

Adagio Creation

Sanford Baran: All time zones in the US and Canada are now back on Standard Time. It was delightful getting an extra hour of sleep last night. But of course, now it will be darker an hour earlier in the evening. I checked and here in Colorado we'll be getting 10 hours and 15 minutes of daylight today. By the time of the Winter Solstice on December 21st it will be down to 9 hours and 21 minutes. So, winter, although not quite here yet, isn't all that far off. And not that there's anything wrong with winter, but as we heard in the pre-service music, spring will come again. In other words, as far as the big picture is concerned all is well.

I'd like to take a moment to consider the following thought: Our job is to create the world. While this might sound like a tall order, it really isn't because it's a job that gets done in consciousness.

Simply put, we create the world by experiencing whatever comes to us through the lens of spirit. And in doing this our experiences are transformed, uplifted, purified into forms that spirit can use for its purposes.

Thinking about it this way we can take advantage of everything that comes our way. We don't judge it, try to get rid of it or dump it on somebody else. We understand that what comes to us is the raw material that transformed by our attitudes and orientation fuels the creative process.

How we experience the world matters. This provides the wherewithal for us to create the world, one experience at a time.

This morning I have something I'd like to share with you, a piece of music. I'm not going to tell you anything about it or even tell you what it is, although some of you might recognize it or know it. I will tell you that it's eight and a half minutes long.

So, if you're game, sit back, relax, and totally immerse yourself in it. Listen deeply, maybe even feel it in your body.

After the piece finishes let's come back together and compare notes.

[Listen to the piece](#)

Jim Crowner: *Adagio for Strings* has to be one of the most beautiful manmade pieces of music I've ever heard.

Sanford: Thanks, Jim. Right, that was the *Adagio for Strings* by American composer Samuel Barber, performed by the London Philharmonic Orchestra, David Perry conducting. Let's get some others' impressions:

Alex Bootzin: I love this piece and have probably heard it hundreds of times, but each time I hear it it's a cathartic experience. A couple things about it: If you look at the score it's written in whole notes as the measure of the unit of beat, with several whole notes per measure. I think he wrote it that way to slow everybody down, both players and listeners. It moves at a rate of speed that's a bit hard for us to receive in this day and age when we're so sped up. I recall this piece was used at the end of the movie *The Elephant Man* when he was dying and ascending. The music has that effect on me: an ascension and a transmutation going on.

PenDell Pittman: *Adagio for Strings* was written by Samuel Barber in the 1930s. And, later in life, he wrote a choral version, *Agnus Dei*, with lyrics based upon a biblical verse from the Book of John — “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.” Such speaks to intercession and forgiveness.

An initial unison note is quietly surrounded by harmonies that through an unfolding series of intricate musical progressions epitomize a pensive reflection. These build into a climactic crescendo that finally “exhales” into a moment of silence, then a sublimely melodic resolution.

Whether or not Samuel Barber himself intended to portray something mystical, he composed in a modern time of increased spiritual and musical awakening. In the *Adagio*, I clearly hear the ringing sounds of divine emanation actualizing the subconscious resonances in mankind.

Christina Pivarnik: Sanford, I loved your prelude, saying we are here to create our worlds. That was in my mind and heart as I listened to this beautiful piece of music. I love its lyrical quality. In our lives we have moments of crescendo and moments of softness, of *pianissimo*, and it's our job to create in every moment and to do something just magical!

Milly Holliday: I second what Christina said about creation. I think of the ancient cultures who believed that the world was created by song—it was sung into being. Now we sing healing, sing forgiveness, sing beauty into the world that we have today.

Laura Fisher: I've been a dancer most of my life. In order to dance, a dancer has to feel the music in their body or their dance is not meaningful. Listening to this music, just now, I felt the music move the fluids in my body. I felt my blood rising in crescendo, gently but so full. I felt the racing passion through my veins and then, in the softer rhythms, I could feel my body sleeping and then reactivating. As the music went the fluids in my body went. This is more proof that we are all One. We can all move naturally in harmony with

beautiful music. Our bodies are perfectly designed to move with the greatest music of all: the true tone of life!

Suzanne Core: I love the majesty of this piece and I love this creation together in these moments. I love that we can do this, that we are an orchestra, a holy choir. This is a new and different form of creation, because every time we gather we sound the tone together collectively. How wonderful we can do it without much speaking. How wise is our Lord and what fun it is to work for him.

John Gray: Samuel Barber's *Adagio for Strings* became a personal theme song for a period in late 1991. Any on this videoconference today who were connected then have memories of a series of organizational earthquakes within what we called “EDL” the next year and years after. But lots of things were going on in less visible ways leading into that dissonant period. I was somewhat privy to early rumblings and ruptures developing below the surface, but today, that ancient history is just context and a lead-in to the *Adagio for Strings* story I’m about to tell.

While in South Africa thirty years ago, in late 1991, I was visiting friends Jeffrey & Madeleine Newman in their home at Zeven Rivieren near the Cape. Jeffrey had a collection of classical recordings and a fine stereo system to play them on. I felt drawn into the room one morning when Jeffrey was playing the London Philharmonic Orchestra’s rendition of *Adagio for Strings*—the very one Sanford played for us today. Then, as now, it sounded and felt majestic and mighty, and I just sat down and listened. Although I’d heard Barber’s *Adagio* before, it never had the impact and effect on me it did then. Later, on a quiet afternoon when no one else was in the house, I put the CD on “repeat” and played *Adagio* over and over and over at high volume while I lay on my back on the living room floor. My heart was aching with what I mostly only sensed was going on invisibly. In those moments there on the Newmans’ carpet this musical piece wrapped auditory form around those essences.

Back home in California after that trip I asked friend and musicologist Allen Dorfman about Barber’s *Adagio*. He gave me an understandable explanation of harmonies weaving and rising in intensity toward a crescendo of dissonance, then a break followed by a soft resumption of consonance leading to resolution. For me, then, *Adagio* was a musical synopsis of the times.

It is also, and more importantly, an apt representation of a certain sort of creative process in which what may seem well-ordered and predictable dissolves into discord and

then returns as a still, small but unstoppable musical voice of resolution and completion. Barber labelled his work an *adagio* for its measured musical pacing, as Alex emphasized a few minutes ago, but I thought of it and still think of it as symbolizing a bit of the soundtrack to the present-day live performance starring all of us and many more. Right now we each play roles in the dramatic process of elevating and restoring the consciousness of humankind to true spiritual identity.

I think fine music is a translated condensation of a higher, physically inaudible realm. It is a beautiful and moving way the Word may be expressed and sound in the world. I've listened to other compositions by the talented Samuel Barber, but, to me, *Adagio for Strings* is his *opus magnus* of heavenly perception.

Sanford Baran: Composers often incorporate dissonance and tension to give a composition a trajectory, a means to take the listener on a journey.

For me the *Adagio* is definitely a journey. It begins very simply on a single note, B flat, and then gradually increases in harmonic texture while slowly almost imperceptibly building in intensity. And it keeps doing this until it reaches a climax, double forte (very loud) with the strings playing dissonantly, stridently in very high registers and these chords seem to go on interminably. And for me this is a moment of extreme discomfort.

And then all of a sudden, silence, perhaps one of the longest silences in classical music, although it only lasts about five seconds. A dramatic turning point, a release. And then the piece starts to resolve itself slowly finding its way back from whence it originated. And musically you're sort of back to where you started, but emotionally and vibrationally, something has been completely transformed, uplifted, to the extent there is a yielding on the part of the listener to the power moving in the piece, the same power that moves heaven and earth.

Note there might be a tendency on the part of the listener to want to back off as the intensity comes to a head. But if we bail during the dissonance/tension aspect of the cycle then the journey is aborted and that particular opportunity to move upward is lost. Fortunately, abundant other opportunities are always present to creatively handle and carry through to victory.

We are here to create the world. Many of the things that come to us may not be all that intense, but they still provide the raw material that fuels the creative process. So as creators there is always something there for us to do.

As PenDell mentioned earlier, Samuel Barber arranged the *Adagio for Strings* into a choral composition, incorporating the Latin text of the liturgical *Agnus Dei*, a part of the Mass.

I thought it would be interesting to end our time together by playing this choral arrangement, giving us an opportunity to experience the *Adagio* again, having now generated substance around this piece together.

I think you'll find that this version while musically similar has a different feel. John, in an email to me yesterday, captures this sentiment perfectly. "Because the music is humanly voiced, the weaving harmonies seem to have more breadth and nuance, more celestial quality...". Well put.

So here is Barber's *Agnus Dei* performed by the choral ensemble *Voces8*. Enjoy...

[Listen to the piece](#)

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Sanford Baran: sanbar0805@comcast.net

John Gray: johncgray@aol.com

Pre-Service Music

Spring Will Come Again

Composed by Leonard Bernstein and sung by Kyle Bielfield

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8a3sbL-JsOg>