

PROGRAM NOTES

by Phillip Huscher

Aaron Copland

Born November 14, 1900, Brooklyn, New York.

Died December 2, 1990, New York City.

Symphony No. 3

Copland began his third symphony in the summer of 1944 and completed it in September of 1946. Serge Koussevitzky conducted the first performance on October 18, 1946, in Boston. The score calls for three flutes and two piccolos, three oboes and english horn, two clarinets, E-flat clarinet and bass clarinet, two bassoons and contrabassoon, four horns, four trumpets, three trombones and tuba, timpani, two harps, celesta, piano, strings, and a percussion battery consisting of bass drum, tam-tam, cymbals, xylophone, glockenspiel, tenor drum, wood block, snare drum, triangle, slapstick, ratchet, anvil, claves, and tubular bells. Performance time is approximately forty-two minutes.

The Chicago Symphony Orchestra's first subscription concert performances of Copland's Third Symphony were given at Orchestra Hall November 14, 23, and 24, 1950, with Rafael Kubelík conducting. Our most recent subscription concert performances were given on June 8, 9, and 10, 2000, with William Eddins conducting. The Orchestra has performed excerpts from this symphony at the Ravinia Festival only once previously, on July 21, 1956, when the composer himself conducted the first two movements.

It was left to Aaron Copland, who was born with the century just over a hundred and seven years ago, to serve as the grand statesman of American music. Of all the gifted composers who came of age in our country in the twentieth century, Copland was the one whose work seemed to capture best the essence of this land and its people—from the rural charm of *Appalachian Spring* to the Wild West picture-postcard scenes of *Billy the Kid* and *Rodeo*. (With his characteristic good humor—and perhaps a bit of envy—Virgil Thomson called Copland “the president of American music.”)

And so, at the end of World War II, Copland was the obvious choice to write our official musical statement—to express the optimism sweeping this country and to provide a grand public monument of hope and affirmation. Copland didn't set out with this in mind when he began his Third Symphony in the summer of 1944, in the isolated town of Tepotzlan, Mexico, far from both his home turf and the front lines of war. At that point, he was thinking more of pleasing Serge Koussevitzky, who had commissioned the work, and who “liked music in the grand manner.” But, from the start, Copland apparently planned to incorporate his recent *Fanfare for the Common Man*, a brassy, populist soundbite composed in 1942 to boost morale in wartime effort, into this work. (David Diamond, Copland's friend and fellow-composer, wrote to him in Mexico in 1944, “Make it a really KO symphony. And do, please use the fanfare material.”)

And so the shadow of the war hovered over the symphony from its inception, despite the composer's insistence that he wasn't “consciously thinking of that.” By the time the score was completed, in a converted barn near Tanglewood, Massachusetts, in September 1946, the war was over, the fanfare had taken its place in the symphony's finale, and Copland publicly claimed that the work was “intended to reflect the euphoric spirit of the country at the time.”

Expectations ran very high once word got out that Copland had written a third symphony, his first large-scale abstract orchestral work in a decade. (It's the longest concert piece of his career.) Copland's score followed shortly on the heels of two other high-profile third symphonies—one by Roy Harris, hailed as the “great American symphony” at its premiere in 1939, and one by William Schuman two years later. Predictably (though not without justification), Copland's Third Symphony was greeted as a landmark in American music at its premiere, and it went on to win several prizes, including the New York Music Critics' Circle Award. Koussevitzky, who conducted the premiere, proclaimed it the greatest American symphony

ever written. Clifford Odets, the then-popular playwright, found in its music “as lofty a nature as we in America have yet expressed.”

Inevitably, for a work so accessible, so popular with a wide audience, and so highly successful, there was a backlash. Some of Copland's friends and critics complained that the finale, with its grandiloquent fanfare, was overblown, while others thought the whole piece too obviously “populist.” Virgil Thomson detected “something false” and wondered whether “the feelings expressed in the work are entirely spontaneous and personal.” Copland himself claimed that he had deliberately adopted “a broad familiar symphony style, not trying to explore new, unmapped territory,” and he admitted that the music was “fat-grand” rather than his usual “lean-grand.” (He later sanctioned a couple of cuts in the finale to help lower the high cholesterol content.) Although it has never achieved the popularity of the ballet scores *Billy the Kid*, *Rodeo*, or *Appalachian Spring*, the Third Symphony quickly made many new friends for Copland and for serious orchestral music in this country. It is probably the best-known American symphony of the twentieth century. “The symphony has become an American monument,” Bernstein said, “like the Washington Monument or the Lincoln Memorial.”

Aaron Copland on the Third Symphony

Regarding my Third Symphony, one aspect ought to be pointed out: it contains no folk or popular material. During the late twenties, it was customary to pigeonhole me as a composer of symphonic jazz, with emphasis on the jazz. I have also been catalogued as a folklorist and purveyor of Americana. Any reference to jazz or folk material in this work was purely unconscious.

For the sake of those who like a purely musical guide through unfamiliar terrain, I add a breakdown by movements of the technical outlines of the work.

I. *Molto moderato* (very moderate). The opening movement, which is broad and expressive in character, opens and closes in the key of E major. (Formally it bears no relation to the sonata-allegro with which symphonies usually begin.) The themes—three in number—are plainly stated: the first is in the strings, at the very start without introduction; the second, in a related mood, in violas and oboes; the third of a bolder nature, in the trombones and horns. The general form is that of an arch, in which the central portion is more animated and the final section is an extended coda presenting a broadened version of the opening material. Both first and third themes are referred to again in later movements of the symphony.

II. *Allegro molto* (very fast). The form of this movement stays closer to normal symphonic procedure. It is the usual scherzo, with first part, trio, and return. A brass introduction leads to the main theme, which is stated three times in part one: at first in horns and violas with continuation in clarinets, then in unison strings, and finally in augmentation in the lower brass. The three statements of the theme are separated by the usual episodes. After the climax is reached, the trio follows without pause. Solo woodwinds sing the new melody in lyrical and canonical style. The strings take it up, and add a new section of their own.

The recapitulation of part one is not literal. The principal theme of the scherzo returns in somewhat disguised form in the solo piano, leading through previous episodic material to a full restatement in the tutti orchestra. This is climaxed by a return to the lyrical trio theme, this time sung in canon and in fortissimo by the entire orchestra.

III. *Andantino quasi allegretto* (moving along a little, almost like an allegretto, slightly fast). The third movement is freest of all in formal structure. Although it is built up sectionally, the various sections are intended to emerge one from the other in continuous flow, somewhat in the manner of a closely knit series of variations. The opening section, however, plays no role other than that of introducing the main body of the movement.

High up in the unaccompanied first violins is heard a rhythmically transformed version of the third (trombone) theme of the first movement of the symphony. It is briefly developed in contrapuntal style and comes to a full close, once again in the key of E major. A new and more tonal theme is introduced in the solo flute. This is the melody that supplies the thematic substance for the sectional metamorphoses that follow, at first with quiet singing nostalgia; then faster and heavier—almost dancelike; then more childlike

and naive; and finally vigorous and forthright. Imperceptibly, the whole movement drifts off into the higher regions of the strings, out of which floats the single line of the beginning, sung by solo violin and piccolo, accompanied this time by harps and celesta. The third movement calls for no brass, with the exception of a single horn and trumpet.

IV. Fanfare: *Molto deliberato* (very deliberate)—*Allegro risoluto* (fast and resolute). The final movement follows without pause. It is the longest movement of the symphony, and closest in structure to the customary sonata-allegro form. The opening fanfare is based on Fanfare for the Common Man, which I composed in 1942 at the invitation of Eugene Goossens for a series of wartime fanfares introduced under his direction by the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra. In the present version it is first played *pianissimo* by flutes and clarinets, and then suddenly given out by brass and percussion. The fanfare serves as preparation for the main body of the movement that follows. The components of the usual form are there: a first theme in animated sixteenth-note motion; a second theme—broader and more songlike in character; a full-blown development; and a refashioned return to the earlier material of the movement, leading to a peroration. One curious feature of the movement consists in the fact that the second theme is to be found embedded in the development section instead of being in its customary place [following the statement of the first theme]. The development, as such, concerns itself with the fanfare and first-theme fragments. A shrill tutti chord, with flutter-tongued brass and piccolos, brings the development to a close. What follows is not a recapitulation in the ordinary sense. Instead, a delicate interweaving of the first theme in the higher solo woodwinds is combined with a quiet version of the fanfare in the two bassoons. Combined with this, the opening theme of the first movement of the symphony is quoted, first in the violins, and later in the solo trombone. Near the end a full-voiced chanting of the second songlike theme is heard in horns and trombones. The symphony concludes on a massive restatement of the opening phrase with which the work began.

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