

# ROBERT SIROTA, COMPOSER

*“fashioned with the clean, angular melodies,  
tart harmonies, lively syncopations  
and punchy accents of American  
Neo-Classicism”*

**—THE NEW YORK TIMES**



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## SELECTED WORKS

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### *Two Variations on America the Beautiful for solo piano (2020)*

Sirota composed these variations—"...alabaster cities..." and "...God mend thine every flaw..."—as part of Min Kwon's project *America/ Beautiful*, for which she commissioned a diverse group of more than 70 of today's leading American composers to each compose a variation on *America the Beautiful*. Of his *Two Variations on America the Beautiful*, Sirota says, "Our country is supposed to be about creating unity out of diversity; about making sure that all voices are heard, that no single voice shouts the others down. To do this while celebrating the beauty and distinctiveness of every individual voice is what we are working towards. '...alabaster cities...' is a view of our country as seen from 30,000 feet. A dream, an ideal, an aspiration, never to be completely achieved, always to be striven for. '...God mend thine every flaw...' brings that aspiration down to ground level, where the real work goes on every day to form a 'more perfect union.'"

### *Immigrant Songs (2018)*

*Immigrant Songs* was commissioned by the Cathedral of St. John the Divine and Nina Stern, whose ensemble Rose of the Compass premiered the work, along with the Choir of the Cathedral of St. John The Divine. It is dedicated to Nina Stern's mother, Marina Friedenbergn Stern, who immigrated to New York City along with her family in 1941. Scored for choir, soloists, organ, recorder, chalumeau, oud, kanun, harp and frame drum, the libretto of *Immigrant Songs*, by Victoria Sirota, celebrates the lives and work of three immigrants to New York: Spanish builder and engineer Rafael Guastavino; Internationally renowned painter Marina Friedenbergn Stern; and Trinidadian native Ravi Ragbir.

### *Prelude and Spiritual for Mother Emanuel (2015)*

Robert Sirota's *Prelude and Spiritual for Mother Emanuel*, with text by his wife, Victoria Sirota, was premiered at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine's New Year's Eve Concert for Peace, on December 31, 2015. The work, for chorus, soprano soloist, string orchestra, and piano, is written in memory of the victims of the June 17, 2015 shootings at Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina, and is dedicated to their families.



### ***Triptych for string quartet (2002)***

*Triptych*, Robert Sirota's first string quartet, was written to commemorate the victims of September 11, 2001. It had an emotional first performance by the Chiara String Quartet on September 26, 2002, at Trinity Church on Wall Street, one of the churches on the periphery of Ground Zero. The musical composition was created in tandem with a painting of the same name by Deborah Patterson; the three panels of the painting bear the same subtitles: "Desecration," "Lamentation," and "Prayer."

### ***American Pilgrimage for string quartet (2016)***

The American String Quartet commissioned Sirota to write his second quartet after championing *Triptych*. *American Pilgrimage* is conceived as a companion piece to *Triptych*: a celebration of the beauty, pathos, and variety of America's geography and culture. It is laid out in four movements: "Morning: Waldo County, Maine;" "Mid-day: Mother Emanuel Church, Charleston, South Carolina;" "Sunset: High Desert, Santa Fe, New Mexico;" and "Evening: Manhattan." The raw material is drawn from four sources: Protestant hymnody, Gospel music, Native American songs, and jazz. Sirota describes the work as an effort to "capture a glimpse of the epic quality of our country—the awesome diversity of its landscape and its people."

### ***Wave Upon Wave for string quartet (2017)***

Robert Sirota was commissioned by the Naumburg Foundation to compose his third string quartet for the 2016 Naumburg Chamber Music Competition winners, the Telegraph Quartet, who gave the world premiere at Carnegie Hall in 2018. *Wave Upon Wave* is the third string quartet in a trilogy spanning fifteen years. Sirota says, "Each of the string quartets in my trilogy is in essence a long journal entry reflecting a response to our times. Now, given the uncertainty of this moment in our history, rife with threats of tyranny, environmental catastrophe, and the human potential for evil, I find myself turning inward to examine the topography of the human heart: our vast potential for creative energy, idealism and altruism. *Wave Upon Wave* is about our fears, our hopes, and our prayers that we will triumph over the forces of darkness which threaten to overwhelm us."

### ***A Call for the Battle to Cease (2017)***

The Concert Artists of Baltimore commissioned Robert to compose *A Call for the Battle to Cease*, a work for orchestra, chorus and piano. The text, also by Victoria Sirota, addresses the need for people to transcend the divisions of race, nationality, class, and politics that tear at the fabric of common humanity. *A Call for the Battle to Cease* will be premiered in a future season and is available for performance with pianist Simone Dinnerstein.

### ***Contrapassos for soprano and string quartet (2020)***

Robert Sirota's tortuous and wistful *Contrapassos* for soprano and string quartet, with lyrics by Stevan Cavalier, is a modern-day odyssey probing the depths of one soul searching for salvation in his dreams, inspired in its form by Dante's *Divine Comedy*. The piece begins with memories of the quotidian joys of childhood, quickly turning to darkness and thoughts of early death by suicide, heart attacks in middle age, and final judgement. And yet throughout, there is the vigorous embrace of abundant life, of the beauty of our world, and of our striving for faith. The work will be premiered in spring 2022 by soprano Abigail Fischer and the Telegraph Quartet.

### ***Rising for piano trio (2021)***

To rise means to come into action. To rise means to become active in opposition or resistance. To rise means to prove oneself equal to a demand or emergency. And it means so much more. Robert Sirota's new work for piano trio will consist of seven movements, four principal movements each expressing a different aspect and energy of what it is to rise, separated by three briefer interludes. Sirota's concepts of *Rising* embrace the purely physical qualities of reaching upward and ascending, the struggle against oppression and subjugation, striving and aspiring to a life of dignity and accomplishment, and the mystical vision of death and resurrection. *Rising* will be premiered by the Neave Trio and a presentation of the work with dance is in development.

## **RECENT RELEASES**



# ROBERT SIROTA

Over five decades, composer Robert Sirota has developed a distinctive voice, clearly discernible in all of his work – whether symphonic, choral, stage, or chamber music. Writing in the *Portland Press Herald*, Allan Kozinn asserts: “Sirota’s musical language is personal and undogmatic, in the sense that instead of aligning himself with any of the competing contemporary styles, he follows his own internal musical compass.”

Robert Sirota’s chamber works have been performed by Alarm Will Sound; Washington Square Contemporary Music Society; Sequitur; Sandbox Percussion; Yale Camerata; yMusic; pianist Jeffrey Kahane; TACTUS Ensemble; Chameleon Arts Ensemble; New Hudson Saxophone Quartet; Left Bank Concert Society; Dinosaur Annex; the Chiara, American, Telegraph, Ethel, Elmyr, and Blair String Quartets; the Peabody, Concord, and Webster Trios; and the Fischer Duo, and at festivals including the Tanglewood, Aspen, Yellow Barn, and Cooperstown music festivals; Bowdoin Gamper and Bowdoin International Music Festival; and Mizzou International Composers Festival. Orchestral performances include the Seattle, Vermont, Virginia, East Texas, Lincoln (NE), Meridian (MS), New Haven, Greater Bridgeport, Oradea (Romania) and Saint Petersburg (Russia) symphonies, as well as conservatory orchestras of Oberlin, Peabody, Manhattan School of Music, Toronto, and Singapore.

Sirota’s liturgical works include three major commissions for the American Guild of Organists: *In the Fullness of Time*, a concerto for organ and orchestra, *Mass* for chorus, organ and percussion, and *Apparitions* for organ and string quartet, as well as works for solo organ, organ and cello, and organ and piano.

Robert Sirota celebrated his 70th birthday with *Sirota @ 70*, a season-long celebration in 2019–2020 featuring performances of his works spanning 20 years. World premieres of commissions for the occasion included *Job Fragments* for baritone Thomas Pellaton; *Dancing With the Angels* for flutist Carol Wincenc; and *Blackbird Singing*, for flutist Linda Chesis and the Cooperstown Summer Music Festival. Due to COVID-19 cancellations, the premiere of *Contrapassos*, with libretto by Stevan Cavalier for the Telegraph Quartet and soprano Abigail Fischer for the Sierra Chamber Society, will be rescheduled for a later season, as will the premieres of his latest works, *Family Portraits*, for cello and piano, composed for the Fischer Duo, and *Prayer* for organ, composed for his wife Victoria Sirota.

Additional recent commissions include Sirota’s third string quartet, *Wave Upon Wave* for the Naumburg Foundation; *Immigrant Songs* for the Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine; *Luminous Bodies* performed by Jeffrey Kahane and yMusic at the Sarasota Music Festival; *Hafez Songs* for Palladium Musicum; *O Blessed Holy Trinity* for choir and organ, for Trinity Episcopal Church, Indianapolis; and

his Cello Sonata No. 2, for Benjamin Larsen and Hyungjin Choi. In the past three years, Sirota has also been commissioned by the American String Quartet, Alarm Will Sound, and yMusic, and has collaborated with Paul Simon on three arrangements of his iconic songs.

Sirota has held seminars and residencies at the Yong Siew Toh Conservatory in Singapore, University of Missouri-Kansas City, Samford University, Carnegie Mellon University, Peabody Institute, University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and New World School of the Arts at Miami Dade College. He also created and curated Bridging the Gap, a series of concerts at National Sawdust that explore the relationships between generations of composers.

Sirota is recorded on the Capstone, Albany, New Voice and Gasparo labels and his discography grows with an arrangement on Paul Simon’s *In The Blue Light* (Legacy Recordings, 2018); *Elegy for a Lost World* on violist Jonah Sirota’s *Strong Sad* (National Sawdust Tracks, 2018); his second string quartet, *American Pilgrimage*, on American String Quartet’s *American Romantics* (independently released, 2018); and *Diners*, on the New Hudson Saxophone Quartet’s *New York Rising* (ClasSax, 2019).

Recipient of grants from the Guggenheim and Watson Foundations, the United States Information Agency, National Endowment for the Arts, Meet The Composer, and the American Music Center, Sirota’s music is published by Muzzy Ridge Music, Schott, Music Associates of New York, MorningStar, Theodore Presser, and To the Fore.

Before becoming Director of the Peabody Institute of the Johns Hopkins University in 1995, Sirota served as Chairman of the Department of Music and Performing Arts Professions at New York University and Director of Boston University’s School of Music. From 2005–2012, he was the President of Manhattan School of Music, where he was also a member of the School’s composition faculty.

A native New Yorker, Sirota studied at Juilliard, Oberlin, and Harvard and divides his time between New York and Searsport, Maine with his wife, Episcopal priest and organist Victoria Sirota. They frequently collaborate on new works, with Victoria as librettist and performer, at times also working with their children, Jonah and Nadia, both world-class violists.