

Copland

Listener's

Guide

Aaron Copland's Call of Heroism

Classical Connections Series

Concert Two Friday, January 11, 2013

Program Letter from Home

Symphony No. 3

Aaron Copland is praised as one of the greatest American composers, maybe even *the* greatest American composer. But the word "American" may be a trick. There's an assumption out there that the greatest composers aren't American at all. So "greatest American composer" can be high praise and snobby put-down all in one!

This year's Classical Connections season divides neatly in two: two composers who don't get enough respect (Respighi and Copland), and two composers whose greatness is beyond question (Debussy and Beethoven). So now I take up the banner for fellow Brooklynite Aaron Copland.

Copland's reputation is based primarily on his ballet scores for *Billy the Kid* (1938), *Rodeo* (1942), and *Appalachian Spring* (1944). Their broad sonorities bring to mind the vast spaces of the American landscape. Copland's use of traditional American songs and dance tunes evokes nostalgia for the simplicity of our old-time roots. That's the Copland of "Letter from Home", the beautiful World War II-era piece that opens our concert.

But there was more to Copland's music than easy-on-the-ear Americana. He had a gnarly streak, too. His raucous *Symphony for Organ and Orchestra* inspired Walter Damrosch, conductor of the premiere, to address the audience afterwards, saying, "Ladies and gentlemen, I am sure you will agree that if a gifted young man can write a symphony like this at 23, within five years he will be ready to commit murder!"

With his *Third Symphony*, composed between 1944 and 1946, Copland attempted to meld the light and serious sides of his style in a vast populist work that evokes the prairies, small towns, and big cities of the U.S. as well as the steely determination of those who beat back fascism. It's perhaps the great orchestral work of one of the greatest composers.

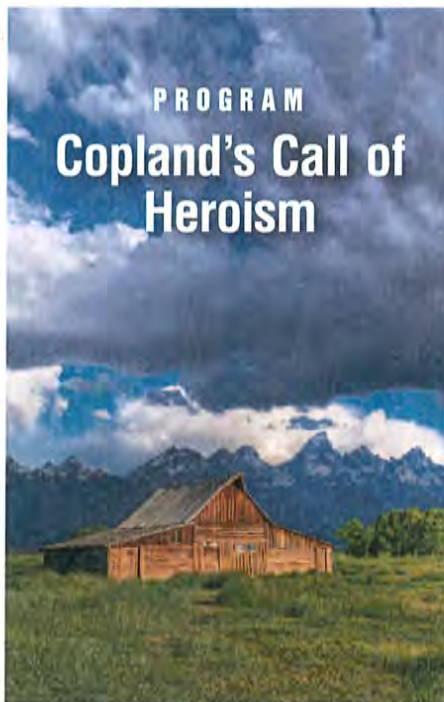
Not just greatest American. Greatest, period.



DAYTON
Philharmonic



PROGRAM
Copland's Call of Heroism



DEMIRJIAN
 CLASSICAL CONNECTIONS

Friday, January 11, 2013
 8:00 p.m., Schuster Center
 Q&A after the concert
 Neal Gittleman *conductor, host*

Aaron Copland (1900–1990)
 Letter from Home
 Symphony No. 3

- I. Molto moderato, with simple expression
- II. Allegro molto
- III. Andantino quasi allegretto
- IV. Molto deliberato—Allegro risoluto

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Classical Connections Listener's Guide
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The Great American Symphony

BY NEAL GITTLEMAN

We often hear of “The Great American Novel”, the idea that this or that book captures the spirit of the United States in a particular era and serves as a latter-day analogue to literary classics of other lands and other times. Melville’s *Moby Dick*, Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn*, Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*, Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises*, Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath*, Ellison’s *Invisible Man*, David Foster Wallace’s *Infinite Jest*—all fit the bill.

The Great American Novel is more than a list of, well, great American novels. It’s an aspirational notion. A standard of importance, meaning, and cultural relevance that American authors of every generation aspire to.

And American composers? Do they strive to write The Great American Symphony?

Maybe not. Certainly not in the same way writers essay The Great American Novel.

Most American classical music is music of the 20th and 21st centuries, while the heyday of the symphony was the 18th and 19th. After 1900, the symphony was no longer the dominant musical form (Gustav Mahler notwithstanding). Ballet

scores were big. Musical theater, too. American composers continued to write symphonies (Charles Ives and William Grant Still wrote four, Samuel Barber two, Roy Harris nine, William Schuman ten, Leonard Bernstein, Christopher Rouse, and John Corigliano three each), and some of them are wonderful pieces.

Are any of them The Great American Symphony?

Nope. There’s only one. Copland’s Third.

It was Copland’s fifth piece with “Symphony” in its title. There’s the jazzy, dissonant 1924 Symphony for Organ and Orchestra (source of the infamous “ready to commit murder”



SERGE
 KOUSSEVITZKY

quip), Symphony No. 1 (the organ symphony redone sans organ), the 1929 Dance Symphony (created from previously unpublished

music written for the 1922 vampire ballet *Grohg*), the 1933 Short Symphony (which conductor Serge Koussevitzky characterized as “Not too difficult, but impossible!”), and the Third, composed between 1944 and 1946 on a commission from Koussevitzky and the Boston Symphony Orchestra.



Notwithstanding its predecessors—and its number—Copland described it as “my first proper, full-scale symphony.” It was also his last.

Copland got the commission in March 1944, but materials in the Library of Congress show sketches of important musical themes in the Third Symphony dated November 1940. He wrote the first movement in the summer of 1944 and the second in the summer of 1945. The third movement followed in the spring of 1946, and the fourth was written in June of 1946 with an October premiere looming on the Boston Symphony’s concert schedule.

The large proportions of the symphony come from Koussevitzky. Copland wrote, “I knew exactly the kind of music he enjoyed conducting and the sentiments he brought to it, and I knew the sound of his orchestra, so I had every reason to do my darndest to write a symphony in the grand manner.” But the reasons for the scope of the piece go deeper.

Riding the success of his American-themed ballets, Copland was ready to write something that wasn’t “ripped from the headlines” of American mythology, something that didn’t quote cowboy songs, fiddle tunes, or Shaker hymns. It did quote “Fanfare for the Common Man”, Copland’s musical tribute to the everyday Americans fighting fascism. He said, “it was a wartime piece—or more accurately, an end-of-war piece—intended to reflect the euphoric spirit of the country at the time.”

Much has been written about the Third Symphony’s echoes of Prokofiev (particularly in the second movement), Shostakovich (throughout), and Mahler (indirectly, through Shostakovich). Copland acknowledged the links, although he said he “was not aware of being directly influenced by other composers when writing the work.”

Composing in the mid-1940s, Copland was certainly aware of the idea of Socialist Realism. First

promulgated in 1932 in a decree from Stalin, Socialist Realism said that art should portray the heroism of workers and common people, that art should be optimistic and idealistic, and that art should be free of ambiguity and confusing meanings.

Soviet composers grappled with this doctrine, sometimes following it, sometimes fighting it, sometimes co-opting it. The fundamental flaw of Socialist Realism is that great art never flows from a government decree.



JOSEF STALIN

Regardless of the sincerity of a composer’s intent or quality of their technique, there’s no way that an “Ode to the Workers of the Tractor

Factory at Smolensk on Meeting Their Production Quota” can be great music!

Here’s the great irony: There is one great masterpiece of Socialist Realist music. It’s by a Jewish kid from Brooklyn—a socialist, yes, but an American socialist. It honors those who fought fascism. It celebrates the common man. It’s uplifting, inspiring, unapologetically optimistic.

It’s Aaron Copland’s Third, The Great American Symphony.

18 Fanfares, One Classic

"Fanfare for the Common Man". It's one of the most recognizable, most iconic pieces of American music. Of 20th-century music. Of music, period.

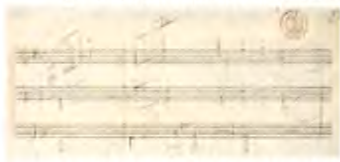


Not only is it a staple of orchestral and band concerts, but it's been borrowed for all kinds of uses. Emerson, Lake

and Palmer adapted it. Bob Dylan, too. And Mannheim Steamroller. Also Styx. NASA has used it to wake up Shuttle and International Space Station crews. It's been used in television shows and U.S. Navy recruiting ads. It was played at Bill Clinton's and Barack Obama's inaugurations and at Glenn Beck's Restoring Honor rally. The Chicago Blackhawks play it when they take the ice. The Wolverhampton Wanderers of English soccer play it when they take the pitch.

"Fanfare for the Common Man" is everywhere!

It's also the centerpiece of the finale of Copland's Third Symphony, a vast, imposing fantasia on the Fanfare. The finale opens quietly, with the fanfare heard not in the familiar brass, but in flutes and clarinets. Then the brass and



percussion take over, and nearly all the music that follows is designed to

combine with the Fanfare, as Copland builds the symphony to its triumphant conclusion.

How did this uncommonly exciting three minutes of music become so, well, commonplace?

It began an hour south of Dayton in 1942. The British conductor Eugene Goossens, then Music Director of the Cincinnati Symphony, wanted to recreate something he had done in England



during World War I: commission a group of composers to write a series of rousing fanfares to open each concert of the season in support of the war effort. Goossens chose 18 composers—mostly Americans,

but some Europeans, too. It was an impressive lineup, including Walter Piston's "Fanfare for the Fighting French", Howard Hanson's "Fanfare for the Signal Corps", Darius Milhaud's "Fanfare de la Liberté", Paul Creston's "Fanfare for Paratroopers", and Goossens' own "Fanfare for the Merchant Marine". Good pieces, all. But mostly forgotten.

Then on March 12, 1943, they opened a concert with something Aaron Copland called "Fanfare for the Common Man". The rest, as they say, is history.

A Copland Timeline

1900

November 14, Aaron Copland born in Brooklyn to department store owner Harris Copland and Sarah Mittenthal Copland.

1914

Begins piano lessons.

1917

First composition: "Moment Musicale" for solo piano.

1921

Goes to France to study with Nadia Boulanger. (Beats fellow Brooklynite Neal Gittleman there by 53 years.) First published work: "The Cat and the Mouse."

1925

Symphony for Organ and Orchestra premieres with Nadia Boulanger as soloist.

1930

Copland has not yet committed murder. (Sorry, Maestro Damrosch!)

1938

Lincoln Kirstein's Ballet Caravan premieres cowboy-song-filled ballet *Billy the Kid*.

1942

Composes "A Lincoln Portrait", *Rodeo* ballet, and "Fanfare for the Common Man".

1944

Writes *Appalachian Spring* ballet for Martha Graham. Begins work on Third Symphony.

1946

Boston Symphony premieres Third Symphony.

1953

Testifies before House Un-American Activities Committee. Doesn't name names.

1967

Last major orchestral work, *Inscape*, commissioned by New York Philharmonic.

1990

December 2, dies after a long bout with Alzheimer's.

1900

Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Puccini's *Tosca* premieres. Boxer Rebellion. Galveston Hurricane "blew all the people all away".

1914

World War I. Wright Brothers win patent suit.

1917

Russia's October Revolution. NHL formed.

1921

Pittsburgh's KDKA is U.S.'s first radio station. Sacco and Vanzetti trial. Taft becomes Chief Justice. Cal beats OSU in Rose Bowl, 6-0.

1925

Hitler publishes *Mein Kampf*. The Charleston. Scopes Trial. *The Battleship Potemkin*. *The Great Gatsby*.

1930

First radio broadcast of *The Lone Ranger*. Discovery of Pluto. Hostess bakes the first Twinkie.

1938

Munich Conference yields "peace in our time". Germany occupies Sudetenland. Taliesin West.

1942

Doolittle's bombers raid Tokyo. Battle of Midway. "White Christmas". *The Skin of Our Teeth*.

1944

D-Day. Douglas MacArthur: "I shall return." Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie*.

1946

U.N. General Assembly holds first meeting.

1953

Queen Elizabeth II crowned. Ian Fleming writes first James Bond novel. Russian H-bomb.

1967

"It was 20 years ago today, Sgt. Pepper taught the band to play." Ali says "no" to the Draft Board.

1990

Nelson Mandela leaves Robben Island Prison.