Program Notes
by Chris Morrison
Reno Chamber Orchestra
“Barber” – February 28 and March 1, 2026

Charles Ives

Born: October 20, 1874, Danbury, Connecticut
Died: May 19, 1954, New York, New York

Charles Ives is now recognized as one of America’s great composers, although his music was largely ignored during his lifetime. His father George was a bandmaster whose unconventional musical ideas were a huge influence. In 1894 Ives entered Yale, where he received a more traditional musical grounding (he also played on the football team). In 1902 he co-founded Ives and Co., a very successful Manhattan life insurance company. Ives fit in composing where he could: on evenings, weekends, and while commuting to and from work. The 1910s saw the creation of many of his most important works, like the “Concord” Sonata and “Three Places in New England.” In 1930 Ives retired from the insurance business. Having lost the inspiration to compose, he spent his time revising works already written. In 1947 he was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for his Symphony No. 3, written back in 1904. Ives’s music is an innovative combination of European influences, quotations of traditional songs and hymns, a free use of dissonance, and experiments in techniques like collage, quartertones, and unusual tonal and rhythmic combinations.

Symphony No. 3 “The Camp Meeting”

Composed: 1901-4, rev. 1909-11
Duration: 20 minutes
Instrumentation: flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, 2 horns, trombone, percussion, strings

Ives and his business partner, Julian Myrick, opened the Ives and Co. insurance company in 1902. Within just a few years, the company was selling more insurance than any other firm in the nation. Busy as he was with his new business venture during the day, Ives still spent evenings and weekends composing. Through the first decade of the twentieth century, Ives wrote and revised the Symphony No. 3. Ives himself regarded the Symphony as a “cross between the older ways and the newer ways.” meaning the more traditional approach of his previous two symphonies and the more adventurous, dissonant style – and frequent employing of folk tunes and hymns – of later works like the Symphony No. 4.

There is something of a narrative in the Third Symphony, with its subtitle “The Camp Meeting.” Ives seems to be remembering camp meetings he attended as a youth in the neighborhood of his family's Connecticut home, for which his father George would lead the singing of hymns. Ives's starting point for the symphony was a trio of organ pieces he had written in 1901 when he was the organist at Central Presbyterian Church in New York. Added to those are a variety of quotations of other hymns and popular songs.

In the first movement, “Old Folks Gatherin',” hymn fragments – including “What a Friend We Have in Jesus,” “O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing” (also known as “Azmon”), and “Just As I Am” – appear and disappear, in a multi-part texture that calls to mind the counterpoint of Baroque era composers like Johann Sebastian Bach. The flute eventually plays the entirety of “What a Friend We Have in Jesus,”

which had been heard only in fragments before that.

The second movement, “Children’s Day,” is cheerful and animated, with multiple hymns, including “Now from the Altar of My Heart” and “There Is a Fountain Filled with Blood,” heard in counterpoint with one another. After a central march, the movement ends with more hymn fragments.

All the hymns from the previous two movements return for the final movement, “Communion.” After more Bach-like counterpoint, the hymn “Woodworth” emerges as the central focus, as very quiet, distant church bells sound to end the symphony.

Gustav Mahler, who was at the time of the Symphony's writing the conductor of the New York Philharmonic, was apparently one of the relatively few people who got to see Ives's music in its early stages. He saw a version of the Symphony No. 3's score, and took it back to Germany in the months before he died in 1911. Mahler may or may not have met Ives, and may or may not have promised to conduct the Symphony No. 3 (or even actually conducted it) at some point. Like so much in Ives's biography, the facts are sketchy and contradictory.

In any event, interest in the Symphony No. 3 was nearly nonexistent from that point until composer Lou Harrison led the Symphony's premiere performance, with the New York Little Symphony, in New York on April 5, 1946. Not long after, another great composer, Bernard Herrmann, led a CBS radio broadcast performance. This attention led to Ives receiving the Pulitzer Prize for Music in 1947 for the Symphony. A wealthy man already, Ives reportedly gave Harrison half of the money he received for the prize. While the often-prickly Ives dismissed musical awards as “badges of mediocrity,” his friends often mentioned seeing those very prizes, including the Pulitzer certificate, on display at the Ives home.

Samuel Barber

Born: March 9, 1910, West Chester, Pennsylvania
Died: January 23, 1981, New York, New York

Samuel Barber remained separate from the modernist trends of the twentieth century, writing music with an emotional directness and melodic generosity largely out of fashion at the time. Part of a musical family – his mother was a pianist, his aunt a contralto at the Metropolitan Opera, and his uncle a composer – Barber was attracted to music at a very early age. At 14 he became part of the very first class at Philadelphia’s Curtis Institute of Music, where he studied piano, composition, and voice. There he met composer Gian Carlo Menotti, who became his life partner and musical collaborator. The slow movement of Barber’s String Quartet, now known as the Adagio for Strings, has become his signature piece, more or less launching his career when Arturo Toscanini featured it in a famous NBC Symphony concert in 1938. Barber won two Pulitzer Prizes: the first in 1958 for the opera Vanessa, and the second in 1963 for his Piano Concerto. His music was embraced by some of the greatest musicians of his time, commissioned and first performed by the likes of Vladimir Horowitz, Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, and Leontyne Price.

Knoxville: Summer of 1915, Op. 24

Composed: 1947
Duration: 15 minutes
Instrumentation: solo voice, flute (doubling piccolo), oboe (doubling English horn), clarinet, bassoon, 2 horns, trumpet, percussion, harp, strings

Knoxville: Summer of 1915 is Barber's setting, one he described as a “lyric rhapsody,” of part of a 1938 prose-poem by author James Agee, which later became the introduction to Agee's Pulitzer Prize-winning book A Death in the Family (1957). Barber described his response to Agee's words in a 1949 interview as “immediate and intense. I think I must have composed Knoxville within a few days … You see, it expresses a child’s feelings of loneliness, wonder and lack of identity in that marginal world between twilight and sleep.” Barber's setting was commissioned by soprano Eleanor Steber, who premiered it in 1948 with the Boston Symphony Orchestra under Serge Koussevitzky.

The music and text combine to create a nostalgic picture of Knoxville, Tennessee, where James Agee was born. In 1915, Agee was six. The following year, Agee's father died in a car crash, and his family left Knoxville for good. Unsurprisingly, Agee felt this to be a defining moment in his life. As it happens, while writing his music, Barber was also dealing with his own father's sustained illness – in fact, the score carries the dedication, “In Memory of my Father.”

Agee begins by describing himself as “successfully disguised to myself as a child.” His text evokes a tranquil setting, in which not much is happening: adults sitting on the porch passing the time in conversation, their voices “gentle and meaningless, like the voices of sleeping birds.” Barber's music is calm and lyrical, rocking gently in triple meter, but also engaging in some agitated word painting as the calm of the evening is broken by a passing horse and a buggy, automobiles, and a streetcar that is “raising its iron moan; stopping, belling and starting.” The music speeds and becomes more chaotic, with string pizzicati and staccato phrases from the strings and woodwinds.

Some family members lie with the boy on quilts in the yard, looking at the stars that “are wide and alive, they seem each like a smile of great sweetness, and they seem very near.” The music returns to the calm of the opening minutes. One also hears the “dry and exalted noise of the locusts from all the air.” The main figures remain the boy's mother and father, who are both “good to me.” But there are darker thoughts, too, as the boy's thoughts turn to the transitory nature of the experience: “May God bless my people, my uncle, my aunt, my mother, my good father, oh, remember them kindly in their time of trouble; and in the hour of their taking away.”

After a dark section in which the boy wonders “who shall ever tell the sorrow of being on this earth,” the boy is eventually “taken in and put to bed.” As he falls asleep, the music calmly floating and rising, he recognizes one thing that his family hasn't taught him, and can't: “who I am.”

Jasmine Barnes

Born: September 28, 1991

Jasmine Barnes is an Emmy-winning composer and acclaimed vocalist. She was a recent recipient of Opera America’s Discovery Opera Grant for women composers. Barnes also received the Florence Price Award for composition from Pricefest, and was the winner of the International Women's Brass Conference Emerging Composer Competition and the Black Brilliance award from The Pleiades Project. She has been commissioned by prestigious organizations such as the New York Philharmonic, American Composers Forum, San Francisco Symphony, Chicago Symphony, Opera Theatre of Saint Louis, Carnegie Hall, Aspen Music Festival and School, and Orpheus Chamber Orchestra. She is the former Head of Compositional Studies and Jazz Voice Studies at Booker T. Washington High School for the Performing and Visual Arts, having won numerous awards for her teaching. She holds her Bachelor of Arts and Master of Arts in Music from Morgan State University. Barnes is also a part of a

network of composers called “The Blacknificient Seven” with Damien Geter, Jessie Montgomery, Shawn Okpebholo, Dave Ragland, Carlos Simon, and Joel Thompson.

“When they ask me to stand, will I?” from She Who Dared

Composed: 2025
Duration: 5 minutes

With a libretto by Deborah D.E.E.P. Mouton, She Who Dared is the fifth opera composed by Jasmine Barnes. Combining classical music with influences from soul, gospel and protest music, She Who Dared was described as “the best possible blend of Billie Holiday and Claude Debussy” by the Boston Globe.

The opera, believed to be the first professionally-produced opera written by two African-American women, follows seven women who helped to desegregate the Montgomery, Alabama bus system in the 1950s: Aurelia Browder, Claudette Colvin, Susie McDonald, Jeanetta Reese, Jo Ann Robinson, Mary Louise Smith, and the most famous of the group, Rosa Parks. The opera was commissioned by American Lyric Theater – of which RCO Music Director Kelly Kuo serves as Associate Artistic Director and Conductor – and was premiered on June 3, 2025 by Chicago Opera Theater at Chicago's Studebaker Theater.

Even though Rosa Parks planned and was prepared for her famous act of defiance, the opera takes a moment to focus on the moment of doubt she experienced just prior to the event – both the immediate personal and long-term societal impact – in the aria “When they ask me to stand, will I?” Lawrence Edelson, General Director of Chicago Opera Theater, said in a National Public Radio interview that “I will put that aria up with something by Puccini or by Mozart or by Verdi in terms of the emotional punch and the melodic beauty. It is just stunning.”

Matt Browne

Born: 1988

The music of Colorado-based composer Matt Browne incorporates such eclectic influences as the timbral imagination and playfulness of György Ligeti, the shocking and humorous polystylism of Alfred Schnittke, and the relentless rhythmic energy of Igor Stravinsky. Dr. Browne has collaborated with such ensembles as the Minnesota Orchestra, Alarm Will Sound, PRISM Quartet, Albany Symphony, Milwaukee Symphony, Eastman Wind Ensemble, PUBLIQuartet, New York Virtuoso Singers, New Jersey Symphony, New England Philharmonic, and the Villiers Quartet. Recently, his music has received honors including the ASCAP Foundation Rudolf Nissim Prize (2017), first prize in the 2020 New Classics International Competition of the Moscow Conservatory, a BMI Student Composer award (2015), and a residency at the Mizzou International Composers Festival. Dr. Browne holds a Doctorate of Musical Arts in Music Composition from the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor and a Bachelor of Music from the University of Colorado at Boulder. Among his teachers were Michael Daugherty, Kristin Kuster, Carter Pann, and Daniel Kellogg.

I Have Seen the Future

Composed: 2025
Duration: 17 minutes

Instrumentation: 2 flutes (one doubling piccolo), 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani, percussion, harp, strings

I Have Seen the Future was commissioned by a consortium of orchestras including the Reno Chamber Orchestra, Cincinnati Chamber Orchestra, Chamber Orchestra of Pittsburgh, and Chamber Orchestra of the Triangle. The work was given its world premiere performance on August 9, 2025 by the Cincinnati Chamber Orchestra conducted by Eckart Preu.

For each of the five movements of I Have Seen the Future, Browne has taken inspiration from science fiction and other writers: Samuel Butler for the the first movement, Darwin Among the Machines; Isaac Asimov for the second, Robbie; Brian Aldiss for the third, Supertoys Last All Summer Long; Harlan Ellison for the fourth, I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream; and Richard Brautigan for the fifth, All Watched Over by Machines of Loving Grace. Browne elaborates in a note his has written about his score:

“This piece draws inspiration from multiple, yet interconnected, sources. First and foremost, I’ve long wanted to create music that pays homage to the film and television scores of the late ’50s through the ’60s – works by composers like Bernard Herrmann, early Jerry Goldsmith, Alex North, Quincy Jones, and Marius Constant. The scores of that era had a bold, brash dissonance and a raw, unpolished edge, punctuated by lush melodies and bizarre textures. Compared to the grand, sweeping orchestrations of earlier decades, they carried a grittier, more pulpy sensibility.

“Another key inspiration came from a museum exhibit on the 1939 World’s Fair in Flushing, NY. Among the artifacts was a simple pinback button with the phrase 'I Have Seen the Future' printed on it. I’ve always been fascinated by how past generations envisioned the future – and how often their boldest predictions ended up being wildly off the mark.

“Structurally, this piece is designed like a 1960s science fiction short story anthology. Each movement is inspired by historical writings on Artificial Intelligence and Robotics – topics more relevant now than ever. These writings range from the existential to the dizzyingly optimistic to the outright apocalyptic. By weaving these perspectives together, the piece underscores a single, fundamental truth: that no one really knows what comes next.”

Douglas Moore

Born: August 10, 1893, Cutchogue, New York
Died: July 25, 1969, Greenport, New York

Douglas Moore was a multifaceted artist: composer, pianist, organist, conductor, educator, actor, and author. He started writing music, including popular songs, while studying at Yale University. As World War I intervened, Moore served in the United States Navy. Later, he studied at the Schola Cantorum de Paris and the Cleveland Institute of Music, working with famous composers Vincent d'Indy and Ernest Bloch. He also worked with pedagogue Nadia Boulanger. In 1926, Moore joined the music faculty of Barnard College at Columbia University, where he also led the university's orchestra. In 1940 he became chair of the music department there, remaining in that position until his retirement in 1962. Moore's compositions include orchestral works, ballets, and works for theater and film, many inspired by American history and culture. His greatest fame came with his “folk operas,” including Giants in the Earth, which won Moore the Pulitzer Prize in 1951. Many of Moore's works enjoyed success during his lifetime, but only one, the opera The Ballad of Baby Doe (1956), continues to be performed

regularly.

Farm Journal

Composed: 1947
Duration: 14 minutes
Instrumentation: 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, trumpet, timpani, percussion, strings

Douglas Moore came by his fascination with American history honestly: he was born in former colonial farm country on Long Island, his father was part of a family that had come to America in 1640, and his mother was descended from both Miles Standish and John Alden. While his best-known compositions remain his operas, Moore also wrote a considerable amount of music for orchestra, including two symphonies and several tone poems and suites. Farm Journal was commissioned by the Little Orchestra Society, which gave the work its premiere on January 19, 1948. Much of the music originated in the score Moore composed in 1940 for a documentary film, Power and Land.

The first movement, Up Early, is marked Allegro and is a lively, tuneful romp. Rather more restrained, the second movement, Sunday Clothes, shares some of the playfulness of the first movement, its loping rhythm propelled forward by the snare drum and timpani. A contrasting central section is framed by a trumpet fanfare. Marked Andante, the third movement, Lamplight, is the longest of the suite. Serving as a slow movement, the nocturnal music drifts quietly, with phrases from the woodwinds sounding over gentle strings. The music swells momentarily, then returns to calm. A bold horn phrase announces the final movement, Harvest Song, that has some of the quality of a march, suggesting the unrelenting work of harvest time.

Composer Peggy Glanville-Hicks described Moore's suite as “in a sense nature music, but a peopled landscape, landscape with human figures. It is perhaps this capacity to create vivid moods that is the composer’s most outstanding asset.”