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## A Performer's Guide to Barbara York's Four Paintings by Grant Wood

Allen Parrish

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A PERFORMER'S GUIDE TO BARBARA YORK'S  
FOUR PAINTINGS BY GRANT WOOD

by

Allen Parrish

A Dissertation  
Submitted to the Graduate School,  
the College of Arts and Sciences  
and the School of Music  
at The University of Southern Mississippi  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Doctor of Musical Arts

Approved by:

Dr. Richard Perry, Committee Chair  
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Dr. Christopher Goertzen  
Dr. Benjamin McIlwain  
Dr. Timothy Tesh

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## ABSTRACT

In 2012, Barbara York was commissioned by John Manning to write *Four Paintings by Grant Wood* for solo tuba. The work is based on four paintings by native Iowan painter, Grant Wood. The four paintings are *Stone City, Iowa*; *Young Corn*; *American Gothic*; and *Parson Weems' Fable*. York included details from these paintings in each movement. This dissertation includes information about Barbara York, Grant Wood, the programmatic details of *Four Paintings by Grant Wood*, and technical considerations for the work. The performer should be better prepared to create a well-informed performance after reading this dissertation.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Richard Perry, for his guidance and support. I would also like to thank my other committee members (Dr. Joseph Brumbeloe, Dr. Christopher Goertzen, Dr. Benjamin McIlwain, and Dr. Timothy Tesh) for their role in my progress towards the DMA.

Additionally, I am grateful to Professor John Manning for taking the time to meet with me for a virtual interview. I enjoyed our conversation and his insights about the piece.

There are many names of teachers and mentors that I have worked with during my academic career. I would not be where I am today without the positive influence of these people. I would like to thank Dr. Douglas Whitten, Dr. Mark Walker, Mr. Daniel Walden, and Mr. Nicholas Efstathiou for their guidance throughout my musical journey.

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is the culmination of my academic studies. The process of earning this doctoral degree would not have been possible without the love and support of my wife, Lauren. I would like to dedicate this dissertation to her and our daughter, Nora.

I would also like to dedicate this dissertation to Barbara York. Although I only knew her for a few years, she became a close friend and a musical mentor.

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## CHAPTER I - INTRODUCTION

### Purpose of Study

In 2012, Barbara York (1949-2020) received a commission from John Manning, Associate Professor of Tuba and Euphonium at The University of Iowa, to write a piece for solo tuba. John Manning requested that the work be based on four paintings by native Iowan painter Grant Wood (1891-1942). The paintings that he selected for this commission are *Stone City, Iowa*; *Young Corn*; *American Gothic*; and *Parson Weems' Fable*. The resulting composition, *Four Paintings by Grant Wood*, consists of four movements, and the title of each movement corresponds to a painting by Wood.

The purpose of this dissertation is to inform the performer about how Barbara York was influenced by Grant Wood's life and these paintings to create *Four Paintings by Grant Wood*. The piece contains musical details meant to depict specific aspects of the paintings and their historical contexts. This dissertation includes explanations of these musical details and how one might represent them in performance. This performer's guide also contains technical considerations for each movement as well as recommendations for addressing these considerations. Biographical information about Barbara York and Grant Wood is included for a better understanding of the work.

To achieve a well-informed performance of this piece, the performer should commit time to background research. Barbara York explained how rewarding it was to learn about Grant Wood's life while composing this work. As part of the compositional process, she spent time viewing the paintings in addition to reading *Grant Wood: A Life*

by R. Tripp Evans<sup>1</sup>. The musician that is preparing this work of music will be likewise rewarded by following a similar path of preparation. An analysis of this piece will aid in the understanding, preparation, and performance of *Four Paintings by Grant Wood*.

### Background and Significance

Although program music can be traced back as early as the fourteenth century (the Italian caccia were descriptive pieces that sometimes involved hunting scenes<sup>2</sup>), the genre became common during the Romantic Period. In an interview with the author, John Manning mentioned Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition* and explained that the work "wouldn't have happened if that exhibition of Victor Hartman's works didn't exist after his death and didn't affect Mussorgsky so much."<sup>3</sup> *Pictures at an Exhibition* is an earlier example of a musical work that was influenced by visual art.

Generally defined, program music is "music of a narrative or descriptive kind; the term is often extended to all music that attempts to represent extra-musical concepts without resorting to sung words."<sup>4</sup> Works of dance, literature, and painting have the potential to inspire the creation of music. During the preparation and performance of program music, it is essential to become acquainted with the non-musical sources that have influenced their composition. The preparation of program music should include a

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<sup>1</sup> R. Tripp Evans, *Grant Wood: A Life*, New York: Knopf Doubleday, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Kurt Von Fischer & D'Agostino, *Caccia*, Grove Music Online, 2001, <https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000004517>.

<sup>3</sup> "Interview with John Manning," September 18, 2020, Appendix A.

<sup>4</sup> Roger Scruton, *Programme Music*, Grove Music Online, 2001, <https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000022394?rskey=uKJQU1&result=1>.

discovery and careful study of the non-musical sources that provided inspiration for the piece, an examination of the extent that these sources influenced the work, and how to communicate the findings to an audience.

Barbara York is a significant composer within the tuba community. Her contributions to the repertoire warrant further scholarly study. Between 2002 and 2020, York published eighteen works for solo tuba. Because of York's significance in the tuba community and the rich programmatic nature of *Four Paintings by Grant Wood*, there is a need for a detailed analysis. The analysis given here is drawn from the composer's own thoughts regarding the work.

### State of Research

There are no published scholarly sources that deal exclusively with Barbara York and her music, although there are few sources that mention specific works by York. The International Tuba and Euphonium Association Journal published an article which includes a review of *Four Paintings by Grant Wood*.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, a master's thesis<sup>6</sup> and a doctoral dissertation<sup>7</sup> mention her works. The master's thesis was written to accompany a recital performed by the author of this dissertation on which *Four Paintings by Grant Wood* was included. Aside from the relatively few scholarly sources, information about

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<sup>5</sup> Daniel Brown, "ITEA Journal: New Materials," 42, no. 2 (Winter 2015), <http://www.iteaonline.org/members/journal/36N3/36N3newmaterials.php>.

<sup>6</sup> Allen Parrish, "Thesis for Graduate Study in Tuba Performance," 2018, *Electronic Thesis Collection*, 251, <https://digitalcommons.pittstate.edu/etd/251>.

<sup>7</sup> Justin Kendall Worley, "An Annotated Bibliography of Music for Horn, Tuba, and Piano," 2014, [https://libres.uncg.edu/ir/uncg/f/Worley\\_uncg\\_0154D\\_11579.pdf](https://libres.uncg.edu/ir/uncg/f/Worley_uncg_0154D_11579.pdf).

Barbara York can be gathered from program notes and alongside any of her compositions on her publisher's website.<sup>8</sup>

There are two newspaper articles about Barbara York; one is published by the *Joplin Globe*<sup>9</sup> and the other by Pittsburg State University's newspaper, *The Collegio*.<sup>10</sup> The article published by the *Joplin Globe* is a short biographical sketch about Barbara York. The more recent article published by *The Collegio* is a memorial piece that was published shortly after York's death that echoes information from the former newspaper article.

Research concerning program music is more extensive than that related to Barbara York and her music. Many sources regarding program music were written in the middle of the twentieth century. Notable authors have written about program music, including Aaron Copland, Carl Dalhaus, and Donald Francis Tovey<sup>11</sup>. One source that relates well to this study of York's *Four Paintings by Grant Wood* is Siglind Bruhn's *Musical Ekphrasis: Composers Responding to Poetry and Painting*<sup>12</sup>. In this book, Bruhn discusses the claim that instrumental composers have been inspired by specific poems or visual artworks and have transformed the features and messages of these art forms into the musical language - which is what Barbara York has done with *Four Paintings by*

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<sup>8</sup> Cimarron Music Press, Cimarronmusic.com.

<sup>9</sup> Andra Bryan Stefanoni, "Pianist for area musicals has her own impressive resume," *The Joplin Globe* (October 2015), [www.joplinglobe.com/news/lifestyles/pianist-for-area-musicals-has-her-own-impressive-resume/article\\_b1e30bfc-e0a8-50b6-b773-fce407ee8b4c.html](http://www.joplinglobe.com/news/lifestyles/pianist-for-area-musicals-has-her-own-impressive-resume/article_b1e30bfc-e0a8-50b6-b773-fce407ee8b4c.html).

<sup>10</sup> "Music world, especially alumni, mourns loss of composer, accompanist," *The Collegio* (November 2020), <https://www.pittstate.edu/news/2020/11/music-world,-especially-alumni,mourns-loss-ofcomposer,-accompanist.html#.X9KHUs1KjIU>.

<sup>11</sup> These sources are listed in the bibliography.

<sup>12</sup> Bruhn, Siglind. *Musical Ekphrasis: Composers Responding to Poetry and Painting*. Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon Press, 2000.

*Grant Wood*. While several resources discuss the influence of visual arts on music, there are a few that consider specific musical works and how they were based on other works of art.

A master's thesis by Amanda Duthie, entitled "Do Music and Art Influence One Another? Measuring Cross-Modal Similarities in Music and Art,"<sup>13</sup> explores interactions between music and the visual arts from a scientific perspective. A doctoral dissertation by Yining Jiang, entitled "Connection Between Visual Arts and Music: The Painting and Music of I-uen Wang Hwang,"<sup>14</sup> examines connections between painting and music - particularly in Wang Hwang's music and visual art. Because Jiang's dissertation is about the general connection between visual arts and music rather than a single piece of music, she includes an extensive background about the connection between visual art and music ranging from Ancient Greece through the twentieth century. "Piano Music Inspired by the Visual Arts from 1870 to 1970"<sup>15</sup> by Donna Marie Hall is an example of scholarship related to the influence of visual arts on music. However, the scope of Hall's thesis spans one hundred years. The present study of Barbara York's *Four Paintings by Grant Wood* is narrower in scope because of the focus on the influence of visual art on one musical work.

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<sup>13</sup> Amanda Catherine Duthie, "Do Music and Art Influence One Another? Measuring Cross-Modal Similarities in Music and Art," (2013), *Graduate Theses and Dissertations*, 13163. <https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/etd/13163>.

<sup>14</sup> Yining Jenny Jiang, "Connection Between Visual Arts and Music: The Painting and Music of I-Uen Wang Hwang" (2017), *Dissertations*.164. <https://commons.lib.jmu.edu/diss201019/164>.

<sup>15</sup> Donna Marie Hall, "Piano Music Inspired by the Visual Arts from 1870 to 1970" (1974), thesis, University of North Texas, <https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc663316/m1/1/>.

## Method

To create a better understanding of *Four Paintings by Grant Wood*, this dissertation includes biographies of the composer (Barbara York) and the painter of the four paintings that inspired the work (Grant Wood). York's biography includes information about her compositional style, how she became an established composer in the tuba community, and the genesis of this composition. An interview was conducted with John Manning to gather details about the genesis of the work from his perspective.

Both John Manning and Barbara York explained that reading *Grant Wood: A Life*<sup>16</sup> by R. Tripp Evans was integral in the composition and preparation of *Four Paintings by Grant Wood*. Therefore, most of Wood's biographical information contained in this dissertation is drawn from Evans' book.

The bulk of analysis includes specific musical details from each movement that were influenced by aspects of the paintings. To discover these details, three interviews with Barbara York were conducted - transcripts from these interviews can be found in Appendix A of this document. York was able to articulate artistic influences for specific compositional decisions several years after writing this work, while struggling with pulmonary fibrosis. It is important to note that the brevity of the third interview was because of these severe health issues - which sharply declined from the first to the final interview.

In addition to programmatic elements of the movements, the analysis also includes recommendations for dealing with the technical considerations encountered in

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<sup>16</sup> R. Tripp Evans, *Grant Wood: A Life*, New York: Knopf Doubleday, 2010.

the piece. This information is gathered from the author's experience performing the work and the interview with John Manning - who premiered and commercially recorded *Four Paintings by Grant Wood*.

The information in this dissertation will serve as a guide to the performer of Barbara York's *Four Paintings by Grant Wood*. A performer can utilize this research as a starting point for the preparation of this piece of music and be better equipped to create a well-informed performance.



## CHAPTER II – BARBARA YORK

### Biography

Barbara York was born in Winnipeg, Canada on February 23, 1949. York credited her early interests in music to her observations of her two older sisters' piano lessons. When she was five years old, York's mother took five minutes off both of her sister's piano lessons so that York could have ten minutes of lessons. York explained "I learned to read music at the same time I learned to read words."<sup>17</sup> Two years after beginning piano lessons, York began composing.

York attended McGill University in Quebec, Canada during the 1960s, but encountered difficulties in college because she strongly disliked the style of composition that was taught there. In a news interview by the *Joplin Globe*, York explains that "What was considered acceptable in universities at that point was atonal music. That was the big rage. If you didn't write atonal music, you weren't considered appropriate."<sup>18</sup> Rather than writing music without a tonal center, York preferred writing tonal, thematic melodies. She was involved with musical theatre at McGill and her musical style originated there.

Despite the challenges which she faced early in her career - specifically, academic reactions against her music - York was successful as a composer. Her score and lyrics for *Colette* won the Dora Mavor Moore Award in 1981 (Canada's version of a Tony). Her scripted children's piece, *A Butterfly in Time*, was nominated for a Canadian "Juno

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<sup>17</sup> "Music world, especially alumni, mourns loss of composer, accompanist," *The Collegio* (November 2020), <https://www.pittstate.edu/news/2020/11/music-world,-especially-alumni,mourns-loss-ofcomposer,-accompanist.html#.X9KHUs1KjIU>.

<sup>18</sup> Andra Bryan Stefanoni, "Pianist for area musicals has her own impressive resume," *The Joplin Globe* (October 2015), [www.joplinglobe.com/news/lifestyles/pianist-for-area-musicals-has-her-own-impressive-resume/article\\_b1e30bfc-e0a8-50b6-b773-fce407ee8b4c.html](http://www.joplinglobe.com/news/lifestyles/pianist-for-area-musicals-has-her-own-impressive-resume/article_b1e30bfc-e0a8-50b6-b773-fce407ee8b4c.html).

Award” in 2006. Additionally, she received commissions from two Canadian symphony orchestras (Mississauga and Saskatoon) and presented works at three World Saxophone Congresses.<sup>19</sup>

York has become reputable among the tuba community, exemplified in both her substantial compositional output and attention from noteworthy professionals. York’s music is published by Cimarron Music,<sup>20</sup> where she has thirty compositions for solo tuba or euphonium and sixteen works for chamber ensembles that include the tuba or euphonium. Her compositions have been included on the Leonard Falcone International Euphonium and Tuba Festival solo competition repertoire list for four out of the previous five years.<sup>21</sup> Also, Tim Buzbee and the Iceland Symphony recorded her Concerto for Tuba and Orchestra on Buzbee’s CD, *Raw Emotions*.<sup>22</sup>

York’s reputation and success in the tuba community can be traced back to her work as a collaborative pianist. In addition to composition, her career consisted of nearly fifty years of working as a concert accompanist. York moved to Pittsburg, Kansas to be closer to her children, and spent nearly the last two decades of her life working as a staff accompanist at Pittsburg State University. The Professor of Tuba and Euphonium at Pittsburg State University, A. Douglas Whitten, hosted guest artists and many regional tuba and euphonium conferences in Pittsburg. Whitten hired York to accompany visiting

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<sup>19</sup> Cimarron Music, <https://www.cimarronmusic.com/sonata-for-horn-7445>.

<sup>20</sup> Cimarron Music, <https://www.cimarronmusic.com>.

<sup>21</sup> Leonard Falcone International Euphonium and Tuba Festival, “Historical Information,” <https://www.falconefestival.org/index.php/festival-history>, 2020.

<sup>22</sup> Albany Records, “Tubist Extraordinaire Tim Buzbee Performs New Works for Tuba and Orchestra,” [www.albanyrecords.com/mm5/merchant.mvc?Screen=PROD&Store\\_Code=AR&Product\\_Code=TROY1133&Category\\_Code=a-BS](http://www.albanyrecords.com/mm5/merchant.mvc?Screen=PROD&Store_Code=AR&Product_Code=TROY1133&Category_Code=a-BS).

musicians. Connections with these guest artists led to commissions and lifelong musical relationships.

In 2002, Douglas Whitten hosted his former teacher, Mike Fisher, as a guest artist. It can be assumed that Fisher enjoyed working with York because he commissioned York's first tuba piece, *Sea Dreams* that same year. Two years after *Sea Dreams* was composed, it was included on the required repertoire list for the International Tuba and Euphonium Conference (ITEC) in Budapest. In 2006, York won the Harvey Phillips Award for Euphonium in Chamber Music at the ITEC with *Conversations* for euphonium, alto saxophone, and piano.<sup>23</sup>

Barbara York became an American citizen in 2017. York retired from accompanying in 2018 because of physical issues with her wrist but continued composing until a few weeks prior to her death in the fall of 2020 from pulmonary fibrosis.

York explained that a signature of her compositional style is the altered recurrence of thematic material. In her interview she attributes this trademark to her theatrical background where she “spent a good decade working in the theater and even doing some writing and being able to see a story progress.”<sup>24</sup> Manning described a staple of her music as being “slow, beautiful melodies that morph over time.”<sup>25</sup> Other characteristics of her writing style include smooth, lyrical melodies, angular technical passages, and rounded forms - all of which are prevalent in *Four Paintings by Grant Wood*.

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<sup>23</sup> Cimarron Music, <https://www.cimarronmusic.com/sonata-for-horn-7445>.

<sup>24</sup> “Interview #1 with Barbara York,” August 12, 2020, Appendix A.

<sup>25</sup> “Interview with John Manning,” Appendix A.

## Commission from John Manning

While John Manning was formulating the concept for his second recording project, *Field Notes: Tuba Music from Iowa*,<sup>26</sup> he wanted to commission a work related to Iowa. He remembered reading a children's book<sup>27</sup> to his daughter about Grant Wood after he and his family moved to Iowa.

Manning first became aware of York's music from his teaching assistant at The University of Iowa in 2004, Josh Calkin. Calkin was playing York's *Arioso Gloria* (2003) at the time and Manning recalled of the piece: "it's simple writing but sophisticated enough; it had a nice beauty to it."<sup>28</sup> He also mentioned first working with York at Pittsburg State University, where they collaborated for a recital at an International Tuba and Euphonium Association (ITEA) regional conference.

After deciding on his subject matter, he approached York because he liked her musical style and enjoyed working with her. John Manning stated that York was excited about his request for a piece that was positive and happy because she had mostly done commissions that were generally sad or in memory of a lost loved one. York listed *Four Paintings by Grant Wood* among her top three compositions.<sup>29</sup>

Manning mentioned specific reasons for choosing each of the four paintings. He chose *Stone City, Iowa* because it is a real place in Iowa and the painting has "Iowa" in the title. Manning selected *Young Corn* because he liked the work and thought it was

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<sup>26</sup> John Manning, *Field Notes: Tuba Music from Iowa*, Tempe, AZ: Summit Records, CD, 2016.

<sup>27</sup> John Duggleby, "Artist in Overalls: The Life of Grant Wood," San Francisco: Chronicle Book, 1996.

<sup>28</sup> "Interview with John Manning," Appendix A.

<sup>29</sup> "Personal communications" with Barbara York, September 20, 2020.

different from Wood's other landscape paintings. *American Gothic* was picked because it is Grant Wood's most famous painting and *Parson Weems' Fable* was selected because it does not appear as typical for Grant Wood's style – Manning explains that the painting is surreal and similar to a political cartoon. He said of *Parson Weems' Fable*: “Wow, that's really quirky and it doesn't quite look like a typical Grant Wood painting.”<sup>30</sup>

John Manning did not request that the paintings be placed in any specific order; York was given the liberty to arrange them as she saw fit. York explained that she “put them in an order that I felt would work musically and emotionally as a journey.”<sup>31</sup>

Manning continued to explain that he “intended it to be programmatic - to be music that is inspired by paintings by a specific painter and then, Barbara took it a step further and made it picturesque and more meaningful.”<sup>32</sup> Manning described his satisfaction of the resulting composition as being “lucky” to “stand on the shoulders of two geniuses: Grant Wood and Barbara York.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> “Interview with John Manning,” Appendix A.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER III – GRANT WOOD

### Biography

Grant Wood was born on February 13, 1891 in the rural town of Anamosa, Iowa in a farmhouse. Wood's father, Francis Maryville Wood (known as Maryville), had a reputation in his community as an honest, hard-working man known for his "masculinity" that was characteristic of men in the late nineteenth century.<sup>34</sup> Wood's complex relationship with his father is evidenced in many of his paintings, including two of the four paintings in York's *Four Paintings by Grant Wood* - "American Gothic" and "Parson Weems' Fable." In Wood's incomplete autobiography he writes about his father: "There was a certain mystery and loneliness about father that I sensed even as a child, a strange quality of detachment which no one would ever be able to understand," he continues, "we loved him and revered him, yet we sensed that he was not one of us."<sup>35</sup> Wood, however, crossed "sensed" out and replaced it with "knew" - which seems to suggest that somehow he "knew" that his father was not one of them.<sup>36</sup>

Wood's relationship with his mother, Hattie Weaver Wood, contrasted to that with his father. Although Maryville excluded Grant Wood from helping with the farm because he was weak, his mother encouraged him to help with gardening and taught him the names of all the flowers and plants. More than farming, these experiences with his mother inspired Wood's admiration for Iowan landscapes. Grant Wood's support from Hattie Wood was also exemplified by his first art "studio." His father disapproved of his

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<sup>34</sup> Evans, 12.

<sup>35</sup> As cited in Evans, *Grant Wood: A Life*, 14.

<sup>36</sup> Evans, 14.

art, and because of this, young Wood hid under the kitchen table to draw. He would begin only after Maryville left for the fields. His mother knew about the arrangement and encouraged it. Grant Wood explained that he “had privacy and could peer out at the world through the arched openings in the red-checkerboard tablecloth.”<sup>37</sup> This arch became a recurring theme for Wood as arches and curtains are on display in many of his paintings (such as *Parson Weems’ Fable*).

Another important figure in Grant Wood’s personal life was his younger sister, Nan Wood. Although he had two older brothers, he was closest to Nan. Following the death of his father in 1901, Grant, Nan (who was two years old at the time), and Hattie grew much closer. At the age of eighteen, Nan claimed that “the family unit became we three” because their brothers had moved out.<sup>38</sup> This concept of ‘we three’ represented a bond that persisted throughout their lives.

Wood’s family can be observed in several of his paintings either as models, subjects, or muses. For example, the small figures in *Young Corn* are reminiscent of Grant and Nan Wood playing in the fields during their childhood. Wood evokes both the memory of his father and mother in *Parson Weems’ Fable*. His relationship with Maryville can be seen in the work’s foreground, in the confrontation between father and son. The background of the work includes a harmonious cooperation between mother and son which is reminiscent of Wood’s relationship with his own mother.

Wood’s mural, *Imagination Isles*, that he designed at McKinley Junior High in 1921 was an important influence for his landscape portraits. This mural represented a

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<sup>37</sup> Evans, 19.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 34.

childish emotional release for Wood, and he claimed that the man that could find his way to the 'Imagination Isles' would find a world without "fear, unwanted intrusions, and even financial difficulties."<sup>39</sup> For Wood, it seems that his landscapes - which Evans describes as an "emotional outlet"<sup>40</sup> - provided an escape from the harsh realities of paintings such as *American Gothic*.

The final years of Grant Wood's life were characterized by great achievements and disappointments. In 1934, Wood became the director of Iowa's Public Works of Art Project (PWAP). As director, Wood led thirty-four artists that were responsible for creating murals in Ames. The same year, he was appointed to the art faculty at the University of Iowa. Evans explained that Wood took pride in the community that these positions offered him instead of the prestige of these positions.<sup>41</sup> Within a year of earning the PWAP directorship, Wood resigned because twenty-one of his workers submitted a petition for his removal.

Much to his friends' and family's surprise, Wood married Sara McClain Sherman (Sara Wood) in March of 1935. The marriage initially offered security and self-confidence for Wood, but eventually it became a cause of financial and emotional stress. In addition to the tumultuous marriage, Wood's mother died in October of 1935. Grant and Sara Wood separated in 1938 and were divorced the following year. Wood died in February of 1942 from pancreatic cancer.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 133.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 131.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 166.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.



Grant Wood was known for his depictions of rural, scenic life in the American Midwest. Before achieving national recognition in the 1930s, Wood experimented with modern techniques such as impressionism. However, the bulk of his oeuvre is characterized by Regionalism in which he sought a simplicity of form to create “truly American Art.”<sup>43</sup>

### Background of the Paintings

Each painting that was selected by John Manning for this commission has a unique historical background. *Stone City, Iowa* (1930) marked a shift in Grant Wood’s style towards an embodiment of “joyful escapism” in which “we encounter a luscious, parallel universe where the painter’s primal physical impulses play out at the scale of the earth itself.”<sup>44</sup> The painting consists of an Iowan landscape and a small city. Stone City was a bustling town in the late nineteenth century but had nearly become a ghost town when the painting was completed. Grant Wood enjoyed visiting Stone City to work on his sketches. *Stone City* debuted in 1930 at the Art Institute of Chicago alongside *American Gothic*. The painting was overshadowed by the amount of press received by *American Gothic* and was criticized for an “overemphasis on design and troubling departure from visual reality.”<sup>45</sup>

Wood’s satisfaction in painting landscape portraits can be observed in his persistence in painting them despite poor critical reception. The year after *Stone City*

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<sup>43</sup> “Grant Wood,” Totallyhistory.com.

<sup>44</sup> Evans, 131.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 131.

debuted, he painted *Young Corn*. Wood was commissioned to paint *Young Corn* as a memorial to a Cedar Rapids teacher.<sup>46</sup> Although one might expect a memorial to be dark and reflective, this painting is pleasantly reminiscent. Evans explains that “sealed beneath layers of patriotic varnish, Wood’s childhood fantasies and adult fixations float just beneath the surface of his work.”<sup>47</sup> It is likely that the scene that Wood paints is his family farm and the children playing are he and his sister. York was influenced by this interpretation when composing the second movement of *Four Paintings by Grant Wood*.<sup>48</sup>

At the debut in 1930 at the Art Institute of Chicago, *American Gothic* was the “universally acknowledged hit of the show.”<sup>49</sup> Wood was inspired to paint this work after encountering a small Victorian-era farmhouse during the spring of 1930 on a trip to Eldon, Iowa. He was drawn to a Gothic window that seemed out of place on this small structure in the middle of rural Iowa - an architectural contradiction that Wood found intriguing.<sup>50</sup> Wood intended to create an analogy between the farmhouse and the owners. The farmhouse is dark and uneasy, and the characters are painted to depict the same mood. Evans’ explains that the man in *American Gothic* is painted as if he is looking in the viewer’s direction, but not directly at the viewer. He suggests that Wood painted him this way because he felt that his father knew he was there, yet never paid attention to him.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 136.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 130.

<sup>48</sup> “Interview #2 with Barbara York,” August 19, 2020, Appendix A.

<sup>49</sup> Evans, 102.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 91.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 91.

The sitters for *American Gothic* are Wood's sister, Nan, and his dentist, Byron McKeeby - who was sixty-two when the painting was created. McKeeby was thirty-two years older than Nan, which caused viewers to question the nature of the character's intended relationship. It was not clear whether they were husband and wife or father and daughter. Evans explains that "neither possibility ultimately relieves the viewer's sense of discomfort."<sup>52</sup>

*American Gothic* was met with much approval from national art critics. Evans attributes this positive reception by art critics to "the painting's powerful psychological charge."<sup>53</sup> The reaction by rural Iowans, however, was overwhelmingly negative. Many native Iowans were "angered by the image, perceiving in it a parody as cruel as it was inaccurate."<sup>54</sup> This disapproval by the people Wood grew up around and loved caused a great deal of anxiety for him.

Grant Wood's mixed emotions towards Iowans stemmed from his complex relationship with them. Wood never openly professed to be a homosexual, as homosexuality was taboo in rural twentieth century culture, and doing so might have ruined his reputation. However, many people who were close to Grant Wood claimed that "everybody knew" about his homosexuality."<sup>55</sup> Although Wood loved much about Iowa, he never felt completely accepted by Iowans, except by his mother, sister, and some of his close friends. York explained that she included these internal struggles in composing the movement.

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 91.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 102.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 102.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 283.

*Parson Weems' Fable* was painted in September of 1939 and was the first work that Wood painted after a two-year hiatus.<sup>56</sup> *Parson Weems' Fable* is a depiction of the legendary story of George Washington chopping down his father's cherry tree. This fable originated from Washington's first posthumous biographer, Mason Locke Weems (also known as Parson Weems). This painting is unnatural in Grant Wood's use of a famous portrait of George Washington (at age sixty-four) on the body of young Washington in *Parson Weems' Fable* - an example of satire. The portrait of George Washington, known as the *Athenaeum Portrait*, was originally painted in 1796 by Gilbert Stuart.<sup>57</sup> In Wood's painting, he highlights the fallacy of the fable created by Parson Weems. The peculiar use of Washington's adult head on the depiction of 'young George' draws attention to how equally imprecise it would be to assume that George Washington was always presidential and honest, even as a young boy.

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<sup>56</sup> The previous painting that was painted in 1937 was *Sultry Night*.

<sup>57</sup> National Portrait Gallery, "George Washington (The Athenaeum Portrait), [https://npg.si.edu/object/npg\\_NPG.80.115](https://npg.si.edu/object/npg_NPG.80.115).

## CHAPTER IV – ANALYSIS OF FOUR PAINTINGS BY GRANT WOOD

### Stone City, Iowa

This composition begins with the movement, “Stone City, Iowa.” York focuses on one primary detail of the painting in this first movement: the horse travelling through the scenery. The soft, motor rhythm which introduces the piece is meant to depict the horse and rider entering the scene. York explained in an interview: “It’s a little bit ‘Schubert’ - in terms of accompaniment. It’s a little bit like Schubert’s art songs, when you get this pattern going. This “riding” pattern.”<sup>58</sup> The art song which she references is Schubert’s *Erlkonig*, which also begins with a moving rhythm in the accompaniment.

York’s interpretation for this movement - and the painting - is that Grant Wood is the horse rider who desires to return to the safety and comfort of his childhood farm. R. Tripp Evans suggests the “childlike qualities” of *Stone City, Iowa* in Wood’s invitation for viewers to “slide down Stone City’s velvety hills, peek into its doll-sized house, and skate across the mirrored surface of a turquoise-blue Wapsipinicon River.”<sup>59</sup> Evans’ description of these innocent features reinforces York’s interpretation of the rider longing to return to his childhood.

“Stone City, Iowa” is in rounded binary form. The opening “A” section ends in mm. 39. The lyrical “B” section consists of mm. 40 through 76. The return of the “A” section occurs at mm. 77. The movement consists of a coda in the final measures.

The tuba enters four bars after the opening piano accompaniment with an acrobatic melody that suggests the entrance of the horse and rider into the musical scene.

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<sup>58</sup> “Interview #2 with Barbara York” Appendix A.

<sup>59</sup> Evans, 133.

The movement is in the key of A-flat major, but York explores several other tonal centers throughout. The marked tempo is “Allegretto, half note = 100.” However, in the only commercially available recording of the work (performed by John Manning), the tempo of the opening movement is approximately half note = seventy-eight. Additionally, York played significantly slower than the marked tempo when demonstrating the opening accompaniment.<sup>60</sup> This could have been because of her poor health, but she did not comment on the slower tempo.



Musical Example 1 Measures 21-22, “Stone City, Iowa”

Throughout the movement, the listener follows the horse and rider’s journey through Wood’s scenery. York writes dynamic swells throughout, such as the crescendo in mm. 21 followed by the decrescendo in mm. 22, to portray the rolling hills of the Iowan landscape found in *Stone City, Iowa*. Other instances of dynamics swells includes mm. 17-18, mm. 61-64, mm. 71-74, mm. 89- 91, and mm. 93-94. The performer should



Musical Example 2 Measures 31 and 32, “Stone City, Iowa”

<sup>60</sup> Interview #2 with Barbara York, Appendix A.

York represents passing objects that are “zipping” by the horse and rider in mm. 31-32. The accented notes that come through the texture are meant to capture this “zipping” sensation of passing trees, buildings, and other objects in the horse’s path. This representation of motion perceived by the rider occurs in mm. 31-37 as well as mm. 69-72. The soloist should play the unaccented notes slightly softer and the accented notes should be brought out of the musical texture – in both the solo part and the accompaniment. The performer should regard the lighter style of the movement during this section and not play too heavily - overplaying these leaps is a temptation for the soloist to achieve greater accuracy, but a lighter approach will better capture York’s intent.

The “B” section, from mm. 41-69 is meant to evoke Wood’s longing to return to his childhood. The technical melody of the work’s opening represents “movement,” whereas this slower section is the representation of “feeling.” York writes this melody to capture Wood’s feelings of his childhood.



Musical Example 3 Measures 41 through 52, “Stone City, Iowa”

York reprises the opening “A” section at mm. 77. The same analytical process should be applied to the recurrence of the “A” section. The music of the final eleven measures serves as a coda and is meant to suggest the exit of the horse and rider. The ‘motor’ rhythms slow down, and York includes both a ritardando and a decrescendo to *niente*. The performer should envision the rider exiting the scene rather than stopping the horse. This can be depicted by maintaining the forward motion in conjunction with the

decrescendo and ritardando. Rather than slowing down too quickly, the soloist should gradually ritardando during the final measures of the movement.

The primary challenges of *Stone City, Iowa* include flexibility, pitch accuracy, and endurance. Mm. 21-22 and mm. 31-32 (see figures 1 and 2, respectively) are two examples of sections with wide intervals. These leaps are difficult because they occur in the upper register of the instrument, where the partials are closer together. Slow, deliberate practice is essential for mastery of these intervals. For example, the tempo in the opening is half note equals 100, and the soloist should begin practice well below the written tempo. When preparing this section, the metronome should be set at nearly half of the marked tempo, i.e., half note equals 50, and gradually increased after several correct repetitions. This technique should be utilized for smaller sections of the music. Varying the repetitions by slurring would further enhance the technical preparation of this movement. These variations allow for the soloist to focus on the air rather than relying on the tongue for pitch accuracy.

Beyond technical mastery, the soloist should strive to achieve musical representation of the horse to capture York's vision for the movement. The performer should strive for a light articulation to evoke the motion of the horse galloping through the scene. The light articulation is particularly challenging to maintain during the wide leaps because the tubist may tend to over-articulate these intervals for clarity. It is important to maintain a consistent, forward-moving tempo to portray the intended sense of motion. The tendency to slow down during the lyrical section must also be avoided.

"Stone City, Iowa" presents endurance challenges because the soloist rests for ten full measures out of the one hundred and nineteen total measures. There are three two-



measure rests and one four-measure rest. At the indicated tempo, these rest periods go by quickly. The endurance concerns are compounded by the high tessitura. Manning noted the importance of pacing himself and taking breaks during practice because of the physically demanding nature of the movement. In addition to pacing oneself during the preparation of this work, one must also practice the endurance necessary for an unstrained performance. This includes more extended practice sessions in which the musician recreates taxing performance situations - such as performing the movement in its entirety, taking a short break, and repeating the movement. To prevent injuries, it is important to have a self-awareness of physical capabilities and to not push past limits.

### Young Corn

John Manning selected the four paintings for Barbara York to use in this composition but did not specify the order. According to Evans' biography of Wood there was no such relation between the paintings. However, York sequenced the paintings in a way that made sense to her and she took 'artistic liberty' in the connection between movements. The primary subject of the first movement was the horse riding through the scenery. York envisioned the second movement, *Young Corn*, as the rider's destination and the subject of his yearning, his childhood farm.

*Young Corn* is another example of Grant Wood's Iowan landscapes. There are vast hills, a farm, fields of corn, and three people in the field. Barbara York explained that the "little kids in this huge landscape" are Grant Wood and his sister. She stated that "he goes home but those children aren't there anymore. That is his memory. He could get back to the farm, but you can't get back to your childhood. So, it's a memory rather than a

reality.”<sup>61</sup> Although Grant Wood could not return to the comfort of his childhood, York wrote this movement to suggest the safety and peacefulness that one might feel when reminiscing about their childhood.<sup>62</sup>

When discussing *Young Corn*, Barbara York described how she visited her hometown and childhood home after nearly fifty years had passed. She explained that “when you're a child, everything seems much bigger. And when you go back as an adult, ‘I didn't realize that the schoolyard was as small as it was.’”<sup>63</sup> Her interpretation of *Young Corn* was that the children in the painting were so small because it was a memory of Wood’s own childhood. She combined these experiences from her own life with Grant Wood’s reminiscence in *Young Corn* to write this movement. She explained that the performer should recall similar memories.

The opening melody conveys a general sense of longing, beginning in mm. 19 York evokes specific playful childhood memories that Wood might be recalling. She explained that the protagonist of the movement during this section might ask the audience: “remember when we used to run around and play together? And throw water at each water at each other and chase the chicken?”<sup>64</sup> These were not documented memories by Wood, but York utilized artistic liberty in imagining memories that Wood might have had. The soloist should play this section lightly and softly, considering the soft dynamic (*mezzo piano*) stylistically rather than in terms of volume. The melodic line should increase in volume and intensity during the crescendo in this section.

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<sup>61</sup> “Interview #2 with Barbara York,” Appendix A.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.



Musical Example 4 Measures 19 through 23, “Young Corn.”

York writes “*poco movendo*” in mm. 27 and the melodic line gradually ascends into the upper register, which leads to the *poco piu agitato* in conjunction with the F#4. York explained that this is a “cry of longing,” after Wood remembers how special and safe his childhood was. The performer should play mm. 28-34 as one phrase leading to the climax at mm. 35, while maintaining the intensity in phrasing during the dotted half notes.

After this high point, the dynamic softens, and the register descends to “tempo primo” with the return of the opening theme at mm. 43. York confirmed my inquiry that the climax of this movement, which occurs at mm. 35, is a “longing that cries out and then settles, but you are still longing. And then it’s back at the beginning, it’s like a cycle of longing.”<sup>65</sup> The climax lasts for two and a half measures. Therefore, one should sustain the dynamic level until the written decrescendo.

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

*poco più agitato*

The image shows a musical score for measures 34 through 38. It consists of three staves: a single bass staff at the top and a grand staff (treble and bass) below. The top staff contains a melodic line with several triplet markings and dynamic markings of *f* and *mf*. The grand staff below provides harmonic accompaniment with chords and a steady bass line. The tempo marking *poco più agitato* is centered above the top staff.

Musical Example 5 Measures 34 through 38, “Young Corn.”

The peaceful sense of longing which permeates the movement is abruptly interrupted by the tritone that occurs between mm. 63 and mm. 64. Barbara York explains “that is where the loss happens in some way. There is something about that which interferes with - it changes so that it is no longer peaceful and safe.”<sup>66</sup> The short melodic figure from mm. 61 that resolves from D to E is repeated in measure 63. In this instance, the D to Ab produces a feeling of discomfort which foreshadows the anxiety of the third movement. The performer should draw attention to this variation and the altered, darker mood that it creates.

The image shows a musical score for measures 63 and 64. It consists of three staves: a single bass staff at the top and a grand staff (treble and bass) below. The top staff contains a melodic line with a triplet marking and a dynamic marking of *mp*. The grand staff below provides harmonic accompaniment with chords and a steady bass line. The measure number 63 is written above the first staff.

Musical Example 6 Measures 63 and 64, “Young Corn.”

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

Compared to the first movement, *Young Corn* is not as technically acrobatic, but is challenging in different ways. While *Stone City, Iowa* is physically taxing, *Young Corn* is ‘emotionally’ taxing. The tubist must stay engaged in the emotion of the movement for the entire duration. The movement also presents challenges in the high tessitura, wide intervals, and an instance in which the soloist must enter on an F#4 after a beat of rest.

*Young Corn* might cause issues for the soloist because of fatigue from playing the first movement coupled with the high tessitura of the second movement. The performer might consider taking a break between practicing the first and second movements when practicing the work as a whole. The soloist should decrease the length of this break as the embouchure strengthens.

To prepare the wide intervals, the tubist should isolate these intervals by listening to them on the piano, buzzing, singing, playing slowly, and then at tempo. The F#4 that occurs after a short rest is a notable example of one of these intervals. Audiation is helpful for an accurate entrance on the F#4, the soloist should spend adequate time listening to, buzzing, and playing the interval from the A#3 to the F#4.

In the interview with Manning, he explained that buzzing and singing phrases was a useful technique in his preparation of this work. The tubist should select a phrase and play it on the piano. The soloist should then buzz or sing with the piano while regarding intonation and smooth intervals. After multiple repetitions, one should play the phrase on the tuba with the same attention to detail. The primary goal of implementing this practice technique is to remove physicality so that the soloist can focus on phrasing and the emotions that should be portrayed.

## American Gothic

"American Gothic" is a focal point for this musical work. When discussing *Four Paintings by Grant Wood*, York uses this movement as a point of departure. York explained that most people know of this famous painting. Her aim was not to portray Wood's painting through her writing, but to represent reactions to the painting and his emotional response to these reactions. York sought to capture the complexity of Wood's relationship with Iowa - he was fond of the landscape and the people, but those people did not always accept him. Additionally, York includes Wood's feelings of a childhood lost and internal conflicts of living as a suppressed homosexual in rural 1930s culture.

To capture Wood's complex character, York includes three primary motives which represent specific elements of these relationships. These motives relate to the reception of *American Gothic's* debut. York explains that these motives represent anxiety and fear for the Iowan's harsh reactions, an anguished longing to escape to the simplicity of childhood, and the militaristic marching of the Iowans to protest. There was no record of an actual protest, but York utilized 'artistic liberty' and was inspired by Evans' description of "indignant Iowans"<sup>67</sup> to imagine a protest by them.

The opening piano accompaniment is meant to suggest alarm bells because of the uproar that was created by *American Gothic*. To achieve a sense of alarm, York writes dissonant major seconds and heavy, accented off-beats. York suggested that this accompaniment is foreshadowing the impending turmoil, as to say, "watch out, you are going to be in trouble with this one."<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Evans, 103.

<sup>68</sup> "Interview #1 with Barbara York," Appendix A.



Musical Example 7 Measures 1 and 2, “American Gothic.”

The piano accompaniment introduces the tuba solo, which begins in mm. 3 with the first motive - the “anxiety/fear” motive. York explained that this anxiety is complex in Wood’s feelings towards his native land and the people that live there. She explained



movement is a “positive longing; it’s nostalgic. However, the listener might feel that you can’t be nostalgic anymore in American Gothic because of the danger. The nostalgia is gone.”<sup>69</sup> An awareness of the interconnection between these musical figures is important and the performer should emphasize these differences.



Musical Example 9 Measure 3, “Young Corn.”



Musical Example 10 Measure 5, “American Gothic.”

After presenting the “anxiety” motive in various keys and registers, York introduces a motive in the left hand of the accompaniment in mm. 27 which is meant to suggest a longing for the comfort of childhood. She explains this motive:

On one hand, he is missing his childhood roots, on the other he has been attacked by the very people he loves, and he also now sees them as three-dimensional. It's almost like, ‘Tell me that my childhood was real, that these people were genuine, that I can get back there. But I know I can't.’<sup>70</sup>

This motive is repeated several different times in the solo part. York confirmed that the performer could conceptualize the words “over and over” during this melody. The soloist might think about these words as fitting the melody in order to visualize Wood’s longing and the fatigue that Wood experienced as a result of his anxiety. She responded that this

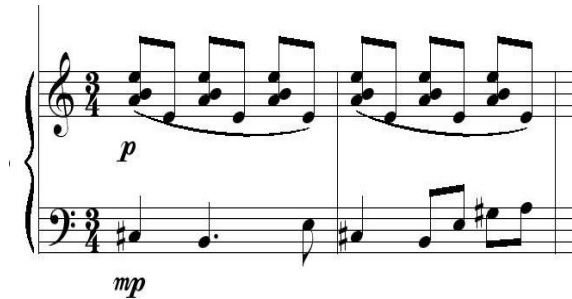
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<sup>69</sup> “Interview #1 with Barbara York,” Appendix A.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.



conceptualization fits the melody well.<sup>71</sup> This “longing” motive is lyrical and should be played in a cantabile style - softly and legato. Additionally, the performer should not breathe after the dotted quarter note but maintain the integrity of the phrase.



Musical Example 11 Measures 27 and 28, “American Gothic.”

The third significant motive of *American Gothic* occurs in mm. 53 of the accompaniment. This triplet rhythm was written to depict the “militaristic” marching of the Iowans to protest Grant Wood’s painting; this motive could be called the



Musical Example 12 Measure 53 and 54, “American Gothic.”

“militaristic” motive. There is a notable interchange between the accompaniment and the soloist during this section. The accompaniment presents the “militaristic” motive in alteration with the soloist playing the “anxiety” motive - although the “anxiety” motive is

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<sup>71</sup> “Interview #1 with Barbara York,” Appendix A.

transposed up a fourth. This juxtaposition of motives suggests a correlation between the militaristic Iowans and the anxiety that Grant Wood felt towards them. Following this interplay, in mm. 69, the music crescendos for seven measures from *mezzo forte* until the interchange is reversed - the “anxiety” motive is in the accompaniment and the “militaristic” motive in the solo part.

The subtle off-beat accompaniment in mm. 86 recalls the “alarm” of the movement’s opening. This accompaniment has a much thicker texture, and the dissonance is not as sharp. The opening “alarm” accompaniment consists of two pitches: “E” and “D.” This section at mm. 86 consists of predominantly minor chords over a “C” pedal in the left hand. The soloist plays the “longing” motive with the recurrence of the “alarm” accompaniment.

The various occurrences of the motives at different places in the movement highlight the complexity of emotions that Grant Wood experienced in the wake of *American Gothic*’s reception. The performers should understand which motive is being performed and how they are connected in both the solo part and the accompaniment. This awareness assists with recreating York’s intended concept of this movement.

In the only cadenza of the work, York combines all the previously heard motives to summarize Grant Wood’s emotions about *American Gothic*’s reception. York describes this cadenza as “a cry of anguish about the treatment he received, partly because he can’t go back to the safety of childhood.”<sup>72</sup> In the opening of this cadenza, York recalls the quick, sixteenth note passage that was presented in mm. 12-15. York

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<sup>72</sup> Personal communications with Barbara York.

explained that this melody is another way that she expresses Wood’s anxiety and fear - the melody is an extension of the “anxiety” motive.



Musical Example 13 Excerpt #1 from the cadenza of “American Gothic.”

After recalling the technical passages, the cadenza expands upon the “longing” and “militaristic” motives. The “longing” motive is sequenced in the third phrase of the cadenza where the final three notes are repeated an octave higher and then another octave higher. The conceptualization of the “longing” motive that was mentioned previously fits this repetition: “over and over, and over, and over.”



Musical Example 14 Excerpt #2 from the cadenza of “American Gothic.”

After this sequence, the soloist unwinds the “militaristic” motive. This melody is sped up, slowed down, and then becomes a version of the motive from the beginning of the second movement. As was described, the four-note melody at the end of the “anxiety” motive is a transformation of the melody from movement two. The end of the cadenza is not the minor ending of the “anxiety” motive, but the major reminiscent version from the second movement.



Musical Example 15 Excerpt #3 from the Cadenza of “American Gothic.”

This recurrence of the reminiscent melody occurs after the slowing down of the “militaristic” motive which might suggest that the “slowing down” of the “militaristic” motive represents either the retreat of the protesters or Wood coming to terms with the Iowan’s dissatisfaction with his work. She explained that her primary goal in writing the complex cadenza was to combine the previously heard motives.<sup>73</sup>

Performance challenges of the third movement are not as pronounced as those of previous movements. Throughout *American Gothic*, the tessitura is in the middle register (E2-G3), but the soloist must play a few passages above the staff. This lower tessitura is a relief from the frequent upper register playing of the first two movements.



Musical Example 16 Measures 12 through 15, “American Gothic.”

The most rhythmically-dense section that might cause technical issues occurs in mm. 12 and 14. Slow, deliberate practice during the early stages of preparation assists

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

with clarity in these measures. It is important to observe the written articulations and create contrast between the slurs and the staccatos.

In mm. 18, the soloist must enter on an E4 after two measures of rest. This is not as challenging as the entry on the F#4 in the previous movement because the E pedal in the left hand of the accompaniment assists with audiation. The recommended technique for practicing an accurate entrance on this note is the same as for the previous movement. The soloist should play the final note of the phrase which precedes the period of rest and then practice singing, buzzing, and playing the E4. While rehearsing with a pianist, one might request that the accompanist play the musical figure during the rest while giving more weight to the pedal E. This might help that the soloist audiate the pitch to assist with an accurate entrance.

Because of the importance of motives, the performers will gain insight from highlighting on the score the various recurrences of the motives. These markings might create distraction on a performance score, therefore, the performers should make copies and become familiar with the motives. In rehearsal, the soloist should communicate the programmatic elements of the motives with the collaborative pianist.

The primary performance consideration of the cadenza is how one might communicate the “cry of anguish” that should be evoked during this section. The performer might consider dynamic change, tempo alteration, and the use of silence in the cadenza. York mentioned that she views music as the combination of the composer’s “humanity” with the performer’s “humanity.” The cadenza is an excellent opportunity for the performer to reflect on this combination.

The performer should consider the segue from the third movement into the fourth. “American Gothic” ends after the cadenza and the pianist immediately begins the final movement. Though York did not specify on the score whether there should be a pause between the final note of the cadenza and the first note of *Parson Weems’ Fable*, she performed the segue *attacca*. Manning’s recording of the work divides the movements into separate tracks.<sup>74</sup> Ultimately, the interpretation is left up to the performer and should be rehearsed with the collaborative pianist.

### Parson Weems’ Fable

Barbara York explained that the fourth movement, *Parson Weems’ Fable*, is based on Grant Wood’s thoughts about the historical fable instead of his personal life. This painting was a fitting choice by York to be the final movement because it was the latest in the group of four requested by Manning and “arguably Wood’s last truly great painting.”<sup>75</sup> York suggested that “this movement is more simple because it’s almost all about the painting and not about Grant Wood’s inner life.”<sup>76</sup> The painting is theatrical in the large, red curtain and Wood’s dramatic portrayal of George Washington and his father. York uses melodrama<sup>77</sup> to communicate her interpretation of Wood’s thoughts regarding this fable.

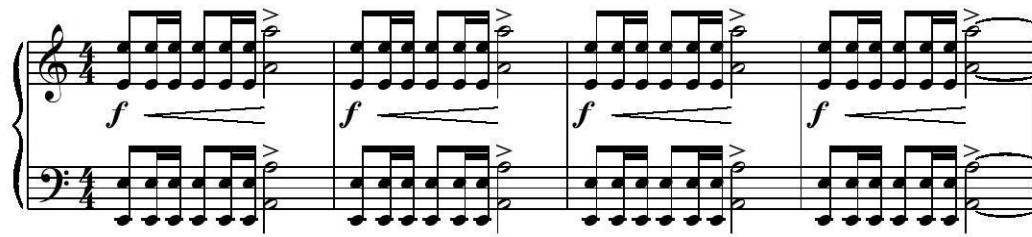
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<sup>74</sup> Manning, *Field Notes*.

<sup>75</sup> Evans, 279.

<sup>76</sup> “Interview #3 with Barbara York,” September 20, 2020, Appendix A.

<sup>77</sup> Melodrama is defined as “a sensational dramatic piece with exaggerated characters and exciting events intended to appeal to the emotions.”



Musical Example 17 Measures 1 through 4, “Parson Weems’ Fable.”

The work begins with a musical quote from “Hail to the Chief” which was first performed on February 22, 1815 to honor the late George Washington and the end of the War of 1812.<sup>78</sup> This musical quote sets the stage for the “Allegro Furioso” in mm. 6 and the dramatic entry of the soloist two measures later. York explained that the musical figures do not suggest any specific idea. However, the complete section from mm. 6-27 is meant to portray George Washington’s father and his reaction to his son chopping down his cherry tree. This section is grandiose and ends in a perfect authentic cadence at mm. 25. The performer should play this section as an exaggerated stage performer, with a full, robust tone, extreme contrast, and dramatic phrasing.

York explains that the slower, lyrical section that follows is meant to represent George Washington’s exaggerated apology to his father for chopping down the cherry tree. The melody is lyrical and, although the meter is in common time, it can be felt in two. As with the rest of the movement, this section should be performed with an exaggerated style. The “Dolce and Legato” section consists of four phrases: three of equal length and an extended phrase. The equal phrases consist of four measures, except for the second phrase in the section (from mm. 31-36). This phrase is extended with a

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<sup>78</sup> *Hail to the Chief*, Library of Congress, Washington, DC, 2002.

three-measure sequence, for a total of six measures. York includes a short piano melody in mm. 36 that connects the first half of the “Dolce and Legato” section with the second half. The performers might add a “rallentando” to this measure with an “a tempo” in mm. 37. This is not written in the score but complements the melodramatic style.



Musical Example 18 Measures 35 through 37, “Parson Weems’ Fable.”

After the musical representation of George Washington's apology to his father, the accompaniment reintroduces the father with a recurrence of the “Hail to the Chief” quote followed by a recapitulation of the opening melody. Rather than an exact repetition of the opening, York replaces the second half with new material beginning at mm. 59. This section, “Joyfully,” is slighter faster and in A major - the parallel major to the rest of the fourth movement. York explains that this section represents the joy and pride that George Washington’s father felt because of his apology. It is grandiose and melodramatic; when explaining the melodramatic aspect of this movement, Barbara York mimicked silent film actors and their overstated movements. Just as York portrayed the silent film actors, so should the performer overemphasize this final section - particularly the phrasing - to evoke the theatrical elements of the movement.



At the end of the piece, York includes a musical quotation of “Battle Hymn of the Republic” in the piano accompaniment that is continued with the eighth notes of the tuba solo. Following this quote, York extends an authentic cadence in the accompaniment, which begins on the E dominant seventh chord on beat 3 of mm. 88. Then she inserts three repetitions of “Hail to the Chief” prior to the resolution to the tonic in the final three measures. Not only does this final section function as a representation of the father’s joy, but it also acts as a grand finale to the entire work.

The image displays a musical score for measures 87 through 94. It is written in 4/4 time with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The score is divided into two systems. The first system (measures 87-90) shows a tuba solo in the bass clef and piano accompaniment in the grand staff. The piano accompaniment features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes in the right hand and a more static bass line in the left hand. A forte (*f*) dynamic marking is present. The second system (measures 91-94) continues the tuba solo and piano accompaniment, ending with a final cadence. The piano accompaniment includes a series of chords and a final resolution to the tonic. A forte (*f*) dynamic marking is also present in the second system.

Musical Example 19 Measures 87 through 94, “Parson Weems’ Fable.”

The technical considerations of the fourth movement are similar to those of previous movements. The primary challenges of this movement include the use of the extreme upper register, issues of clarity on the quicker rhythms at the faster tempo, and a consideration of the intended musical style. The upper register is prevalent during the “Dolce and Legato” section. The highest note of the work, G4, is written in measure 42

and approached by a small leap. Though the movement does not stay in the upper register throughout, this “Dolce and Legato” section presents endurance challenges after the previous ten minutes of physically demanding playing.

The tubist should manage fatigue while practicing this lyrical section. An awareness of fatigue and making adjustments in rehearsal, such as playing down the octave, is important to prevent damage to the embouchure. The soloist should practice endurance in the upper register and incorporate the upper register into a daily routine or warm up session.

*Parson Weems’ Fable* does not contain as many technically challenging passages as previous movements. However, the performer should not overlook the relatively few passages that might present issues with clarity. For example, the sixteenth note which follows the dotted eighth in mm. 9 should be clearly articulated within the musical texture. The performer should also consider technical accuracy in mm. 19-24. Slow, deliberate practice with a metronome is essential for preparing these sections – particularly the leaps into beat three of mm. 19 and beat two of mm. 24.

Mm. 23 is another instance in which the soloist must enter on a high note (specifically an F4) after a brief period of rest. The performer should be well acquainted with this technical demand from prior movements and should implement similar strategies for practicing this entrance.

It is important to consider the style throughout the entirety of *Parson Weems’ Fable*. As mentioned in this analysis, melodrama is paramount to the performance of this movement. The performer should overemphasize musical elements in each phrase to

achieve this style. Melodrama was at the forefront of York's musical conception of *Parson Weems' Fable* and should be well-communicated through the performance.

## CHAPTER V – CONCLUSION

Barbara York completed extensive background research about Grant Wood and the four paintings requested by John Manning. *Four Paintings by Grant Wood* contains many extramusical elements that require an understanding of York's intended programmatic effects to perform the piece as she envisioned it. Familiarity with these details increases the understanding of York's intellectual approach to composing this work.

York used the information that she gained from her research, combined with her own insight and experiences, to compose *Four Paintings by Grant Wood*. During the interviews with York, it was clear that her intention was not to create a piece of music that should be interpreted and performed one way, but one where the performer has a role in the music making process. She explained that she tries “not to ever be rigid in what I want from people in my pieces - most of the time. There might be one or two occasions where I say ‘I really want that.’ Otherwise, I try to leave room for the artist to interpret.”<sup>79</sup> It is important to acknowledge and encourage the performer's role in utilizing their own experiences to interpret and perform *Four Paintings by Grant Wood*.

York recommended reading Evans' biography of Grant Wood to better understand his life and the paintings which influenced this piece. Reading this book might take time but would increase the performer's background knowledge of Grant Wood and provide insight about his life that influenced Barbara York. She explained that “there's a lot of subtlety in his work that I tried to put into my own work of him because

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<sup>79</sup> “Interview #2 with Barbara York,” Appendix A.

this particular biography was very rich in information.” Ideally, for a strong performance of *Four Paintings by Grant Wood*, one should follow a similar line of research as York in composing this work. The performer should have a similar understanding of Grant Wood and the historical context of these four paintings to prepare this piece.

Because the work is titled *Four Paintings by Grant Wood*, it is useful to spend time viewing the paintings closely. An understanding of the paintings will assist the performer to realize how these details influenced Barbara York. The soloist should revisit the paintings throughout the preparation of the work. There is a mutual relationship between understanding the paintings and preparing the piece - preparing the musical work aids with the understanding of the paintings and, similarly, a greater familiarity with the paintings enhances the performance of the work.

Manning mentioned in the interview that he visited the city (and namesake of the painting) which influenced *Stone City, Iowa* while preparing this work. He also visited the house which inspired Grant Wood to paint *American Gothic*. Visiting these locations in Iowa would not be necessary to perform this piece of music but might provide further insight for the performer.

Manning explained that he intended the commission to be programmatic, “music that is inspired by specific paintings by a specific painter,” but continued to say that York “took it a step further and made it picturesque and more meaningful.” Without considering the programmatic elements of *Four Paintings by Grant Wood* and the amount of detail that York included in this work, the piece stands alone as an interesting piece of music. The melodies and themes are tuneful and the work is well written.

However, Barbara York developed these musical ideas to create meaning behind this work that is enriching to the performer.

When the performance is supplemented with projections of the paintings, the reception of the piece is greatly enhanced. The performer should consider displaying the paintings on a screen or in a program for a performance. Manning explained that he displayed the paintings on a projector during the performance of this work. The musician would need to plan these logistical details in advance and arrange for a means to switch paintings between movements. One might consider enlisting the assistance of a stage manager and practicing coordination during a dress rehearsal. It would be important to communicate that there is no pause between movements three and four. In addition to displaying the paintings, the performers might communicate details from the paintings to the audience. Manning explained that York spoke about the music and the paintings prior to their performance of the work.

As was mentioned in her biography, York died in the fall of 2020. Prior to her death, York spent over eighteen years creating relationships with members of the tuba community and contributing compositions to the repertoire. Because of her prolific output, tuba and euphonium performers have many opportunities to perform her music. This dissertation shall inform musicians about York's music (particularly *Four Paintings by Grant Wood*) and assist with creating a performance consistent with her intent.

## APPENDIX A – Interview Transcripts

Interview with John Manning, September 18, 2020

**Allen Parrish:** I know you're busy. So, we'll get right into it with the questions that I sent you. In the beginning, what led you to commission *Four Paintings by Grant Wood*? And how did you connect with Barbara?

**John Manning:** Okay. All right. I think I first became aware of Barbara's work through my first T.A. here [at The University of Iowa]. I came to Iowa in 2004, my T.A. was Josh Calkin, who's now the professor at Wayne State College in Wayne, Nebraska and he was playing a piece (maybe commissioned by his teacher) called *Arioso Gloria* by Barbara. It's really a beautiful piece. I mean, to say, it's simple writing, but sophisticated enough; it really had a nice beauty to it. So, after I learned that piece, I might have learned a couple of more pieces by her - maybe the concerto and I can't remember - I've bought so many of her pieces now. So, I first became aware through *Arioso Gloria* and Barbara may remember better than I, but I do remember playing a recital with her at Pitt State at that regional conference. I don't remember whether it was Grant Wood or what I played. I don't really remember the years too well. But I think I first played with her at that regional. I can't remember what year it was. So, when I was doing a recording project, it was my second CD and I wanted to feature music that had Iowa connections. I recorded one piece that was written by Kate Wallman, who was one of my former T.A.s and she was an organist. And she wrote a piece that can be played for tuba and organ or tuba and piano and a piece by a composer from Cedar Rapids.

So, when I was looking to find more, I thought “what if I were to commission a composer to write a piece about something connected to Iowa?” I remembered reading a children's book to my daughter about Grant. And, because when we first moved to Iowa, we were kind of learning about the states. We talked about how he had the artist colony, how he used to teach at The University of Iowa and a little bit about his famous paintings. I saw some of his work in museums here in Iowa over the years and, of course, everybody knows about American Gothic. So, when I was searching for some kind of connection to Iowa, to the music from Iowa, *Fields Notes from Iowa* was the title of the CD. I thought well, I really liked Barbara's style of writing, and I enjoyed meeting and working with her. She was the first person I thought of because I really liked her style. I can't remember how I came up with the idea, but I think that I breached the topic. I just looked for all the old emails and I think Barbara had a different email address and I can't find them.

The basic idea was: "I would like to commission you to write a piece for me that has a program behind it where it's a musical depiction of several of Grant Woods paintings." And I don't know if I had decided which paintings by then, but she was excited by the idea because she had been doing a lot of commissions in memory of a lost loved one or sad things or just people in general or for people. But I think that this request intrigued and excited her because she had something to latch on to that was positive and happy. She could probably tell you best what her reaction was, but I remember being really excited about it. I got the funds to commission it and when I first got it, I knew right away, I thought, "yeah, this is fantastic."



It is not an easy piece and Barbara writes really well for the tuba. But she, not being a tuba player, doesn't know what it feels like to stay in a certain range for certain amounts of time and that's actually good, because it challenged me. But it can be (some parts of the piece) can be really tiring. Just because she writes mostly in the f tuba range - and it's such a beautiful range, of course she's going to write for that. But it's deceptively taxing. A lot of her music is deceptively taxing. She writes really slow, beautiful melodies that morph over time, and they tend to stay above middle C. So that was a challenge, but it was a good thing for me. It made me a better player and it was a challenge to record and I don't think I ever performed it perfectly live. But the recording: I was able to record it in more digestible chunks where I could take rests. So, getting back to your question, I think the next thing was: how did you choose the painting?

**Allen Parrish:** Yes. Why did you choose the specific paintings that you did?

**John Manning:** I think they just appealed to me and, of course I wanted to include American Gothic. I bought a biography about Grant Wood.

**Allen Parrish:** Is that R. Tripp Evans', Grant Wood: a life?

**John Manning:** That sounds right because I gave it to Barbara.

**Allen Parrish:** Oh, yes. I read the same book. So, I've read the entire thing.

**John Manning:** Alright, so we all come from the same place. I think after reading that biography, I learned about how, in some ways, American Gothic was a blessing and a curse. I learned about his childhood and his sexuality, and I learned about his different techniques and stories. I'm not even sure I knew about "Parson Weems' Fable" until reading the book. And I thought, "Wow, that's really quirky and it doesn't quite look like a typical Grant Wood painting." I figured I had to have American Gothic in there. But the other thing is, I think I chose stone city, because it is a real place in Iowa, just a couple hours from me. I think the painting is called "stone city, 'comma' Iowa. So, I'm not sure how many his paintings have the title Iowa in them, but that's one of the reasons but also, when you look at it, it's a really interesting painting because, as Barbara mentioned, the little horse and rider, the bridge over the river, the church, and then the village and the surrounding foothills and stuff. Around that time, I was bringing my daughter to summer camp. And on the way back, it wasn't far from Stone City, Iowa. So, we stopped in but there wasn't much to see. It's mostly just the bridge, a few buildings around it, maybe a restaurant, and a church. And that was it. The bridge is still there. I don't know if it's the same exact bridge in the painting or if it's been replaced. But it felt really personal after I visited the place. And I thought I remember trying to drive on the road, leaving town, trying to find the rough vantage point that he painted the perspective from, from the fields. I don't think I was successful, but I felt an attachment to that one. Because the theme of the album was music from Iowa, I thought it best to start off - I'm not even sure I specified which movement was first - I think I left that up to her, all I requested were these four paintings.

**Allen Parrish:** She mentioned that you did give her the four and she could arrange them in any way that she would like. I think in talking to her, she said that Grant is the horse rider in the first movement. And from the first movement to the second, that's Grant Wood riding into the second movement. The way that she crafted those paintings together is amazing.

**John Manning:** I also think it's really cool. How artwork can influence other artwork, you know like Mussorgsky's "Pictures at an Exhibition" wouldn't have happened if that exhibition of Victor Hartman's works didn't exist after his death and didn't affect Mussorgsky so much. And so, I've always had a fascination with programmatic music - instrumental music that tells a story or has a connection or connotation to some place or thing has always been fascinating to me. I've even taught a class on program music. It's an interesting niche of orchestral music, or instrumental music. Because it's specifically evocative, without using words, which is really the strength of music: it tells stories without words, it conveys emotions without speech, unless you're talking about vocal music. So, I think that explains *Stone City, Iowa*. And, and I'm not even sure when I first heard it, with the piano ostinato, that I guessed that that was a horse. Because in the scale of the painting, you don't really see that horse and rider on that large of a scale: it's tiny and in the center of the painting, and in some ways, it is a focal point. But she easily could have focused on the church or the hillside or a tree or something else. I think it is fairly centered in the location. I'm not looking at the painting right now. But I think it's fairly centralized in the canvas.

**Allen Parrish:** And I'm pretty sure that's true.

**John Manning:** So, I think Barbara had to tell me that the opening is the rider. And I thought "Oh, okay." To me, it's just like this junky little scene. And once she had informed me, after I started practicing a little bit, then it was perfect, because now I had a real image and a focus.

**Allen Parrish:** So, would you agree that the performer of this piece would do well to pay attention to these paintings and how they might have influenced the music?

**John Manning:** That's what the whole piece is about.

**Allen Parrish:** It's pretty straightforward.

**John Manning:** It's funny, she chose the title. She didn't call it "Four movements, slightly inspired by Grant Wood," she literally called it "Four Paintings by Grant Wood." So that's exactly what I was looking for: a musical evocation of those paintings. And Grant Wood is a celebrated artist and a celebrated Iowan. And, for example, "Stone City" actually took place in Iowa, and a lot of his paintings were set in Iowa. So absolutely, in fact, I encourage, and I have many times, performed it with a slideshow showing the paintings behind the performer on a digital projector. Not doing anything special, just stagnant photos, and maybe telling the audience in fact, perhaps even Barbara in some

performances, talked to the audience about the paintings and the music. So absolutely, yeah. The performer should have in mind the paintings, and here's several reasons why.

Well, one because it was written that way, because the composer intended that way and the commissioner, or me, wanted that connection. But beyond that, because of the technical challenges to this piece. I spent hours and hours working on that piece and never completely perfected it. I probably could continue on for the rest of my life working on it. But because of the technical challenges, I think it helps the performers - the tuba player and the pianist - to try to escape the burden of focusing so much on the technique and be inspired by the visual mental imagery that the paintings conjure. And it kind of distracts you from the job of: "Okay, I can hit this high C sharp, I can play these sixteenths and I got to make sure this A is in tune," because we're all thinking of that. But I think we need to supersede - that the music needs to go beyond the technique. And all those hours I spent on the technique, I always tried to make sure that even if, as the technique, the performance, and the accuracy got better, I tried to make sure I embedded the spirit and nature of those images in my head.

**Allen Parrish:** Sounds a lot like the window picture analogy where your technique is the window and your musicality is the picture outside of the window.

**John Manning:** That's a good way to put it, yeah "framing."

**Allen Parrish:** So, speaking of preparing this work, what are some specific things (if you can remember) that you did to prepare for performing and recording this work?

**John Manning:** I played it very slow. This is where Barbara's music can be beautifully insidious. She would write small little patterns that repeat but one note or two notes are changed. And that was always the killer. It was always on a high note that I seemed to have trouble with. I mean that in the best sense of the word. I love her and I love her writing. The insidious part is that those subtle little delicacies, as a pianist, all you're doing is activating a different finger. But as a tuba player, it might be a lip slur, it might be a partial or a note that it's really difficult to center, or something like that, and it's good for us to be players to not have any sympathy because we shouldn't be whining about our technical challenges, because all instruments have technical challenges. But the one huge difference between brass instruments and piano is that there's one key for every single note on the piano, whereas we only have seven different options, and they repeat themselves in partials and you can put down your finger on the right button and get the wrong note, which is really easy to do - as you know.

**Allen Parrish:** Especially in that upper register that she likes to write in.

**John Manning:** Right. And that's the exact area where the partials are so close together, that your odds of hitting the wrong note by accident are much higher. And so the second thing I did besides slow repetition was a lot of singing, careful singing and buzzing, because that's what I recommend to all tuba players, especially in the upper range - is to be able to sing and buzz everything that you hear. So that you can manifest it through the tuba with more authority and accuracy. But even then, sometimes fatigue sets in, even if

you hear it and you know you're normally successful on it, when fatigue sets in, you can easily lose it. So other strategies I had to do were to just remember - if I had an eighth rest, after playing like fifty 16th notes, I'd have to just take my mouthpiece off my lips just to give myself half a second of blood returning to the lips, half a second of rest. So I had to consciously sometimes remember to - when I had the opportunity, whether it was just a very brief moment - give my lips a rest and I had to force the tuba away from my face because I often keep the tuba and the mouthpiece really ready to go - as you might know, I try not to waste too much time leaving the mouthpiece breathing, but I have to step away from my work when I get really tired. So that was another strategy. I think we've talked about slow practice and repetition, singing and buzzing, as well as, once I learned it, to pace myself and give myself breaks, whether that be a full run through or making sure I'm resting during the rests, or only practicing 16 bars at a time or four bars at a time. There is probably more to this answer, but that's most of it.

**Allen Parrish:** If those are the things that stick out to you, then those are definitely worth noting. So, you mentioned that you chose “Stone City, Iowa,” because it was, it had Iowa in the title, and it was close to you, American Gothic because it was popular. Would you say for “Young Corn,” you chose it because you're interested in the painting?

**John Manning:** At first, I was. Yes, at first, I was just interested in the look of the painting. Because it was one of those several paintings that he did where he had the style of - almost voluptuously shaped trees and geography and rounded, organic looking, or even human looking, elements to his landscapes. And I think I originally just chose it

because I liked it. And it was a little different from the other ones. But it was Barbara that really added a whole new dimension. And it might have been revealed in the novel (I can't remember), in the biography. But something I didn't know, and maybe Barbara told me, or the book included, but the term "young corn" not only refers to the, literally, corn that comes up in the first months of planting. It might have been a nickname for children in Iowa. I've never heard that myself, but maybe in the 20s and 30s, it was - young corn. But that was one twist that I didn't think about when choosing the painting. What a genius of Barbara, that she latched onto the struggles, if you remember, the story in the book of young Grant under the kitchen table drawing while his dad was out working and his dad wasn't really supportive of him and his mom protected him. He was protected by his mom as the suffering artist. I'm sure his dad didn't understand the whole thing. And I think part of it had to do with him not being a farmer and wanting to be an artist and part of it might have had to do with his sexuality or whatever was happening at the time. But he, obviously, did not strike me as having a very happy childhood. You might have read the book more recently than I, but I don't think he was beat up or anything. But I don't think his dad was very affectionate. And he was distant from him and close to his mom. And always was. And I think that the really sad mode and style is absolutely gorgeous. The melody is bittersweet, I think, and sometimes memories of childhood are sweet, sometimes memories of childhood are bitter. And I think Barbara captured that concept really well. I have no idea if Grant Wood had that in mind at all when he did the painting. But Barbara took some poetic license and created a melody that really made sense and helped me play it well as a kind of tortured young artist who was a little troubled and



tormented or even just growing pains. But it's a beautiful slow movement and that's what Barbara's forte is. Um, which one are we on now? "*Parson Weems*"?"

**Allen Parrish:** Yes, *Parson Weems*'.

**John Manning:** And I remember choosing that one because it appears not typical for Grant Woods' style. It's almost like a parody, not of himself, but it's almost like a political cartoon. And symbolic - it was almost surreal with the figure of the cherry tree and George Washington's head on, was it George Washington's head?

**Allen Parrish:** Yes, the George Washington head is from the Athenian portrait, which is one of the most famous portraits of George Washington. So, Grant Wood used that portrait on young George Washington.

**John Manning:** Yeah. Which is surreal. And the Parson, he was leaning over and wagging his finger, and I think you could see the hatchet behind his back, "I did not cut down the cherry tree." So, as far as selecting the painting, I thought it was a unique, different type of painting compared to the other three. And it was Barbara that put the sense of humor into it. I can't remember, I might have suggested this, but it begins with the military tune called "for ruffles and flourishes," which is reserved for the president - I used to be in the military band. And so, if there's a general you do three iterations, then play the national anthem or a fanfare, but if it's the President - it's only the President of the United States that gets four. So, I think I might have said something like that to her

like "is there a way you can use this idea?" And she did it beautifully and so that's why it opens like that. It was a tough one, because it's very quirky and angular, but fun. The other clever thing she did is quoted, not only "for ruffles and flourishes," but she quoted...

**Allen Parrish:** Battle Hymn of the Republic?

**John Manning:** Was that what it is?

**Allen Parrish:** I think so, or "Hail to the Chief," one of the two.

**John Manning:** Yeah, I'll have to listen to it carefully. I think it's "Hail to the Chief." And I think there's also, there might be two bars of "God Bless America." I'll have to listen to them again. But yes, she used a musical quote. Kind of as a pun playing on the young George Washington. There's a faster section in that last movement. Right?

**Allen Parrish:** The "joyfully" section.

**John Manning:** I'm not sure what she was thinking for that section. Did she tell you?

**Allen Parrish:** Yes. So, the first opening section is the father angry at the boy. The lyrical middle section is the boy apologizing to his father. And then the recap of the beginning section leads to this "joyfully" section, which represents the pride and joy that

George Washington's father felt for his son apologizing for chopping down the cherry tree.

**John Manning:** It's coming back to me now. I hope I played it that way. I didn't remember the story until you mentioned it. So, what's interesting is that, you know, I intended it to be programmatic, to be music that is inspired by specific paintings by a specific painter. And then, Barbara is the one that took it a step further and made it picturesque and more meaningful. And not only was it about the paintings, but it was about his life, it was about the life of the subject of one of the paintings. It had a sense of humor - it has a sense of beauty and triumph. I don't think we talked too much about American Gothic, but American Gothic - she might have said something along those lines - but I mentioned it as a blessing and a curse. Everybody in the world recognizes that painting. And it's the most parodied painting in the world. And I did, around that time, get down to go see the Gothic house. So, in Southern Central Iowa, wherever it is. And it's pretty unremarkable but the painting is amazing. And you know, we both read the same book about the story of the dentist and the pitchfork and symbolism.

**Allen Parrish:** It's crazy how much symbolism is in that painting.

**John Manning:** I'm not sure if Barbara embedded anything about that from the painting. It's kind of like he became so famous, such a superstar, because of that painting - it's like, when people hit the jackpot, or sell a million records on one song and instant fame. The painting has a serious tone, but there's also a mysterious nature to it. And there's almost

some humor involved. Like, why are they standing up there, etc. But the angst and the mix of emotions that Barbara uses in that movement is quite interesting. I'm sure he's thrilled that he had so much success and made so much money off of American Gothic. But yet, he wasn't looking to be a superstar, he just liked to wear his overalls and keep to himself. And I seem to remember that some of the publicity was pretty brutal towards him - he almost got more attention than he wanted at the time. So, I think that there's an angst to the themes in that movement that she wrote, they are beautiful, but have a tragic edge to them. And represent that, maybe in some ways, he wished he never did the painting or had second thoughts.

**Allen Parrish:** I definitely got that from the work as well.

**John Manning:** So, I'm lucky because I got to stand on the heads - on the shoulders of two geniuses: Grant Wood and Barbara York. And all I had to do is play the music.

**Allen Parrish:** We actually had her in our studio class, because we're commissioning a work from her, and one of the students asked what was her favorite piece of music that she's written, and *Four Paintings by Grant Wood* was one of the two or three that she mentioned.

**John Manning:** Well, it's one of my favorites that I've ever recorded. That's for sure.

**Allen Parrish:** It's one of my favorites that I've played as well. That's why I'm doing my dissertation on it.

**John Manning:** Cool, great.

**Allen Parrish:** But I think I have everything that I needed, and I really appreciate your time, especially taking time out of your busy schedule. You have a great day.

**John Manning:** You too. Take care. Bye.

**Barbara York:** Which movement you want to talk about?

**Allen Parrish:** I'm thinking the section I just read in the biography was the section regarding American Gothic. So, I think, since that painting is fresh in my mind, it might be good to start with the third movement.

**Barbara York:** Yeah, and that's a very well-known painting but until you have read more of the biography, it doesn't always make sense. It's really interesting that he asked people who were friends; his sister and a family friend who posed for that. Even with the perspective, he was putting on where they looked, in the painting, they looked rather hard and harsh and judgmental. And if you notice in the window of the house behind them, the curtains are drawn upstairs and they're the same color as her dress - not quite the same color, but similar. And the lines are drawn downstairs and they're also brown. You know, everything is shut up inside. So, you can't see in - and there is this couple locking you from getting in. They are standing out there. They might as well be going [York mimics a stern facial expression], which they are not. But their faces are. It's really interesting because he was very close to his sister and she wasn't judgmental like that. But she didn't like posing for him so he could make his comment. And it's really interesting because I said at one point when I was talking about this piece, I think it was one of the times that John Manning played it. And I said, the question could be asked on this piece, did he like Iowans: did he like them or did he find them harsh and judgmental? And I said, "I think, both." He was very criticized for that painting because Iowans didn't like the way they were depicted. In the end, a lot of people found it unkind. And he was criticized for it

even in newspapers elsewhere, which is why we have [York sings the opening accompaniment] at the beginning. It's alarm bells going off because he created a stir with that. And it wasn't an easy ride for him on that painting. They didn't quite like him for it. Right? So he had [York plays the opening accompaniment on the piano], and then the tune comes in. It's quite angular and harsh and also a little bit militaristic later [York plays more of the piece]. It seems like people are marching up and going, "how dare you?" or, on the other hand, is that the Iowans who are doing that, right? Is that the people, he just painted to look like that. I think there's a lot of subtlety in his work that I tried to put into my own work of him because this particular biography was very rich in information, much more so than the other couple of things that I had read - which was primarily by art critics, which was good. We do not know anything about art, I will freely admit that. So, I learned from reading that. But to have this biography as well and then to be able to see into his emotions and his soul, a little bit, was very helpful. It's like every so often I stick this "longing theme" into the work as if I just want to go home and be a kid again.

**Allen Parrish:** Is that the rhythm from the third movement?

**Barbara York:** Yeah. I think that that is him, you know. [York plays the melody on the piano]. So that's the heart of "if I could just be under my mother's kitchen table with my crayons again on here and not have to be an adult." I hear that with so many young people, too: "I don't like this 'adulging' thing, it's hard." I love this new word: "adulging," right? "Adulging," it is hard, it really is hard. There's an element of having lost his safety along with the innocence. You know, I think we all do that when we go through puberty

and then grow into adults, we lose that innocent sense of safety like nobody's looking after you anymore kind of thing. You can go back and get support sometimes; you get support from the parents, but they're not protecting you anymore. You have to be out there and do it yourself. And then you become your own, you become a parent. You have to do it for somebody else. It's definitely really interesting. But I think there was always the sense of longing in him, you know, because we know that homosexuality at that point - in the 30s - was not acceptable in Iowa. Certainly not in rural Iowa. Elsewhere it was much more acceptable, but it was not acceptable when he went home. So, it was difficult for him to deal with the fact that he really loved Iowa because he had great memories of it and had a really interesting childhood with his mother and sister. But there was this element constantly juxtaposing that with the sense of criticism.

**Allen Parrish:** That makes sense. It seems like his mom still provided a little bit of protection, by living with him at the house at Turner Alley, just to keep the townspeople from talking.

**Barbara York:** You know, he felt safe with her and she loved him unconditionally. And it did give him some protection in that sense, and I think really was the main reason he was even painting at that point and to paint through that period where he had gone home.

**Allen Parrish:** Just like whenever he was a boy under the table, as you mentioned, his mom was looking after him. They seemed to, from what I've read in the biography, have had a really special relationship.



**Barbara York:** I think so because she seemed to understand him. And she kind of protected him from his father being that "generational" type of guy that he was - close minded. You know, "man up," "be a man," "drawing pictures is not manly." That kind of person.

**Allen Parrish:** So, the "American Gothic," the man, the dentist in American Gothic, kind of reminds me of Maryville [Grant Wood's father]. I saw that he painted his face to be looking at you, but not really giving you attention. And it seems like that might...

**Barbara York:** Yeah. Oh, I've never thought of that. That's true. Yeah. He's not really looking at you. Yeah, that is true.

**Allen Parrish:** And it seems like that's how he felt about his father. He was there watching him, but not really giving him attention.

**Barbara York:** That's really smart. Oh yeah.

**Allen Parrish:** I gathered that from the biography. So that's not original. But I'm learning.

**Barbara York:** I'm glad I read that because it completely changed the whole way that I approached the piece. First of all, I didn't know anything about art. So, I had to sit, look at the paintings and drawings. John picked the paintings. But he said you could put them in any order you want, so I put them in an order that I felt would work musically and emotionally as a journey. But then, reading this biography really helped me to understand the paintings better and to look for things in the paintings that I would not have looked

for if I hadn't known more about him as a person, because I'm just not perceptive about visual art. I mean, I don't know enough about visual art to have seen that without the help of the book.

**Allen Parrish:** Yeah. When I first looked at American Gothic, I just saw a couple of farmers and a pitchfork. I did not think of all the nuance that Grant Wood painted.

**Barbara York:** Neither did I. I went "oh, dear, I have to do American Gothic. It's like an icon." You know, it's so familiar. What could I possibly have to say about American Gothic? I'm not even American. You know, I've known American Gothic, but I didn't know anything about Grant Wood because I came down from Canada and it's like I had no idea that it was Grant Wood that had painted it or how it fit into his life or any of that. It was really interesting. Boy, it was educational for me to work on these paintings. It was great. It's one of the most interesting projects that I've been given because I've learned so much from doing it. And I'm really grateful to John Manning for commissioning it because it was just a great experience for me to have to deal with this artwork and this artist. And it was so interesting. I guess artists generally are pretty interesting? Yeah, I think we're all kind of quirky, don't you think? We're pretty weird. But, you know, it was just really interesting. And he was very observant about America and quite occasionally quite political in what he was doing, and very observant, but also looking behind things that he was seeing. He wasn't one-sided at all. He was able to put into his paintings the nuance of both "well, this is good, but this is not so good." And get both in the same painting, which was really amazing. Pretty incredible. He was able to get a lot of depth.

**Allen Parrish:** He is very multidimensional. Do you recall the portrait of his friend, the coming-of-age portrait? I don't remember who the friend was, but he painted him. And there were those two little boys that were beside him on one side. And there was a landscape in the background. I found that one particularly interesting.

**Barbara York:** I don't remember that one in particular, I have to go back and look again.

**Allen Parrish:** Let me go grab my book. Just speaking of how complex he was, this was a very complex painting. I have my book right here. This one right there.

**Barbara York:** Oh, yeah.

**Allen Parrish:** I thought "oh, it's just a picture of his friend." But if you look it's a coming-of-age painting, like the innocence you were talking about.

**Barbara York:** I could go back and look at all of these paintings with so much more attention, I think. Do you know the term "young corn"? From the second movement, "young corn" was what they called adolescent boys. So, for him, once you know about coming of age, there was that in his mind also. So much stuff.

**Allen Parrish:** You said that the rhythm in the beginning, the off-beats, was meant to suggest uneasiness or being stirred?

**Barbara York:** Yeah, it's like an alarm bell. And so, it's like "watch out, you are going to be in trouble with this one." There was this outcry about this like painting. There was a lot of discord about the painting.

**Allen Parrish:** And so, the tuba melody [from the beginning of movement 3], that's supposed to be militaristic?

**Barbara York:** No, I don't think so. I think what it is, that is anxiety and worry. I think when we get into [York sings a melody], that is more militaristic.

**Allen Parrish:** Oh, yeah. Right.

**Barbara York:** But this thing with the tuba [the melody from the beginning of movement 3]. Right? That's why this one comes in a lot. That comes in quite a bit in other movements. It's like that little kind of heartache. And it's like, "oh, my God. I've poked a stick into the wasps' nest here.

**Allen Parrish:** Gotten the people riled up.

**Barbara York:** "Oh my, I am in for it."

**Allen Parrish:** Yeah. And I see that in a bunch of different registers.

**Barbara York:** Yeah. [York plays a melody on piano]. It's all over the place.

**Allen Parrish:** That's anxiety. Nervousness?

**Barbara York:** Except this is not: [York sings melody from movement 3]. I think that's more like heartache. You know, it's like longing for some safety. "I wish I was home," because it comes right out of the movement before - if you'll look. The second movement finishes like that.

**Allen Parrish:** And then you lower it a half step in American Gothic.

**Barbara York:** Yes, I make it more... I make it minor, too. Right? And this is a longing for that home. And so, we bring that back in American Gothic with all the turmoil going on and "oh God, I've really lost it now." "I've lost that thing I was longing for" on the last page because it's all over that second movement.

**Allen Parrish:** It's interesting how you took the theme in young corn - to be so sweet - it's positive in movement two and then in movement three it's a darker longing.

**Barbara York:** Exactly. Yeah. It's positive, but longing. It's positive, but it's longing - nostalgic.

**Allen Parrish:** Nostalgic. That's a good word.

**Barbara York:** And then you feel like you can't be nostalgic anymore in American Gothic because there's danger and it's gone. I do that a lot in my work, I take a motive from somewhere and I use it again, but I will transform it into something else - that's kind of a signature of my writing. And this is one of those situations where I've taken something previously and it has a different or transformed meaning. It's not quite the same as it was. I think I was saying that in another interview I did the other day with the ITEC people (the ITEA people). I think that comes from my theatrical background where I spent a good decade working in the theater and even doing some writing theater and being able to see a story progress. Even though I don't write stories, I just make comments on things about the stories. But to take that motive or phrase and use it again, but transform it, is kind of a way of moving the emotional journey through. I think that is because it might still tell a story or comment on stories.

**Allen Parrish:** That sounds a lot similar to Wagner's Leitmotifs. Not exactly the same, but similar.

**Barbara York:** Exactly. Yeah. I don't write like that, but the use is similar. Exactly.

**Allen Parrish:** I'm looking through this movement. Are there any other significant details from the third movement? I'm sure we're going to discuss this piece a lot more in the future. But just initially, anything else?

**Barbara York:** No, I don't think so. I think we basically got them all.

**Allen Parrish:** It seems like you took the ideas of the militaristic, rigid rhythm and then the anxiety, like anxious and uncomfortable remembrance of Iowa and built a movement from that.

**Barbara York:** And it's interesting because in the march, you feel like that is still in 3/4. It's not "in 2" like a march, a non-march setting, but a march.

**Allen Parrish:** That's interesting.

**Barbara York:** So, it's like the brain or the mind are locked into an attitude. But it's not even quite militaristic either.

**Allen Parrish:** Yeah. It's like there's something behind the militaristic feel that is just not right.

**Barbara York:** That's right. Exactly. It's a quirky military, in that sense. I get quirky sometimes. And sometimes, I don't know why I'm doing something, but later I'll look at it

and think “that's why I did that” because it says a little more than if I just have been absolutely in the box.

**Allen Parrish:** Yeah. I think our subconscious, and Grant Wood's subconscious, really all of ours, as artists and musicians, plays a big role into the art that we make.

**Barbara York:** I totally agree with you. And I think over time, we learn to not censor it, and that's really hard. But to let my unconscious burble away back there and then provide some ideas or inspiration. Listen, it was Crosby from Crosby, Stills, and Nash, I can't remember what it was, but he said that he had learned that if he doesn't pay attention to his muse, she goes away.

**Allen Parrish:** "You're not listening to me, so I'm done."

**Barbara York:** You pay attention to your subconscious, giving you ideas and little new directions to look at it. It will shut itself off and go away. So, you have to let it be there. Sometimes I'll go to bed at night not being able to figure out how to finish a piece or what to do with that and I'll let the unconscious mind just work away on it while I'm asleep and let it just do its job and I'll get up in the morning and it'll be there. But for me, writing is a partnership between the conscious mind and the unconscious mind, you have to let the mind do its job, too. And then you can work out, technically - the conscious “stuff.” You can work out the technique, creating a piece, but you can't work out the inspiration - that has to come from somewhere else.

**Allen Parrish:** If I didn't write as well, I would not understand that at all. But I completely understand what you're saying. So, it seems like in general for this one, the

approach was kind of more about Grant Wood's life than the specific American Gothic painting. And like Grant Woods...

**Barbara York:** Yeah, I think so. And the reaction to the painting from the outside? Yes, I think it was. Because everybody knows that painting, I don't need to describe the painting in that sense. I can look it up online and buy a thousand art books that describe that painting. It doesn't make any difference, so I felt that was more important to put into a perspective of how it reflected him.

**Allen Parrish:** That makes sense.

**Barbara York:** It was more useful to me at that point - it was just a different perspective and it made sense.

**Allen Parrish:** I think as a result of listening to this, I can see Grant Wood in the painting. Now I can see how he fits into it.

**Barbara York:** Great. That's great.

**Barbara York:** It was really nice to talk to you.

**Allen Parrish:** You as well. Thank you so much.

**Barbara York:** We'll talk again.

**Allen Parrish:** Definitely. Have a good evening.



Interview #2 with Barbara York, August 19, 2020

**Allen Parrish:** It's been pretty interesting. I read through this, actually the day after we talked last, I read through the part about *Stone City* and *Young Corn*. So, I guess we could talk about those movements. If you have a preference for which one we start with.

**Barbara York:** Well, let's start with "Stone City," because I think it leads into "Young Corn." You'll notice that the rider is very small in the painting, in the actual painting, but that's my focus for the whole movement and, for me, the piece starts before that rider even comes into the painting. It's like he's coming along the road. Eventually, you know, he is in that painting and that painting is coming out of the city. So, he goes across the bridge and he is out of the city, that painting is at the end of the city. To me, he's riding along to go home, he's riding home. So, he follows this - you get that "sound thing" that happens when you're speeding along in a car or something and you go past something that goes "woop, woop." Right? [York sings melody from the first movement], That's what is happening at this part. That's what going on, it is going past him. Eventually he crosses that little bridge, and he goes up that winding road because where he wants to go. He wants to go back to "home."

**Allen Parrish:** Oh, Okay.

**Barbara York:** And then of course there's that saying, "you can never go home." What he really wants to do is to go back to his childhood. But he can't do that, but the best he can do is to go home. And so, it's leading (that little motive) to the farm in the country.

**Allen Parrish:** So, the horse rider is Grant Wood?

**Barbara York:** I think so. He was representing Grant Wood's feelings.

**Allen Parrish:** And he's going back to his hometown - his farm that he grew up in?

**Barbara York:** Yes. I think so. That is in my mind. Yeah. I'm not sure that even Grant would agree with that. But for me, that's what I saw in the painting.

**Allen Parrish:** It seems like he put himself in a lot of paintings. So, I think that's entirely, or it could be, accurate.

**Barbara York:** I think he very much paints about his own feelings about things, so there he is all the time, in a way, because he has always been very self-revealing. He's very open about his feelings and he is not closed off and secretive about himself. So, I think whether he wants to or intends to or not, he winds up in the painting. Because it expresses him so much - for me, that's why that book was so helpful.

**Allen Parrish:** Yeah. For sure.

**Barbara York:** I got a sense of him as a personality and started seeing him in all these paintings.

**Allen Parrish:** He was definitely complex because he idolized the manliness of his father and his father's generation, and he wanted to seem masculine but he also didn't ignore his thoughts and feelings. He was very complex.

**Barbara York:** He was, and men of that generation, if they were gay, especially if they were gay and from more rural areas, had a lot of difficulty. I think reconciling that, where an admiration for masculinity and the desire to please their parents or please their male

generation before them. And yet, at the same time, having to recognize that you don't think - you can't - change your sexuality. It's like you really are born with it and having to deal with that conflict, I think, is difficult, but it creates an interesting person in a way.

**Allen Parrish:** Yeah, for sure.

**Barbara York:** You know, I think it creates a person who has had to deal with that kind of internal struggle and, therefore, much more interesting and complex.

**Allen Parrish:** And it makes for good art, for sure.

**Barbara York:** Yeah, for sure. Yeah.

**Allen Parrish:** I get the sense of longing; wanting to go home in the melody in measure 41.

**Barbara York:** Oh yeah. Yeah, exactly.

**Allen Parrish:** Yeah. I definitely sense the horse going to you - you get the forward motion along with the sense of longing. It's like you want to go somewhere and then you think about: "this is where I want to go."

**Barbara York:** Yeah. Yeah sure. It's a little bit "Schubert" in terms of accompaniment, in that respect, it's a little bit like Schubert's art songs, when you get this kind of pattern going on. This "riding" pattern going on.

**Allen Parrish:** So the main themes I see are the: [Parrish sings melody from the beginning of Stone City]. That is the horse, right?

**Barbara York:** Yes.

**Allen Parrish:** And then you mentioned that the accents are the things going by.

**Barbara York:** That's right.

**Allen Parrish:** Well, that's really cool. And the end is when the...

**Barbara York:** Yes. The rider is going far away from us.

**Allen Parrish:** Okay. So that's the rider disappearing.

**Barbara York:** The rider disappears into the distance and eventually he gets there. Yeah. We just don't see it until the next movement.

**Allen Parrish:** The other interesting thing about the piece was the cornfields in the front. I remember the biography said something significant about that. But I don't remember what it was. There's a lot in this movement. So, I guess we could go on to movement two.

**Barbara York:** Yeah, I think it definitely follows on from there, in my mind, because it gets (he gets) back to the farm. Of course, you can't get back to your childhood. So, in my mind, all those kids are in the field with a woman. Those little kids in this huge landscape. That's him and his sister. Of course, he goes home but those children aren't there anymore. That is his memory. You know, he would get back to the farm, but you can't get back to your childhood. So, it's a memory rather than a reality. I think he felt very protected by his mother because his father was quite critical of him wanting to be an artist and he didn't want him to be a worker, but his mother would hide him under the kitchen table with his crayons. I think he was very happy with his mother and his sister,

even if they were out doing hard work. I think he had to eventually go through puberty and adolescence. For me, that was part of the longing that he wanted to get back to. He wished that he could get back to that childhood. The figures are so small compared to the size of the landscape in the painting. It's like the landscape is just giant and these little figures in the middle there. Do you have the picture pulled up?

**Allen Parrish:** Yes. I have it pulled up right here. I couldn't find it in the biography, but I found it on the internet. Would you like me to send a link?

**Barbara York:** No, it's ok.

**Allen Parrish:** And now that I see that. It seems as though those figures are so far away. They're like just a memory - like you said.

**Barbara York:** Well, if you ever go back to where you grew up - if you haven't been there for a long time. I did that a couple of years ago; I went back to the house I grew up in Montreal and everything seemed so much smaller. When you're a child, everything seems much bigger. When you go back as an adult. It's like "wow, I didn't realize that the schoolyard was as small as it was." That kind of thing. The distance to the school seemed a lot further than it actually was. I think that is part of it too: that, through the child's eyes, the field is huge. You know that he and his sister and mother are very small, but they are small because they are just a memory. Or that's my interpretation. I mean, what do I know? I'm not an art critic, by any means.

**Allen Parrish:** But I think Grant wrote for everyday people, he didn't write for the art critics. He wrote for the everyday people. So, I would say that our interpretation is just as

valid as some of the art critics. But it's ironic that you mentioned that because I actually drove by the house that I grew up in last week.

**Barbara York:** How long had it been since you had been there?

**Allen Parrish:** Fifteen, twenty years?

**Barbara York:** Yeah, that's plenty of time.

**Allen Parrish:** The last time was whenever I moved out of there. So, my grandma and grandpa lived in a two-story house and then my parents and I lived in a trailer on their property. And so, I moved out of there when I was five and my grandparents sold it when I was like eight or nine. So, I worked down the street from this place, on a job, so I thought, "I'll just drive by there and see what it's like," and the house that I was brought home to was torn down. The two-story house was still there but it seemed so much smaller.

**Barbara York:** When you are four or five, everything seems so much bigger compared to now. It is really interesting. My husband likes to go back to see places that he has lived before. Or things like that and I often wonder if I should be asking him more when we do that, if they seem the same or if they seem different. For me, just going back to our house in Montreal, well first of all, all of the trees were much older. There was a huge tree in the front yard and my father had planted it. But just the distance to the school and the size of the elementary school - the schoolyard - was so much smaller than my recollection of it. All of these distances were really different now that I'm an adult and, you know, I was

in that school until I was thirteen. So, I wasn't just little, "itty-bitty." But it still seemed so much bigger, somehow.

**Allen Parrish:** It's also, it's not that you miss the place, but you miss the memories and the people and like the relational associations with the place. I drove by there and both of my grandparents that lived in that two-story house, have since passed. So, you go there, and you think about your grandparents.

**Barbara York:** So, for you that's the childhood that's lost. There's a whole childhood there that's gone.

**Allen Parrish:** I understand Grant Wood more in this painting now that I had that experience. And I didn't even think about that until now.

**Barbara York:** Yeah, it's a very human experience to want your childhood back. Especially if there has been some traumatic experience associated with losing it. I think everybody wants the safety of childhood. As long as they haven't had an abusive childhood or something like that. I think many of us want to go back to when times were simpler and safer, and somebody looked after us. And, you know, there's that element of longing there. And then we discover, of course, that we can't because often those memories were not the way that things actually were anyway. It wasn't that big, and it wasn't that far. It wasn't the perception anyway.

**Allen Parrish:** It's impossible to regain innocence.

**Barbara York:** Yes, that's right. It's impossible.

**Allen Parrish:** Just playing this piece, thinking about my own experience and how it relates to Grant Wood is going to be super helpful. But, in general, in “Young Corn,” the melodies are meant to evoke this sense of longing for childhood?

**Barbara York:** Yes. And also the safety and peacefulness of childhood. You know the feeling of being protected. That [York sings the melody from Young Corn]. It's peaceful and safe.

**Allen Parrish:** I think we mentioned last time, but that little motive is one that comes back, right?

**Barbara York:** Yes, it comes back in the next movement and it's the triplet motive. I think that is where the loss happens in some way. There is something about that which interferes with - it changes so that it is no longer peaceful and safe. It becomes something else; it becomes something cut off.

**Allen Parrish:** So, is there anything else? Is there anything else specific that we have not discussed in “Young Corn”?

**Barbara York:** It's also a reference that "Young Corn" referred to boys. It was a slang phrase meaning "young boy."

**Allen Parrish:** It seems like Grant Wood did not have sexual relationships with young boys, but he had - it's almost like he was a maternal/paternal figure to some of these younger boys. For example, whenever his wife's son-in-law (I think) came and stayed



with them. He was particularly attached to his son-in-law. It wasn't in an overtly sexual way. It was as if he was a father figure.

**Barbara York:** Yeah, it was like mentorship, he was a kind person. He wasn't being destructive because he had seen enough of that. And he didn't want to be that; he wasn't a bully. I think he enjoyed being able to parent in that sense even though he didn't have any of his own children and wasn't going to. I think that happens to a lot of gay men. They have the desire to be parents, and now they can because they're allowed to adopt. Which is a good thing. Many of them make absolutely wonderful parents because they have a really strong nurturing desire.

**Allen Parrish:** The tritone at the end, [Parrish sings the melody at the end of "Young Corn"] the D to the A-flat, I don't have perfect pitch so I can't sing it precisely. Tri-tones make most people feel uncomfortable. Is the end of this meant to be uncomfortable?

**Barbara York:** Yeah. Because it's going to lead into the next movement, right? Which starts with alarm bells ringing and people getting "up in arms" about what he is painting. And it is, again, losing the innocence. Losing childhood. It's like you can't hold onto it, and it doesn't last, it is going to slip through your fingers. It's just a memory, it's not real, anymore.

**Allen Parrish:** It seems like earlier on you're getting around, tonally, a little bit, when you go from the A to the E-flat and then you go to the E immediately at measure thirty-nine. If you have the music nearby?

**Barbara York:** There's a lot of chromaticism in this whole section, right? [York plays the section]. Yeah. It's entangled in itself, it's more entangled.

**Allen Parrish:** It also seems like, obviously, the register is getting lower. Is that significant?

**Barbara York:** Well, starting at the top, it brings out a little bit of "cry" of longing. And I write it as a "Poco piu Agitato," I want it a little more agitated. So, we are coming down from that. But it stops right there. It's like 'ahhh' and then it's like you let that out and bring it down. Rather than working your way up to it, it's that reverse effect. It starts up there. Same thing.

**Allen Parrish:** So, it's like a longing that cries out. And then it sort of settles. But you're still longing.

**Barbara York:** Yeah. Exactly.

**Allen Parrish:** And then it's back at the beginning. Pretty much, the "A" theme. It's like a cycle of longing. It seems.

**Barbara York:** Exactly.

**Allen Parrish:** What about the section measure 19? That's just another way to express the longing? Or is there any difference?

**Barbara York:** I also think that's a little bit playful. That's a little bit "childhood," because it seems to be pretty major and tonal at that point and doesn't get too anguished. So, it's like "remember when we used to run around and play together?" And throw water

at each other and chase the chicken. It's like saying "wasn't that fun? When we used to play hide-and-side around the barn?" Remembering those things that children do.

**Allen Parrish:** And then we get back to the "poco piu agitato" section. It seems almost like thinking about how things used to be: "we used to run around and play" and then it's like, "oh, man, I really miss that."

**Barbara York:** "I miss that," yes, exactly. I just follow where it goes, emotionally.

**Allen Parrish:** This is probably one of my favorite pieces of tuba music. Even the more I dig into it, the more I think, "man, this is good stuff."

**Barbara York:** I know, you are so intelligent about this whole piece, it's a wonderful idea. You notice so much in the piece. Because you have spent some time with it and now you have read the book - or you're reading a book -and then it's like you have a really intelligent approach to how you want to, how you want to deal with it and that's so great. I think there's lots of room for you to just interpret, I hope so. I try not to ever be rigid in what I want from people in my pieces, most of the time. There might be one or two occasions where I say "I really want that." Otherwise, I try to leave room for the artist to interpret. I don't think it's going to be well-played, if you're not interpreting it yourself.

**Allen Parrish:** And the music that you write is written in such a way. It's so easy to interpret. The music is such that I would not interpret something out in 'left field.' I'm going to interpret it with my background. It is like I'm going to bring my background to the interpretation of this piece.

**Barbara York:** Hopefully, yeah. I try to touch people in their humanity. My humanity and your humanity is where we can coincide. It's where we can share feelings and memories and things from our background so that we can understand each other. And we can understand Grant Wood, too. It is through our humanity that we do that.

**Allen Parrish:** For sure. It reminds me of the third movement of your concerto for tuba – how that's clearly just, there's a war going on and people respond to that so differently. But it's just alarm bells.

**Barbara York:** And it's just ugly and hollow. It doesn't resolve. It doesn't feel like it's going to get better. It's like "boy, this isn't what I thought I signed up for." It's like "woah."

**Allen Parrish:** It's been good to Zoom with you.

**Barbara York:** It's been a lot of fun. It's been great because it's fairly easy to do this, it's something that, because we know each other really well, we're very comfortable in chatting with each other and it doesn't matter that we are separated. You know, it's fine, this works.

**Allen Parrish:** It would've been nice to make the trip up to up to Kansas, but it's not worth the risk.

**Barbara York:** Right, it isn't and this way, we've split them up, separated them, so that you have a chance to go out and read some more and then wait a few weeks and do another one. We'll do one more probably.

**Allen Parrish:** Yeah, thanks. I really appreciate your time and I'm really glad that you're feeling better.

**Barbara York:** Thank you. I've enjoyed talking to you and we've become really good friends.

**Allen Parrish:** Definitely. I'll message you in a couple of weeks and we'll do it. We'll set something else up. And I hope you enjoy the rest of your week.

**Barbara York:** Thanks, you too. Bye-bye.

**Barbara York:** This movement is more simple because it's almost all about the painting and not about Grant Wood's inner life. It's really about the painting, which is like a kind of melodrama.

**Allen Parrish:** Exactly.

**Barbara York:** The curtain being pulled back. Onto what looks like a staged scene. We know that the fable is a fable. It wasn't real. It didn't happen. It never happened. So, it's very theatrical, in that sense, so is the music. The music is theatrical and melodramatic, you know? It's insincere in many ways.

**Allen Parrish:** Yeah, over the top, for sure.

**Barbara York:** Over the top in the emotions to the point that, " oh, my son, what a wonderful child, you've told the truth." Really over, overblown.

**Allen Parrish:** So, on a big scale, I'm just going to go over what we discussed last time. And you can just confirm; so, you have the opening quote of "Hail to the Chief," which is played four times in the beginning, which, you did not intend for this, but it was brought to your attention by Doug Whitten that for a four-star general it would be played four times and it just so happens to work out that way.

**Barbara York:** Correct. I didn't realize that.

**Allen Parrish:** And in this first section, we have the melodramatic entrance and portrayal of the father who is upset with his son for chopping down the cherry tree?

**Barbara York:** Yes.

**Allen Parrish:** Okay. And then, in the middle, the “Dolce and legato” section is the apology of Little Boy George Washington to his father for chopping down the cherry tree.

**Barbara York:** Right.

**Allen Parrish:** Okay. And then we get a, it's kind of a quasi-recapitulation at the “Allegro furioso,” where it comes back in. And, and the, the interesting part of the recapitulation is, whereas most of the time, all of the materials in the tonic key in general sonata form here, instead of the second part of the opening theme, we get this "joyfully" section which is transposed from A minor to A major, and it's joyful, and it represents the father who is proud of his son for his honesty.

**Barbara York:** There you go. Yeah. Exactly. You've done such a good job.

**Allen Parrish:** Thank you. And I remember one specific question I had: the rhythm at measures 19-23: [Parrish sings rhythm]. That's just a continuation of this father, the portrayal of the father, or is that something else?

**Barbara York:** Yeah. That's right. And at the end, the tag at the end is - there's a little insertion of the Battle Hymn of the Republic ("and truth goes marching") in the piano in measures 87 through 89.

**Allen Parrish:** I was rehearsing this with my accompanist last week. And she said that was interesting how you quoted the Battle Hymn of the Republic there. And I said that I didn't realize that from looking at it in the score, but now that I hear it, it's so evident.

**Barbara York:** It's not in your part, but it's in there.

**Allen Parrish:** And then, another interesting thing about the ending is how you extend the cadence at measure 88 beat three – there is a dominant seventh and then you use the "Hail to the Chief" quote to extend that cadence.

**Barbara York:** Yes.

**Allen Parrish:** I think that was really interesting.



**Barbara York:** I use the tuba to finish the "Battle Hymn" so it switches over: the tuba finishes that and then the piano is back to the flourishes.

**Allen Parrish:** Do you prefer whether or not there's space between the last two notes in the tuba part?

**Barbara York:** I don't really particularly want it; you can put it in if you want it. I didn't intend it that way.

**Allen Parrish:** Okay. I felt that whenever I was rehearsing this, I could make the last note bigger if I were to take a small breath before the last note, and it lined up with the accompanist.

**Barbara York:** It wouldn't offend me in any way.

**Allen Parrish:** Okay, awesome. Well, is there anything else that you would like to add?

**Barbara York:** No, that's good. This movement really is the most straightforward and it really is about the painting and not about Grant Wood.

APPENDIX B – The Paintings

*Stone City, Iowa* (1930) by Grant Wood

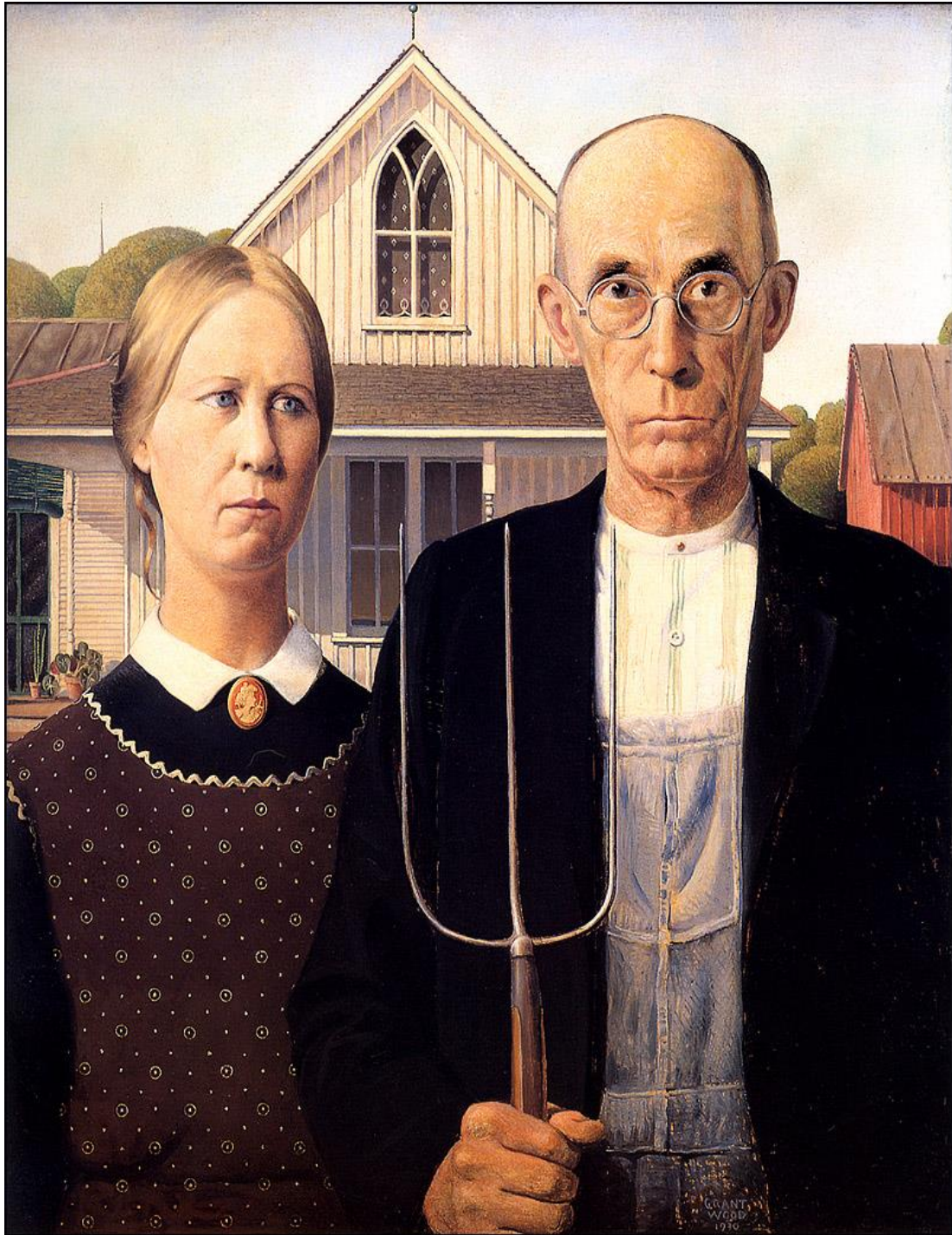


*Young Corn* (1931) by Grant Wood

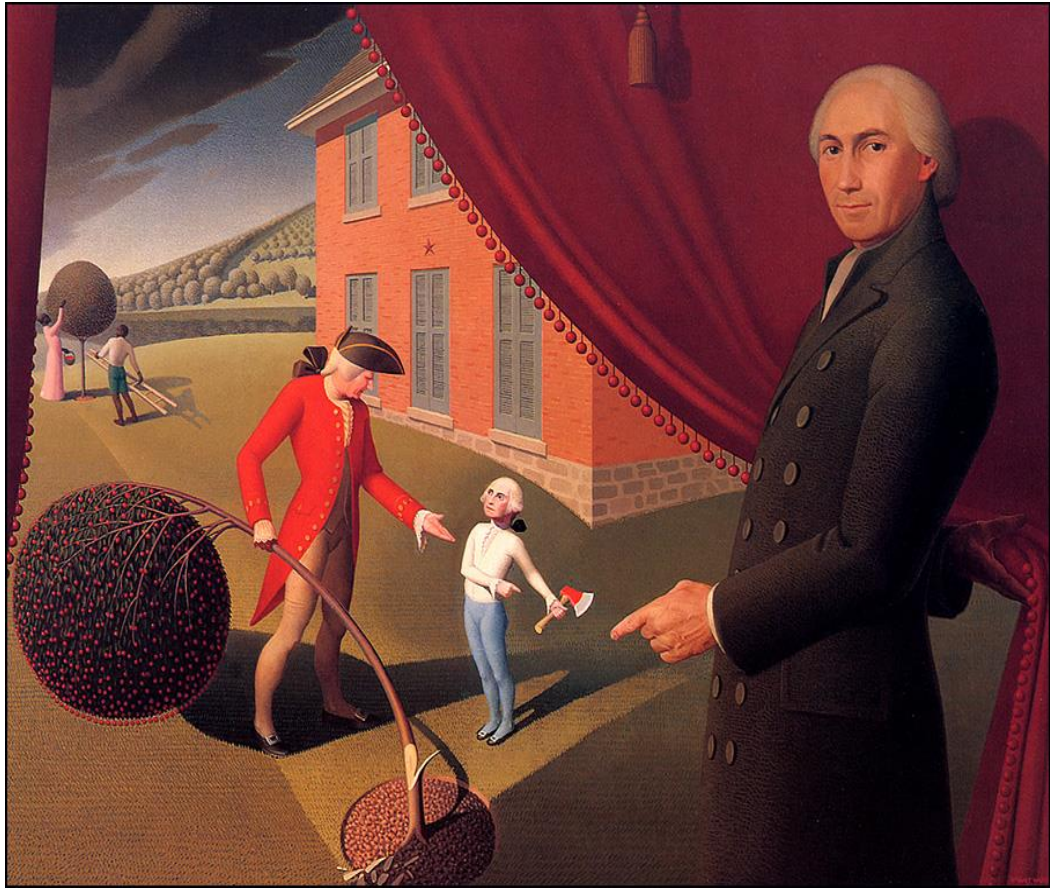




*American Gothic* (1930) by Grant Wood



*Parson Weems' Fable* (1939) by Grant Wood



APPENDIX C – IRB Approval Letter



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August 11, 2020

To Whom It May Concern,

Acting on behalf of The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board, in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services regulations (45 CFR Part 46), and University guidelines, I have reviewed the following project and have determined that review by USM's IRB is not necessary.

Principal Investigator: Allen Parrish

Graduate Student Project: "A Performer's Guide to Barbara York's *Four Paintings by Grant Wood*."

Date Submitted: August 11, 2020

Formal IRB review is not required in this instance, as the project does not meet federal or institutional definitions of "human subjects research."

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Samuel V. Bruton". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Samuel V. Bruton

Director of the Office of Research Integrity



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