

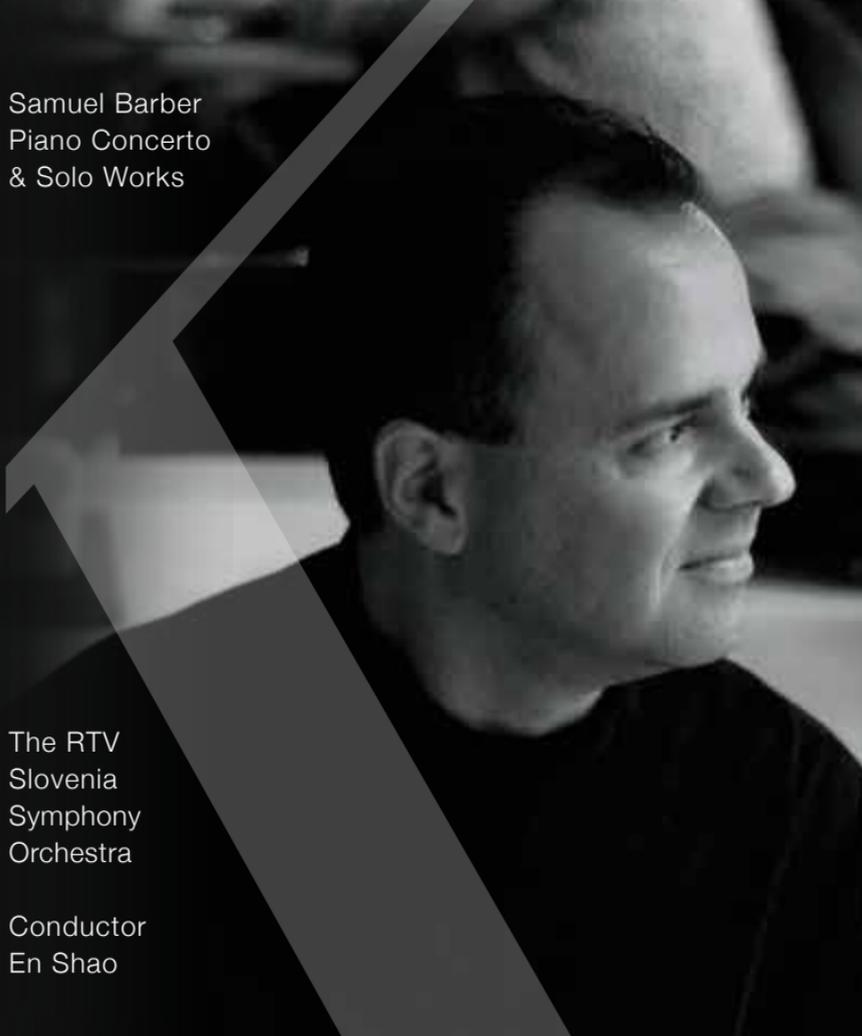


Kevin Robert Orr

Samuel Barber
Piano Concerto
& Solo Works

The RTV
Slovenia
Symphony
Orchestra

Conductor
En Shao





“Classical movement forms barely govern otherwise unbridled textural density in this unsurpassed challenge to the performer.”

I have always been fond of Barber’s Piano Sonata, Op. 26, a monument of twentieth-century piano composition by any standard, mining the depths of the composer’s coloristic prowess like no other single work. Classical movement forms barely govern otherwise unbridled textural density in this unsurpassed challenge to the performer. The ever-evolving application of the melodic half-step across the four movements—an angry scowl, a Romantic lilt, a staggering clown—is a personal fascination. An invitation to perform on the Contemporary Music Series at the University of Siegen, Germany, lent ample motivation to tackle this masterwork in the early spring of 2013. I have not since looked back. My fascination only grew with recurrent performances. I *had* to record this work. My friend and trusted engineer-producer, Andreas Meyer, and I endeavored to capture the Sonata over a weekend at the University of Florida School of Music in 2014.

My thinking as a performing artist and teacher would never again exclude Samuel Barber from being among the most capable piano composers of the last century. I felt a duty to further champion his efforts. While serious pianists needed no convincing (Vladimir Horowitz being among his chief advocates), far too many non-pianist friends knew Barber solely as the architect for *Adagio for Strings*.



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In seeking other major keyboard works of comparable impact to the Sonata, the Piano Concerto, Op. 38, was an obvious choice. The Pulitzer-Prize-winning work had been infrequently recorded since John Browning’s astounding efforts, to which I had and still frequently return. Moreover, I hadn’t encountered a single recording containing both the composer’s Piano Concerto and Sonata. Unlike Barber’s earlier and more popular concertos for Violin and Cello, the Piano Concerto presents a more balanced account of his striking compositional range, embracing certain influences yet never wholly embedding itself within any of the common ‘isms’ of the century. The opening solo cadenza toys with motives that, beyond the subsequent principal theme, form the basis of the movement’s thematic material—a possible nod to Liszt’s Piano Sonata in B Minor? The second and third movements emote entirely different, addictive compulsions—the second, a compelling yet somewhat eerie love story; the third, sarcastic, wicked amusement.

Masterclasses taught in the summers on the Adriatic coast of Slovenia formed acquaintances with a number of musicians of the Slovenia RTV Symphony,



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based in Ljubljana. All were rank-one performers, and lovely people, lending to natural pursuit of their partnership for this project. A grant from the University of Florida, where I have taught since 2000, provided the essential missing ingredient.

The Concerto was recorded in the impeccable studios of Slovenia RTV, Ljubljana, over two days in mid-November, 2015. I recall only fond memories of that whirlwind experience with the exceptional Slovenia RTV Symphony under Maestro En Shao and Concertmaster Benjamin Ziervogel. Such compelling and thoughtful artists.

A third day at RTV studios afforded the recording of two additional and different jewels of the composer: the Nocturne, Op. 33, and the Ballade, Op. 46, character pieces of entirely opposing psychological conditions. Once maintaining the view of these works as mere student pieces, I have been fully cured of that unfortunate and embarrassing misperception.



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The Nocturne is, in my estimation, a spectacularly composed piano solo. There is something uniquely gratifying in Barber's opening promise of familiarity, promptly and strikingly rewiring the ear through unanticipated harmonic diversion. An acquiescent 12-tone melody, shielded by the conservative accompaniment from more conventional dodecaphonic tendencies, exemplifies Barber's mastery of blending compositional mechanisms.

The Ballade makes no attempt at stylistic familiarity. One never feels totally resolved with this piece, not listener nor performer. Such is the account surrounding the work's creation during a troublesome personal time for the composer. Among Barber's final compositions, form is the only terrestrial force in the Ballade. Melody, harmony, musical *affect*...all remain ungrounded.

Kevin Robert Orr pursues a creative agenda as concert pianist, teacher, lecturer, clinician, and adjudicator that has taken him to major music institutions and festivals across North America, Europe, and East Asia.

Orr's recital programs and discography span the works of past and living composers. In review of Orr's recording of the Sonatas and Ballades of Johannes Brahms, Gramophone noted, "*Within four bars, I recognize that a formidable, seasoned artist is at work...two minutes in... and I'm hooked by Kevin Robert Orr's huge sound, pliable command of Brahms' thick writing, bracing sense of rhythm, and generous phrasing.*" American Record Guide remarked, "*This is first-rate playing, expressive and assured.*"



Collaborations have paired Orr with such internationally acclaimed artists as Karl Leister (clarinet, Berlin Philharmonic), James Thompson (trumpet, Montreal Symphony) and the Jupiter Quartet. Orr's performances of both new and standard classical repertoire have been heard on Public Radio throughout the United States.

A Steinway Artist, Orr's principal teachers include Paul Schenly, Robert Elliot Hopkins, Caroline Oltmanns, Melva Huebert and Doris Arnold Cunningham. Dr. Orr is Professor of Piano at the University of Florida School of Music. The list of individuals whose unique and critical contributions were equal to my own is long. Special thanks are due to the incredible staff of Slovenia RTV, namely Patrik Greblo, Tina Rupnik, and Maja Kojc. Andreas Meyer and I were treated with such kindness and accommodation, made to feel entirely at ease. The state-of-the-art RTV orchestral recording studio is not one I would expect to experience with another ensemble anywhere.

Were it not for the generous support of the University of Florida, Provost Joseph Glover and College of the Arts Dean, Lucinda Lavelli, the project would have never proceeded beyond my imagination. Additionally, the herculean efforts of Cynthia Brochu, whose careful budget oversight connected all dots foreign and domestic, must be recognized.

Exceptional piano technicians in both Gainesville and Ljubljana rendered impeccable New York and Hamburg Steinway instruments. Deepest thanks are extended to Ron Weigert (Gainesville, USA) and Zlatko Silič (Ljubljana, Slovenia).



Thanks are also due to Cole Moretti and Miran Kazafura, facility producer and engineer whose expertise and kind assistance ensured the perfect working space in Ljubljana.

I am forever indebted to engineer-producer Andreas Meyer, both for his brilliant ears and eyes in the studio, and more importantly his trust in my artistic vision. We are friends first, which I believe is the basis for the successful collaborations we've enjoyed. Thank you, Andreas.

Lastly, I am reminded every day of my incredibly good fortune in convincing Rhonda to take a musician for her life partner. I am ever humbled by her encouragement, understanding, and love.

Producer & Engineer - Andreas K. Meyer
Recording Engineer for sessions at RTV Studios - Ljubljana Slovenia Miran Kazafura
Assistant Engineer - Cole Moretti
RTV Slovenia Symphony Orchestra
Artistic Director - Maja Kojc, Managing Director - Patrik Greblo
Piano Technicians - Zlatko Silič (Ljubljana Slovenia), Ron Weigert (Gainesville FL)
Steinway Model D (Hamburg in Ljubljana Slovenia, New York in Gainesville Florida)
Photography - Lucija Magajna
CD Design - Sandra Meyer

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Kevin Robert Orr, Samuel Barber Piano Concerto & Solo works

Piano Concerto Op.38

14:38		1. I. Allegro appassionato
7:39		2. II. Canzone
7:05		3. III. Allegro molto
4:07		4. Nocturne Op.33 (Homage to John Field)
6:09		5. Ballade Op.46

Piano Sonata Op.26

8:39		6. I. Allegro energico
2:23		7. II. Allegro vivace e leggero
6:18		8. III. Adagio mesto
5:42		9. IV. Fuga: Allegro con spirito
62:45		Total Time

