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## Samuel Barber

Samuel Barber's music, or at least one piece of it, is now known to millions who otherwise boast only limited knowledge of 20th-century classics, thanks to the copycat tendencies of movie directors. It is difficult at this distance to grasp how fierce the infighting was in the world of "serious" music during the decades when popular music was pushing it farther and farther toward the fringes of American life. The advocates of take-no-prisoners modernism were not pleased by the way Barber clung to such "old-fashioned" concepts as lyrical beauty and emotional expression, while nationalists lamented that this cultivated child of privilege, had neglected to carve out a distinctly "American" style. Nor were the times propitious for open discussion of Barber's personal life, which for over four decades centered on a relationship that began in the 1920s with the meeting of two teenagers at the Curtis Institute of Music. The man some Web sources still coyly call his "housemate," Gian Carlo Menotti, became the most successful composer of opera in mid-century America. Barber would in time win two Pulitzer Prizes, but would also suffer the public failure of his opera "Antony and Cleopatra" which opened the new Metropolitan Opera House in 1966, and the rupture of his domestic relationship, which broke apart in 1973. Nevertheless, when Barber died in 1981, Menotti was at his bedside. The Sonata on this disk was written in 1932, during the first flood of youthful passion that would four years later result in the Quartet with its famous Adagio.

## Heitor Villa-Lobos

Self-taught musicians make life hard on the people who like to put composers in tidy little boxes. Heitor Villa-Lobos is said to have picked up most of his musical knowledge by ear, listening to concerts in the family home. He was only twelve when his father suddenly died in 1899, but he was able to go to work at once playing in the pits of theaters or the new movie houses. Because young Heitor skipped the sort of formal training that sets most composers on a path they can either follow or reject, his trajectory is harder to plot. He picked up both the classical tradition and assorted folk styles in the same way: by listening to the music and playing it. His instruments were clarinet, guitar and cello, and his freelancing took him from the street music of Rio de Janeiro, to the orchestra of the city's opera house. Because he had the flexible approach to musical construction that practical musicians so often show, he has been treated as a "rebel" against the classical tradition, and because he sometimes incorporated Brazilian folk melodies in his work, he's been lumped in the grab-bag category of "nationalist" composers, who supposedly set themselves against European authority... unless, of course, you remember that he spent the 1920s in Paris, spent the 1930s in Brazil working on patriotic projects. Villa-Lobos was clearly an eclectic musician, wary of letting his style slide too far in the direction of any one of his models. He was proud of his originality, determined to sound like no one else, but his own sound was sufficiently varied that it's not easy to find a "typical" composition. His Second Sonate for Cello and Piano, Opus 66, was written in 1916, before his move to Paris.

## Robert Muczynski

If you look at the symphony halls and opera houses it's easy to see the 20th century as a time when audiences and composers lost touch with one another. A century that began with audiences filling halls to hear the latest creations of Puccini or Mahler, ended with a standard repertoire utterly dominated by music from the 19th-century and earlier. But if you focus on compositions for smaller groups of players, you see a different trend. Several of the most successful composers of the century, including Bartok and Shostakovich, made their greatest contributions in the field of chamber music. Composers of solo or small-group works are constrained by the need to provide players with music they can really care about. This trend has especially shaped the career of Robert Muczynski, whose music has been described by critic Walter Simmons as noteworthy for "an avoidance of pretense or grandiosity of any kind." Born to Polish-American parents in 1929, the composer's talent was recognized early, and he entered De Paul University as a piano major in 1947, completing his BA in 1950 and his MA in 1952. Before the decade was over he had composed and performed a Piano Concerto for the Louisville Orchestra, and had made his New York debut as a pianist at Carnegie Recital Hall, with a program devoted entirely to his own music. In 1956 he became head of the piano program at Loras College, leaving after three years to serve as composer-in-residence in the Oakland school district, funded by the Ford Foundation, and then a faculty position at the University of Arizona, where he taught until his retirement in 1988. His Opus 26 Sonata for Cello and Piano was published in 1970. From beginning to end the sonata crackles with dramatic action.

## By Samuel Barber

Sonata for Violincello and Piano, op. 6

1—*Allegro ma non troppo*

2—*Adagio, Presto, di nuovo Adagio*

3—*Allegro appassionato*

## By Robert Muczynski

Sonata for Cello and Piano, op. 25

8—*Theme and Variations*

9—*Scherzo*

10—*Andante sostenuto*

11—*Allegro con spirito*



## By Heitor Villa-Lobos

Second Sonata for Violincello and Piano, op. 66

4—*Allegro moderato*

5—*Andante cantabile*

6—*Allegro scherzando*

7—*Allegro vivace sostenuto*

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Co-Producer, mastering,  
engineering: Mike Moore

Studio: Dead Aunt Thelma's

Art concept and design: Dave Schwanke

Text: David MacLaine

Publishers: G. Schirmer (Sontana-Barber),

M. Eschig (Sonata-Villa Lobos),

G. Schirmer (Sonata-Muczynski)

St. Elvis: Jerry Bobbe and Maria Choban

Web site: Nathan Fretta

Catalog No. a4

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