American Voices: Copland, Bernstein and Barber

Minnesota Orchestra

Osmo Vänskä, conductor
Sharon Bezaly, flute | Susie Park, violin

Thursday, May 3, 2018, 11 am | Orchestra Hall
Friday, May 4, 2018, 8 pm | Orchestra Hall
Saturday, May 5, 2018, 8 pm | Orchestra Hall

Aaron Copland
Suite from *Billy the Kid*
c. 20'
Introduction: The Open Prairie
Street in a Frontier Town
Mexican Dance and Finale
Prairie Night (Card Game at Night)
Gun Battle
Celebration (After Billy’s Capture)
Billy’s Death
The Open Prairie Again

Jeff Beal
Concerto for Flute and Orchestra *
c. 23'
[in three untitled movements]
Sharon Bezaly, flute

INTERMISSION
c. 20'

Samuel Barber
Concerto for Violin and Orchestra, Opus 14
c. 25'
Allegro
Andante
Presto in moto perpetuo
Susie Park, violin

Leonard Bernstein
Symphonic Suite from *On the Waterfront*
c. 22'

* World premiere

NightCap
NightCap: Eeyore Has a Birthday
Post-concert performance by Minnesota Orchestra musicians playing chamber music by
David Evan Thomas and Jon Deak
Saturday, May 5, 10:30 pm, Target Atrium; separate ticket required

OH+
Concert Preview with Phillip Gainsley and Jeff Beal
Thursday, May 3, 10:15 am, Auditorium
Friday, May 4, 7:15 pm, Target Atrium
Saturday, May 5, 7:15 pm, Target Atrium

Minnesota Orchestra concerts are broadcast live on Friday evenings on stations of Classical Minnesota Public Radio,
including KSJN 99.5 FM in the Twin Cities.
two dozen works dedicated to her which she performs worldwide. She has collaborated with major orchestras in London, Leipzig, Salzburg, Stockholm, Stuttgart, Gothenburg, The Hague, Lahti, Seoul, Taiwan, Singapore, São Paulo and Cincinnati, among many others. Her collaboration with the BIS Records label has produced many award-winning recordings of new music as well as core repertoire by Mozart, Ibert and Nielsen. She was a top prize-winning graduate of the Paris Conservatory, a BBC New Generation Artist and the first wind player to be artist in residence for The Hague Philharmonic Orchestra. She performs on a 24-carat gold flute that was made especially for her by Muramatsu. More: aormanagement.com, sharonbezaly.se.

Orchestra in Bach’s Brandenburg Concertos No. 2 and 4, numerous Young People’s Concerts and three chamber music concerts. She has performed solos around the world with European orchestras such as the Vienna Symphony, Orchestre National de Lille and Royal Philharmonic; with American orchestras including the Pittsburgh, San Francisco, Indianapolis and Memphis symphony orchestras and the Orchestra of St. Luke’s; the major symphony orchestras of Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, Tasmania, Canberra and Perth; Korea’s KBS Orchestra; and Orchestra Wellington in New Zealand. She was the violinist of the Eroica Trio from 2006 to 2012, touring internationally and recording the ensemble’s eighth CD, an all-American disc that was nominated for a Grammy. She will perform Barber’s Violin Concerto with the Minnesota Orchestra again in July 2018 at the Minnesota Beethoven Festival in Winona, Minnesota. More: minnesotaorchestra.org.

Of the work she performs on this program, Park states: “The Barber Violin Concerto is special to me for a number of reasons. It was a joy and honor to study, since it has a direct musical lineage to me through my teacher at Curtis, Jaime Laredo. He worked on the piece with Barber himself, who also went to Curtis. It is special also in its beauty, warmth and generosity—and it’s refreshing and rejuvenating to embrace these qualities, especially when universal beauty is so important to celebrate.”

Copland: Suite from *Billy the Kid*
Designed as a one-act ballet, Copland’s suite follows the adventures of Billy the Kid as he travels across the Wild West. Tender string harmonies set the scene of wide open prairies, while clashing keys and cowboy tunes add excitement along the journey.

Beal: Flute Concerto
In Beal’s brand-new Flute Concerto, the virtuoso solo flute speaks above active but less demanding music from the orchestra. The opening movement’s focus is on the soloist’s dexterity and swift musical gestures, while the Rubato middle movement is gently beautiful and lyrical. The electric bass is prominent in the rapid-fire, jazz-laced finale.

Barber: Violin Concerto
In Barber’s concerto, the violin sings passionate, lyrical lines in the opening pair of movements, then delivers a whirlwind of triplet rhythms in the fast-paced finale.

Bernstein: Symphonic Suite from *On the Waterfront*
Bernstein transformed his only original film score into a single-movement symphonic suite highlighted by a solo horn that guides the orchestra through many of the movie’s main themes.
Early in 1938 Aaron Copland was approached by Lincoln Kirstein, director of the Ballet Caravan, who wished to commission a ballet based on the life of Billy the Kid. But Copland was not drawn to this subject, and he felt a particular aversion to cowboy music: “I have never been particularly impressed with the musical beauties of the cowboy song as such. The words are usually delightful and the manner of singing needs no praise from me. But neither the words nor the delivery are of much use in a purely orchestral ballet score, so I was left with the tunes themselves, which, I repeat, are often less than exciting. As far as I was concerned, this ballet could be written without benefit of the poverty-stricken tunes Billy himself must have known.”

Kirstein assured Copland that he need not use actual cowboy tunes in the ballet, but as the composer left to spend the summer of 1938 in Paris, Kirstein gave him several collections of cowboy songs to look over. And then a strange thing happened, softening Copland: “Perhaps there is something different about a cowboy song in Paris. But whatever the reason may have been, it wasn’t very long before I found myself hopelessly involved in expanding, contracting, rearranging and superimposing cowboy tunes on the rue de Rennes in Paris.” Copland uses theme-shapes, intervals and bits of rhythm from these tunes—we sense their origins and distinctive flavor without ever hearing the tunes in their original form.

**The music: adventures in the frontier**

The premiere of *Billy the Kid* was a success, and Copland arranged an orchestral suite from its music, preserving about two-thirds of the original score. The suite begins with *The Open Prairie*, which creates a sense of great space, and the steady tread of two French horns marks the appearance of humans within this vastness. Suddenly we are on a *Street in a Frontier Town*, full of dizzy human energy. Here Copland quotes “Old Grandad,” “Whooppe-Ti-Yi-Yo” and “The Old Chisholm Trail,” and a solo trumpet performs a *Mexican Dance*—specifically, a *jarabe*. A reprise of the opening prairie music leads to the *Prairie Night (Card Game at Night)*—a nocturne for woodwinds, trumpet and strings—and this proceeds into the *Gun Battle*, with its booming drums and spatters of gunfire.

*Celebration* depicts the town’s relief at Billy’s capture. Eugene Loring, who danced the part of Billy at the premiere, had encouraged Copland to include a “macabre polka” as part of the ballet, and this was Copland’s response. This *Celebration* is built on dotted rhythms and the sound of a honky-tonk piano, but what gives this music its “macabre” dimension is its bitonality: Copland sets the dance-tune in C major and its accompaniment in C-sharp. The suite now jumps to *Billy’s Death*—his final breaths are heard in the *quasi tremolando* solo violin. In the suite, Copland moves directly from Billy’s death to a reprise of the music for *The Open Prairie*, and *Billy the Kid* concludes out under the open sky of the vast prairies.

Copland’s score for *Billy the Kid* set the gold standard for music about the West. Its epic sense of space, use of cowboy tunes, and concise evocation of a raw frontier town—replete with honky-tonk revelry, gunfights and the lonely hero—have become part of the imagination of every subsequent composer who writes music about the American West.

**Instrumentation:** 2 flutes, piccolo (1 flute also doubling piccolo), 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, snare drum, bass drum, cymbals, suspended cymbal, guiro, slapstick, sleigh bells, tin whistle, triangle, wood blocks, glockenspiel, xylophone, harp, piano and strings

Program note by Eric Bromberger.

**Jeff Beal**

**Concerto for Flute and Orchestra**

Premiered: January 18, 2017 (third movement); May 3, 2018 (full concerto)

Jeff Beal may be best known as a composer of music for films and television, but his newly-written Flute Concerto has its origins not in Hollywood—nor the Washington D.C. of his Emmy Award-winning score for Netflix’s *House of Cards*. Instead the genesis came in Stockholm, Sweden, where Beal worked out the basic parameters of the concerto over coffee and conversation with flutist Sharon Bezaly in June 2015.
Beal recalls that inspiring meeting: “Sitting in Stockholm harbor on a beautiful sunny day, I had a long chat with Sharon about the concerto I would compose for her. The light of the northern summer sun bathing the harbor was a perfect metaphor for what she wanted: A concerto full of joy, energy and rhythm, with some of the eclectic jazz sensibilities of my scoring on House of Cards.”

The seeds for the project were planted earlier in 2015 when Bezaly and BIS Records founder Robert von Bahr reached out to Beal, whose music they knew through House of Cards, and invited him to Stockholm to hear Bezaly play. “He came, listened to Sharon and was stunned,” says von Bahr. “He cleared away his much-better-paid schedule to compose her a concerto.”

Beal’s Flute Concerto, this week receiving its first-ever complete performance, is the latest in a series of world premieres given by Bezaly, a strong advocate of new music who is the dedicatee of more than 20 concertos—among them works by Kalevi Aho, Sally Beamish, Sofia Gubaidulina and Anders Hillborg. Bezaly comments: “Breathing life into the past, making it part of our present, is a great privilege for any performer. But a significant part of my vocation as a musician is the inspiration to inspire the great composers of our time to write new and ground-breaking music, so that future generations are able to breathe new life into our present, their past, in a perpetual celebration of timeless music.”

This particular project came near a time of personal grieving for Bezaly, which impacted the concept and structure of the piece. Beal further recalls from their conversation in Stockholm: “Sharon shared the story of her childhood in Israel, and her close connection to her mother who had also been her musical mentor, whom she had lost earlier that year. This, coupled with this emotional brief sense of Sharon’s personality, provided me a way into the piece. As painful as a loss of a parent can be, her deep affection for her mother was certainly part of my inspiration for the second movement. We also spoke about the beauty of memorable melodies, and kept returning to this idea of rhythm and energy.”

Bezaly performed the concerto’s third movement a handful of times in 2017, first with the Seoul Virtuosi Chamber Orchestra on January 18, 2017. The first and second movements have never been performed for audiences prior to this week, making this the world premiere of the concerto in its full form.

a multi-talented composer

Jeff Beal is hardly the first composer known primarily for films and television to find his way to the concert hall (another, James Newton Howard, will have his Violin Concerto heard at the Minnesota Orchestra’s upcoming Sommerfest), but he may be among the most multi-faceted. His early studies were as a jazz trumpet player—first spurred by the gift of a Miles Davis/Gil Evans record from his grandmother Irene Beal, who had been a pianist and professional accompanist of silent movies. After graduating from the Eastman School of Music, where he met his wife, operatic soprano Joan Beal, he pursued a career in New York City as a jazz performer, recording artist and composer.

In the mid-1990s Beal moved to Los Angeles, where in 2000 he made his breakthrough into film music by scoring the Academy Award-winning film Pollock. His notable projects since have included scores for the documentaries Blackfish, The Queen of Versailles and An Inconvenient Sequel: Truth to Power; music for the HBO series Carnivàle and Rome; and the score and theme for Monk. In 2013 came the opportunity to score one of the first major online series featuring an A-list cast and director when Academy Award nominee David Fincher tapped him as composer for Netflix’s House of Cards. Overall Beal’s music has been recognized with 16 Emmy Award nominations and five Emmy wins, most recently in 2017 for season five of House of Cards.

For his film and TV projects, Beal follows the “do it yourself” mantra, as he composes, orchestrates, conducts, records and mixes the music himself. Much of the recording happens not within the confines of a Hollywood studio—but rather, in Beal’s own living room, where an entire string orchestra squeezes in to record for House of Cards. The well-known theme music for that show is a family affair: Beal supplies the lonely trumpet calls and piano arpeggios, his son Henry performs the relentless bass guitar riff, and his wife Joan lends her operatic voice beginning in the series’ second season.

Aside from his work for media, Beal has composed commissioned works for the St. Louis, Rochester, Pacific, Frankfurt, Munich and Detroit symphony orchestras. He has also written for the Smuin Ballet, Metropole Orchestra, Ying String Quartet, Debussy Trio, Henry Mancini Institute, Chamber Music Festival of Lexington, Los Angeles Master Chorale, Brooklyn Youth Chorus, guitarist Jason Vieaux and Minnesota-based men’s vocal group Cantus, which premiered Beal’s Beneath Thin Blanket in 2016.

the concerto in brief

The instrumentation of Beal’s Flute Concerto is smaller than that of many modern orchestral works, which appropriately clears a path for the solo flute. The brass “section,” for instance, consists of a single horn. The sole atypical addition to the orchestra is an electric bass guitar. Throughout the concerto, which comprises three untitled movements, Beal makes use of what he calls Bezaly’s “gorgeous tone throughout the entire register of the instrument and prodigious circular breathing ability.”
In the golden days of the Renaissance and early Baroque age, most male composers began their musical lives as boy sopranos trained in church choirs. Ultimately, instrumental virtuosity superseded the human voice. By contrast, the 20th century’s Samuel Barber, a supreme American lyricist, was among the few composers of his time who studied singing. Gifted with a mellow baritone voice, he pursued a triple major in composition, piano and voice as a member of the charter class of Philadelphia’s Curtis Institute of Music.

Barber’s lyrical style also characterizes his instrumental concertos: the Violin Concerto premiered under Eugene Ormandy in Philadelphia in 1941, the Cello Concerto introduced by Raya Garbousova under Koussevitzky in Boston in 1946, and the Piano Concerto which John Browning premiered at Lincoln Center in 1962 and repeated here at Orchestra Hall in the 1980s.

**like a human voice**

Of all instruments, the violin may be closest to the human voice—and this is how Barber employs it, maximizing the instrument’s warmth and intimacy. However, the patron who commissioned the Violin Concerto had sought a different effect.

Samuel Fels, a wealthy businessman in Barber’s hometown of Philadelphia, proposed a vehicle for his adopted son, Iso Briselli, a violin prodigy. The young composer developed the first two movements of this Opus 14 while residing in the idyllic Swiss village of Sils Maria, but like other expatriate Americans, fled Europe after the Nazis invaded Poland. Back in Philadelphia, Barber presented the opening movements to Fels—but they did not please.

Fels had anticipated flashy music of the kind that triggers cheering, and this thoughtful discourse between soloist and orchestra was too lyrical for him. Barber responded by dashing off a showpiece finale demanding consummate skills—but this was judged too difficult! Soon, however, a promising Curtis student named Herman Baumel delivered a polished reading of the finale. Baumel also gave a private performance of the concerto with the Curtis Orchestra under Fritz Reiner and played it with the Philadelphia Orchestra in rehearsal before the official premiere.

Fels was unable to reclaim money already dispensed to Barber, who had spent it in Europe. So the businessman compromised by paying half the fee and surrendering the rights of first performance to the composer. The esteemed American violinist Albert Spaulding delivered the concerto’s premiere on February 7, 1941.

**the concerto in brief**

The traditionalist side of Barber as well as his progressive impulses—irregular rhythms and sometimes edgy dissonances—are shown to advantage in this moving work, which has commanded a solid niche in the repertory for more than half a century.

**allegro.** The music is not hard to follow. There are no contests here, only a harmony of dialogue between partners, the big orchestra and the little violin, cast as a wordless troubadour of intense personal emotion. The opening movement includes...
While both *West Side Story* and *On the Town* were made into successful motion pictures, *On the Waterfront* represents a distinguished Bernstein effort conceived for a film from the outset—and not for a “musical,” but as the cinematic equivalent of the traditional “incidental music” for stage plays.

Understandably enough, film composers at first followed the stage tradition of providing background music for individual scenes, but it did not take long for them to recognize the new medium’s inherent opportunities for a greater unity between the musical and dramatic elements. In the 1930s such composers as Sergei Prokofiev in the Soviet Union, Silvestre Revueltas in Mexico and Virgil Thomson in our own country were able to work in direct collaboration with their respective screen directors in developing and shaping films in which music enjoyed an unprecedented prominence. This new type of partnership led to films in which music was used not only to augment the dramatic mood, but frequently in place of words to create the various moods. Bernstein’s only contribution to this genre, his score for Elia Kazan’s 1954 production *On the Waterfront*, remains outstanding in this respect. The Symphonic Suite from the film is one of seven Bernstein works that the Minnesota Orchestra performs during 2018, the composer’s centennial year.

**music from a violent milieu**

Like *West Side Story*, which came a few years later, *On the Waterfront* deals with a violent milieu in the city Bernstein’s music captured so brilliantly in its various phases. In this case the subject is racketeering on New York’s teeming commercial docks, and the defiant response of one sensitive young longshoreman (“Terry,” unreforgettably played by Marlon Brando) to the situation in which he finds himself.

It happens not infrequently that a composer writing for a film may produce more music than is actually used. Parts of Bernstein’s score had been cut in the editing of the film, and the composer was motivated to prepare a Symphonic Suite to salvage some of this music. The suite was completed on July 5, 1955, and was first performed on August 11 of that year by Bernstein and the Boston Symphony Orchestra at Tanglewood. In the program note for the suite’s New York premiere in 1960, Howard Shanet wrote:

“The film score of *On the Waterfront* lends itself especially well to conversion into concert music because it is so symphonically conceived from the very beginning. The score of the entire film is built from only five or six thematic ideas which, however, are constantly being combined with each other and transformed into new shapes to meet the changing dramatic requirements of the story. Because the original film score is not just scraps of background music but a tightly organized symphonic structure, the concert suite derived from it makes complete musical sense...even if the listener does not know what each theme represents in the film story.”

It is possible, however, to relate the suite’s five sections (played without pause) to parts of the film, as Shanet did in the following outline:

**andante (with dignity).** The broad theme that opens the suite serves also, in a much grander version, to end it. In the film, this music has the same double function: as the so-called Main Title it accompanies the opening credits and titles; but it recurs at the end of the picture, as the music to which the injured Terry makes his heroic walk in defiance of the racketeers’ power.
**presto barbaro.** This striking passage starts with the percussion instruments alone—softly at first, then rising to a climax. The whole passage then becomes the basis for what is essentially a set of variations, each working up to its own climax. In the picture this music is always associated with violence—sometimes warning of it in advance, sometimes actually accompanying it, sometimes recalling it. For example, the first time it is heard (for percussion instruments alone) the screen shows an ordinary street scene; but the shocking contrast between the prosaic, static street and the brutal, dynamic music produces an ominous warning of tragedy to come.

**more flowing.** This lyrical, melodious section, sung first by the woodwinds, but then taken up by all the other elements of the orchestra, is the “Love” theme in the picture. It is associated with the girl, Edie, whose love is responsible to a great extent for Terry’s conversion to the forces of good.

**allegro non troppo, molto marcato.** In the Symphonic Suite this section has the role of a scherzo, contrasting with the flowing quality of the love music that precedes it. In the film it is heard under the climactic fight between Terry and the racketeer Johnny Friendly.

**a tempo.** This is the return of the opening Main Title theme in its final transfiguration as Terry’s heroic walk to victory. Starting as softly as possible, it grows as it marches irresistibly toward the last powerful chord. In the final phrases the Love theme is blended with it. But it does not end on the conventional triumphal cadence of most Hollywood films; On the Waterfront, as William Hamilton observes in a brilliant essay on this subject, “requires a finality that does not say everything is going to be just dandy,” and the last measures are marked by discordant cries that remind us of the bitterness and suffering that have characterized this story of violence.

**Instrumentation:** 2 flutes, piccolo, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, E-flat clarinet, bass clarinet, alto saxophone, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, 2 timpani, snare drum, bass drum, cymbals, suspended cymbal, large and small tamtams, triangle, tuned drums, wood block, glockenspiel, vibraphone, chimes, xylophone, harp, piano and strings

*Program note by Richard Freed.*