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## Article Title: Music From the Soil of the American Midwest: Howard Hanson, Educator, Composer, Conductor

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Article Summary: Hanson, a Pulitzer Prize-winning composer (1896-1981), attributed his musical inspiration to the Nebraska prairies where he grew up. Bachenberg provides biographical details and a selected list of recordings.

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Photographs / Images: Howard Hanson, about four years of age; Hanson with cello; Wahoo High School instrumental ensemble about 1912 (including Hanson, Earl Morin, and probably Wilhelmina Herold); Wahoo, Nebraska, about 1914; Hans and Hannah Hanson, Howard Hanson's grandparents; Hanson's birthplace and boyhood home in Wahoo as it looks today; Hanson conducting the Wahoo Neumann High School Band, February 21, 1966; Lincoln Symphony Orchestra and Nebraska Wesleyan Concert Choir, conducted by Hanson for the February 20, 1966, dedication of the NWU Fine Arts Center

# Music

## *From the Soil of the American Midwest*

*Howard Hanson, Educator, Composer, Conductor*

*By Eric Bachenberg*

Nebraska takes great pride in its literary artists. Who has not heard of John Neihardt, Willa Cather, Mari Sandoz, and Bess Streeter Aldrich? It may come as a surprise to most Nebraskans, but the Cornhusker State is home to yet another giant of the arts, and a Pulitzer Prize-winner at that. For various reasons, however, Howard Hanson's name and reputation have slipped into obscurity. Of him it has been said, "It is difficult to think of another twentieth-century composer whose name triggers such feelings of reverence and at the same time has stood in such crying need of rehabilitation."<sup>1</sup>

Howard Hanson is acclaimed by his hometown of Wahoo, Nebraska, as one of its five famous sons, the others being baseball Hall-of-Famer Sam Crawford, movie producer Darryl Zanuck, Nobel Prize-winning geneticist George Beadle, and artist Clarence Anderson. The Saunders County Historical Society museum features an exhibit on Hanson, and his family home is owned by the society and is open to the public.

Hanson attributed much of his musicality to his Swedish heritage. Virtually all nationalities that migrated to America brought a tradition of music with them. Because radio would not appear until after World War I, and phonographs were rare, every community had to be self-reliant to keep its musical traditions alive. A typical family might have a piano, a violin, or both. Any town could be expected to have a baseball team and an orchestra or band. Wa-

hoo was no different. This, then, was the world into which Howard Hanson was born; a nation of immigrants, with a diverse musical heritage that flourished because there was no competing form of entertainment.

Hanson's grandparents and father were born in Skane, Sweden, a little town near Malmo. In the spring of 1869 a colony of thirty Swedish families came to Nebraska, settling in southern Saunders County in the vicinity of Swedeburg. This group included Howard's grandparents, Hans Sr. and Hannah Hanson and their sons, one of whom was Hans Hanson, Jr.<sup>2</sup> Eventually Hans and Hannah had five sons; Hans Jr., Oscar, Ernest, Aaron, and Nils or Nels. Hans Sr. owned a farm west of Ithaca until he retired, but most of his sons left the farm and pursued non-agricultural careers. Hans Hanson, Jr. moved into Wahoo, married Hilma Eckstrom, and went into the hardware business, forming a partnership with H. M. Stratton which they named Stratton & Hanson Hardware.

Wahoo of the late nineteenth century was a bi-ethnic town, approximately half Swedish Lutherans and half Bohemian Catholics, with Anglo-Saxons making up the remainder. Hans and Hilma Hanson purchased a house at Twelfth and Linden Streets, north of downtown Wahoo. There they had a son who died in infancy. Their second son, Howard, was born October 28, 1896. Thus, he would consider himself an "only child." When Howard was barely one year old, grandmother Hannah Hanson died on the Hanson family farm west of Ithaca on November 17, 1897, at age fifty-eight.

She was buried in the Swedish Lutheran Cemetery southwest of Swedeburg.<sup>3</sup>

Wahoo of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was as musically and culturally active as any town of its size. In addition to Luther Academy with its school of music and arts, Wahoo had an opera house and local music and arts appreciation groups called the Mendelssohn Club and the Philharmonic Society. Wahoo was served by three railroads, and people could travel to nearby cities such as Fremont, Omaha, and Lincoln. The Hanson family traveled to Omaha in July 1898 to see the Trans-Mississippi Exposition, and to visit Hilma Hanson's parents, the Eckstroms.

Music was a major influence in the Hanson household. Howard described his mother as being very musical and possessing a fine voice. In addition, Hilma Hanson played piano and studied counterpoint at Luther Academy in Wahoo. Likewise, Hans Hanson took an interest in music and supported his son's endeavors. On November 21, 1900, a local talent performance took place at the opera house. One of the acts featured Hans Hanson yodeling and whistling. In December 1901 the Wahoo town orchestra performed at Mead. One of the vocal soloists was Mrs. F. H. Zanuck, who the following September would become the mother of a son, Darryl.<sup>4</sup>

The Wahoo Mendelssohn Club met occasionally in the Hanson home and in January 1908, the Hanson family spent a Saturday in Lincoln attending a matinee of the musical *Red Mill*. On a more adventurous note, the Hansons

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took a motor trip to Kansas City in a two-cylinder Maxwell and attended a performance of Dvorak's *New World Symphony*, performed by Sir Karl Busch and the Kansas City Philharmonic. Howard recalled this was the first symphony he ever heard, and admitted he "was in heaven."<sup>5</sup>

Throughout his youth Howard continued to develop musically. He sang in the choir of the Swedish Lutheran Church in Wahoo and took piano and cello lessons. By 1910 he was skilled enough to perform. In January Hilma and Howard played piano for the Mendelssohn Club, with Mrs. Hanson performing *Prelude* and *Down in the Forest* by Landon Ronald, and Howard performing *Butterfly* and *Brigadon* by Edvard Grieg. In late February, Howard performed a piano solo at Wahoo High School. That summer, the Wahoo Ladies Chorus performed a series of concerts in towns in the vicinity of Wahoo. The thirteen-year-old Howard played piano in this series, featuring a piano solo, *Carnival Scene*, by Grieg.<sup>6</sup> It was no coincidence that Howard's performances featured works by Grieg, the great Norwegian composer, because Howard, being of Swedish ancestry, took a particular interest in works by Scandinavian composers. Throughout his career Hanson would be compared to Grieg and to the Finnish composer, Sibelius. The works of Richard Wagner were also popular during Howard's formative years, and many of his early compositions have been linked to Wagner.

Hanson's education and musical development were briefly interrupted in November 1910 when he was stricken by appendicitis. The state of medicine at the time meant going to a hospital in Omaha for surgery.<sup>7</sup> By the time he enrolled at Wahoo High School in the fall of 1910, he was well-established as a musician. He was anxious to continue growing musically, but there were obstacles to overcome. In later years he recalled:

I started conducting the high school orchestra in Wahoo. We had no music su-

pervisor because it was a small town and a small high school, and the conductor was a trumpet player who taught mathematics, and he really didn't enjoy conducting very much. I wrote a little piece for him, a march to celebrate some event, and he asked me if I would conduct it, which I did, and he said, "Well, why don't you go on conducting?" He turned the orchestra over to me and I conducted it for at least two years and even took it on a little tour of Nebraska towns.<sup>8</sup>



**Howard Hanson, about four years of age.**  
Courtesy of Saunders County Historical Society

Such was the state of music in the public schools in Hanson's time; music was not regarded as a separate discipline, but was taught by teachers from other fields who happened to have some musical talent. Orchestras flourished in the schools for the same reasons they flourished in public. It wasn't until athletics grew in prominence that

high school orchestras gave way to bands, which could serve as auxiliary functions of athletic programs.

Although Howard was officially the leader of the Wahoo High Orchestra his junior and senior years, two other people of note were involved. The first was Miss Wilhelmina Herold. Miss Herold was a native of Plattsmouth, and attended the University of Nebraska. After college, she took a teaching position at Wahoo High, teaching history and German. As a pianist and vocalist of some talent, Herold accompanied the Wahoo High Orchestra and various ensembles and soloists. The second person who influenced Hanson was Earl Morin (1894–1957). Like Howard he was born of Swedish immigrants. Although two years older, Morin was in the same class at Wahoo High. He was an accomplished violinist, and with Hanson playing cello, they formed the core of the Wahoo High School Orchestra.<sup>9</sup>

During the two years of Hanson's leadership, the Wahoo High music program flourished. Early October 1911 saw a music program featuring a violin and cello duet by Morin and Hanson. In November an opening exercise featured several duets by the two, accompanied by Miss Herold, a piano solo by Hanson, a violin solo by Morin, and a vocal solo by Herold. Late December 1911 brought a program where the junior class impersonated the faculty. The *Wahoo Wasp* noted, "Miss Herold, in the person of Howard Hanson, led the songs and favored us with a very touching piano solo."<sup>10</sup>

The Wahoo High orchestra built its reputation traveling and performing. In early March 1912 the orchestra traveled to Fremont to perform on a Thursday evening for the Declamatory Contest, and for the Teacher's Association meeting the next day. Later that month the school chorus and orchestra performed a concert in Wahoo. The *Wasp* noted: "Of the many pieces played by the orchestra, the march 'March 17th' composed and arranged by Howard Hanson deserves mention. The receipts at the door were \$43.50."<sup>11</sup>

## Howard Hanson



**Howard Hanson.** Courtesy Howard Hanson House, Wahoo, Nebraska

The Wahoo High orchestra continued to travel and perform under Hanson's leadership. In late March 1913 the *Wasp* reported: "The Wahoo High School presented a pastoral operetta, 'Sylvia,' at the opera house Wednesday evening before a large crowd. The play was fine and the High School Orchestra under the directorship of Howard Hanson was excellent." In the meantime Hanson was making plans for his post-high school education, and in December 1912 he was hired by the Redpath Lyceum Bureau (Chautauqua) to perform for twenty weeks the following summer.<sup>12</sup>

On May 20, 1913, Howard Hanson graduated from Wahoo High School, along with Earl Morin. The keynote speaker of the commencement was Dr. Samuel Avery, chancellor of the University of Nebraska. Hanson performed a cello solo, *Gavotte*, by Popper. For this he was greeted with a continuous call

for an encore, and he responded by playing a second number. Hanson later recalled that shortly before graduation he was called to the office of the school superintendent, C. W. Walton, who asked him about his future plans. "I hope to become a musician and composer," Hanson answered. "Howard, you don't have to be a musician and composer, you have brains," Walton replied.<sup>13</sup>

In early June 1913, Howard and his father drove to Omaha, where Howard caught a train to Davenport, Iowa, and joined the Redpath Chautauqua. He spent that summer traveling with the Chautauqua circuit in Minnesota and North Dakota, performing as a cello soloist. That autumn, Hanson returned to Wahoo and enrolled at Luther Academy to study music. On Monday, September 22, he performed a recital in the academy chapel. In reviewing the recital the *Wasp*



**Wahoo High School instrumental ensemble, about 1912.** Howard Hanson is seated in the front row (left), with cello; Earl Morin is seated between the two young women in the front row. The pianist is probably Wilhelmina Herold. Courtesy of Saunders County Historical Society

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commented: "It is hoped Howard may be able to do for the Swedish folk songs what Grieg has done for the Norwegians, Brahms for the Germans, and Dwork [sic] for the Bohemian folk songs."

In November, Hanson appeared in a performance at the Wahoo Opera House with the McDonell Company. His studies at Luther Academy were apparently brief, because in December he was reported to be traveling and performing with the Redpath Lyceum. He apparently continued to travel and perform with the Chautauqua, but in August 1914 returned to Wahoo and accompanied his uncle, Oscar Hanson, and cousin, Lyman, on a motor trip to Estes Park, Colorado.<sup>14</sup>

During the summer of 1915 Hanson again toured with the Chautauqua, returning to Wahoo briefly in September. In the fall of 1915 he enrolled at the Chicago Conservatory of Music at Northwestern University and graduated in 1916 with a Bachelor of Arts degree. College-level academics at the time permitted a student to receive credit for a course by passing an examination; Hanson tested

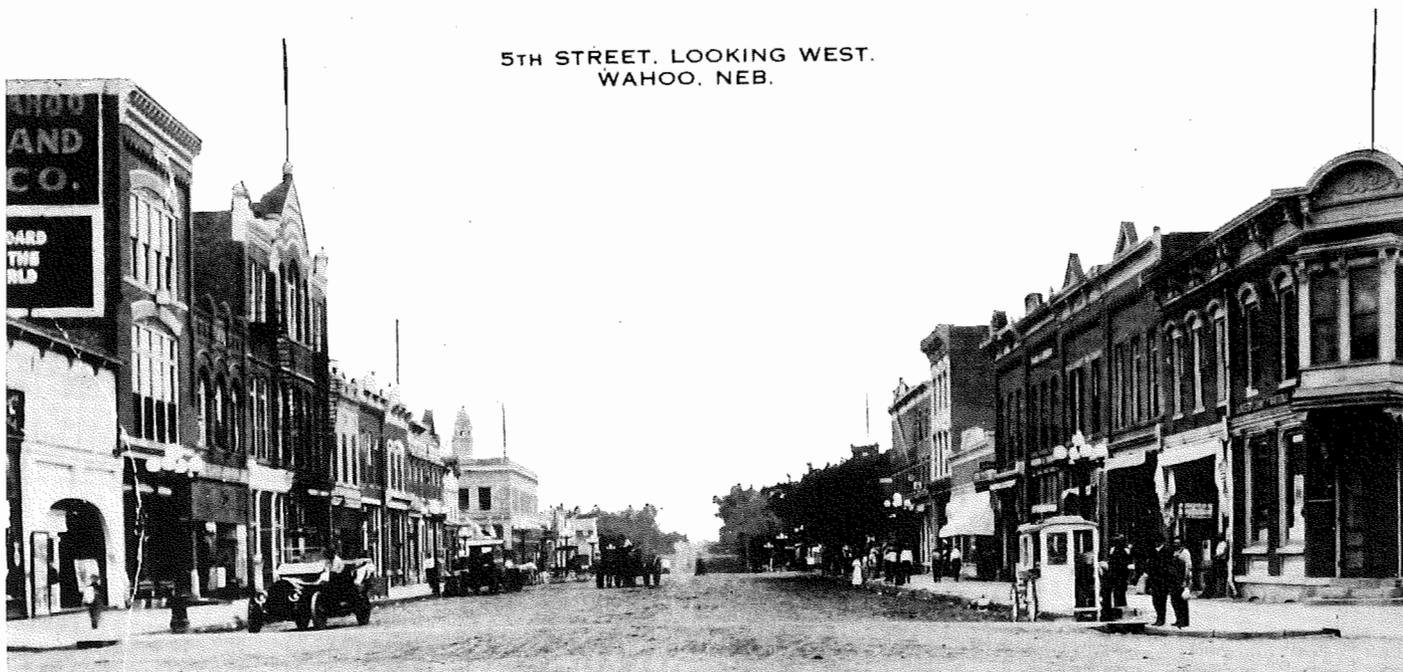
through many of his courses and thus received his degree from Northwestern after only one year of study. Upon graduation he was appointed to a teaching position at the College of the Pacific in San Jose, California. On August 16, 1916, he and his cousin, Lyman, departed for San Jose, Howard to teach and Lyman to be a student.<sup>15</sup>

Thus Hanson was absent from a family gathering in September 1916 when grandfather Hans Hanson, Sr., observed his eightieth birthday. With only one son still helping on the farm, the elder Hanson had decided to retire and sell the farm, which had been established in 1870. All five sons gathered for one last time on the farm where they had been raised. Hans Hanson, Sr. died the next year, and was buried next to his wife, Hannah.<sup>16</sup>

Although now a teacher, Howard Hanson continued to live the life of the student during the next few years, spending the academic year in California and returning to Wahoo when classes ended. In 1919, at age twenty-two, he was appointed dean of the Uni-

versity of the Pacific's school of music. The next year saw the debut of two of his major compositions, *California Forest Play* and *Before the Dawn*. The two pieces were a milestone in his career as a composer; as a result of these compositions Hanson was declared one of the first three winners of the "Prix de Rome" award. The winners received a three-year fellowship to the American Academy in Rome to study and compose. Hanson continued as dean of Pacific's school of music until December 1921, when he took leave to travel to Rome to begin his fellowship. He returned to Wahoo in mid-December to spend the holidays with his parents. By this time the Wahoo newspapers frequently printed feature articles chronicling his musical and academic accomplishments.<sup>17</sup>

On December 30, 1921, the Luther League of Wahoo's Bethlehem Lutheran Church—the Hanson family church—gave a banquet to honor Hanson and his achievements. Approximately 150 attended, including uncle Oscar Hanson, now mayor of Wahoo. Howard expressed his appreciation both verbally



5TH STREET. LOOKING WEST.  
WAHOO. NEB.

Wahoo, Nebraska, about 1914. The building with the flagpole at left is the opera house, where Howard Hanson and the Wahoo High School Orchestra performed. NSHS-RG1121-13-8

## Howard Hanson



Hans and Hannah Hanson, Howard Hanson's grandparents. *Atlas and Plat Book of Saunders County, Nebraska* (Des Moines: Brown-Scoville Pub. Co., 1907).  
Courtesy of author

and musically by playing some of his compositions.<sup>18</sup>

In late January 1922 Hanson sailed to Europe to begin his three-year study in Rome. Six months of his studies involved traveling to various European culture centers and musical events. Stops on the itinerary included Vienna, Salzburg, Munich, Frankfurt, the Passion Play at Oberammergau, Gloucester, Leeds, London, and Paris. On May 18, 1922, Hanson performed one of his compositions for the king of Italy.<sup>19</sup>

As Hanson toured Europe in late 1922, he wrote to his parents from his various stops and they shared these letters with the *Wahoo Wasp*. The September 7, 1922, edition featured a letter from Florence, Italy, and October 19 saw a letter from Lindau, Germany. This was the time of the runaway inflation of the Weimar Republic, which Hanson experienced firsthand. He mentioned he was able to get a bed at the inn for thirty-three marks, about eight U.S. cents. He also mentioned exchanging \$30 for 3,000 marks.

The October 26, 1922, *Wasp* published a letter from Munich in which Hanson described the Oberammergau Passion Play. November 2, 1922,

brought a letter from Berlin, with a mention that the Deutsche Mark was then at 1,500 to the dollar. Two more letters were published November 23, which Hanson had written in September from Sweden. The first, dated September 12, 1922, mentioned his visit to Lund, his mother's birthplace. The letters continued in the *Wasp* through the end of 1922.

In the meantime Hanson continued to receive recognition beyond Wahoo. In April 1923 he was nominated to the *Omaha Bee's* "Nebraska Hall of Fame." This was an informal honor, which consisted of a photograph of "Hall of Fame" members and a brief column describing their achievements.<sup>20</sup> May 30, 1923, witnessed another milestone in Hanson's musical career, when he conducted the premiere performance of his *Symphony No. 1 - Nordic* in Rome, performed by the Augusteo Orchestra. Hanson attributed his inspiration for the symphony to his visit in Sweden. He would later remark that the symphony wasn't his best, coming as it did early in his career. Nonetheless, Hanson took the position that once a composition was finished, it stayed finished, and he would never go back and rewrite a completed work.<sup>21</sup>

Meanwhile, back in Wahoo, times continued to change. Possibly due to his health, Hans Hanson retired from the hardware business, and in November 1923 the store's stock was sold to Wahoo's other two hardware stores. Later that month the elder Hanson was admitted to a hospital in Omaha, where his leg was amputated.<sup>22</sup>

In February 1924 Howard returned to the United States. The main purpose of this trip was to conduct some of his works in New York. It was during this trip that Hanson was contacted by George Eastman, inventor of the Kodak camera. Eastman, although lacking musical talent himself, appreciated fine music and endowed the University of Rochester to establish a school of music. It was Eastman's wish that this music school be the best in the nation and, impressed by what he had read and heard about Hanson, he offered Howard the school's directorship. Hanson accepted Eastman's offer, agreeing to take charge of the school upon completion of his final year in Rome. Hanson would go on to serve as director of the Eastman School of Music for forty years.<sup>23</sup>

During his 1924 visit Hanson also returned to Wahoo for a few days. Father Hans had been brought home from Omaha and was now getting around on crutches, while waiting to be fitted with an artificial leg. During Howard's visit several groups, including the Wahoo Women's Club, hosted a reception in his honor at Luther Academy on Friday, February 15. The reception was held in the academy's concert hall, and the *Wasp* reported every seat filled. Hanson spoke of his experiences in Europe, including performing for the king of Italy, and concluded by playing three of his compositions on the piano. The following Tuesday Hanson spoke to an assembly of Wahoo High School students, and again performed some of his compositions. Hanson then returned to Rome to complete his final year at the American Academy.<sup>24</sup>

In the autumn of 1924 Hanson began

his tenure as director of the Eastman School of Music. In October, his parents traveled east to spend the winter with him in Rochester. A few years later they moved to Rochester permanently, although they retained ownership of the house in Wahoo. Thus with the passage of time Hanson became less and less an actual citizen of Wahoo, but he would always maintain ties to his hometown. The December 18, 1924, *Wasp* stated:

[A]lthough he is now world famous as a young artist of unusual ability, he is still a typical Nebraska boy, unaffected by his accomplishments and to his Wahoo friends the same Howard Hanson that they have known from boyhood up. A typical example of his admirable spirit of comradeship was displayed a couple of years ago when he borrowed a slide trombone and joined Prokop's band to play for the Old Settler's picnic at Mead, and had as much fun as anyone on the grounds. Howard Hanson never does anything by halves and that day was not parading as a Priz [sic] de Rome scholar but was the grandson of Hans Hanson.

Besides serving as director of the Eastman School of Music, Hanson became involved in other musical activities. One was the annual Festival of American Music. A popular opinion of the time held that the only good classical music had been composed by European composers before 1900. Hanson strove to promote the concepts that fine music was still being composed, and that American composers were on a par with the Europeans. During Hanson's tenure at Eastman some seven hundred composers were showcased. One notable example was William Grant Still (1895–1978). Still was the first African American to have a work performed by a major American orchestra when, in 1931, Hanson conducted the Rochester Philharmonic in performing Still's *Symphony No. 1 - Afro-American*. It wasn't until 1935 that the New York Philharmonic performed Still's work.<sup>25</sup>

Another activity in which Hanson became involved was the National Music Camp at Interlochen, Michigan. This summer music camp had been founded in 1927 by Joseph Maddy. Maddy was



Howard Hanson's birthplace and boyhood home at Twelfth and Linden Streets in Wahoo as it looks today. Courtesy of Saunders County Historical Society

Hanson's friend and colleague. For decades, Maddy directed the vocal music section of Interlochen, while Hanson directed the orchestral section. The camp continues to this day.<sup>26</sup>

In early March 1928 Hanson again visited Nebraska. The main reason for this trip was to conduct the Omaha Symphony Orchestra in concert. On Monday, March 5, he was the guest at a noon luncheon hosted by the Omaha Chamber of Commerce. The next day Hanson traveled to Wahoo to attend a luncheon hosted by the Wahoo Lions Club. That afternoon he spoke to the students of Wahoo High School, and performed three of his compositions: *March of the Bells* (inspired by the bells of Wahoo's Swedish Lutheran Church); the second movement of the *Nordic* symphony; and *Pan and the Priest*. The concert with the Omaha Symphony was the following Thursday, and featured the *Nordic* symphony in its entirety. For this event the Wahoo Lions Club chartered a Union Pacific passenger train to take some 200

Wahoo citizens to the concert.<sup>27</sup>

In 1930 the Boston Symphony Orchestra observed its fiftieth anniversary. For this occasion the orchestra commissioned Hanson to compose a symphony, which he titled *Symphony No. 2 - Romantic*. It was first performed November 28, 1930, and conducted by Serge Koussevitsky. *Romantic* would become one of Hanson's best-known works, and a passage from the first movement became the theme for the Interlochen Music Camp.<sup>28</sup>

As radio found its way into more and more American homes in the early 1930s, many stations included classical music in their broadcasts. The *Wasp* of January 8, 1931, noted Hanson conducting an orchestra of 190 Eastman students in a half-hour performance on radio station WJZ of New York. The same issue also mentioned Anthony Donato, a Wahoo native, performing with the Lincoln Symphony Orchestra at the Stuart Theatre in Lincoln. Donato had been a Hanson student at Eastman.

## Howard Hanson

Meanwhile, Hanson could be heard conducting orchestras on radio for several years.

Also in the early 1930s, the New York Metropolitan Opera commissioned Hanson to compose an opera. At the time, the general manager of the Met was Giulio Gatti-Casazza. Opera in this era still enjoyed broad support, and Gatti strove to include a new opera in the Met's repertoire every year. Hanson's work was to be performed during the 1934 season. The opera was based upon the novel *The Maypole of Merry Mount* by Nathaniel Hawthorne, and was entitled *Merry Mount*. Hanson composed the music, while the libretto was written by Richard Stokes. The storyline was set in Puritan New England.<sup>29</sup>

On March 14, 1932, George Eastman committed suicide at age seventy-seven. The philanthropist/inventor had been in failing health. Hanson dedicated his new opera to Eastman's memory, and the first performance of *Merry Mount* was at Ann Arbor, Michigan, on May 20, 1933. *Merry Mount* then opened at the Metropolitan Opera in New York on February 10, 1934, with Tullio Serafin conducting and Lawrence Tibbett singing the lead role. The first performance was broadcast live over radio and featured fifty curtain calls for Hanson and the performers. Despite this reception, the opera received mixed reviews and was performed only nine times during the Met's 1934 season. Subsequently Hanson arranged passages from the opera into an orchestral piece entitled *Merry Mount Suite*. Meanwhile, in January 1934, Hanson had traveled to Lincoln, where the Music Teachers National Association was holding its fifty-fifth meeting at the University of Nebraska Coliseum. Here he conducted the Lincoln Symphony in a concert that included his *Symphony No. 2 - Romantic*. Hanson also went to Wahoo for a brief visit with Uncle Oscar Hanson and family.<sup>30</sup>

In June 1935 Hanson again returned to Nebraska, this time to receive an honorary Doctor of Music degree from the

University of Nebraska, one of nineteen such honorary doctorates he would receive in his lifetime. In 1935 he was elected a member of the National Institute of Arts and Letters, and in 1938 became a fellow of the Royal Academy of Music in Sweden. During his career Hanson also served as president of the National Association of Schools of Music, Music Teachers Association, and the National Music Council.<sup>31</sup>

In early September 1937 Hanson and his parents visited Wahoo. Hanson had gone on a tour to California to conduct several orchestras, and Mr. and Mrs. Hanson accompanied him. On their return east they stopped in Omaha and rented a car to drive to Wahoo.<sup>32</sup>

In 1937 Hanson was commissioned to compose a symphony to commemorate the tricentennial of the coming of the first Swedish immigrants to America. This work, *Symphony No. 3*, had its premiere March 26, 1938, in the NBC Radio studio in New York, with Hanson conducting the Boston Symphony Orchestra. The performance was broadcast on WOW radio in Omaha. Hanson was aware of Wahoo's interest in his work, and wrote a letter to the Wahoo Chamber of Commerce expressing his thanks and appreciation.<sup>33</sup>

The Wahoo newspapers continued to publicize significant events in Hanson's career. The *Wasp* of April 27, 1939, featured an article stating how Hanson, at the annual Festival of American Music in Rochester, sparked interest in a long-forgotten Dutch immigrant, Johann Friedrich Peter, who came to a Moravian colony in 1770 and composed several works, including "sinfonia" [*sic*], which Hanson performed at the festival.

On May 12, 1939, father Hans Hanson Jr. died in Rochester at age seventy-six. Although his four brothers still lived in Wahoo, Hans was buried in Rochester. Subsequently, Howard composed a fourth symphony, which he entitled *Requiem*, and dedicated it to the memory of his father. The first performance was with the Boston Symphony on December 3, 1943. In May 1944 *Symphony No. 4 -*

*Requiem* won a Pulitzer prize for distinguished musical composition.<sup>34</sup>

During this period two women came to play significant roles in Hanson's life and career. The first, Ruth Watanabe, was the daughter of Japanese immigrants. A California native and a musician, she met Hanson at a musical event in the late 1930s. After Pearl Harbor in December 1941, a presidential decree ordered Japanese-Americans, including Watanabe, detained and placed in internment camps. Soon thereafter, a letter came authorizing her release on the condition she be sent to Rochester. Upon arrival Watanabe was put to work as a music librarian, a post she would hold until retirement. During her career she earned a doctoral degree, and after retirement the Special Collections section of the Sibley Music Library at Eastman was named in her honor. When Watanabe visited Hanson's birthsite in Wahoo in 1996 she stated she never knew how Hanson remembered her or found out about her detainment, or how he was able to arrange her release.<sup>35</sup>

The second influential woman was Margaret Nelson, also known as Peggy. A native of Pittsburgh, she too was a student of music. It is not known how she and Hanson met, but Hanson liked her enough to compose a tune for her. Although Hanson was twenty years older, they were married in 1946, a marriage that would last until Hanson's death in 1981.<sup>36</sup>

Hanson continued to return to Nebraska as his work permitted. In the 1950s the University of Nebraska sponsored the Montgomery Lectureship Series, featuring weeklong symposiums dealing with contemporary civilization. Hanson was chosen to present the lectures for the week of February 11, 1951. The lectures were held Monday through Friday, beginning at 8 P. M. in the Love Library auditorium. Hanson's Monday night lecture was entitled "Development of the Creative Art." During this lecture he spoke of the trends of music composition, noting that composers of late were being influenced less by German

music, and more by Russian and French, and surprisingly, by American “native” music, or music with its roots dating back to colonial America. Also during the week Hanson conducted a rehearsal of the University of Nebraska orchestra, which was rehearsing his *Symphony No. 1 - Nordic* for the spring concert. He also addressed the university’s annual honors banquet.<sup>37</sup>

Another academic honor came Hanson’s way in 1954 when he was named to the College of Electors of the New York University Hall of Fame of Great Americans, an honorary lifetime post. The Hall of Fame had been founded in 1900, and Hanson was the first representative of the music world so honored. The following year his *Symphony No. 5 - Sinfonia Sacra* was premiered by Eugene Ormandy and the Philadelphia orchestra.<sup>38</sup>

In the late 1950s, as Hanson’s career as director of the Eastman School of Music entered its final years, appreciation for his music also began to ebb. Being rooted in the Romantic Age of music, his works began to be eclipsed by contemporary composers, influenced by modern tastes such as jazz. There had always been some degree of resentment toward Hanson because he had the Eastman-Rochester orchestra at his command with which to perfect and refine his compositions. The Eastman students were aware of these sentiments; one former student from that era recalls a light-hearted conversation over lunch with his classmates. The question was raised whether Hanson would retire soon and who would replace him? One student replied that Sibelius couldn’t do so because he was already dead. Hanson was undoubtedly aware of many of these opinions and comments, but kept his feelings to himself.<sup>39</sup>

Wahoo hadn’t forgotten Hanson. In early 1963 the Saunders County Historical Society was organized. Like most other county historical societies, it began as a group of people with no funds and no property. As one of the society’s first acts, Emil Placek wrote Hanson, ad-

vising him of the status of his boyhood home at Twelfth and Linden. The Hansons had sold the house in 1944, which was then divided into apartments. The house had deteriorated as the years passed, the owner fell behind in property taxes, and finally the county foreclosed. After receiving Placek’s letter Hanson paid the back taxes and took title to the house. He then deeded it to the city of Wahoo, which transferred title to the historical society. The society sublet the house to the Wahoo Women’s Club, the same club that had been founded as the Mendelssohn Society, for whom Hanson and his mother had performed, and which had met on occasion in the house. Repairs began immediately, and the basement was converted into a meeting room.<sup>40</sup>

In 1964 Hanson retired after forty years of leading the Eastman School of Music, but his musical activities continued. Indeed, Mrs. Hanson commented, “If this is retirement I say let’s go back to work. . . . If I kept his pace I’d be worn out by 11 o’clock in the morning.”<sup>41</sup>

The year 1966 saw Hanson return to Nebraska for two events. Nebraska Wesleyan University had built a new fine arts building and auditorium, and invited Hanson to participate in the dedication festivities. He took part in a week-long series of seminars and recitals, then on February 20, 1966, conducted the Lincoln Symphony Orchestra and the Nebraska Wesleyan University Choir in the premiere concert in O’Donnell Auditorium. The concert ended with a thirty-minute ovation.<sup>42</sup>

The next day Hanson traveled to Wahoo. He had been invited to visit Wahoo Neumann High School by band director Don Johnson. At 1:30 P. M. Hanson walked into the band room to begin rehearsal, and the Neumann band was described as “speechless,” even though the members knew well in advance that Hanson was coming and had rehearsed the music previously. Hanson removed his jacket, commented “OK now, where is everybody?” (meaning the various instrument sections), and

began the rehearsal.

The rest of the day was filled with events, including a luncheon at which Hanson received a key to the city. He was appointed to the board of trustees of John F. Kennedy College, newly opened on the old Luther Academy campus. Hanson also greeted friends and relatives and toured his old home. By this time the Women’s Club had spent \$7,500 refurbishing the house, and Hanson expressed gratitude that his hometown should want to preserve it.

That night Hanson conducted the Neumann band in concert and praised Johnson for his work with the students. He admitted being somewhat apprehensive, expecting to find a typically amateurish high school band, but reported that everyone could be proud of the Neumann band’s talent. Hanson concluded his visit with the comment, “I’ll be back next year.”<sup>43</sup>

“Next year” was 1967, the centennial of Nebraska’s statehood, which saw a wide variety of commemorative events. As part of the festivities, Hanson was commissioned to compose an orchestral work. In November he came to Nebraska and conducted the Omaha Symphony Orchestra in the Joslyn Museum auditorium. The highlight of the concert was Hanson’s centennial composition, *Dies Natalis*. The *Omaha World-Herald* described it as “based on the lovely old Lutheran chorale, ‘How Beautiful Shines Our Morning Star.’ It is pure Hanson; lyric, wonderfully wrought, and riveting the attention from the first tone to the last.”<sup>44</sup> As expected, the concert concluded with a standing ovation.

Another commission of honor came from the New York Philharmonic Orchestra in 1968. That year marked the Philharmonic’s 125th anniversary; for this event Hanson composed his *Symphony No. 6*. The premiere was February 29, 1968, with Leonard Bernstein conducting. In 1971, in observance of Hanson’s seventy-fifth birthday, Linden Street in Wahoo was renamed Howard Hanson Symphony Street for one week in October.<sup>45</sup>

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In 1974 Hanson was commissioned to compose a symphony to commemorate the fiftieth season of his beloved Interlochen National Music Camp, which would be observed in 1977. The piece was entitled *Symphony No. 7 - A Sea Symphony* for orchestra and choir, with text by Walt Whitman. Age did not deter Hanson; as planned, he conducted the premiere performance in Interlochen's Kresge Auditorium on August 7, 1977, when he was eighty years old. Although Hanson continued to compose, age finally began to take its toll. In early 1981 he entered a hospital in Rochester, and on February 26, at age eighty-four, Howard Hanson died.<sup>46</sup>

Under the circumstances, it would seem the memory of Hanson and his music would fade into obscurity, much like old music manuscripts consigned to a dusty library shelf. For one thing,

Hanson's "romantic" taste, which was reflected in his compositions, had become passé, superseded by more contemporary styles such as that of George Gershwin. For another, new mediums of entertainment had evolved since Hanson's high school days; radio, sound movies, and television. The concert hall was no longer the center of attraction it once had been. The social upheavals of the 1960s brought changes in attitudes, one of which was to reject old, traditional values, values that Hanson's music seemed to reflect.

Popular tastes can and do swing like a pendulum, however. The baby boomers and the anti-establishment youth of the 1960s are rediscovering many of the rejected values of their younger days, including classical music, which includes the works of Howard Hanson.

In January 1987 a group of musicians gathered in Edinburgh, Scotland, to record a series of Haydn compositions for Delos Records. The conductor of these sessions was Gerard Schwarz, conductor of the Seattle Symphony. During an informal moment Schwarz and his colleagues discussed the feasibility of making a series of recordings highlighting the works of American composers. The logical starting point was Howard Hanson, who more than anyone else had worked throughout his life to promote American composers.

Beginning later that year Schwarz and the Seattle Symphony recorded a series of five compact discs of Hanson's symphonies and other compositions. These recordings received critical acclaim, and thus began a re-emergence of appreciation for Howard Hanson and his music. With the new interest sparked



Howard Hanson conducting the Wahoo Neumann High School Band, February 21, 1966.  
Courtesy of Saunders County Historical Society

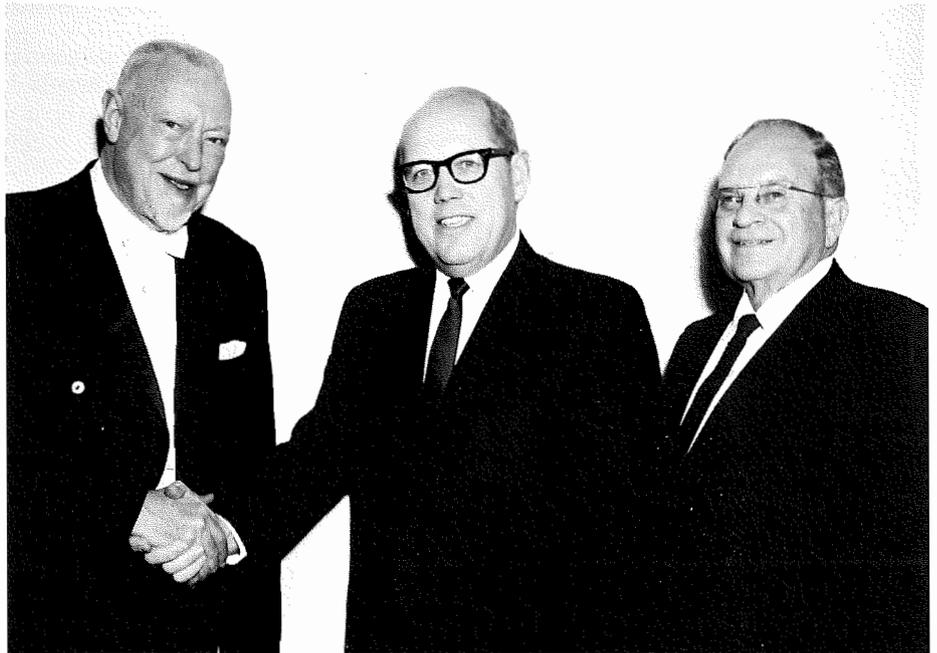


Hanson conducted the Lincoln Symphony Orchestra and the Nebraska Wesleyan Concert Choir for the February 20, 1966, dedication of the Fine Arts Center at Nebraska Wesleyan University. Courtesy of Nebraska Wesleyan University

by the Seattle Symphony recordings came the realization that 1996 would be the centennial of Hanson's birth. Unfortunately, Margaret "Peggy" Hanson did not live to see most of the events of that year; she died March 31 at the age of eighty.<sup>47</sup>

Certainly the Eastman School of Music hadn't forgotten Hanson. Besides being the centennial of his birth, 1996 was also the seventy-fifth anniversary of the school itself. A delegation from Eastman traveled to Wahoo to visit Hanson's birthplace. This delegation included former Eastman director Robert Freeman and Librarian Emeritus Ruth Watanabe. In turn, four representatives from Wahoo traveled to Rochester to attend a festival in October observing Howard Hanson's centennial. Other centennial events took place in Nebraska. The Omaha Symphony Orchestra performed a concert of Hanson compositions at Joslyn Art Museum. On March 27 the Nebraska Legislature adopted LR351, a resolution declaring October 28, 1996, as "Howard H. Hanson Day."<sup>48</sup>

Musical events continued to honor Hanson. On May 11, 1997, Dr. William Wyman conducted a concert of the Lin-



Howard Hanson (left), with Nebraska Wesleyan president Dr. Vance Rogers (center), and music department head Oscar "Pop" Bennett, February 20, 1966. Courtesy of Nebraska Wesleyan University

coln Civic Choir and the United States Air Force Heartland of America concert band. The concert featured Hanson's *Symphony No. 7 - A Sea Symphony*, and was held in O'Donnell Auditorium in the Rodgers Fine Arts Building on the Nebraska Wesleyan campus, the same auditorium Hanson dedicated thirty-one years earlier.<sup>49</sup>

An Eastman music graduate, Belinda Takahashi, composed a piece for concert band entitled *Awakenings*. The piece was commissioned by the Eastman School for the bands of Wahoo's two high schools to perform to commemorate the centennial of Hanson's birth. The Wahoo High and Bishop Neumann High bands performed the premiere of

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*Awakenings* on May 7, 1998, at the University of Nebraska's Kimball Recital Hall. The performance was conducted by Neumann band director Joann Couton. Thirty-two years earlier, Mrs. Couton had been a member of the Neumann band when Hanson paid his visit.<sup>50</sup>

One honor has eluded Hanson. In 1996 the Nebraska Hall of Fame Commission received his nomination for induction into the Nebraska Hall of Fame in the State Capitol. Hanson was nominated with the hope of adding to the observations of the centennial of his birth. However, Nathan Gold was chosen as the inductee that year.

Nonetheless, appreciation for Hanson's music continues to grow. Following the path of Gerard Schwarz and the Seattle Symphony, several recordings of Hanson's music have been released. Some of them include Hanson conducting the Eastman-Rochester Orchestra performing his works. Thus the listener has the opportunity to hear a master composer conducting his own compositions.

Hanson once made the comment: "My music springs from the soil of the American midwest. It is music of the plains rather than of the city and reflects, I believe, something of the broad prairies of my native Nebraska."<sup>51</sup> Neihardt, Cather, Aldrich, and Sandoz put their Nebraska experiences into writing. Howard Hanson expressed his experience through his music. Listen to Howard Hanson's music, and one hears the same spirit that inspired the authors.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> David Owens, quoted in liner notes for *Howard Hanson-American Romantic*, performed by the Seattle Symphony, Gerard Schwarz, conductor (Delos International: 1989-92), DE 3150.

<sup>2</sup> *Wahoo* (Nebraska) *Wasp*, Sept. 6, 1928.

<sup>3</sup> David Russell Williams, *Conversations with Howard Hanson* (Arkadelphia, Ark.: Delta Publications, 1988), 17; *Wahoo Democrat*, Nov. 18, 1897. The cemetery is now known as Grace Lutheran Cemetery in Richland Township, southwest of Swedeburg.

<sup>4</sup> *Wahoo Democrat*, Dec. 26, 1901.

<sup>5</sup> Williams, *Conversations*, 15. The author was unable to determine the exact date of this trip.

<sup>6</sup> *Wahoo Wasp*, Jan. 27, Feb. 24, July 28, 1910.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, Nov. 24, 1910.

<sup>8</sup> Williams, *Conversations*, 51.

<sup>9</sup> *History of Saunders County* (Wahoo: Saunders County Historical Society, 1983), 337.

<sup>10</sup> *Wahoo Wasp*, Dec. 21, 1911. Earl Morin held various public offices in Wahoo until his death. Miss Herold took a teaching position in Fremont a few years after Hanson's graduation.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, Mar. 21, 1912.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, Dec. 12, 1912.

<sup>13</sup> *Wahoo Newspaper*, Febr. 24, 1966.

<sup>14</sup> *Wahoo Wasp*, Aug. 16, 1914.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, Aug. 10, 1916.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, Sept. 28, 1916.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, Dec. 15, 1921.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, Jan. 12, 1922.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, Mar. 11, 1922.

<sup>20</sup> *Omaha Bee*, Apr. 10, 1923.

<sup>21</sup> Williams, *Conversations*, 8-11.

<sup>22</sup> *Wahoo Wasp*, Nov. 8, 1923.

<sup>23</sup> *Baker's Biographical Dictionary of Musicians*, 7th ed., ed. Nicolas Slonimski (Shirmer Books: 1984), 947.

<sup>24</sup> *Wahoo Wasp*, Feb. 21, 1924.

<sup>25</sup> Liner notes, *William Grant Still, Symphony No. 1*, performed by the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, Neeme Jarv, conductor (Chandos Records: 1993), CHAN 9154.

<sup>26</sup> Liner notes, *Hanson Conducts Hanson* (Citadel Records: 1996), CTD 88116.

<sup>27</sup> *Wahoo Wasp*, Mar. 1 and 8, 1928.

<sup>28</sup> *Baker's Biographical Dictionary*, 947.

<sup>29</sup> *Wahoo Wasp*, Jan. 4, 1934.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, June 13, 1935; *Baker's Biographical Dictionary*, 948.

<sup>32</sup> *Wahoo Wasp*, Sept. 9, 1937.

<sup>33</sup> Liner notes, *Symphony No. 3*, performed by the Seattle Symphony Orchestra, Gerard Schwarz, conductor (Delos International: 1990), DE 3092; *Wahoo Wasp*, Apr. 14, 1938.

<sup>34</sup> *Wahoo Wasp*, May 18, 1939, and May 4, 1944; *Omaha World-Herald*, May 2, 1944.

<sup>35</sup> Conversation with State Senator Curt Bromm, Wahoo, Nebraska, November 1996.

<sup>36</sup> *Eastman Notes* 20 (Jan. 1997): 17.

<sup>37</sup> *Lincoln Sunday Journal-Star*, Feb. 11 and 13, 1951.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, Apr. 4, 1954; liner notes, *Symphony No. 5*, performed by the Seattle Symphony Orchestra, Gerard Schwarz, conductor (Delos International: 1992), DE 3130.

<sup>39</sup> Conversation with Dr. Robert Morrow, retired professor of music, Nebraska Wesleyan University, January 17, 1999.

<sup>40</sup> Conversation with Senator Curt Bromm, October 1996.

<sup>41</sup> *Wahoo Newspaper*, Feb. 24, 1966.

<sup>42</sup> *Lincoln Star*, Feb. 21, 1966.

<sup>43</sup> *Wahoo Newspaper*, Feb. 24, 1966.

<sup>44</sup> *Omaha World-Herald*, Nov. 14, 1967; *Wahoo Newspaper*, Nov. 16, 1967.

<sup>45</sup> *Wahoo Newspaper*, Oct. 25, 1971.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, Mar. 5, 1981.

<sup>47</sup> *Eastman Notes*, Jan. 1997.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*; *Legislative Journal of the State of Nebraska*, Ninety-fourth Legislature, Second Session (Lincoln: Clerk of the Legislature, 1996), 1311, 1597.

<sup>49</sup> *Lincoln Sunday Journal-Star*, May 11, 1997, 8H; concert program in author's possession.

<sup>50</sup> *Wahoo Newspaper*, Apr. 16, 1998; conversation with Reggie Shonka Carlson, 1999.

<sup>51</sup> Quoted in liner notes, *The Mystic Trumpeter, Howard Hanson, Vol. V*, performed by the Seattle Symphony Orchestra, Gerard Schwarz, conductor (Delos International: 1994), DE 3160.

# A Selection of Howard Hanson Recordings

The recordings of Howard Hanson fall into three categories. First, Hanson recorded several of his own compositions. The title "Hanson Conducts Hanson" has been used more than once. Second, Hanson recorded the works of American composers. Third, in recent years several musical groups have recorded Hanson's works, especially Gerard Schwarz and the Seattle Symphony. The following list is divided accordingly.

## Hanson Conducting His Own Compositions

Mercury 432 008-2: *Hanson Conducts Hanson*. Includes *Symphony No. 1 - Nordic*, *Symphony No. 2 - Romantic*, *Song of Democracy*. Released 1990.

Mercury 434 302-2: *Hanson Symphony No. 3*. Includes *Symphony No. 3*, *Elegy in Memory of My Friend Serge Koussevitsky*, *The Lament for Beowulf*. Released 1991. These two discs were recorded in the late 1950s and early 1960s with the Eastman-Rochester Orchestra. Both were done in studio conditions, and were remastered for compact disc.

Citadel CTD 88110: *Hanson Conducts Hanson*. Includes *Song of Democracy*, *Merry Mount Suite*, *Symphony No. 2 - Romantic*. Performed with the Mormon Youth Chorus and Symphony, recorded live in concert at the Mormon Tabernacle, March 11, 1972. Includes an after-concert speech by Hanson. Released 1995.

Citadel CTD 88116: *Hanson Conducts Hanson*. Includes *The Lament for Beowulf*, *Pan and the Priest*, *Rhythmic Variations on Two Ancient Hymns*, *Interlochen Theme*, *Symphony No. 7 - A Sea Symphony*.

Also recorded live in concert: *Pan and the Priest* and *Rhythmic Variations* from the 1972 Mormon Youth concert; *Beowulf*, *Symphony No. 7*, and *Interlochen Theme* from Interlochen, August 7, 1977, the fiftieth-year anniversary concert. Released in 1996 in commemoration of Howard Hanson's centennial.

## Hanson Conducting Other Composers

As part of his lifelong effort to promote American compositions, Hanson conducted the Eastman-Rochester Orchestra performing the works of American composers. These were recorded in the 1950s and 1960s for Mercury records and remastered for compact disc.

Mercury 432 755-2: Charles Ives, *Three Places in New England*, *Symphony No. 3 - The Camp Meeting*; William Schuman, *New England Triptych*; Peter Mennin, *Symphony No. 5*. Released 1991.

Mercury 432 016-2: Morton Gould, *Spirituals in Five Movements*, *Fall River Legend*; Samuel Barber, *Medea*. Released 1991.

Mercury 434 307-2: Samuel Barber, *Capricorn Concerto*; Walter Piston, *The Incredible Flutist*; Charles Tomlinson Griffes, *Poem for Flute and Orchestra*; Kent Kennan, *Three Pieces for Orchestra*; William McCauley, *Five Miniatures for Flute and Strings*; William Bergsma, *Gold and the Señor Commandante Ballet Suite*. Released 1992.

Mercury 434 324-2: *Fiesta in Hi-Fi*. Robert McBride, *Mexican Rhapsody*; Ron Nelson, *Savanna River Holiday*; Lyndol Mitchell, *Ken-*

*tucky Mountain Portraits*; Charles G. Vardell, Jr., *Joe Clark Steps Out*; William Grant Still, *Sahdji*; Alberto Ginastera, *Overture to the Creole Faust*. Released 1992.

## Hanson Compositions Recorded by Others

The recordings by Gerard Schwarz and the Seattle Symphony sparked the revival of interest in Hanson's works. The Schwarz recordings are available separately or as a boxed set, Delos DE 3150. Individually the discs are:

Delos D/CD 3073: *Symphony No. 1 - Nordic*, *Symphony No. 2 - Romantic*, *Elegy in Memory of My Friend Serge Koussevitsky*. Released 1989.

Delos DE 3092: *Symphony No. 3*, *Fantasy Variations on a Theme of Youth*, *Symphony No. 6*. Released 1990.

Delos DE 3105: *Symphony No. 4 - Requiem*, *Serenade for Flute, Harp, and Strings*, *The Lament for Beowulf*, *Pastorale for Oboe, Harp, and Strings*, *Suite from Merry Mount*. Released 1992.

Delos DE 3130: *Mosaics*, *Piano Concerto in G Major*, *Symphony No. 5 - Sinfonia Sacra*, *Symphony No. 7 - A Sea Symphony*. Released 1992.

Schwarz and the Seattle Symphony also released a fifth disc. Delos DE 3160: *The Mystic Trumpeter*, *Howard Hanson Vol. V*. Includes *Dies Natalis*, *The Mystic Trumpeter*, *Lumen in Christo*, *Lux Aeterna*. *The Mystic Trumpeter* is a Walt Whitman poem set to music by Hanson and narrated by James Earl Jones. Released 1994.

Albany Records TROY 129: *Howard Hanson, An American Romantic*. Includes *Concerto for Organ, Harp, and String Orchestra*, *Nymphs and Satyr Ballet Suite*, *Concerto da Camera in C for Piano and String Quartet*, *Two Yuletide Pieces for Piano*, *Four Pieces for Chorus*. Released 1994.

Citadel CTD 88111: *Celebrations*. An anthology with two Hanson compositions, *March Carillon* and *Chorale and Alleluia*. Released 1995.

Citadel CTD 88119: *Howard Hanson - Randall Thompson*. It contains one Hanson composition, *String Quartet*, composed in 1924, and performed by the Lyric Art Quartet of Houston. Released 1996.

Nimbus Records NI 7881: *Lawrence Tibbett - From Broadway to Hollywood*. A collection of recordings by Lawrence Tibbett that includes the aria, *Oh 'Tis an Earth Defiled*, from Hanson's opera *Merry Mount*, recorded in 1934. Released 1996.

NAXOS Historical 8.110024-25: *Hanson: Merry Mount*. This is a two-disc recording of the opera *Merry Mount*. It was broadcast on radio February 10, 1934, and Lawrence Tibbett arranged to have the broadcast recorded on acetate discs. The sound quality ranges from fair to horrible. Nonetheless, it is the only recording ever made of *Merry Mount* in its entirety. Due to copyright restrictions, it is not available for sale publicly in the United States, and can only be purchased by special arrangement in Canada, England, or possibly elsewhere.