

John Barrows

Biography

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John R. Barrows was known for his elegant playing, his impeccable musicianship, his dedicated teaching, and his friendship with composer Alec Wilder, who once said that when his music was played by John Barrows it somehow came back sounding better than he had thought it could.

Barrows was born in 1913 in Glendale CA. His early years were spent in Montana, where he played euphonium. During his high school years in San Diego, he studied cello and later, horn. He attended the Eastman School of Music (1930-1932), San Diego State Teachers College (1933-1934), and Yale University (1934-1938). His teachers included Richard Donovan and David Smith.

Barrows joined the Minneapolis Symphony in 1938, then served as assistant leader of the Army Air Forces Band during World War II, and afterwards moved to New York and played with the City Opera (1946-1949) and the City Ballet (1952-1955). He also appeared in San Juan PR with the Casals Festival Orchestra (1958-1961) and occasionally worked with such artists as Woody Herman, Miles Davis, and Billie Holiday.

Chamber music was important to Barrows. He performed with such ensembles as the Budapest String Quartet and the Pasquier Trio before co-founding the New York Woodwind Quintet in 1952. Barrows made few recordings, but those with the quintet are among his best. Many reviewers have called the quintet the finest woodwind quintet in the world, and Barrows' horn playing was crucial to its success. He also performed regularly with the Fine Arts Quartet in Milwaukee. Barrows wrote, "There is no other musical experience that can quite equal playing chamber music in intensity of self-expression and yet within the framework of cooperative effort."

Barrows wrote several chamber works and made numerous arrangements for band. He was concerned about the limited repertoire for horn, so he performed little known works. Wilder's three sonatas and one suite were written for him, and the singing melodies in Wilder's works brought out Barrows' best playing.

Barrows taught at Yale (1957-1961), New York University (1958-1961), and finally at the University of Wisconsin at Madison (1961-1974), where he taught all levels although he could have accepted only the most advanced students. His influence, through his sense of humor and high artistic standards, won the admiration of audiences, the respect of students, and the devotion of friends.

*Barrows was elected an Honorary Member in 1989. Tributes appear in the May 1974 issue of *The Horn Call*. The John Barrows Memorial Scholarship was established at the University of Wisconsin in 1974.*

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