

# Organ Sonatas and the Development of an American Musical Style

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CHRISTOPHER MARKS

**T**HIS ARTICLE CONSIDERS THE DEVELOPMENT of an American musical style in organ music, specifically in organ sonatas and symphonies from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By examining nearly sixty compositions written during this period, a progression can be traced in which musical style incorporates more explicitly American elements, and compositional technique becomes more sophisticated and innovative. I acknowledge at the outset that any attempt to define “American musical style” is quixotic. The difficulty is compounded by the fact that stylistic elements that many listeners consider “American,” often associated with Native American music, African American music, jazz, or popular song, did not enter into organ music as quickly as they penetrated other genres of classical music. Nevertheless, some indicators of American style are discernable throughout the period in question, and will be described here with reference to specific compositions.

The story of the American organ sonata begins with Dudley Buck (1839–1909), whose two such works, published respectively in 1868 and 1877, arguably represent the pinnacle of nineteenth-century American organ composition. With these pieces, Buck established a benchmark against which all subsequent American organ music can be measured. However, the following quotation from *The American Organist*, from only a decade after Buck’s death, vividly captures the quickly fading impact of his music:

Buck was famous for a while and the printing presses that duplicated his anthems by [the] thousands carved his name deeply upon the sands of time and then on the same tireless ground-bass of their whirring cogs ground it out again almost e’er the earth closed over him. ... From the best of today the man of tomorrow saps his nourishment, and the best of today fades while the man of tomorrow blossoms into greater achievements, to be in his turn sapped and left in the wreckage of advancing civilization.<sup>1</sup>

The swift disappearance of Buck’s music from historical consciousness indicates the disposability of much American music written during his era, but it also points to that most American of concepts: “progress.” Many composers

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<sup>1</sup> [T. Scott Buhman], “Gutenberg and Dudley Buck,” *The American Organist* 2, no. 7 (July 1919): 267.

were, like Buck, “left in the wreckage” as American composition “advanced.” The quest for an American style was important to each succeeding generation of composers in the nineteenth century. The organ sonata offers a lens through which to view one aspect of the development of that style. However, as the following quotations from composer and critic William Henry Fry (1813–1864) reveal, its development was a struggle:

I make common cause with Americans, born or naturalized, who are engaged in the world’s Art struggle, and against degrading deference to European dictation. . . . If I did not think I could make a school for myself, I would not write at all; for so has done every man who has made any name. But every such composer has considered it beneath the dignity of his mission, servilely to copy pre-existing forms, and follow in the steps of “illustrious predecessors,” as the critics always and invariably would have him do. . . . If he has not studied and made himself master of the art of writing fugues and sonatas, he is an ignoramus, a quack and pretender, who does not know the rules of the trade; but if he publish fugues and sonatas for the purpose of showing that he can do so, it is about as much to his credit, as to publish the multiplication table to show that he has committed it to memory and, was able to write it down.<sup>2</sup>

In a proto-Ivesian manner, Fry defines Americanism in music as the pursuit of independence and progress. Fry’s ideals did not specify what new American forms ought to replace “the art of writing fugues and sonatas,” nor did all critics or musicians agreed with Fry’s nationalistic ambitions, but recognizably American traits nonetheless emerged as the century waned.

Indeed, many prominent American organ composers of the period did not write sonatas, but focused instead on the more popular forms, such as theme and variations, short service preludes, character pieces, marches, pastorales, or dances. They emphasized appealing, practical, and easily digestible music. John Knowles Paine (1839–1906), the first major American composer-organist, wrote no organ sonatas, but produced multiple variation sets and preludes and fugues. Organ repertoire composed by other members of the so-called Second New England School, including George Chadwick (1854–1931), Arthur Foote (1853–1937), and Amy Beach (1867–1944), similarly excluded sonatas. Other composers of the same period who wrote no organ sonatas but contributed numerous other organ works include George Bristow (1825–1898), George Washbourne Morgan (1822–1892), and Samuel B. Whitney (1842–1914).

For those composers who did write them, sonatas typically comprised a small fraction of their output. Dudley Buck, George Whiting (1840–1924), Henry Dun-

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<sup>2</sup> William Henry Fry, “Mr. Fry’s Letter to Mr. Willis,” *Dwight’s Journal of Music* 4, no. 18 (Feb. 4, 1854): 138–39.

ham (1853–1929), and Horatio Parker (1863–1919), for example, all published dozens of shorter organ works but no more than one or two sonatas. This holds true for all of the composers discussed below. The premise of this study is that this large-scale form signified compositional ambition and seriousness of purpose and therefore best represents the innovations, progress, and independence that led to the realization of an American style.

In pursuit of this idea, the discussion will focus on American sonatas during a period from roughly 1865 until 1930. The compositional bookends of that period are Buck's organ sonatas and Leo Sowerby's *Symphony in G* (1930). Buck's sonatas, in seriousness of purpose and compositional craft, tower over his more popular works, yet they were not especially "American" in style. By contrast, Sowerby's *Symphony* is a monumental work and, I argue, the first major organ work with a distinctively "American" sound. This study takes account of more than sixty American organ sonatas between Buck and Sowerby that collectively tell the story of the development of an American style in organ music.

Many of the sonatas discussed here are significant, well-crafted, and rewarding pieces that demonstrate American contributions to the organ repertoire during a period in which more attention was paid to their European counterparts. Almost none of these sonatas has entered into the standard organ repertoire, yet many are worth exploring and performing.

Before discussing American organ sonatas in detail, it will be useful to define both "organ sonata" and "American." While neither term can be easily dispatched, the discussion can be guided by general characteristics. Under the heading "organ sonata," we might include compositions that:

1. Are written for solo organ
2. Are titled "sonata" or "symphony"<sup>3</sup>
3. Have 3 or 4 movements
4. Use sonata-allegro form in the first movement
5. Focus on thematic and motivic development to an extent not typical of shorter pieces
6. Use some cyclic elements, such as themes that reappear in more than one movement or a unifying, extra-musical program

While not all sonatas feature all of these characteristics, they usually include most of them.

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<sup>3</sup> There is little distinction between these two titles as an indicator of style or form. "Symphony" became more commonplace around the turn of the century, and perhaps suggests an association with the orchestral sound of the instruments being built. For the purposes of this discussion, though, "symphony" and "sonata" are synonymous.

Defining “American” in this context is much more difficult. The pieces included in this study were by composers born in the United States or who emigrated here before the piece was written. Some other less easily measurable characteristics emerged:

1. Simplicity, naïveté, and optimism in tone, especially in sonatas written earlier in this period
2. Inclusion of modal melodic or harmonic gestures, reminiscent of folk song
3. Inclusion of harmonies or rhythms associated with popular music
4. In the twentieth century, innovation in style and form and development of a distinctive compositional voice
5. Performance indications written in English
6. Registration instructions clearly associated with American organs

Composers who wished to develop a national or even individual style were in a bind, as Fry pointed out: to prove their legitimacy, they had to write according to European standards, showing their grasp of traditional form, counterpoint, and harmony. To do this was immediately to be dismissed as imitative, while to ignore these standards was to be considered unskilled and uneducated. Moreover, since the most clearly “American” music of the period—for instance, works based on Native American or African American music, or songs from vaudeville, Broadway, and Tin Pan Alley—did not easily make its way into church, the development of an American style in organ music was hampered even further. Yet, in examining these sonatas, clear indications of stylistic reformation do emerge, culminating in the distinctive American organ style of Sowerby’s symphony.

## Early Sonatas

Thayer, Eugene (1838–1889)	Sonata No. 1 in F, Op. 1 (Bote & Bock, c. 1863)
	Sonata No. 2 in C (Bote & Bock, c. 1863)
	Sonata No. 3 in D minor (Bote & Bock, c. 1863)
	Sonata No. 4 in D minor (Bote & Bock, c. 1863)
	Sonata No. 5 in C minor (G. Schirmer, 1889)

Buck, Dudley (1839–1909)	Grand Sonata in E-flat, op. 22 (Beer and Schirmer, 1866) Second Sonata, op. 77 (G. Schirmer, 1877)
Dunham, Henry M. (1853–1929)	First Sonata in G minor, op. 10 (Arthur P. Schmidt, 1882) Second Sonata in F, op. 19 (Arthur P. Schmidt, 1891)
Whiting, George E. (1840–1923)	Grand Sonata, op. 25 (Arthur P. Schmidt, 1890)
Wrightson, Herbert (1869–1949)	Sonata No. 3 in F (Summy, 1899)
Barnes, Albert Lewis (1861–1906)	Sonate Chromatique (Schuberth, 1900)
Storer, H. J. (1860–1935)	Sonata No. 1 in G minor (J. Fischer & Bro., 1900)
Lynes, Frank (1858–1913)	Sonata in C major, op. 49 (Arthur P. Schmidt, 1907)

Eugene Thayer was the first American composer to publish organ sonatas, in 1863 or 1864.<sup>4</sup> His four early sonatas are notable only for being the first of their kind, not for their musical value: in spite of his rigorous German training, Thayer's compositional skills were unremarkable. Like Mendelssohn's sonatas, they are loose collections of short pieces that do not feature classical sonata-allegro form. Thayer's reliance on counterpoint betrays his schooling, but also his ineptitude. Although nationalistic references are found in his variations on "America" and "The Star-Spangled Banner," his sonatas, including the later fifth (1889), mark an inauspicious beginning to an American tradition of organ composition.

In contrast, Buck's Grand Sonata in E-flat, published in 1866, is the work of a skilled craftsman (Example 1). His counterpoint, form, texture, harmony, and thematic development are adept, and his melodies appealing. Equally notable are the virtuosic technical demands. Like Thayer, Buck used a patriotic song, "Hail! Columbia," as a theme in the final movement. For all of his skill, Buck did not attempt to be innovative, which perhaps explains why this piece has never

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<sup>4</sup> John Ogasapian, "The Organ Sonatas of W. Eugene Thayer: a Critical Appraisal," *The Tracker* 34, no. 4 (1990): 18–22.



*Example 1* Buck, *Grand Sonata in E-flat, op. 22, mvt. 4, fugue based on "Hail! Columbia"*

achieved much recognition. That notwithstanding, his sonata stands clearly as the first substantial piece of organ music by an American composer.

Buck's Second Sonata (Example 2) is even more significant. It is more technically challenging, especially in the writing for pedals, which makes more use of the heel, hinting at the increasing influence of French technique. These advanced techniques are squarely in service of expressive ends. Buck published and performed orchestral transcriptions, which evidently influenced his approach to texture and registration at the organ. He was innovative in his use of the instrument, even while he worked within traditional (that is, European) formal and harmonic confines.

These pioneering works were followed by a series of sonatas by lesser composers. Yet the very existence of American sonatas for organ signals the ascendancy of the genre; the fact that these pieces rarely succeeded does not lessen the importance of the attempts. The growing interest in the genre may partly be traceable to the publication of European models by, for example, Josef Rheinberger and Charles-Marie Widor, and performances in the United States between 1893 and 1904 by Alexandre Guilmant.

Though George W. Chadwick wrote no organ sonatas himself, the following quotation from his biographer Victor Fell Yellin helps contextualize the work of American composers:

The ideal of the gifted artist appreciated and supported by a noble patron, a reality in European cultural history even until the twentieth century, was never practical for American musicians. . . . There was no such profession as "American composer." Yes, there were many—to many—part-time composers who were essentially



**Example 2** *Buck, Second Sonata, op. 77, mvt. 2, orchestral approach to texture*

amateurs, since they earned their bread doing other things. . . . Here is the central reason why any comparison between European and American music always tends to be invidious [and] why any consideration of Chadwick's music must take into account the effects of amateurism.<sup>5</sup>

Most American sonatas of this period suffer from this amateurism, which manifests itself as a lack of formal sophistication and thematic development. They are often plagued by a pianistic approach to texture that does not translate well to the organ, especially when compared to the highly idiomatic quality of Buck's music. Harmonically, they follow late German romantic tendencies toward chromaticism, lack of harmonic closure, and distant key relationships, but not always convincingly.

From a certain perspective, amateurism can itself be construed as a feature of American style, as well as an indication of the expectations of American audiences. If some composers of this generation felt they needed to demonstrate their bona fides by writing to European standards, the rejection of that imperative by others may be seen as an adoption of "American" ideals of independence and progress, as Fry articulated. Moreover, American composers' relatively meager training—itself arguably the result of American political progress, whereby patronage was not a viable option for them—meant that their harmonic language,

<sup>5</sup> Victor Fell Yellin, *Chadwick: Yankee Composer* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990), 88–89.

formal approach, and melodic construction do not compare favorably with their European models. Glimmers of Americanism can be seen in the prominence of march movements, capitalizing on the popularity of American marches by the likes of John Philip Sousa. Beyond this, if somewhat intangibly, there is a sense of unbridled optimism and naïveté in these early sonatas that might be aligned with other forms of cultural expression during this period of American history.

## Sonatas of the 1900s

Baldwin, Ralph (1872–1943)	Sonata No. 1, Op. 10 (G. Schirmer, 1901)
Borowski, Felix (1872–1956)	Sonata [No. 1] for Organ (J. Fischer & Bro., 1904)
	2me Sonate (Laudy & Co., 1906)
Lemare, Edwin H. (1865–1934)	Symphony in D Minor, Op. 50 (Novello, 1906)
Andrews, Mark (1875–1939)	Sonata in A minor, Op. 17 (G. Schirmer, 1908)
	Sonata in C minor No. 2 (H. W. Gray, 1912)
Parker, Horatio (1863–1919)	Sonata in E-flat, Op. 65 (G. Schirmer, 1908)
Rogers, James H. (1857–1940)	Sonata in E minor (G. Schirmer, 1910)

By the turn of the century, the most notable composer to develop an American style wasn't even American. The impact of Dvořák's "New World" Symphony on the development of an American classical musical style cannot be overstated. This outside influence was crucial: as Joseph Horowitz writes, "questions of American identity were more likely to occur to outsiders like Dvořák, or first-generation Americans like George Gershwin and Aaron Copland, for whom jazz, folk songs, and popular music became vital points of reference."<sup>6</sup>

The influence of Dvořák's style is evident in organ sonatas of the early 1900s, especially the first sonata by Felix Borowski, who himself had something of an outsider's perspective. The son of a Polish immigrant, he was born in England and moved to the United States, where he became a professor at the Chicago Musical College and then Northwestern University and was also a leading music

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<sup>6</sup> Joseph Horowitz, *Classical Music in America* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2005), 104.

**Example 3** Borowski, *Sonata No. 1*, mvt. 1

critic for the *Tribune*. In a 1903 article entitled “The Present Condition of Music,” Borowski names Dvořák “perhaps the greatest living composer.” He cites Edward Macdowell (1860–1908) and Horatio Parker as the most successful American composers, but notes:

Neither Macdowell nor any other American composer can be said to be possessed of a distinctly national individuality. There is no such thing as American music in the sense that there is Russian or Scandinavian music. Various attempts have been made to exploit the peculiarities of Indian art, and the tunes of the [African American] have also been experimented with with a larger measure of success. Although the day of America’s separate musical existence has not yet dawned, that the nation will eventually develop its own musical language and produce remarkable results with it is not to be doubted.<sup>7</sup>

If Dvořák’s “From the New World,” by incorporating intimations of native musics, could be heard as the height of Americanism, it is not surprising that Borowski’s first sonata reflects characteristics of that symphony (see Example 3). By those lights it can be seen as the most American sonata thus far, while it also evinces more sophisticated thematic development and handling of form. Borowski is the first of the composers under consideration here to unify the multi-movement structure by referencing themes from the first movement in later movements.

Similarities with Dvořák aside, Borowski’s sonata is an attractive piece that suggests a new orchestral approach to registration and marks a clear turning point in the evolution of the genre. His second sonata from 1906 shares many of the same characteristics, while his third sonata came in 1924 and shows even more of a tendency toward orchestral textures and registrations.

A handful of other sonatas from the 1900s also manifests these symphonic

<sup>7</sup> Felix Borowski, “The Present Condition of Music,” *The World To-Day* 5, no. 6 (December 1903): 1593–97 at 1597.



*Example 4a* Parker, *Sonata in E-flat, op. 65, mvt. 3*

influences. Mark Andrews, who emigrated from England to Montclair, New Jersey, in 1902, wrote two sonatas. The first, written in England, opens with a theme that could easily have been by Dvořák. The second sonata, from 1912, also demonstrates an orchestral approach to texture and dynamics. Andrews is inventive in his use of sonata form and thematic development, displaying a level of skill not seen in composers from the previous generation. Yet he retains a certain Germanic style, with a reliance on counterpoint and, in the second sonata, a treatment of “Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott” reminiscent of Reger.

This same Germanic outlook appears in Edwin Lemare’s second symphony of 1906, with its Wagnerian harmony, fluidity of form, continuous development, and specific indications of symphonic registration. Although Lemare had emigrated from England to the United States by the time this piece was written, there is nothing American in its style.

There is also the 1908 sonata of Horatio Parker, one of the most prominent of American composers of his day. The undeniable appeal of the scherzo movement (Example 4a) has ensured its frequent performance, but the other movements remain less familiar today. The emphasis throughout the work is on the development of short motives, especially in the first movement, which also relies on symphonic textures. The final movement, by contrast, is a rather academic fugue, showing the persistent centrality of Germanic organ music as a touchstone (Example 4b). Despite the characteristic use of the downward leap of a minor seventh, which occurs twice in the subject and references a Baroque type, as a whole it comes off as rather dry and demonstrates no markers of a distinctive American style.

Taken together, these pieces show diverse influences. One could argue that this “melting pot” of European influences is itself an American stylistic characteristic, up to and including its limited and stylized absorption of non-European musical elements.



*Example 4b Parker, Sonata in E-flat, op. 65, mvt. 4*

## Sonatas of the 1910s

Becker, René Louis (1882–1956)	First Sonata in G, op. 40 (G. Schirmer, 1912) Second Sonata in F, op. 41 (G. Schirmer, 1912) Third Sonata in E, op. 43 (G. Schirmer, 1913)
Jepson, Harry Benjamin (1870–1952)	[First] Sonata in G minor (H. W. Gray, 1913)
Lemare, Edwin H. (1865–1934)	Sonata No. 1 in F, op. 95 (Schott, 1914)
Yon, Pietro A. (1886–1943)	Sonata Prima (G. Schirmer, 1916) Sonata cromatica (seconda) (J. Fischer & Bro., 1917)
Barnes, Edward Shippen (1887–1958)	Symphonie pour orgue, op. 18 (G. Schirmer, 1918)

The increasing French influence on American organ composers is more overt in the sonatas of the 1910s. In part, this is traceable to three extensive US concert tours by Alexandre Guilmant, in which he performed much French music, including his own sonatas, alongside music by composers representing other national and historical styles, among which the music of Bach held a central place. Notably, his 1904 performances at the St. Louis Exposition included

À mon cher ami et maître Monsieur Louis Vierne

## Symphonie

### I Prélude

Fonds et Anches sur tous  
les claviers  
Foundation stops and Reeds  
on all manuals  
All manuals coupled to Gt. and to Ped.

Edward Shippen Barnes, Op. 18

Moderato (♩ = 50)

Manuals G PR *fff*  
Gt.

Pedal *fff*  
Ped. G PR

Example 5 Barnes, *Symphonie*, op. 18, opening

G PR Sans 16  
Gt. (without 16) *f*

Péd. G PR

Example 6 Barnes *Symphonie*, op. 18, mvt. 4

Borowski's first sonata. Guilmant's own sonatas rely more on classical forms and a more Germanic harmonic and contrapuntal outlook than the "modern" symphonies of Widor or Vierne, making them similar to the American sonatas we have examined thus far.

The clearest early examples of French influence in American organ sonatas come from René Louis Becker, an Alsatian composer who emigrated to the United States in 1904. His three sonatas, published in 1912, are more reminiscent of Widor than Dvořák or Mendelssohn. Like Widor in his early symphonies, Becker abandoned classical sonata form and assembled loosely connected suites. The textures, melodies, and harmonies resemble Widor, and the simplicity of predominantly ternary-based form echoes much French music of the time, as well as American character pieces.

*Più animato* ♩ = 92

*Example 7 Lemare, Sonata No. 1 in F, op. 95, mvt. 1*

Harry Benjamin Jepson, who studied with Widor, also wrote three sonatas. The first, published in 1913, is clearly modeled after a French symphony, although it is not an especially successful piece. As professor of organ at Yale, Jepson influenced many prominent American organists and was involved in the planning of the university's original Woolsey Hall organ.

More successful is the first organ symphony (1918, Example 5) by Edward Shippen Barnes. Dedicated to his teacher Louis Vierne, it might easily be mistaken for a Vierne symphony. Registration and manual indications are in the French manner, as are the harmonies and textures. The fourth movement could easily have been titled "Clair de lune," and the final movement is in the style of a French toccata (Example 6).

One other sonata of the 1910s with less French influence deserves mention. Lemare had written some organ symphonies before he came to the United States for the first time in 1900. In 1914, he published an organ sonata (Example 7). This switch from "symphony" to "sonata" implies a different approach, and indeed this piece is more concise, clearer in texture, and more harmonically direct. Most significant is the sudden emergence of rhythms and harmonies that reflect the growing influence of American jazz and popular song.

## Sonatas of the 1920s

Dickinson, Clarence (1873–1969)	Symphony “Storm King” (H.W. Gray, 1920)
Jepson, Harry Benjamin (1870–1952)	Second Sonata for the Organ: A Pageant (H.W. Gray, 1921)
Rogers, James H. (1857–1940)	Sonata No. 2 in D minor (G. Schirmer, 1921) Third Sonata (G. Schirmer, 1923) Sonatina No. 2 in F minor (G. Schirmer, 1929) Sonatina (Theodore Presser, 1929)
Stewart, Humphrey (1856–1932)	The Chambered Nautilus (Theodore Presser, 1922)
Yon, Pietro A. (1886–1943)	Sonata romantica (J. Fischer & Bro., 1922)
Barnes, Edward Shippen (1887–1958)	Second Symphony (G. Schirmer, 1923)
Moline, Lily Wadhams (1878–1966)	Sonata No. 2 (Summy, 1923)
Borowski, Felix (1872–1956)	Third Sonata (Arthur P. Schmidt, 1924)
Homer, Sidney (1864–1953)	Sonata in One Movement, Op. 39 (G. Schirmer, 1926)
Candlyn, T. Frederick H. (1892–1964)	Sonata drammatica (H.W. Gray, 1928)  Sonata-Rhapsody (H.W. Gray, 1929)

The 1920s brought a handful of programmatic sonatas by American composers. The melting pot of styles and the increasing coloristic range of the organs combined with the creative license offered by an extra-musical program to open the way to the development of a distinctively American style. This is especially evident when the program is itself American, as with the “Storm King” Symphony by Clarence Dickinson (Example 8). This ambitious symphony was based on Dickinson’s impressions of Storm King Mountain on the Hudson. Dickinson provided detailed programmatic descriptions for each movement, focusing on

**Example 8** Dickinson, “Storm King” Symphony, mvt. 1

the power of nature and the folklore of the region.<sup>8</sup> Though the emphasis is on color, whimsy, and symbolism, there is sophisticated thematic development and formal innovation. Modal melodies and folk-like themes and textures are an extension of Dvořákian Americanism, but also venture into new musical territory by hinting at an awareness of modernist trends. This attractive piece demands a virtuosic performer and an instrument with widely varied tonal resources.

Jepson’s second sonata is also programmatic. It won a prize for best sonata in the orchestral style from Eric DeLamarter, assistant conductor of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. Jepson’s orientation is still French, as the titles and textures go to show, but the sonata also points in an American direction. The outer movements are quintessential American marches, resulting in the adoption of rondo form for the first movement instead of sonata form. More interesting are the jazz-influenced harmonies and vernacular style. The third movement, “La Zingara,” is an exoticist representation of gypsy music: although not particularly successful in this case, the incorporation of folk styles not normally heard on the organ added a new ingredient to the melting pot.

Humphrey J. Stewart’s sonata, entitled *The Chambered Nautilus*, is based on excerpts from the Oliver Wendell Holmes poem of the same name (Example 9).

<sup>8</sup> The third movement, according to Dickinson, “brings to mind the hobgoblins that are supposed to disport themselves there [the Hudson Highlands] at night, with elfish glee.”

Allegretto scherzando M.M.  $\text{♩} = 116$

**Example 9** Stewart, *The Chambered Nautilus*, mvt. 3

Perhaps the most successful of these programmatic sonatas, it blends folk and vernacular elements, French organ textures, and orchestral color. The first movement is clearly a sea song, and the scherzo could easily have come from Dupr 's pen. Stewart, born in England, became the first civic organist of San Francisco and in that capacity performed regularly in Balboa Park, which accounts for this sonata's dedication to John D. Spreckels, the wealthy industrialist who funded the organ there.

The freedom of color, style, and form that stem from this programmatic writing pervade subsequent non-programmatic works. This freedom, together with the contemporary musical vocabulary that increasingly penetrated the sonata from outside the organ world, developed a more individualistic—and thus more “American”—style of composition in the 1930s.

Two non-programmatic sonatas of the 1920s deserve to be highlighted, in addition to the aforementioned Third Sonata of Borowski. The second symphony of Edward Shippen Barnes, published in 1923, shows significant steps toward an expressly American style. The syncopated rhythm of the opening motive immediately declares a vernacular influence and unifies the multi-movement structure (Example 10). The French-influenced third movement pushes at the limits of tonality by exploring modal harmonies, ending in an unexpected coda replete with American-inflected harmonies and rhythms. The final movement is a French toccata, with a secondary theme that, melodically, is simple and folk-like, but is undergirded by jazz-influenced harmonies (Example 11). Throughout

Allegro moderato

Manuals

Pedal

Example 10 Barnes, *Second Symphony*, mvt. 1

Allegro

Sw. *f*

Gt. *f*

Sw. to Ped. *f*

Example 11 Barnes, *Second Symphony*, mvt. 5

the piece, Barnes's attention to details of form, thematic development, texture, and harmony is impressive, signaling a marked advance over the amateurism displayed by American composers of the previous generation. This symphony has everything: diverse stylistic influences, challenging technical demands, compositional skill, cyclic unification, coloristic verve, and popular appeal.

Like the Barnes symphony, the *Sonata drammatica* of the English-born T. Frederick H. Candlyn kicks off with a syncopated motive that unifies all three movements (Examples 12 and 13). Yet Candlyn does an even better job of capturing the simplicity and rhythmic fluidity of folk themes. He makes frequent use of impressionistic harmonic parallelism, which was to become common over the course of the next decade. Though stylistically divergent from Barnes's work, this sonata also blends national styles, demonstrates skillful thematic development,



Example 12 Candlyn, *Sonata drammatica*, mvt. 1, main theme



Example 13 Candlyn, *Sonata drammatica*, mvt. 2, development of main theme from mvt. 1

and exploits the resources of a large orchestral organ, while striking a somewhat British tone of reserved grandeur.

## Sonatas of the 1930s

James, Philip (1890–1975)	First Organ Sonata (H. W. Gray, 1930)
Miles, Russell Hancock (1895–1983)	Sonata chromatica (H. W. Gray, 1931)
Sowerby, Leo (1895–1968)	Symphony in G major (Oxford University Press, 1932)
Edmundson, Garth (1892–1971)	Impressions gothiques: Symphony No. 2 for organ (H.W. Gray, 1933)
	“Apostolic” Symphony No. 1 (Fischer, 1936)
Bennett, Robert Russell (1894–1981)	Sonata in G (Cos Cob, 1934)
Friedell, Harold (1905–1958)	Organ Symphony in E minor (unpublished, written c. 1935)
Jepson, Harry Benjamin (1870–1952)	Third Sonata (H. W. Gray, 1935)

The sonatas of the early 1930s solidified the notion of an American style. While

Andante con tranquillità (♩ = 84)

**Manual**

**Pedal**

*Example 14 James, First Organ Sonata, opening*

drawing on diverse influences of the past, modern harmonic and rhythmic approaches began to appear more frequently. Composers were increasingly concerned with developing a unique voice rather than with hewing to traditional national or historic styles, a trend in American music of the period that can also be seen outside the organ loft.

Philip James's sonata, published in 1930, already evinces a more modern approach to harmony and rhythm, with frequent use of irregular meter and syncopations (Example 14). Its harmonies are often jazz-influenced. The outer movements make significant use of imitative counterpoint, but do not attempt to adhere to traditional patterns of resolution and harmonic development. This serious composition occasionally takes on the opulence of the theatrical overture, sometimes ventures into crystal-clear voice-leading, and at other times revels in the emotional turmoil of romanticism. It sounds unlike the work of any other composer or national style considered thus far.

The Organ Sonata in G of Robert Russell Bennett, published in 1934, is even more distinctive (Example 15). Unlike most of the composers considered here, Bennett was not an organist, but spent most of his career as an arranger on Broadway and in Hollywood. Like his predecessors in this genre, however, Bennett approaches it seriously, using modes and diatonic harmonies in an up-to-date fashion and going so far as to include a passage with three tonal centers. This is perhaps the most modern-sounding organ sonata yet.

Harold Friedell's symphony is similarly reliant on modes and non-triadic diatonic harmonies. At the other end of the spectrum is Jepson's extremely challenging third sonata. This piece has an intense chromaticism that rarely allows for tonal closure or stability. Nonetheless, if one can get past the technical challenges and harmonic opacity, there is reward in Jepson's inventive approach to development, textures, and uses of organ color.

The image shows a musical score for the opening of Bennett's Sonata in G. The score is written for piano and includes three systems of music. The first system consists of a treble clef staff with a melodic line and two bass clef staves with accompaniment. The tempo is marked 'Con fuoco' with a quarter note equal to 144 (♩ = 144). The dynamics are marked 'ff'. The first system includes performance instructions: *ff* [8'-4'-2'] for the right hand and *ff* [16'-8'] for the left hand. The second system continues the accompaniment in the bass clef staves. The third system features a more complex texture, with the right hand playing a rapid sixteenth-note passage and the left hand providing harmonic support. A dynamic marking of *fff* is present in the third system, along with the instruction [add 18'].

*Example 15 Bennett, Sonata in G, opening*

The Sowerby symphony looms over all other sonatas of the decade and represents the apotheosis of the genre. It manifests all of the elements that characterize the stylistic evolution of the American organ sonatas discussed thus far: formal innovation, thematic and motivic development, the use of folk-influenced melodies and textures, the deployment of modal harmonies and themes, virtuosic technical demands, dependence on the resources of a large orchestral instrument, and an individualized style that cannot be mistaken for anyone else's.

The main themes of all movements are modal, a trend that was emerging in earlier sonatas. Harmonies are often based on diatonic modes, but veer into the extended tertian harmonies of jazz, or harmonies built on open fourths. Harmonic motion depends heavily on diatonic parallelism in some places and extreme chromaticism in others.

The first movement, which unfolds over the course of no fewer than twenty minutes, is a tour de force of thematic transformation (Example 16). Based on a classical sonata form, the exposition presents three main themes, with the second clearly derived from the first (Example 17). It is presented with the simplicity and whimsy of a folk tune, supported by largely diatonic parallel harmonies, in a manner reminiscent of Copland.

Although the emphasis is on development throughout the movement, there is still a distinct development section, which reaches a climax (see Example 18) with the apotheosized return of the main theme. While the other two movements reach their climaxes at the end, the first movement is unusual in reaching it at

Very broadly ( $\text{♩} = 58-69$  always very freely)

Manual

Pedal

**Example 16** Sowerby, *Symphony in G major*, mvt. 1, main theme

Moderately fast ( $\text{♩} = 80-84$ )

endo pedal

**Example 17** Sowerby, *Symphony in G major*, mvt. 1, second theme as transformation of main theme

heard in alternation. Each section is shorter than the previous one, giving rise to a sense of acceleration. The unusual quintuple meter and extended harmonies give the piece a rhythmic and harmonic profile that evokes the vernacular. Sowerby's metrical ingenuity, most notably manifested via hemiola effects, challenges the performer and excites the listener. The demands on pedal technique in this movement recall Buck's, whose technique was groundbreaking for his time.

The final passacaglia movement was planned with an equal attention to architectural considerations (Example 20). There are two large sections, each with

the beginning of the recapitulation and then winding down, giving the overall impression of an arch form. Sowerby's skill in building and relieving tension through harmony, texture, and registration is clearly apparent.

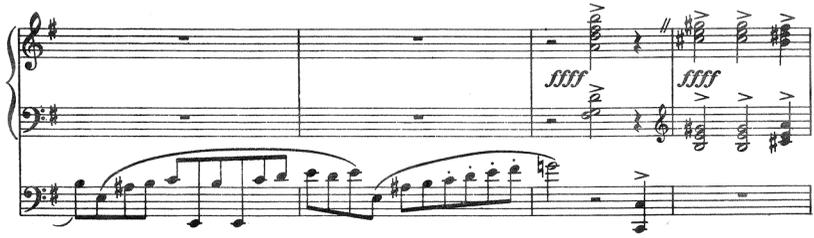
The second movement, simpler in form, is innovative in its own way (Example 19). It is in three sections, each featuring two themes

retarding

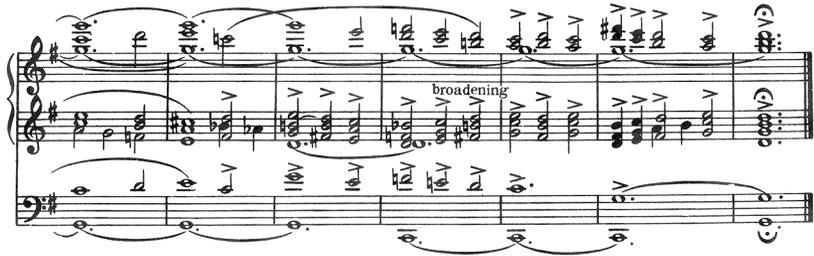
Faster ( $\text{♩} = 100-108$ )

16

**Example 18** Sowerby, *Symphony in G major*, mvt. 1, extremes of pedal range at climax



*Example 19* Sowerby, *Symphony in G major*, mvt. 2, extremes of pedal range at climax



*Example 20* Sowerby, *Symphony in G major*, mvt. 3, extremes of pedal range at climax

17 repetitions of the ground bass, and with each section building to a climax. In the first section, the ground bass is presented solely in the pedal line. Sowerby waits until the second section to move it to the upper voices while also exploring inversion, retrograde, and canonic treatment. His inventiveness in harmonizing the Mixolydian theme with both diatonic and chromatic means never dwindles, creating consistent interest for performer and listener alike.

Sowerby's use of technique and texture throughout is idiosyncratic and yet idiomatic, in this way mirroring the compositional advancements of Buck. Each movement arrives at a climactic point marked by reaching the extremes of the pedalboard—not a cyclic motive as seen in some other sonatas, but a unifying characteristic nonetheless.

## Conclusion

None of Sowerby's contemporaries wrote a piece with as much ambition and scope. For all the nascent modernism in Sowerby's symphony, it is still a romantic work in design, texture, and emotional content, making Sowerby a fitting inheritor of the American tradition begun by the unfortunate Dudley Buck, whose name had been ground out by the whirring cogs of time. Although Sowerby himself was

eventually “left in the wreckage of advancing civilization,” his music has recently enjoyed a resurgence. There were many more American sonatas to come, but Sowerby’s symphony, more than any previous work, was the first to realize the dream of an American style that fully recognized European traditions while remaining un beholden to them.