

Aged 21, West Chester-born Samuel Barber was completing his studies at the Curtis Institute of Music (right near Rittenhouse Square in Philadelphia) when he composed the *School for Scandal* overture, his first piece for large orchestra. He would go on to a long and successful composing career, writing often lush, and mostly tonal, music. Other great works include the Violin Concerto, *Knoxville: Summer of 1915*, two symphonies, several operas (including *Antony and Cleopatra*, for the Metropolitan Opera's opening at Lincoln Center) and the *Adagio for Strings*, one of the most well known pieces of all time. A lifelong Pennsylvanian at heart (he wrote about his unhappiness with New York), he is buried in Oakland Cemetery in West Chester.

The *School for Scandal* overture is an energetic, fast-paced piece, inspired by the 18th century comedy by Irish/British playwright, politician and poet (and clearly, alliterative careerist) Richard Brinsley Sheridan (1751-1816). Sheridan was in parliament for 32 years, but also owned the Theater Royal in Drury Lane. His four-act comedy's central character is Lady Sneerwell, whose salons are rumor-mill of scandals and gossip. The *School for Scandal*'s plot, of mistaken identities, hijinks, gambling, and Shakespearian parody, ends happily ever after.

Reuben Blundell