



Listening Guide—*Symphonic Song*

Composer: Samuel Barber (1910-1981)

Title: *Knoxville: Summer of 1915*, Op. 24

Recording: Royal Scottish National Orchestra, Marin Alsop, conductor; Karina Gauvin, soprano

Form: Intro-A-B-C-A'-D-Intro-A''

Knoxville: Summer of 1915 was composed in 1974 with music set to excerpts from the 1938 prose poem of the same name by James Agee. The work depicts a dreamlike and nostalgic picture of a summer evening in Knoxville, Tennessee, narrated by a young boy overcome with flashes of the mature and introspective thinking of an adult. It is one full movement in a Rondo-like form. A Rondo features recurring material (A) and new contrasting material (B, C, D, etc).

Time	Musical Elements	Instrument or Family
0:00	Introductory material sets the scene of a warm summer evening in Knoxville, Tennessee.	flute English horn clarinet bassoon strings
0:43	The A section begins with a 12/8 “rocking” motif in the clarinet, harp, and strings. The flute compliments the motif with a series of light 8 th notes fluttering between each beat.	flute clarinet bassoon harp strings
0:48	The voice enters, beginning the narration, “it has become that time of evening when people sit on their porches, rocking gently, and talking gently.” Notice how the musical rhythms of the text reflect the inflection of casual speech patterns.	voice
2:09	Text painting continues further enhancing the text; for example, Barber imitates the act of a casual conversation inflection with his choice of rhythm and elongation of the word “casually” in the phrase, “talking casually.”	voice
3:41	A sudden interruption of the calm swaying marks the entrance of the B section as the piccolo, oboe, and clarinet play a biting <i>fortissimo</i> (very strong) four-note motif answered by a single note in the horn.	piccolo oboe clarinet horn
3:46	The rest of the orchestra is slowly added as the tempo accelerates, representing the hustle and bustle of the town. The clanging and ringing bell of a streetcar passing through is depicted by a honking motif in the horns.	French horn full orchestra
4:23	The voice excitedly enters, “A streetcar raising its iron moan; stopping; belling and starting...”	voice



**DUPAGE
SYMPHONY
ORCHESTRA**

5:05	The busyness slows, represented by elongated rhythmic patterns in the orchestra and the streetcar's bell motif faints into the background, gradually diminishing to a pianissimo dynamic. At the same time, the voice narrates softly, "the iron whine rises on rising speed; still risen, faints; halts; the faint stinging bell; rises again, still fainter; fainting, lifting..."	full orchestra voice
5:51	A sense of calm returns as the voice quietly sings, "Now is the night one blue dew" while a sustained drone is held in the orchestra with a shimmering four-note motif sprinkled occasionally throughout marking the C section .	full orchestra voice
7:13	The A section "rocking" motif reenters in the bassoon and strings as the harp imitates the 8th note complimentary line originally played by the flutes. The voice echoes the rocking motion in the text, "Parents on porches; rock and rock..."	bassoon harp strings voice
8:34	The D section begins with a sweet, legato gesture in the flute, clarinet, and bassoon, melodically echoed by the voice as it sings "On the rough wet grass of the backyard..." Thematic material representing the family is introduced, representing the joy and peace felt as they are gathered together in their backyard.	flute clarinet bassoon strings voice
11:20	The peaceful moment is interrupted by a new thought, marked by a <i>più agitato</i> (more agitated) character marking and a <i>forte</i> (strong) dynamic marking, as a weeping gesture is presented in the orchestra. The voice ponders the profound realization that "by some chance, here they are, all on this Earth..."	full orchestra voice
12:16	Material from the introduction is brought back slowly by the English horn followed by the French horns and trumpet. The voice offers a soft, yet somewhat haunting, hymn-like prayer asking for the blessing and protection of his family now until their passing from this Earth, "May God bless my people..."	English horn French horn trumpet voice full orchestra
13:16	A full return to the introductory material is played at a <i>forte</i> dynamic, building up to fortissimo as dramatic, sweeping gestures are added in the strings.	full orchestra
14:03	The "rocking" motif enters again marking the return to the A section in the clarinet, bassoon, harp, and strings, while the English horn echoes the beginning phrase of the vocal line. The voice then enters, "After a little I am taken in and put to bed..."	English horn clarinet bassoon harp strings voice full orchestra
14:24	The voice mimics the sound of a yawn with jumping inflection in the melody as it quietly says, "Sleep, soft smiling, draws me unto her."	voice
16:04	The quiet, final return of the "rocking" motif brings the piece to a close, ending on a sustained pianissimo chord.	full orchestra