

Next on

Discoveries from the Fleisher Collection

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Encore presentations of the entire *Discoveries* series every Wednesday at 7:00 p.m. on WRTI-HD2

Saturday, March 10th, 2012, 5:00-6:00 p.m.

Howard Hanson (1896-1981). *The Lament for Beowulf*, Op. 25 (1925). Seattle Symphony and Chorale, Gerard Schwarz. Naxos 559700, Tr 4. 19:11

Howard Hanson. *Concerto for Piano and Orchestra in G Major*, Op. 36 (1948). Eugene List, piano, MIT Symphony Orchestra, David Epstein. Pantheon 14104, Tr 5-8. 21:20

Howard Hanson. *Elegy in Memory of Serge Koussevitzky*, Op.44 (1956). Eastman-Rochester Symphony, Howard Hanson. Mercury 434302, Tr 5. 11:21



An ancient Roman seeking signs from the flights of birds would climb the Janiculum hill, overlooking the city from the west, across the Tiber. If an augur had been stationed there in 1921, he might just as well have considered the progress of a young Howard Hanson, from Wahoo, Nebraska, son of Swedish immigrants, and the first winner of the American Rome Prize for musical composition. Hanson lived for three years at the American Academy in Rome, which sits on that very hill.

One of the greatest engines for American music ever, Howard Hanson was a conductor, director of the Eastman School of Music for 40 years, and composer of one of the great American symphonies, his Second, the "Romantic." The First, he penned in Rome. After seeing Hanson conduct that in Rochester, N.Y., Kodak founder George Eastman hired him to direct his six-year-old music school.

In Italy, Hanson had also composed *The Lament for Beowulf*, depicting the funeral pyre of the mighty hero. Hanson's voice is already evident, with echoes of his much later *Song of Democracy* (on the Walt Whitman text), popular with college and high school choirs. Hanson's affinity for choral music meshes with his Lutheran heritage, and his studies with organist/theorist Percy Goetschius and with Peter Lutkin, a founder of the American Guild of Organists and composer of one of the most-sung choral works ever, *The Lord Bless You and Keep You*.

Hanson founded the Eastman-Rochester Orchestra, and through decades of recordings and concerts, conducted (he once estimated) more than 2,000 works—many of these titles now deposited in the Fleisher Collection—by more than 500 American composers. Eastman became one of the most influential music schools in America.

All along, Hanson composed. He won the Pulitzer Prize in 1944 with his Fourth Symphony. To honor the great Boston Symphony Orchestra conductor and friend of American music Serge Koussevitsky, who had died in 1951, he composed the *Elegy* for Boston's 75th Anniversary in 1955. It was most fitting, as it was Koussevitsky who had commissioned Hanson's "Romantic" Symphony, in 1930, for Boston's 50th Anniversary. Koussevitsky had also commissioned the 1948 Piano Concerto.

The life of Howard Hanson was one long series of honors, but his greatest honor may be the benefit to others in his educating, conducting, and, of course, composing. His years on the Janiculum augured well for the life of American music.

Hosted by [Kile Smith](#), former Curator of the Fleisher Collection, and [Jack Moore](#), Program Director of [WRTI](#). In *Discoveries from the Fleisher Collection* we uncover the unknown, rediscover the little-known, and take a fresh look at some of the remarkable treasures housed in the Fleisher Collection of Orchestral Music, at the Parkway Central Library of the [Free Library of Philadelphia](#). The Fleisher Collection is the largest lending library of orchestral performance material in the world. For recording details, please go to our [web page](#). For a detailed list of all our shows, please visit our [archives](#).