

PROGRAM

ONE HUNDRED TWENTIETH SEASON

Chicago Symphony Orchestra

Riccardo Muti Music Director

Pierre Boulez Helen Regenstein Conductor Emeritus

Yo-Yo Ma Judson and Joyce Green Creative Consultant

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Thursday, November 4, 2010, at 8:00

Friday, November 5, 2010, at 8:00

Saturday, November 6, 2010, at 8:00

Michael Tilson Thomas Conductor

Scott Hostetler English Horn

Christopher Martin Trumpet

Paul Jacobs Organ

Music by Aaron Copland

Quiet City

SCOTT HOSTETLER

CHRISTOPHER MARTIN

Symphony for Organ and Orchestra

Prelude: Andante

Scherzo: Allegro molto—Moderato

Finale: Lento—Allegro moderato

PAUL JACOBS

First Chicago Symphony subscription concert performances

INTERMISSION

Orchestral Variations

First Chicago Symphony subscription concert performances

Appalachian Spring

Friday evening's concert is generously sponsored by Audrey Love Charitable Foundation.

Steinway is the official piano of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.

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Aaron Copland, the “president of American music” (Virgil Thomson’s phrase) grew up in Brooklyn, lived most of his life in New York, and knew the rest of this country largely by hearsay. His music for Agnes de Mille’s Wild West ballet



Aaron Copland, the “president of American music”

Rodeo, his first great success, was composed on the rue de Rennes in Paris (he had packed a book of cowboy songs), and the only real live cow he ever encountered was the one that hit his car one summer night on a country road near Tanglewood. Even his “hometown” piano concerto, a jazz-saturated New York cityscape, wasn’t composed at home, but in a villa in the French countryside. But Copland was the first composer to find a musical style that perfectly captured the vast open spaces, the homespun plainness, and the bracing pioneer spirit of this great country. It was fellow composer Thomson, reflecting on his first impression of Copland’s

work, who said it best: “I thought that it was the voice of America in our generation. It spoke in the same way that Kerouac did thirty years later.” In work after work, Copland defined forever a distinctly “open” American sound: the music of our own Arcadia, with its silos and patchwork plains, its covered bridges and furrowed hills.

Copland first studied music through a correspondence course and then, like fellow Brooklynite George Gershwin, began formal lessons with Rubin Goldmark (nephew of Viennese composer Karl Goldmark). Copland finally went to Europe, where, in the 1920s, “it was clear that you had to be ‘finished,’” as he later recalled, and ended up as one of the first Americans to study with Nadia Boulanger. There, in her Paris salon,

she helped him find his own distinctive way of writing—and, ironically, the “voice” of American music.

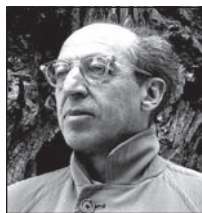
Copland’s long career embraced Carnegie Hall and Hollywood, Broadway and TV, teaching and writing, playing the piano and conducting—he first led the Chicago Symphony at the Ravinia Festival in 1956, returned there often in the 1960s, played his Piano Concerto with the CSO in Orchestra Hall in 1964, and conducted the Orchestra in a program of his own music, as well as that of Berlioz, Carter, and Tippett, here in 1970.

This week’s program spans several decades of Copland’s career, from the *Organ Symphony* of 1924 to the *Orchestral Variations* he made in 1957 of his early *Piano Variations*—each of them, in its own individual way,

confirming that Copland had an uncanny knack for putting his finger on the musical pulse of this country.



Composer Aaron Copland leads the musicians of the Civic Orchestra in a reading session in July 1968.



Aaron Copland

Born November 14, 1900, Brooklyn, New York.

Died December 2, 1990, Peekskill, New York.

Quiet City

Early in his career, Copland was so eager to write theatrical music that he composed a score for a nonexistent play: *Music for the Theatre*, originally called “Incidental Music for an Imaginary Play.” But during the 1930s, Copland became involved in the Group Theater, a company founded by Lee Strasberg and Harold Clurman to present socially relevant drama at popular prices. Copland’s studio at Steinway Hall was even one of the group’s first meeting places. Clurman later recalled that Copland’s own efforts to create a distinctly American body of music had inspired the Group in the beginning. Copland often attended rehearsals, and he became friendly with several of the Group’s members, including Elia Kazan, Clifford Odets—whose 1937 play, *The Golden Boy*, was one

of the troupe’s biggest hits—and Irwin Shaw.

Although Irwin Shaw is remembered today as the bestselling author of the 1970 novel *Rich Man, Poor Man*, which became a successful TV miniseries, he began his career working in radio and writing film scripts and plays. In 1939, after the Group had successfully staged Shaw’s *The Gentle People*, Copland agreed to write incidental music for a production of Shaw’s *Quiet City* later that year. “The script,” Copland recalled, “was about a young trumpet player who imagined the night thoughts of many different people in a great city and played trumpet to express his emotions and to arouse the consciences of the other characters and of the audience.” But the story of Gabe Mellon, who had changed his name in rejection of his Jewish

COMPOSED

1940, based on incidental music written in 1939

October 21, 1943, Orchestra Hall, Désiré Defauw conducting

INSTRUMENTATION

english horn and trumpet with strings

FIRST PERFORMANCE

January 28, 1941, New York City

MOST RECENT CSO PERFORMANCES

July 23, 1964, Ravinia Festival, the composer conducting

APPROXIMATE PERFORMANCE TIME

10 minutes

FIRST CSO PERFORMANCES

July 26, 1941, Ravinia Festival, Carlos Chávez conducting

October 5, 1986, Orchestra Hall, Sir Georg Solti conducting

background and became a wealthy businessman, and his struggling brother, trumpet player David Mellnikoff, obviously resonated strongly with Copland at the time, and he wrote music of unexpected depth and beauty.

When the Group Theater production of *Quiet City* never made it beyond a couple of tryout performances, Copland decided to salvage parts of his score. During the summer of 1940, while he was teaching at the first season of the Berkshire Music Center at Tanglewood, he fashioned a short “suite” for trumpet and string orchestra from the incidental music, adding a solo english horn “for contrast and to give the trumpeter breathing spaces.”

(Copland recycled other music from the complete score for parts of *Appalachian Spring*.) From the soft, gauzy opening to the haunted, nostalgic trumpet melodies, the piece is a pitch-perfect city scene from the 1930s. Copland was amused when reviewers noted its affinity to Whitman’s “mystic trumpeter” and Ives’s *The Unanswered Question*, with its yearning trumpet solos. To him, it was simply a portrait of Shaw’s restless and troubled trumpet player (Copland marks the opening trumpet solo “nervous, mysterious”). Copland’s short, atmospheric piece has become one of his most performed works, and as Copland pointed out, “David Mellnikoff has long since been forgotten!” ■

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Symphony for Organ and Orchestra

Immediately after Walter Damrosch led the premiere of Copland's *Organ Symphony* at Aeolian Hall in New York, he



German-born American conductor and composer
Walter Damrosch

turned to the audience and said, "Ladies and gentlemen, I am sure you will agree that if a gifted young man can write a symphony like this at twenty-three, within five years he will be ready to commit murder."

This is one of the most beloved stories in American music, and it touches on a number of issues in what would eventually become the great Copland saga. For one thing, Copland was very young and almost completely unknown in 1925—and the future importance

and direction of his career was quite unpredictable at the time. He had just emerged from three years in Nadia Boulanger's creative hothouse in Paris, the "shop" that would eventually turn out Virgil Thomson, Elliott Carter, and Philip Glass, among many others. Also, instead of the genial, homespun Americana we tend, unfairly, to associate single-handedly with Copland today, this concerto was unmistakably Modern Music. "It was a joke, of course," Copland later said of Damrosch's remark, "and I laughed along with the rest of the audience, but it was also Damrosch's way of smoothing the ruffled feathers of his conservative Sunday afternoon ladies faced with modern American music." Copland entered the larger musical world that day as one of its daring young men, his notoriety sealed with the unfortunate newspaper headline: "Young Composer to Commit Murder!"

It was Boulanger who got Copland the job of writing the piece in the first place. A highly

COMPOSED

1924

FIRST PERFORMANCE

January 11, 1925, New York City, with Nadia Boulanger as soloist and Walter Damrosch conducting

ONLY PREVIOUS

CSO PERFORMANCE

December 7, 1981; Orchestra Hall; Frederick Swann, organ; Leonard Slatkin conducting (special concert)

INSTRUMENTATION

solo organ, two flutes and two piccolos, two oboes and english horn, two clarinets, two bassoons

and contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones and tuba, timpani, xylophone, cymbals, woodblock, bass drum, snare drum, tambourine, two harps, celesta, strings

APPROXIMATE PERFORMANCE TIME

24 minutes

regarded organist, as well as a teacher and composer, she was invited by Damrosch and Serge Koussevitzky, the new music director of the Boston Symphony, to come to the United States and perform with their orchestras. Rather than play one of the few popular works for organ and orchestra, such as Saint-Saëns's *Organ Symphony*, Boulanger wanted to commission a new work for the program, and she had Copland in mind from the start. When Copland was informed of the important new assignment, a major coup for a composer so young, Boulanger lapsed into her strictest professorial tone: "Only if you are ready by the first of September, though, not the second!" Copland complied, to the day. "I can't tell you my joy," Boulanger wrote him when the finished score arrived. "The work is so brilliant, so full of music."

Copland, in his own slightly different account of the commission, confessed that "I had never heard a note of my own orchestration or written anything for the organ. Moreover, the organ was not a favorite instrument of mine." In any event, he wisely set his reservations aside, recognizing the importance of a major premiere in the hands of Boulanger, Damrosch, and Koussevitzky—obviously never suspecting the headlines the work would eventually make. For a composer so green that he had not yet heard an orchestra play his own music, Copland got the shock of a lifetime when he arrived at the first rehearsal. "I was in such a hurry to get in the hall," he

later remembered, "that instead of going around the block to the stage entrance, I yanked open the front door of the main hall—suddenly I got a blast of my own orchestration!" It was a moment he would never forget, and it reaffirmed his desire to spend the rest of his life composing music: "I was absolutely overwhelmed to hear my own orchestration for the first time. It sounded so *glorious* to me, so much grander than I could have possibly imagined."

At first, Copland had planned to write a symphony in the traditional four movements, but as work progressed he realized he needed just three, the second larger than the first, the finale the longest of all. Despite the three movements, this is not a standard concerto (as the title makes clear), but rather a symphonic work with "the organ treated as an integral part of the orchestra rather than as a solo instrument with orchestral accompaniment," as Copland explained.

Copland opens with a quiet Prelude—"an introductory reverie for the organ, with some incidental material for solo instruments from the orchestra," in the composer's words. The middle movement is the one that Copland heard when



French composer and organist Nadia Boulanger

he walked in on the first rehearsal: “It was the scherzo movement, very brilliant, brassy, and glamorous sounding.” It begins coolly and then heats up quickly, eventually reaching the “glamorous” full orchestral pages that offered Copland his first exposure to the sounds of his own music. Copland recalled that this was the movement that most impressed both Boulanger and Koussevitzky. Later, speaking to his invaluable oral biographer Vivian Perlis, he said: “I was not yet using jazz openly and directly. Nevertheless, if you listen to the scherzo even now, you hear rhythms that would not have been there if I had not been born and raised in Brooklyn.” There is also a suggestion of the French song “Au clair de la lune,” a sly reference to Boulanger’s homeland amidst the sounds of Brooklyn. The organ is

particularly prominent in the finale, even playing without the orchestra from time to time, suggesting that Copland was thinking both “concerto” and “symphony” as he wrote this movement.

The *Organ* Symphony was Copland’s calling card, and it introduced a major new voice in twentieth-century music. When Boulanger asked Virgil Thomson—as important a critic as he was a composer—what he thought of the piece, he told her he wept when he first heard it. “But why did you weep?” she wanted to know. “Because I had not written it myself!” Copland himself remained fond of his work, arranging it for orchestra (without organ) as his First Symphony in the late 1920s, and transcribing the opening Prelude both for chamber orchestra and for piano trio. ■

Orchestral Variations

When the Louisville Orchestra began its landmark series of commissions in 1948, Copland was one of first composers it contacted. But, five times in a row, Copland was forced to turn down the offer because he was too busy or the budget didn't suit the kind of works he had in mind. Finally, in 1957, he replied to yet another request with a proposal that he hoped would satisfy all parties. "I have for a long time wanted to make an orchestral version of my Piano Variations," he wrote, mentioning that this great work of 1930 was generally considered one of his most important compositions. "I noted that Luigi Dallapiccola fulfilled a Louisville commission through a similar orchestral transcription of a series of variations," he continued. "This encourages me to make a similar suggestion in my own case." Copland's offer was quickly accepted, and he set to work turning his Piano Variations into a major orchestral score.

Copland's Piano Variations were widely considered one of the landmark piano works of the twentieth century. When Copland returned to France in the spring of 1949, curious about the new generation of composers then setting the music world on edge, he played the score for a dazzling young firebrand named Pierre Boulez. Copland had heard Boulez play parts of his pioneering Second Piano Sonata, once at Boulez's apartment and once at Ned Rorem's. On the second occasion, as Rorem later recalled, "Aaron sat down and played his Variations, no doubt to prove he was just as hairy as Boulez." Although Copland and Boulez were hardly kindred spirits at that time, and continued to move farther apart, each a central figure in unfriendly and sometimes downright combative circles, they found a rare plot of common ground in Copland's Variations. (As for Boulez's wild and nearly unplayable Second Piano Sonata, Copland

COMPOSED

1930, as Piano Variations; orchestrated in 1957

FIRST PERFORMANCE

March 5, 1958, Louisville, Kentucky

ONLY PREVIOUS CSO PERFORMANCE

July 10, 1962, Ravinia Festival, the composer conducting

INSTRUMENTATION

three flutes and two piccolos, two oboes and English horn, two clarinets, E-flat and bass clarinets, two bassoons and contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets and piccolo trumpet, three trombones and tuba, timpani, snare drum, tenor drum, bass drum, bongos, conga drum, cymbals, tom-tom, woodblock, glockenspiel,

xylophone, tubular bells, antique cymbals, cow bell, harp, piano, strings

APPROXIMATE PERFORMANCE TIME

13 minutes

thought it somewhat monotonous but highly impressive in its “conviction, particularly when Boulez himself plays it.”) When Copland sent Boulez a copy of the Variations in 1950, Boulez openly admired the piece, telling John Cage: “It is the best work I know of him. It is evidently under Stravinsky’s influence. But it is good Stravinsky, i.e., a good influence.” (Later, in the 1970s, when Boulez was music director of the New York Philharmonic, he even conducted the orchestral version.)

The Variations, in either the original version for piano or as orchestrated, is one of Copland’s most impressive works. Compact,

taut, and tightly written, the score does reveal Stravinsky’s influence, particularly in its rhythmic punch and the spacing of certain chords. Copland described the piece as “a theme of dramatic character followed by twenty variations and a coda.” Copland’s pacing is brisk: twenty-two pieces (theme, variations, and coda) in little more than half as many minutes. The essence of the theme itself is just four notes, leaping off the page in wide, jagged intervals. Those notes and their nervous energy color the entire set of variations, even the slower ones. The coda is Copland at his grandest, and here, using the full resources of the orchestra, grander than ever. ■

Appalachian Spring

No Copland score more perfectly captures the vast open spaces, haunting plainness, and the bracing pioneer spirit of our country than *Appalachian Spring*. “I felt,” he wrote, “that it was worth the effort to see if I couldn’t say what I had to say in the simplest possible terms.” *Appalachian Spring* was written for Martha Graham, the doyenne of American dance—the score’s working title was *Ballet for Martha*, replaced only at the last minute by the now-familiar phrase Graham found in Hart Crane’s poem “The Dance,” from his epic cycle *The Bridge*. (Crane meant spring as a source of water, not a season.)

Graham had been commissioning scores since the thirties, and she also had begun working on set design with Alexander Calder and Isamu Noguchi. For years, she had wanted Copland to write a ballet for her company; in 1941, armed with money from Chicago-born Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge, she commissioned both Carlos Chávez

and Copland. It took Graham and Copland a while to agree on their subject. Graham finally suggested something that would capture the spirit of Thornton Wilder’s 1938 play *Our Town*, and that became their touchstone. When Copland received Graham’s first script, he said, “This is a legend of American living. It is like the bone structure, the inner frame that holds together a people.” Eventually Graham settled on a simple tale, defined by the rituals of daily life and set in a small town in rural western Pennsylvania (Graham had spent her childhood in Allegheny County, not far from Pittsburgh). Although Copland originally envisioned a work for double string quartet and piano, he added double bass and woodwinds when he learned that Chávez intended to use them as well.

Although *Appalachian Spring* has taken on iconic status as a portrait of rural Americana, with its furrowed fields and radiant skies, Copland was thinking primarily

COMPOSED

1943–44 as a ballet for Martha Graham

FIRST PERFORMANCE

October 30, 1944, Library of Congress

FIRST CSO PERFORMANCES

August 1, 1946, Ravinia Festival, Pierre Monteux conducting

October 9, 1947, Orchestra Hall, Artur Rodzinski conducting

MOST RECENT

CSO PERFORMANCES

March 12, 2010, Orchestra Hall, Robert Spano conducting

July 11, 2010, Ravinia Festival, James Conlon conducting

CSO PERFORMANCES, AARON COPLAND CONDUCTING

July 23, 1964, Ravinia Festival

April 1970, Orchestra Hall

INSTRUMENTATION

two flutes and piccolo, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, two trombones, timpani, percussion, harp, piano, strings

APPROXIMATE PERFORMANCE TIME

33 minutes

about Graham “and her unique choreographic style” when he wrote it. “Nobody else seems quite like Martha: she’s so proud, so very much herself. And she’s unquestionably very American: there’s something prim and restrained, simple yet strong, about her which one tends to think of as American.”

In a score that is suffused with the natural melodic charm of folk music, there’s just one actual folk song—the then-obscure Shaker song “Simple Gifts” that, in a moment of true inspiration, Copland picked out of a book on Shaker music and dance. (Apparently a line in Graham’s initial script, referring to a “Shaker rocking chair,” pointed him in this direction. As Copland later admitted, “My research evidently was not very thorough, since I did not realize that there have never been Shaker settlements in rural Pennsylvania.”) From its first performance, with sets by Noguchi and Graham herself dancing the young bride (and Merce Cunningham as the Preacher), *Appalachian Spring* took its place in the history of American culture. Copland’s score won both the New York Music Critics’ Circle Award and a Pulitzer Prize. The ballet became a cornerstone of the Graham Company repertory (Martha continued to dance the bride’s role for many years), earning its status not only as “one of Martha’s signature pieces,” in the words of Agnes de Mille, but as a landmark in American music.

When the score was first published, Copland offered this summary of the ballet’s action:

A pioneer celebration in spring around a newly built farmhouse in the Pennsylvania hills in the early part of the last [nineteenth] century. The bride-to-be and the young farmer-husband enact the emotions, joyful and apprehensive, their new domestic partnership invites. An older neighbor suggests now and then the rocky confidence of experience. A revivalist and his followers remind the new householders of the strange and terrible aspects of human fate. At the end the couple are left quiet and strong in their new house.

A footnote about the music performed this week. There are many versions of *Appalachian Spring*, including the original complete ballet, scored for a chamber ensemble of thirteen instruments, and the 1945 suite scored for large orchestra that quickly became the most commonly performed version—as well as a chamber version of the suite and a full orchestral edition of the complete ballet music—seemingly covering all possible permutations. At these performances, the Chicago Symphony performs a version for full orchestra that lies midway between the suite and the complete score: Michael Tilson Thomas has reinstated three of the six tableaux Copland omitted in scaling the music down to suite-like dimensions. ■

Phillip Huscher is the program annotator for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.