

[Listen to the Concert](#)

[Article](#)

[Concert Gallery](#)

[Slideshow](#)

## NOTES ON BARBER'S *ADAGIO*

by Emily Koons

When selecting organ music for this [*Brass, Bells & Pipes*] concert, I felt that it was important to choose pieces by composers who were also church musicians. St. Peter's organ serves as a worship instrument, not merely as a concert instrument. The theology of our faith and our religious music should be mutually supportive, and composers who served at churches understood this.

Not many people know that Samuel Barber was an organist at the age of 13 at a Presbyterian church in West Chester, PA. According to anecdotal knowledge of people there, he didn't play the hymns the way the congregation liked and was sacked after less than a year! (I subbed there immediately after moving to Chester County, PA in the early '80s, just after Barber's death. The organ he played is a small two-manual pipe organ still in use, now moved to Delaware County.) The following year Barber entered Curtis Institute in Philadelphia as a composition with piano and voice major; he also was reputed to have had a beautiful singing voice. He composed very few pieces for organ, for he definitely preferred piano to organ. Most organists know his *Wondrous Love Variations* but not so many know his *Silent Night* or *Toccata Festiva for Organ and Orchestra*. These were composed long after his brief tenure as a church organist as a young teenager.

In reviewing the history of Barber's *Adagio for Strings*, I discovered that arranger William Strickland was an Episcopal organist and conductor who was stationed as a service musician at Arlington's Ft. Myer during WWII. Although I haven't been able to obtain confirmation, Strickland's organ arrangement of the *Adagio* could have been composed on our console (which originated at Ft. Myer) while Strickland was in service. This arrangement was the only one approved of by Barber himself, and Schirmer published it with the composer's blessings in 1949.

No doubt the *Adagio* (composed in the late '30s) was played at memorial services at Ft. Myer, and many people have told me that services for their family members were played on this console at Ft. Myer, at the Old Post Chapel.

[Listen to the Concert](#)

[Article](#)

[Concert Gallery](#)

[Slideshow](#)