann's *Sonata for Flute and Piano* won Best Newly Published Flute Work by the National Flute Society in 1989 and has become a standard in flute repertoire.

In the first of two movements, *Lento con rubato*, the flute and piano begin their mysterious atonal dialogue in a slow opening motif. Supported by the melodic and linear harmonic structure of the piano, the flute leads the journey in varying free time tempos, weaving out of pedantic quiet passages into brooding forte transitions, gradually returning to its slow opening theme. A stark contrast to *Lento con rubato*, is the second *Presto energico* movement that commences in a fury of effervescent zeal and escalates through a flurry of non-stop triplet-runs. Grounded by octave baseline melodies, the movement swiftly rises to a conclusion that leaves you breathless and gasping for air.

### **John Corigliano: Voyage for flute and string orchestra**

With over 100 compositions performed by many of the world's prominent orchestras, soloists and chamber musicians, New York City native John Corigliano (1938-) has been awarded a Pulitzer Prize, a Grawemeyer Award, three Grammy Awards and an Academy Award for his work. In his compositions Corigliano employs a wide variety of styles, oftentimes fusing the traditional elements of classical tonality with the contemporary techniques of minimalism, serialism and atonality.

In 1971, John Corigliano set the 19th-century poet Charles Baudelaire's poem "*L'Invitation au Voyage*" to music for acappella chorus. Twelve years later, Corigliano created an instrumental version of the work, scoring it for flute and strings. In 1988 *Voyage* was arranged for flute and piano.

Much of *Voyage* is based on a line from the English translation of the poem: "*There, there is nothing else but grace and measure, richness, quietness and pleasure.*" These virtues: grace, richness and quietness are musically depicted by the lush atmospheric harmonic colours and the melodic wandering of the flute, as it echoes the character and sentiment of the Romantic era. *Voyage* is likened to "*a drugged version of heaven full of sensual imagery*" according to Corigliano. The piece weaves in and out of major and minor modes, from intense passages to placid episodes, settling into a transcendental close.

### **Aaron Copland: Duo for Flute and Piano:**

The quintessentially American composer, Aaron Copland (1900-1990), composed his *Duo for Flute and Piano* in memory of William Kincaid, the longtime Principal Flutist of the Philadelphia Orchestra who died in 1967. A group of friends, family, students and dedicated supporters of William Kincaid commissioned Copland in 1969 to pay homage to this great musician. The work was first performed by Elaine Shaffer and Hephzibah Menuhin at the Settlement Music School in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in October 1971.

Copland wrote that the work was "naturally influenced by the fact that I was composing for Kincaid's students, not for future generations (although I hoped younger flutists would play Duo eventually). Also, I was using material from earlier sketches in my notebooks, and that may have influenced the style of the piece."

*Duo for Flute and Piano* hints of Copland's jazz-inspired works from the 1920s and his famous folk-inspired ballet scores of the 1940s. The opening *Flowing* movement, a simple and introspective flute lament, gracefully leads into the wistful and reflective mood of the *Poetic, somewhat mournful* second movement; a fitting elegy to William Kincaid. The finale third movement, *Lively, with bounce* provides a high-spirited dance-inspired close; a brilliant and satisfying farewell.

### **Robert Muczynski**

Chicago-born contemporary composer and pianist, Robert Muczynski (1929-2010), published over 50 compositions that have been performed worldwide, attracting a dedicated international following. Muczynski began composing *Sonata for Flute and Piano, Opus 14* in 1960 while living in Oakland, California on a Ford Foundation Fellowship Grant. He completed the first two movements in Oakland and after moving to Chicago in 1961, composed the remaining two. The work was premiered in 1961 at the Academy of Music in Nice, France and was awarded the Concours International Prize.

Deemed as "too difficult, few will choose to play it" by a flautist-friend, Muczynski chose to ignore the voice of critics and wrote music for solo instruments that defied their natural compositional tendencies and clichés. For the flute, he veered away from its serene and sweet melodic texture to reveal its ability to project music with a strong and sharp character.

Muczynski speaks of his *Sonata for Flute and Piano*, "In Sonata-Allegro form, the first movement [*Allegro deciso*] begins with a syncopated four note figure announced by the flute. It has a restless urgency about it. This motive is gradually expanded, developed and varied as the music unfolds. There is frequent reference to it as both flute and piano share the ongoing dialogue. A pulsating energy is maintained throughout. The chattering *Scherzo* (6/8) is both whimsical and headstrong, requiring considerable control and endurance from the flautist. It is concentrated music; it goes by quickly and establishes a need for the contrasting movement which follows. As a respite from the two energetic movements, the *Andante* favours a kind of intimate and sustained music wherein the flute is assigned expressive, soaring lines of high intensity while the piano provides a subdued accompaniment throughout. The final, fourth movement [*Allegro con moto*], in rondo form, resumes the impetuous character of the opening music and sweeps along until arriving at a reckless "cadenza" for the flute followed by an outburst from the piano, as both instruments share in a conclusion of staggered rhythms and all-out abandon."