



# AMERICAN VIOLIN CONCERTOS

ITTAI SHAPIRA

WIPRUD Violin Concerto *Katrina*

BARBER Violin Concerto

MENOTTI Violin Concerto

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GIAN CARLO MENOTTI (1911-2007)

**CONCERTO FOR VIOLIN AND ORCHESTRA IN A MINOR** (1952)

1	Allegro moderato	13'49
2	Adagio	8'39
3	Allegro vivace	7'59

THEODORE WIPRUD (b.1958)

**VIOLIN CONCERTO ('KATRINA')** (world premiere recording)

4	Les Bons Temps	11'34
5	Acadiana	5'14
6	Fly Away	7'45

SAMUEL BARBER (1910-1981)

**VIOLIN CONCERTO, OP.14** (1939-40)

7	Allegro	10'56
8	Andante	8'40
9	Presto con moto perpetuo	4'22

**79'00**

Tracks 1-3, 7-9:

Russian Philharmonic Orchestra/Thomas Sanderling

Produced and Engineered by Ljubov Doronina

Edited by Pavel Lavrenenkon

Recorded 21st – 25th July 2001 at Studio 5, DSS, Moscow.

Tracks 1-3 Originally released on ASV as CDDCA1156

Tracks 7-9 Originally released on ASV as CDPLT8501

Tracks 4-6

Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra/Neil Thomson

Produced by Chris Craker

Engineered by Andrew Mellor

Assisted by Claire Hay

Edited by Claire Hay

Mixed and Mastered by Andrew Mellor

All for SIX Music Productions ([www.sixmp.net](http://www.sixmp.net))

Recorded on the 5th January 2012 at the Friary, Liverpool

Executive Producer for Champs Hill Records: Alexander Van Ingen

## COMPOSER'S NOTE (THEODORE WIPRUD)

On August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina swept over New Orleans. Over the following days, an epic failure of civil engineering left 80% of the city flooded, in addition to extensive storm damage all across the Mississippi Delta. Katrina's legacy of displacement and uncertain renewal will continue to unfold for many years.

As I began composing my concerto, around the fifth anniversary of the storm, the slow-motion disaster of the Deepwater BP oil spill was in progress, threatening the entire economy of the Delta. As I proofread the score before the premiere a year later, a hurricane bore down on my home in New York. Natural and man-made disasters seem more and more with us; I certainly had plenty of imaginative material to work with, even if I was not in New Orleans in late summer 2005.

My Violin Concerto (Katrina) reflects on the devastation the storm and flood wrought on the musical life of the whole Delta, the cradle of so much American music. I have cast the soloist as a different protagonist in each movement – a survivor trying to recapture memories of the good times, only to be overwhelmed by memories of the flood; an ancient witness to the unending stream of disasters afflicting the region; and finally one flying away to find new life elsewhere, with all the emotions that entails.

I am forever grateful to Ittai Shapira for requesting the concerto, helping me shape the concept, and providing the technical assistance only a great virtuoso can provide. I am also grateful to three dear friends who commissioned the work – Dale Frehse, Honey Kurtz, and Karen LeFrak. Violin Concerto (Katrina) is dedicated to all musicians displaced by Hurricane Katrina. It was premiered by Mr. Shapira with the Knoxville Symphony, conducted by Lucas Richman, October 20 and 21, 2011.



## SHAPIRA: VIOLIN CONCERTOS

During the 20th century, America witnessed an explosion of new creative ideas, and composers were at the forefront of this cultural revolution. Some, like Copland and Bernstein, drew upon folk and jazz music to create a distinctive 'American' sound; others, like John Cage, pioneered avant-garde techniques still considered controversial today. In the midst of this maelstrom, Samuel Barber resolutely refused to follow fashion, determined to write the music he wanted to write. The results were often rich and romantic, but they have endured alongside those of his more overtly innovative contemporaries. The relationship between Barber and the Italian-American composer Gian Carlo Menotti was one of the most long-lived and fruitful in recent music history. Like Benjamin Britten and Peter Pears, the pair offered one another mutual inspiration and advice, and Menotti's works are gaining an increasing level of recognition.

The proliferation of musical ideas in 20th-century America has spilled over into the America of the 21st, with composers like Theodore Wiprud fusing minimalism, modernism and jazz styles to reflect events which have shaped the country's history; in particular, the devastation wrought by Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Despite the diversity of their styles, these composers have in common their vivid and expressive writing for violin and orchestra, as displayed by the three Concerti on this disc.

Menotti's Violin Concerto was written in 1952 for the Russian-born violinist Efrem Zimbalist, who was a teacher at the Curtis Institute while Menotti was studying there. Zimbalist was the Institute's Principal between 1941 and 1968, and, although he had officially retired from performance, Zimbalist made an exception in order to premiere Menotti's Concerto in December 1952, with Eugene Ormandy and the Philadelphia Orchestra.

Zimbalist's playing had been described as 'noble, fine-grained, never extrovert', and Menotti somehow managed to reflect this character in his music, without inhibiting the need for display in a Concerto. Thus, the virtuosity of the violin part is tempered by the work's overall tone, which is enigmatic and intimate, with lyrical, singing lines for the soloist, often in its highest register. The rich and dramatic first movement is

characterised by the alternation between A minor and A major, beginning in the violin's opening material; the ambiguity created by this melody is only resolved by the movement's final A minor chord.

The Adagio includes the Concerto's most substantial cadenza, after which the tension of the movement is dissipated, drifting into a soporific D major. Initially, the violin's rather melancholic theme intertwines with woodwind solos, surging into more passionate territory with tonally ambiguous brass interjections. The cadenza follows, ranging from a powerful soliloquy to snatches of dancing, folk-like melody. The orchestra's return signals the dissipation of previous tensions, with lush textures and warm harmonies above which the violin soars. Menotti's Concerto concludes with an energetic C major finale featuring three main themes. The last of these is a triple-time dance, which adds an exotic flavour to the otherwise jaunty and effervescent music.

Towards the end of his life, Samuel Barber explained his reluctance to pander to musical trends:

*I myself wrote always as I wished, and without a tremendous desire to find the latest thing possible... I wrote as I wanted to for myself...*

Alex Ross, music critic of *The New Yorker*, expanded on this in his book *The Rest Is Noise*: 'While so many of his generation favoured lean textures and brief motifs, Barber produced long melodic lines and rich orchestral textures, leaving audiences with the feeling that they had consumed a high-protein meal.'

It was the affluent soap manufacturer Samuel Fels who commissioned Barber to write a violin concerto, to be performed by Fels' adopted son, Iso Briselli. The commission came early in 1939, and Barber set to work during the summer while staying in Sils-Maria in Switzerland. In late August, all Americans residing in Europe were instructed to leave: the Nazi invasion of Poland loomed. Barber duly returned home and was able to continue work on the Concerto in the relative safety of his family's cottage at Pocono Lake Preserve, Pennsylvania.

Briselli was underwhelmed with the two movements sent to him by Barber, arguing that they were 'too simple, not brilliant enough'. Barber responded by declaring that the finale would provide 'ample opportunity to display the artist's technical powers'. It is difficult to discern whether the finale which followed was deliberately fiendish as a kind of musical riposte to Briselli's criticism, or whether Barber had already conceived it as such. Whatever Barber's reasons, the level of difficulty rocketed, and Briselli found the finale too taxing. The \$1000 commission was withdrawn, but Barber's patron, Mary Curtis Bok – founder of the Curtis Institute of Music – organised a sort of trial, at which a student violinist, Herbert Baumel, having been given only a few hours' notice, demonstrated that the Concerto was indeed playable.

At last, Barber's Violin Concerto was premiered on 7 February 1941, played by the acclaimed violinist Albert Spalding, with the Philadelphia Orchestra under Eugene Ormandy – the same conductor and orchestra who would premiere Menotti's Concerto over a decade later. Critics hailed Barber's Violin Concerto as being 'refreshingly free from arbitrary tricks and musical mannerisms', with 'straightforwardness and sincerity being among its most engaging qualities'. The American composer and critic Virgil Thomson put it even more vividly, praising the Concerto for 'its gracious lyrical plenitude and its complete absence of tawdry swank'.

Barber's Violin Concerto opens with delicately orchestrated textures exuding a wistful lyricism, the warm harmony and romantic, singing violin writing creating a sense of nostalgia. Darker, more dramatic moments creep in, but a passionate build-up using the power of the full orchestra unfurls an expansive, unfettered atmosphere brimming with emotion. Particularly striking in this movement is Barber's use of a sustained orchestral chord, above which the violin plays an exquisite, enigmatic line.

An elegiac oboe solo sets the scene for the second movement, which is characterised by its long-breathed phrases and poignant harmonic twinges. The music is full of longing, an emotion which increases in intensity to create a palpable sense of loss. Yet, as the movement reaches its resolution, peace seems to have been reached.

It is difficult to comprehend Briselli's disappointment with the first two movements of Barber's Concerto, but the finale certainly offers a marked contrast of tone and technique. Whereas in the previous movements, Barber wore his heart on his sleeve, this finale – with its frenetic, unremitting writing for the violin – is more guarded in tone, more ambiguous. Even the final chords leave one wondering at what we have just heard; and, above all, marvelling at the sheer prowess demanded by such virtuosic violin writing.

Composer Theodore Wiprud was born in Washington, D.C. and now lives in New York, where he is currently the New York Philharmonic's Director of Education. Wiprud composed his Violin Concerto, 'Katrina', specifically for Ittai Shapira. Written in 2011, the work is a direct response to Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath – which is still felt by the people of New Orleans, where the disaster struck in 2005. This work is Wiprud's first concerto for a solo instrument with orchestra, and in it he reflects on the impact of the hurricane; on the devastating effects of the storm itself and the ensuing flood. Yet there is a hopeful undercurrent, too, with emphasis on the varied and deeply-felt musical life of the whole Delta. Wiprud sought to explore the power and importance of music in times of struggle; and, indeed, the enduring nature of music, and of life itself, even when apparently crushed by such overwhelming events.

When approaching the task of composing this work, Wiprud studied the violin concerto repertoire in detail. Alongside Wiprud's strong affinity with the music of Barber, two recent works stood out: the Violin Concertos by Ligeti and John Adams. Elements of the contrasting styles of both works informed and infiltrated Wiprud's own language. Specifically, Wiprud was inspired by Ligeti's use of ocarinas in his Violin Concerto, and thus chose to incorporate an unusual effect into the orchestral framework of 'Katrina': the use of harmonicas to evoke accordions, which have a strong association with Cajun and Acadian music.

The opening movement of Wiprud's 'Katrina' Concerto is entitled *Les Bons Temps*, meaning 'the good times', as used in the phrase 'Laissez les bons temps rouler' – 'let the good times roll'. This immediately conjures up the spirit of New Orleans, and its French Quarter in particular; Wiprud accordingly infuses his work with elements of jazz, blues and Cajun music, all of which feed into the rich musical life of the region. Wiprud's blend of contemporary classical techniques and jazz styles creates a fusion that conjures up a kind of 21st-century Gershwin. Yet there is a new, more sinister edge, with a tension-building rhythmic momentum reflecting the disaster's impact. This tension manifests itself via what is essentially a series of variations, each one including a wave of sound representing the flooding of New Orleans. In Wiprud's words: 'The waves get bigger and bigger until the soloist is completely submerged.'

The central movement of Wiprud's Concerto is called *Acadiana*, the name given to the French Louisiana region, home to a large Cajun French population. The material is based on the Acadian tune 'Disez Goodbye à Votre Mère', chosen by Wiprud both for its distinctive harmonic structure, and for its elegiac title, suggestive of loss and departure. Wiprud's treatment of this tune, with overlapping, intertwining string textures, expresses this sense of desolation, felt in the wake of the storm.

The Concerto's finale, 'Fly Away', is a free fantasy on the jazz funeral standard 'I'll Fly Away'. New Orleans is famed for its unique approach to death, and its funeral processions have what Wiprud calls "a celebratory side", a sense of appreciating a person's life and then moving on. 'Fly Away' also alludes to the fact that hordes of musicians had to flee their homes, literally moving on in order to escape the disaster: an important transition to make, but a real loss for New Orleans. Fittingly, Wiprud's music is characterised by a restless sense of forward-motion, vigorous rhythms and sinewy, mysterious violin writing, unfolding into a movement which combines acknowledgement of the ongoing struggles brought about by Katrina, with a sense of looking forwards; of hope.

### ITTAI SHAPIRA

In his dual role as violinist-composer, Ittai Shapira is a rarity in the 21st century, but follows a long line of musicians who, in writing and performing their own works, have relished both forms of creativity.

Ittai Shapira regularly performs with prestigious artists across the globe. Engagements include performances with the BBC Concert Orchestra, Belgrade Philharmonic under Sir Neville Marriner, Cape Town Philharmonic, Czech National Symphony under Libor Pešek, Detroit Symphony under Yoel Levi, English Chamber Orchestra with Yuri Bashmet at the Barbican, Israel Chamber Orchestra, Israeli Virtuosi at Alice Tully Hall hosted by Itzhak Perlman, The Knights, the Philharmonia, Polish Chamber Orchestra, Rochester Philharmonic, Royal Philharmonic, Russian Philharmonic with Thomas Sanderling, and the Symphony Orchestras of Budapest, Harrisburg, Jerusalem, Omaha and Shanghai. Performances include a tour of Finland and Sweden with the Oulu Sinfonia, and a tour of Shapira's own composition, *Concierto Latino*, with the Key West Symphony.

In his role as a composer, Ittai Shapira continues to write a variety of works, including a Double Violin Concerto entitled *Magyar*, a Violin and Cello Concerto, 'Sephardic Journeys', and a set of Solo Violin Caprices.

Ittai Shapira made a critically acclaimed Carnegie Hall debut in 2003 with the Orchestra of St Luke's, performing the world premiere of the Violin Concerto written for him by compatriot Shulamit Ran. His recording of this concerto is featured in a compilation of Ms Ran's works performed by Daniel Barenboim and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. In 2006 Ittai Shapira reached an audience of 55 million playing on the Jerry Lewis Telethon, televised nationally in the US. In the same year, Shapira toured a concert piece written for him by Glen Roven, 'The Runaway Bunny', which he performed with Glenn Close, as well as recording the work with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and Brooke Shields.



Carlos Gutierrez, NY PR Photo

Ittai Shapira performs as recitalist and chamber musician throughout the US, Canada, Europe, Australia and China, at venues ranging from the Queen Elizabeth Hall and the Louvre Auditorium to the Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall. He frequently performs as a chamber musician with the ensemble Concertante, and also appears at international festivals, recent examples including those at Aspen, Banff, Ravinia and Schleswig-Holstein.

Ittai Shapira's discography (for labels including Champs Hill, EMI, Meridian Records, Sanctuary Classics, Quartz and Sony/BMG) represents his interest in both standard and unusual repertoire: from Bruch to Berio. Shapira's playing is also featured in the soundtrack for a film made about Daniel Pearl, *The Journalist and the Jihadi*. Shapira is the dedicatee of no fewer than fourteen concertos, the most recent of which is the Katrina Concerto by Theodore Wiprud. Ittai Shapira continues to collaborate with some of today's most respected and communicative composers, enjoying particularly fruitful musical relationships with Avner Dorman and Dave Heath.

Ittai Shapira, who now lives in New York, grew up in Israel, where he studied with the renowned pedagogue Ilona Feher. He continued his studies at the Juilliard School with Dorothy DeLay and Robert Mann. A recipient of the prestigious Clairmont Award, Ittai Shapira co-founded the Ilona Feher Foundation with esteemed colleague Hagai Shaham, dedicated to the nurturing and promotion of young Israeli violinists.

Ittai Shapira plays a 1745 Guadagnini Violin.

## NEIL THOMSON

Neil Thomson is one of the most widely respected and versatile British conductors of his generation. Born in 1966, he studied with Norman Del Mar at the Royal College of Music in London and later at Tanglewood with Leonard Bernstein and Kurt Sanderling.

He has conducted and recorded with the London Symphony Orchestra and the Philharmonia (in a broadcast with Steven Isserlis) and in the past five years has worked with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, London Philharmonic Orchestra, BBC Symphony Orchestra, Royal Scottish National Orchestra, Aarhus Symphony Orchestra in Denmark, Lithuanian National Symphony Orchestra, Orchestra of the Teatro Massimo, Palermo, Orquesta Sinfonica de Yucatan in Mexico, Lithuanian Chamber Orchestra and the RTE Concert Orchestra. In May 2005 he was invited to conduct the



Ittai Shapira and Neil Thomson recording with the RLPO

50th Anniversary Memorial Concert for George Enescu with the Romanian National Orchestra and soloists David Geringas and Carmen Oprisanu.

Since 2008 he has made successful debuts (and immediate re-invitations) with the Israel Symphony Orchestra, the Halle Orchestra, the Orquestra Nacional do Porto and the WDR Rundfunkorchester, Koln.

He has performed with many distinguished soloists including Sir James Galway, Dame Moura Lympany, Sir Thomas Allen, Dame Felicity Lott, Philip Langridge, Sarah Chang, Steven Isserlis, Julian Lloyd Webber, David Geringas, Natalie Clein, Gyorgy Pauk, Brett Dean, Jean-Philippe Collard, Peter Jablonski, and Sir Richard Rodney Bennett.

Recent collaborations include Schumann Cello Concerto with Steven Isserlis, Liszt Second Piano Concerto with Stephen Hough and the premiere of Joseph Phibbs' new Percussion Concerto with Dame Evelyn Glennie at the Cheltenham Festival.

From 1992 until 2006 he was Head of Conducting at the Royal College of Music, the youngest-ever incumbent of this post (first held by Sir Adrian Boult in 1916 and thereafter by conductors such as Sir Malcolm Sargent, Constant Lambert, Vernon Handley and Norman Del Mar).

He was made an Honorary Member of the RCM in 1994 for his services to the institution and has established an enviable reputation as an orchestral trainer.

His skills as a natural communicator have enhanced an already growing reputation as a teacher throughout Europe. He was invited twice to the EU-sponsored masterclasses in Vilnius, Lithuania and has been a Guest Professor at the Mozarteum in Salzburg, the Krakow Academy of Music and the Conservatoire "Arrigo Boito" in Parma. In 2002 he was invited by Lorin Maazel to be on the jury for the European rounds of the Maazel Conducting Competition. In 2007 Neil was on the jury, alongside Gunther Schuller, for the Eduardo Mata International Conducting Competition in Mexico City and in May 2012 for the Prokofiev Conducting Competition in St. Petersburg.

## THOMAS SANDERLING

Thomas Sanderling grew up in St Petersburg, where his father Kurt Sanderling was conductor of the St Petersburg Philharmonic Orchestra. After graduating from the Music School of the Leningrad Conservatory he studied conducting at the Hochschule für Musik in East Berlin. At the age of 24 he became Music Director of the Halle Opera, and at an early age appeared frequently with leading East German orchestras and opera houses, including the Dresden Staatskapelle and Leipzig Gewandhaus. At the request of the composer he gave the German premières of Shostakovich's Thirteenth and Fourteenth Symphonies and made the world première recording of the composer's last orchestral work, the Michelangelo Suite. This recording led to work as assistant to Leonard Bernstein and Herbert von Karajan. Thomas Sanderling has conducted extensively on the international stage, and is equally acclaimed for his operatic work. He was Permanent Guest Conductor of the Deutsche Staatsoper Unter den Linden Berlin from 1978 to 1983, when he moved to the West. Since then he has conducted an extensive repertory of operas at some of the world's leading opera houses. He enjoys a strong relationship with the St Petersburg Philharmonic and since 2000 he has served as Principal Guest Conductor of the Novosibirsk Philharmonic Orchestra and in 2004 became Principal Guest Conductor of the National Philharmonic Orchestra of Russia. He has won wide acclaim and a number of distinguished awards, and in recent years has recorded the complete orchestral works of Taneyev for Naxos. His other recordings, including Shostakovich premières for Deutsche Grammophon, have won considerable critical acclaim and recognition.

