

SAMUEL BARBER

b. March 9, 1910

d. January 23, 1981

20TH CENTURY COMPOSER

**He was among the
most celebrated
composers of the mid-
20th century.**

"I guess, for better or worse, I am an American composer, and I've had a wonderful life being exactly that."

Samuel Barber was among the most celebrated American composers of the mid-20th century. The winner of two Pulitzer Prizes, he was famous for both his instrumental and vocal works.

Born in West Chester, Pennsylvania, Barber composed his first piece at age 7 and wrote his first operetta by age 10. Despite his obvious gift, his family pushed him to play football like other boys his age. At 9, in an apologetic note to his mother, he wrote,

"... I was not meant to be an athlete. I was meant to be a composer."

At 14, Barber began studying piano, composition, voice, and conducting at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. There, he became romantically involved with a fellow student, Gian Carlo Menotti, and they began a 40-year relationship. Menotti also achieved fame, chiefly as an opera composer.

Barber entered the adult program at Curtis in 1928. He graduated in 1934 and made his professional conducting debut in Vienna that same year. After several early successes, he received the American Prix de Rome in 1935 and a Pulitzer Traveling Scholarship for 1935-'36—prestigious honors that furthered his dream of becoming a full-time composer.

In 1938, Barber's most popular work, "Adagio for Strings," premiered under the famous conductor Arturo Toscanini. In addition to its frequent use in film and television, it was played in 1945 during the radio announcement of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's death and later at the funerals of Albert Einstein and Princess Grace of Monaco. In 2005, the Library of Congress selected the original recording of the piece for inclusion in the National Recording Registry.

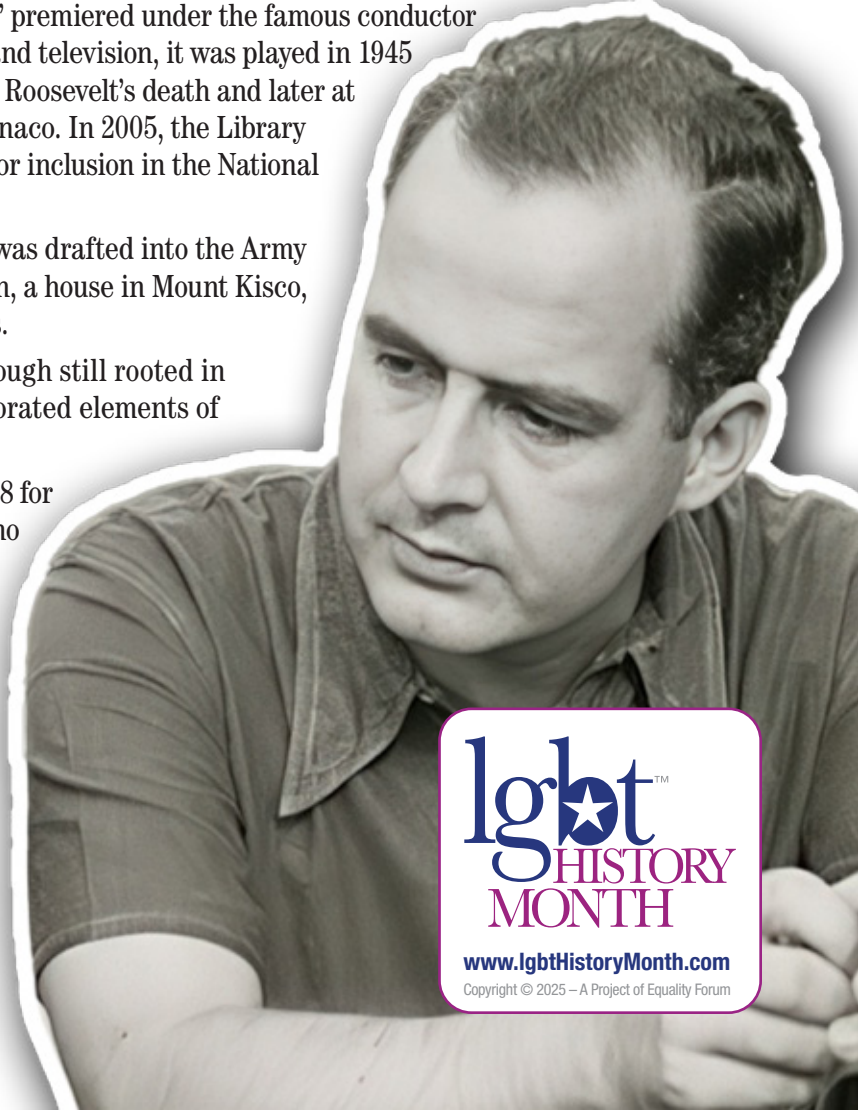
In 1939, Barber returned to his alma mater to teach. He was drafted into the Army in 1942. A year later, he and Menotti purchased Capricorn, a house in Mount Kisco, New York, where they lived and worked for three decades.

After World War II, Barber's musical style evolved. Although still rooted in 19th-century Romanticism, his subsequent work incorporated elements of jazz and modernism.

Barber twice received the Pulitzer Prize for Music: in 1958 for his opera "Vanessa" and in 1962 for his "Concerto for Piano and Orchestra." His only critical failure came with the opera "Anthony and Cleopatra" (1966), which premiered to poor reviews. Devastated, Barber spiraled into depression and alcoholism. Menotti eventually ended their romantic relationship, but the two remained close.

Barber composed throughout his life. Among other works, he produced two symphonies, three concertos, three operas, and more than 100 songs. In the late 1970s, he underwent extensive cancer treatment. Barber died in Manhattan at age 70.

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