



ORCHID CLASSICS



ADAMS | BARBER | CONTE

Royal Philharmonic Orchestra

Michael Poll, conductor

Jack Liebeck, violin

ORC100377

ADAMS | BARBER | CONTE**Midsummer Light****Byron Adams (b.1955)**

1	<i>Midsummer Music</i>	8.49
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Samuel Barber (1910-1981)

Concerto for Violin and Orchestra, Op.14

2	I Allegro moderato	10.54
3	II Andante	8.22
4	III Presto in moto perpetuo	3.53

David Conte (b.1955)*Sinfonietta for Classical Orchestra*

5	I Overture	4.12
6	II Elegy	7.14
7	III Finale	3.53

Total time	47.18
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Midsummer Light brings together three works that explore lyrical expression within American modernism. Rooted in a neo-romantic tradition that nonetheless embraces 20th-century harmonic innovation, formal clarity, and lyricism, these pieces stand in deliberate opposition to the hyper-rationalism of mid-century serialism and the stark minimalism that followed. These composers cultivate rich tonal palettes, transparent orchestration, and emotional directness that assert a distinctly American voice.

Barber's Violin Concerto (1939) exemplifies this confluence: it is anchored in a language reminiscent of that of Sibelius and Elgar and echoes the Brahmsian lyricism of earlier Americans including Arthur Foote (1853–1937) and George Whitefield Chadwick (1854–1931). The concerto's harmonic surprises and rhythmic variety, however, give the piece a characteristic 'New World' feel. This blend of lush lyricism with dynamic harmonic and rhythmic language typifies Barber's compositional idiom; Adams and Conte, writing later in the 20th and 21st centuries, extend this ethos in distinctly individual ways.

Byron's Adams's *Midsummer Music* unfolds in an arch-like structure from a serene opening through an animated middle to a reflective close; Conte's *Sinfonietta* traverses a Stravinskian opening sonata, a Copland-inspired elegiac central movement, and a vibrant, celebratory finale that recalls Poulenc's harmonic world and hints at Conte's formative years studying with Nadia Boulanger in Paris. Though grounded in functional tonality, each work stretches its boundaries to trace a rich emotional arc.



"Summer afternoon -- summer afternoon; to me those have always been the two most beautiful words in the English language." - Henry James

Byron Adams's *Midsummer Music* is an impressionistic piece in a manner reminiscent of composers like Charles Tomlinson Griffes (1884-1920). Adams

recalls that the initial impetus for his *Midsummer Music* for orchestra occurred in the mid-1980s when he first viewed 'Summer' (1890), by the American Impressionist Thomas Wilmer Dewing (1851-1938).



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The painting depicts four elegant, but indistinct, women clothed in diaphanous gowns dancing or floating (or both) to music provided by a seated woman with a golden harp. Later, Adams recalled this canvas while walking the Forest of Fontainebleau, noting the sun-dappled landscape to be similar to the lush green background of the Dewing; he sketched *Midsummer Music* between teaching and conducting duties at the American Conservatory of Music in Fontainebleau.

Midsummer Music contains an extensive quotation from Adams's own art song, 'Green', a setting of a sensuous poem by D. H. Lawrence, as well as 'Il était une bergère', a *chanson populaire* that was first published in the seventeenth

century, which recounts the naughty adventures of a young shepherdess, her cat, and a lascivious priest. Variations on this lively tune make up the work's central section. After a return to the evocative music with which *Midsummer Music* began, the score concludes in a state of rapturous contemplation that gradually dissolves into silence.

Midsummer Music reached its final form in 1998, six years after the first sketches, and is dedicated to art historian and curator John Davis, who suggested that Adams seek out Dewing's paintings.

Michael Poll

Of his *Sinfonietta for Classical Orchestra*, David Conte writes:

I have largely specialized in creating vocal music, choral music, and opera, but around 2009 I began to compose more instrumental music. Since that time, I have written a second string quartet, two piano trios, a sextet for clarinet, strings, and piano, sonatas for clarinet and French horn, and a suite for organ and brass quintet. Long study of the works of the composers I most admire has taught me that instrumental music is informed by a vocal impulse; I have therefore striven to imbue my *Sinfonietta for Classical Orchestra* with dramatic and lyrical melodies.

A *sinfonietta* implies a work shorter than the usual length of a symphony, and is often scored for smaller forces; mine resembles such concise scores as Prokofiev's *Classical Symphony* and Copland's *Short Symphony*.

Begun in June of 2012 and completed in October of that year, I scored the *Sinfonietta* for an orchestra of woodwinds in pairs, four horns, two trumpets, timpani, and strings. The piece is cast in three movements that are played without pause.

The first movement, 'Overture', is a spirited sonata form, quite classical in mood, with dotted rhythms reminiscent of a French overture and containing

animated and steadily running sixteenth notes. The accumulation of rhythmic energy in the movement comes to an abrupt halt as woodwind solos are used to transition into the following movement, 'Elegy'. This movement is filled with quiet intensity, as a 'sighing' motif in the strings is answered by florid woodwind solos. These two ideas are subtly developed and transformed, moving through various tonalities and culminating in several climaxes. The 'Elegy' concludes with woodwinds playing rising passages over a quiet roll on the timpani. The last movement, 'Finale', starts with vivacious figuration that arises from the depths of the orchestra, arriving at the announcement of a jaunty, syncopated theme proclaimed by the full ensemble. The elaboration of this theme proceeds to an animated climax that subsides into a second lyrical melody sung broadly by the violins. More development ensues, succeeded in turn by a protracted transition predicated on an *ostinato*. At this point, all of the themes heard throughout this movement are woven together in counterpoint; this passage leads to an energetic coda.

Sinfonietta for Classical Orchestra was commissioned by the Atlantic Classical Orchestra, Stewart Robertson, conductor, and was premiered on January 31, 2013. I later rescored the piece for eleven instruments: this version was premiered on 1 November 2016, with Michael Morgan conducting an ensemble comprising faculty members of the San Francisco Conservatory of Music and players from the San Francisco Opera Orchestra.

David Conte

When Samuel Barber started sketching his Violin Concerto in 1939, he had already enjoyed a string of successful performances. These included the 1938 premiere of his *Adagio* for strings, an orchestral arrangement of the slow movement of his String Quartet, Op.11 (1936), which was performed by the NBC Symphony conducted by Arturo Toscanini. This piece became his most famous work, earning a solid place in the orchestral repertoire.

Barber hailed from an affluent and cultured family. He attended the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, which played a decisive role in his eventual fame. His distinguished teachers included Isabella Vengerova for piano, Emilio de Gonzorga for voice, and the composer Rosario Scalero. Scalero was a draconian reactionary both as a pedagogue and as a composer from whom Barber learnt vital technical skills while developing a habit of lacerating self-criticism. As a result, Barber often revised his music after a premiere.

Barber's most popular compositions, including the *Adagio* and the Violin Concerto, display a warm lyricism derived from his preoccupation with creating vocal music. He composed many songs, including two song cycles, and two operas. With his suave baritone voice, Barber even recorded his own setting of Matthew Arnold's poem 'Dover Beach' for baritone and string quartet, Op.3 (1931), in 1935.

During his time at Curtis, both as a student and later as a faculty member, Barber wrote several celebrated scores, including the Violin Concerto, Op.14. In 1939, a wealthy patron commissioned Barber to compose a violin concerto for his young protégé, the violinist Iso Briselli. Barber completed the first two movements by mid-October of that year, but Briselli found them insufficiently virtuosic. In response, Barber composed a *perpetuum mobile* finale reminiscent of the last movement of Ravel's 1927 Violin Sonata. Briselli, however, was still dissatisfied. He demanded that Barber re-write the finale; Barber demurred and returned part of the commission fee. The concerto was eventually premiered on 7 February 1941 by violinist Albert Spaulding and the Philadelphia Orchestra conducted by Eugene Ormandy. The work was received enthusiastically by its first audiences. Some music critics, however, were dismissive: Virgil Thomson wrote cattily that the 'only reason Barber gets away with such elementary musical methods is that his heart is pure.' Barber himself was discontented with certain aspects of the initial score, and made several sets of revisions. As his biographer Howard Pollack writes, 'Although Barber essentially finished the score in 1939, the premiere programme note gave its completion date as July 1940, indicating that the composer continued to work on the piece into the

summer; considering, too, the additional changes made just prior to the premiere, the concerto alternatively might be dated 1940 or 1941, as opposed to the more customary 1939.' In 1948, Barber made yet more improvements for a performance by violinist Ruth Posselt with the Boston Symphony conducted by Serge Koussevitzky. Barber's Violin Concerto is now beloved by performers and listeners alike; it is one of few American-composed violin concertos to enter the standard repertory.

Byron Adams

David Conte

Composer

David Conte has received commissions from the San Francisco, Dayton, Oakland, and Stockton Symphonies, Chanticleer, the American Choral Directors Association, the American Guild of Organists, Sonoma City Opera, and the Gerbode Foundation. Since 1985 he has been Professor of Composition and since 2014 Chair of the Composition Department at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music. Conte is the composer of over 150 works published by E.C. Schirmer Music Company, and his work is represented on recordings on the Albany, Delos, Cedille, and Pentatone labels. A Fulbright Scholar in Paris with Nadia Boulanger, where he was one of her last students; a Ralph Vaughan Williams Fellow; and an Aspen Music Festival Conducting Fellow, he earned a D.M.A. from Cornell University, where he studied with Karel Husa. In 1982 Conte worked with Aaron Copland preparing a study of the composer's manuscript sketches. He has taught at Cornell and Colgate Universities, the European-American Musical Alliance in Paris, the American Conservatory in Fontainebleau, France, and the Interlochen Center for the Arts. He co-composed the score for the documentary *Ballets Russes* and he composed the score for the PBS documentary *Orozco: Man of Fire*. Conte's opera *The Gift of the Magi* has received over 40 productions in the U. S., Canada, Europe, and Russia. In 2015 he was awarded the National Association of Teachers of Singing Art Song Composition Award for his cycle *American*

Death Ballads. In 2024 he was named Distinguished Composer of the Year by the American Guild of Organists. He is currently at work on a ballet based on *Brokeback Mountain* with choreographer Pontus Lidberg.

Byron Adams

Composer

Byron Adams (b.1955) is a composer and musicologist. His essays have appeared in scholarly journals such as *19th-Century Music*, *The Musical Quarterly*, and *Music & Letters*. He has contributed chapters to volumes such as *The Cambridge Companion to Elgar* (2004), *The Cambridge Companion to Vaughan Williams* (2013), *The Music of Herbert Howells* (2014), and *Fauré Studies* (2021). In 2007, Adams was appointed scholar-in-residence of the Bard Music Festival and edited the volume *Edward Elgar and His World*. With Daniel M. Grimley, Adams was scholar-in-residence for the 2023 Bard Music Festival, and they co-edited *Vaughan Williams and His World*.

Adams's scores have been performed by the 'Warsaw Autumn' International Festival of Contemporary Music, the Conservatoire Américain in Fontainebleau, France, and the Armenian Philharmonic Orchestra. The Philharmonia Orchestra performed his *Midsummer Music* in 2011 under the baton of Peter Oundjian. The celebrated male vocal ensemble Cantus sang the premiere of his 'Eventide', which they subsequently commercially recorded and featured on their annual National Public Radio Thanksgiving Day broadcast in 2013. That same year, cellist Julie Albers played Adams's Concerto for violoncello and orchestra with Grant Cooper conducting the West Virginia Symphony Orchestra. The Quartetto di Cremona premiered Adams's First String Quartet 'Monteverdiana' in 2019. 2024 saw the first performance of both his Stabat Mater for soprano and chamber ensemble and his Serenata in Stile Antico for oboe and string orchestra.



Jack Liebeck

Violin

In the 25 years since his debut with the Hallé, Jack Liebeck has worked with some of the world's leading conductors including Andrew Litton, Leonard Slatkin, Karl-Heinz Steffens, Sir Mark Elder, Sakari Oramo, Vasily Petrenko, Sir Neville Marriner, Brett Dean, Daniel Harding, Jukka Pekka Saraste, David Robertson, Jakub Hrůša and major orchestras across the globe including Royal Stockholm Philharmonic, Swedish Radio, Oslo Philharmonic, Belgian National, MDR Leipzig Radio Symphony, Moscow State Symphony, Sinfónica de Galicia, Spokane Symphony, St Louis Symphony, Indianapolis Symphony as well as the majority of those of the United Kingdom.

Jack's fascination with all things scientific culminated in the founding of his own festival in 2008 to combine Music, Science and Art, 'Oxford May Music'. He has collaborated with physicist Professor Brian Cox in several unique symphonic science programmes which have included the world premieres of two violin concertos written especially for Jack: 'Voyager Concerto' by Dario Marianelli commissioned by the Queensland Symphony and Swedish Radio orchestras, and 'A Brief History of Time' by Paul Dean, commissioned by Melbourne Symphony. Jack gave the online premiere of Taylor Scott Davis' new concerto for violin, choir & orchestra *To Sing of Love: a Triptych* with the VOCES8 Foundation Choir and Orchestra conducted by Barnaby Smith.

Jack is the Artistic Director of the Australian Festival of Chamber Music, the Émile Sauret Professor of Violin at the Royal Academy of Music, and a member of Salieca Piano Trio.

Jack plays the 'Ex-Wilhelmj' J.B. Guaragnini violin dated 1785, and the 'Professor David Bennett' Joseph Henry bow.

Michael Poll

Conductor

Michael Poll has performed in North America, South America, and Europe, including in Barbican Hall, Wigmore Hall, and the National Theatre of Panama. In 2023 Poll was appointed Associate Conductor of Central City Opera in Colorado; previously he conducted Bloomsbury Opera in London, leading new productions of *Così* and *Figaro*, during which time he also served as an intern assistant conductor to Franz Welser-Möst for *Salome* at the Salzburg Festival, and an observer to Barry Wordsworth for *Copelia* and to Sir Antonio Pappano for *Meistersinger*, *The Ring*, *La Bohème*, *Madama Butterfly*, and the Verdi *Requiem* all at the Royal Ballet and Opera. His debut guitar album, *7-String Bach*, was called 'masterful' by Gramophone magazine, and Wholenote praised the 'Warm, rich, and full tone'. Since its release by Orchid Classics in 2018, *7-String Bach* has been streamed over 1 million times on Spotify and Apple Music.

From 2014 – 2018, Poll was Music Director of the Goodensemble Orchestra at Goodenough College in London, where he led a Gala in honour of Queen Elizabeth, a cycle of Beethoven piano concerti, and premiers by Sato Matsui, Joseph Stillwell, Igor Maia, and Raymond Yiu.

A 2010 Fulbright and a 2012 Marshall Scholar, Poll holds a BA in music *summa cum laude* from the University of Pennsylvania, where he was elected to Phi Beta Kappa in his Junior year, and was concurrently a visiting student at the Curtis Institute of Music. He also holds degrees from the Paderewski Academy of Music in Poland and the Guildhall School of Music & Drama, where he was a Junior Fellow from 2015-2017, and was awarded a Doctorate in 2022 for applied aesthetics in musical arrangement. Poll has been a member of the faculty of the Bryn Mawr Conservatory of Music and the Polish Guitar Academy, a fellow of the Norfolk Chamber Music Festival, an advisor to the Southwark Music Service

and is the Classical Music Programmer for Lancaster Arts. He has been active in the initiative SoundingLab, which brings live music into schools in the US and the UK, and is a 2024 recipient of the British Academy's Small Project Funding. He is currently writing a chamber opera to a libretto by Sir David Pountney.



Royal Philharmonic Orchestra

Violin I

Duncan Riddell, leader
Shana Douglas
Esther Kim
Savva Zverev
Kay Chappell

Violin II

Andrew Storey
Elen Hâf Rideal
Charlotte Ansbergs
Peter Graham
Stephen Payne

Viola

Abigail Fenna
Liz Varlow
Joseph Fisher
Esther Harling

Cello

Roberto Sorrentino
Jean-Baptiste Toselli
William Heggart
Naomi Watts

Double Bass

Benjamin Cunningham
David Gordon

Flute

Emer McDonough
Joanna Marsh (Adams
and Barber)

Flute/Piccolo

Diomedes Demetriades
(Adams and Conte)

Oboe

John Roberts

Oboe/English Horn

Eleanor Sullivan

Clarinet

Sonia Sielaff
Katy Ayling

Bassoon

Richard Ion
Dominic Tyler

Horn

Alexander Edmundson
Finlay Bain
Amadea Dazeley Gaist
(Adams and Conte)
Kathryn Saunders
(Adams and Conte)

Trumpet

Mike Allen
Angela Whelan

Timpani

Elsa Bradley

Percussion

Stephen Quigley
(Adams and Barber)
Martin Owens (Adams)

Harp

Daniel De Fry (Adams)

Piano/Celeste

Ben Dawson

Recorded at Abbey Road Studio 2 on 16 December 2024

Producer & Engineer: Ignacio Lusardi Monteverdi

Associate Producer: Michael Poll

Recordist: Dan Hayden

Mastering Engineer: Alex Gordon

Production Assistant: Ethan Lieber (Conte only)

Special thanks:

Andrew Joe; Peter and Annette Beaumont Ellis; Joe and Sarah Osnoss; Charles McGregor; NYSCA



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