

SAMUEL BARBER

Born 9 March 1910 in West Chester, Pennsylvania; died 23 January 1981 in New York City.

Adagio for Strings (1936 for string quartet; arranged for string orchestra in 1937)

PREMIERE OF QUARTET: Rome, December 1936; Pro Arte Quartet

PREMIERE OF STRING ORCHESTRA ARRANGEMENT: New York, 5 November 1938; NBC Symphony; NBC Radio Network broadcast; Arturo Toscanini, conductor

PSO PREMIERE: 3 January 1941; Syria Mosque; Fritz Reiner, conductor

APPROXIMATE DURATION: 7 minutes

In 1936, Artur Rodzinski gave the American premiere of Samuel Barber's *Symphony in One Movement* in Cleveland and played it the following year at the Salzburg Festival, making it the first American work to be heard at that prestigious event. The chief conductor of the Salzburg Festival at that time was Arturo Toscanini, who was to begin his tenure with the NBC Symphony later that year. Toscanini asked Rodzinski if he could suggest an American composer whose work he might program during the coming season, and Rodzinski advised that his Italian colleague investigate the music of the 27-year-old Barber. By October, Barber had completed and submitted to Toscanini the *Essay No. 1 for Orchestra* and an arrangement for string orchestra of the slow movement from the *Quartet* (Op. 11, in B minor) he had written in Rome in 1936 — the *Adagio for Strings*. Toscanini accepted the pieces for performance, and broadcast them on November 5, 1938 with the NBC Symphony. The *Adagio*, with its plaintive melody, rich modalism, austere texture and introspective mood, was an instant success and remains among Samuel Barber's greatest legacies.