

# AARON COPLAND

(1900 - 1990)

81st Birthday Concert at the Library of Congress

Jan DeGaetani, mezzo-soprano

Leo Smit, piano

- |  |        |
|--|--------|
| <b>1</b> Zion's Walls (from <i>Old American Songs</i> , Second Set, 1952)                              | (2:14) |
| <b>2</b> At the River (from <i>Old American Songs</i> , Second Set, 1952)                              | (2:49) |
| <b>3</b> Simple Gifts (from <i>Old American Songs</i> , First Set, 1950)<br>( <i>voice and piano</i> ) | (1:52) |
| Three Moods (1920-21)<br>( <i>piano solo</i> )   | (4:29) |
| <b>4</b> embittered  | (1:01) |
| <b>5</b> wistful   | (2:04) |
| <b>6</b> jazzy   | (1:17) |
| <b>7</b> Night Thoughts (1972)<br>( <i>piano solo</i> )  | (8:16) |
| <b>8</b> Conversation with Aaron Copland, Donald L. Leavitt<br>and Leo Smit                            | (3:26) |

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|---|---------|
| <b>9</b> Introduction by Jan DeGaetani  | (1:15)  |
| Twelve Poems of Emily Dickinson (1949-50)<br>( <i>voice and piano</i> )                                       | (32:13) |
| <b>10</b> Nature, the gentlest mother   | (4:18)  |
| <b>11</b> There came a wind like a bugle  | (1:36)  |
| <b>12</b> Why do they shut me out of Heaven?  | (1:45)  |
| <b>13</b> The world feels dusty   | (1:59)  |
| <b>14</b> Heart, we will forget him   | (2:15)  |
| <b>15</b> Dear March, come in!  | (2:02)  |
| <b>16</b> Sleep is supposed to be   | (3:04)  |
| <b>17</b> When they come back   | (2:00)  |
| <b>18</b> I felt a funeral in my brain  | (2:29)  |
| <b>19</b> I've heard an organ talk sometimes  | (2:07)  |
| <b>20</b> Going to Heaven!  | (2:25)  |
| <b>21</b> The Chariot   | (4:20)  |
| <b>22</b> The Little Horses (from <i>Old American Songs</i> , Second Set, 1952)<br>( <i>voice and piano</i> ) | (2:33)  |

## AARON COPLAND (1900-1990)

For more than a quarter-century, Aaron Copland was a pivotal figure among American composers. When he went to Paris after World War I, he became the first American to study composition with the remarkable French pedagogue Nadia Boulanger. Subsequently, so many Americans worked with Boulanger that Virgil Thomson could joke that every town in America had two things: a five-and-ten-cent store and a Boulanger pupil. But in 1921 studying composition in Paris (not to mention with a woman) wasn't commonplace for Americans, for whom the conservatories of Germany and Austria had long been the obligatory destination. World War I – and, in Copland's case, reaction against the Germanic conservatism of his New York teacher Rubin Goldmark – encouraged a change of direction that eventually proved liberating: freed of dependence on a single stylistic ideal, American music found its own kind – or kinds – of balance between the contrasting emphases of the French and German traditions.

After his return home in 1924, Copland soon took a leading role in activities and organizations dedicated to furthering the cause of American music: the League of Composers, the Copland-Sessions Concerts, the Yaddo Festivals, the Arrow Music Press, the American Composers Alliance. (Thomson dubbed him “American music's natural president.”) In addition to work as a teacher (notably at Serge Koussevitzky's Berkshire Music Center), he was generous in encouraging and supporting younger talent, and during the Forties was active in introducing the music of Latin American composers to their northern colleagues.

Equally influential was a shift in his own compositional direction during the Thirties. In Copland's autobiographical compilation (prepared with historian Vivian Perlis), the chapter on the late Twenties is entitled “Music for Musicians,” while that on the mid-Thirties is “Music for the People.” The Great Depression and alarming European political developments evoked among many artists increased social concern as well as a search for languages more accessible to larger publics. Copland was not the first musician to respond

in this way (Thomson's 1934 opera *Four Saints in Three Acts* pioneered the approach), but his ballets *Billy the Kid* (1938, choreographed by Eugene Loring), *Rodeo* (1942, by Agnes de Mille), and *Appalachian Spring* (1944, by Martha Graham) became the central works of the new populism. To critics and public alike, they demonstrated that music incorporating or evoking American vernacular musical materials could be written in a fresh, contemporary style, discarding the symphonic upholstery with which earlier native composers had emulated European nationalist traditions.

Alongside ballets, film scores, and other “Music for the People,” however, Copland continued to compose “Music for Musicians,” as well as a *Third Symphony* (1946) that reached out to both audiences. In the late 1940s, he began using twelve-tone techniques, disappointing some long-term admirers who felt that Copland was following a trend, trying to keep up, rather than leading. Yet the germs of such a development had been present in his music at least since the *Piano Variations* (1930), and lengthening historical perspective may well encourage reevaluation of the later works. After his seventieth birthday, Copland's output gradually slowed, though his place in the repertory has never diminished.

The piano works on the present program (part of a concert given at the Library of Congress in honor of the composer's eighty-first birthday) span virtually Copland's entire career. The *Three Moods* were composed in 1920-21; in line with the composer's French preoccupations at the time, the set was originally called *Trois Esquisses*, the individual pieces “*Amertume*,” “*Pensif*,” and “*Jazzy*.” The first was composed on Copland's twentieth birthday, the second on January 8, 1921, while the third, he later said, “must have been on my mind or sketched out the spring before I left for France, but it was not put to paper until Paris, 3 November 1921.” The three terse pieces suggest the range of Copland's expressive and technical interests at an early stage, from the aggressive dissonances of the first to the easy vernacular rhythms of the last. At the first public performances, in 1981, the original titles were retained; the English titles appeared on the published version of the same year, dedicated

to Leo Smit, who gave the first complete performance in Albany in February 1981.

As early as 1933, Copland had written an influential essay stating a (not unqualified) case for the music of Charles Ives, then virtually unknown to the public and most of the musical profession. Although his own compositional concerns were turning in a different direction from that of the senior pioneer, Copland recognized that Ives's difficulty in finding an audience was a problem that concerned all serious American composers. In 1972, after completing *Night Thoughts*, commissioned by the Van Cliburn piano competition, Copland added the subtitle "Homage to Ives"; it was first performed in September 1973 at the competition in Fort Worth, Texas, by Vladimir Viardo. This eloquent example of the composer's dissonant style challenges the player with its widely spaced chords (always a Copland "ear-mark") and the contrapuntal textures of the middle section, which is framed by statements of the piece's opening motive.

By contrast to these piano works, the vocal music on this program, from the middle of Copland's career, exemplifies his simultaneous pursuit of parallel stylistic paths. Around 1949 he returned to vocal writing for the first time since 1928, a return that may be viewed as preparation for the opera *The Tender Land* (1952-54), which might have climaxed Copland's "American" style (as *The Rake's Progress* had capped Stravinsky's neo-classicism), had not a lack of dramatic and musical variety within its prevalent pastoral idiom prevented either popular or critical success.

Copland composed nothing more "popular" than the *Old American Songs*, arrangements for voice and piano (later orchestrated) of hymns, minstrel songs, and folk songs. A first set of five was completed in 1950 and performed that summer at England's Aldeburgh Festival by Peter Pears, accompanied by Benjamin Britten (whose own earlier arrangements of English and French songs, issued by Copland's publisher and performed by Pears and Britten on a 1949 American tour, may have been an initial stimulus). A second set of five settings was finished in 1952 and introduced that year at the Castle Hill

Festival in Ipswich, Massachusetts, by William Warfield, accompanied by the composer.

Among the songs chosen for this program, "Simple Gifts" comes from the first set; a Shaker tune from the period 1837-47, it is, of course, the melody used as the basis of variations in the ballet *Appalachian Spring*. The second set begins with "The Little Horses," described by Copland as "a children's lullaby song originating in the Southern States - date unknown." "Zion's Walls" is "a revivalist song. . . credited to John G. McCurry, compiler of the *Social Harp*." "At the River" is an 1865 hymn by Rev. Robert Lowry (Charles Ives made a harmonically and metrically destabilizing version of this, which must have been known to Copland). Like Britten's harmonizations, Copland's are in no wise antiquarian, capturing the traditional melodies amid inventively modern harmonizations and accompanimental textures.

March 1950 marked the completion of the *Twelve Poems of Emily Dickinson*, begun a year earlier. In Copland's own words: "The poems center about no single theme, but they treat of subject matter particularly close to Miss Dickinson: nature, death, life, eternity. Only two of the songs are related musically, the seventh and the twelfth. Nevertheless, the composer hopes that, in seeking a musical counterpart for the unique personality of the poet, he has given the songs, taken together, the aspect of a song cycle." The Dickinson Poems were first performed in New York in May 1950 by Alice Howland and the composer. (Each song is dedicated to a composer and friend: respectively, David Diamond, Elliott Carter, Ingolf Dahl, Alexei Haieff, Marcelle de Manziarly, Juan Orrego-Salas, Irving Fine, Harold Shapero, Camargo Guarnieri, Alberto Ginastera, Lukas Foss, Arthur Berger. Interestingly, except for Foss and the Latin-Americans, all these were pupils of Nadia Boulanger.) Copland later orchestrated eight of the songs, a version introduced at a New York concert celebrating his seventieth birthday.

An early commentator on the cycle, Arthur Berger, noted a Mahlerian resonance, something of "the wistfulness that characterizes his condensed song forms. . . Even if Mahler had not meant so much to Copland previously,

the sheer challenge of setting poems so preoccupied with death as those of Dickinson would have been enough to establish an affinity with the composer of *Kindertotenlieder*." Behind the un-Mahlerian (but very Coplandesque) jaggedness and rhythmic unevenness, the contrapuntal textures of piano and voice can surely be heard as descendants of some of the *Knaben Wunderhorn* and *Rückert* songs – yet also as relatives of the *Old American Songs*, so that the totality is unmistakably Copland, and, for many listeners, equally unmistakably Dickinson.

– David Hamilton, 1993

## Song Texts

### OLD AMERICAN SONGS

#### Zion's Walls (Revivalist Song)

Come fathers and mothers come  
Sisters and brothers come  
Join us in singing the praises of Zion.  
O fathers don't you feel determined  
to meet within the walls of Zion  
We'll shout and go round  
We'll shout and go round the  
walls of Zion.

#### At the River (Hymn Tune)

Shall we gather by the river  
Where bright angels feet have trod  
With its crystal tide forever  
Flowing by the throne of God.

Yes we'll gather by the river,  
the beautiful, the beautiful river  
Gather with the saints by the river  
That flows by the throne of God.

Soon we'll reach the shining river  
Soon our pilgrimage will cease  
Soon our happy hearts will quiver  
With the melody of peace.

#### Simple Gifts (Shaker Song)

'Tis the gift to be simple  
'Tis the gift to be free  
'Tis the gift to come down  
where you ought to be  
And when we find ourselves  
in the place just right  
'Twill be in the valley  
of love and delight.

When true simplicity is gained  
To bow and to bend  
we shan't be ashamed  
To turn, turn will be our delight  
'Till by turning, turning we  
come round right.

#### The Little Horses (Lullaby)

Hush you bye, don't you cry,  
Go to sleepy little baby.  
When you wake, you shall have,  
All the pretty little horses.

Blacks and bays, dapples and grays,  
Coach and six-a little horses.

Hush you bye, don't you cry,  
Go to sleepy little baby.  
When you wake,  
you'll have sweet cake and  
All the pretty little horses.

A brown and a gray  
and a black and a bay and a  
Coach and six-a little horses.

Hush you bye, don't you cry  
Oh you pretty little baby.  
Go to sleepy little baby.  
Oh you pretty little baby.

## TWELVE POEMS OF EMILY DICKINSON

1. Nature, the gentlest mother  
Impatient of no child,  
The feeblest or the waywardest, —  
Her admonition mild

In forest and the hill  
By traveller is heard  
Restraining rampant squirrel  
Or too impetuous bird.

How fair her conversation,  
A summer afternoon, —  
Her household, her assembly;  
And when the sun goes down  
Her voice among the aisles

incites the timid prayer  
Of the minutest cricket,  
The most unworthy flower.

When all the children sleep  
She turns as long away  
As will suffice to light her lamps;  
Then, bending from the sky,

With infinite affection  
And infiniter care,  
Her golden finger on her lip,  
Wills silence everywhere.

2. There came a wind like a bugle  
It quivered through the grass,  
And a green chill upon the heat  
So ominous did pass

We barred the windows  
and the doors  
As from an emerald ghost;  
The doom's electric mocassin  
That very instant passed  
On a strange mob of panting trees,  
And fences fled away,

And rivers where the houses ran  
The living looked that day.  
The bell within the steeple wild  
The flying tidings whirled.  
How much can come  
And much can go,  
And yet abide the world!

3. Why do they shut me  
out of Heaven?  
Did I sing too loud?  
But I can sing a little minor,  
Timid as a bird.

Wouldn't the angels try me  
Just once more?  
Just see if I troubled them —  
But don't shut the door!

Oh, if I were the gentlemen  
In the white robes,  
And they were the little hand  
that knocked —  
Could I forbid?

4. The world feels dusty  
When we stop to die;  
We want the dew then,  
Honors taste dry.

Flags vex a dying face,  
But the least fan  
Stirred by a friend's hand  
Cools like the rain

Mine be the ministry  
When thy thirst comes,  
Dews of thyself to fetch  
And holy balms.

5. Heart, we will forget him!  
You and I, to-night!  
You may forget the warmth he gave,  
I will forget the light.

When you have done, pray tell me,  
That I my thoughts may dim;  
Haste! lest while you're lagging  
I may remember him!

6. Dear March, come in!  
How glad I am!  
I looked for you before.  
Put down your hat —  
You must have walked —  
How out of breath you are!  
Dear March, how are you?  
And the rest?  
Did you leave Nature well?  
Oh, March, come right upstairs  
with me,

I have so much to tell!  
I got your letter, and the bird's;  
The maples never knew  
That you were coming, — I declare,  
How red their faces grew!  
But, March, forgive me —  
And all those hills  
You left for me to hue;  
There was no purple suitable,  
You took it all with you.

Who knocks? That April!  
Lock the door! I will not be pursued!  
He stayed away a year, to call  
When I am occupied.  
But trifles look so trivial  
As soon as you have come,  
That blame is just as dear as praise  
And praise as mere as blame.

7. Sleep is supposed to be,  
By souls of sanity,  
The shutting of the eye.  
Sleep is the station grand  
Down which on either hand  
The hosts of witness stand!  
Morn is supposed to be,  
By people of degree,  
The breaking of the day.  
Morning has not occurred!  
That shall aurora be  
East of eternity;  
One with the banner gay,  
One in the red array, –  
That is the break of day.

8. When they come back,  
If blossoms do –  
I always feel a doubt  
If blossoms can be born again  
When once the art is out.

When they begin,  
If Robins may –  
I always had a fear  
I did not tell, it was their last  
Experiment last year.

When it is May,  
If May return –  
Had nobody a pang  
Lest on a face so beautiful  
He might not look again?

If I am there –  
One does not know  
What party one may be  
To-morrow, – but if I am there  
I take back all I say!

9. I felt a funeral in my brain,  
And mourners, to and fro,  
Kept treading, treading,  
till it seemed  
That sense was breaking through.

And when they all were seated,  
A service like a drum  
Kept beating, beating,  
till I thought  
My mind was going numb.

And then I heard them  
lift a box,  
And creak across my soul  
With those same boots of lead,  
again.  
Then space began to toll  
As all the heavens were a bell,  
And Being but an ear,  
And I and silence  
some strange race,  
Wrecked, solitary, here.

10. I've heard an organ talk sometimes  
In a cathedral aisle  
And understood no word it said,  
Yet held my breath the while.

And risen up and gone away  
a more Bernardine girl,  
Yet knew not what was done to me  
In that old hallowed aisle.

11. Going to heaven!  
I don't know when,  
Pray do not ask me how, –  
Indeed, I'm too astonished  
To think of answering you!  
Going to heaven! –  
How dim it sounds!  
And yet it will be done

As sure as flocks  
go home at night  
Unto the shepherd's arm!

Perhaps you're going too!  
Who knows?  
If you should get there first,  
Save just a little place for me  
Close to the two I lost!  
The smallest "robe" will fit me,  
And just a bit of "crown";  
For you know we do not  
mind our dress  
When we are going home.

I'm glad I don't believe it,  
For it would stop my breath,  
And I'd like to look a little more  
At such a curious earth!  
I am glad they did believe it  
Whom I have never found  
Since the mighty  
autumn afternoon  
I left them in the ground.

12. Because I could not stop  
for Death,  
He kindly stopped for me;  
The carriage held but  
just ourselves  
And Immortality.
- We slowly drove,  
he knew no haste,  
And I had put away  
My labor, and my leisure too,  
For his civility.
- We passed the school  
where children played  
At wrestling in a ring;  
We passed the fields  
of gazing grain,  
We passed the setting sun.
- We paused before a house  
that seemed  
A swelling of the ground;  
The roof was scarcely visible,  
The cornice but a mound.
- Since then 'tis centuries; but each  
Feels shorter than the day  
I first surmised the horses' heads  
Were toward eternity.

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## A Magical Moment

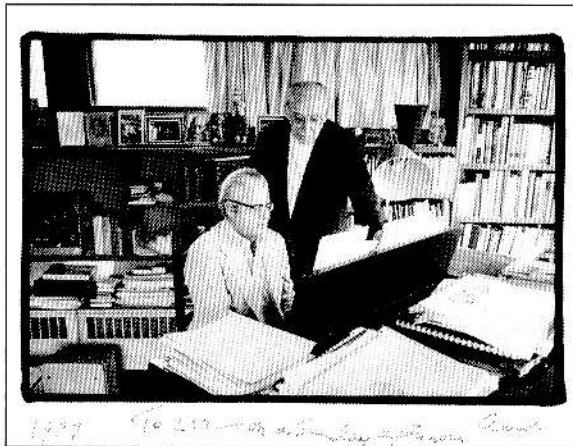
I had just begun to play the introductory phrase of Copland's setting of the old Shaker melody, *Simple Gifts*, when I noticed Jan moving away from her down-stage center position, and walking towards Aaron, who was comfortably on a sofa, up-stage center.

Aaron watched Jan approach with a look of surprise and some alarm, as if to say "what is she up to now?" However, the suspense didn't last long, for in another measure Jan was standing directly behind him.

As she placed her hands on his shoulders, she started to sing, her pure, warm voice enveloping everyone on stage and in the audience. Aaron was clearly touched by Jan's spontaneous gesture. He turned to look up at her with a characteristically happy and bemused smile, which played on his face throughout the entire song.

It was a magical moment, but making music with Jan was to experience musical heaven and the joy and awe reserved for the lucky few who knew and loved her, and who heard and still hear her immortal song.

— Leo Smit, 1993





The distinguished American mezzo-soprano **Jan DeGaetani** in her 30-year career performed an unrivalled breadth of repertory. Perhaps best known as a pre-eminent interpreter of 20th-century music (she premiered works by Luciano Berio, Elliott Carter, George Crumb, Luigi Dallapiccola, Mario Davidovsky, Jacob Druckman, Mel Powell, William Schuman, Leo Smit, and Richard Wernick) she was also renowned for her performance of the German and French song repertoire, and sang with ease in many languages. She was also active in the field of early music; and she took leading operatic roles – from Purcell and Gluck to Stravinsky and the British composers Birtwistle and Maxwell Davies.

Born in Ohio on July 10, 1933, Jan DeGaetani came to New York to study at the Juilliard School. Ms. DeGaetani was heard throughout the United States, Europe, and the Far East with leading chamber ensembles and the world's great orchestras. She was an honored guest at international music festivals, including Aldeburgh, Dartington, Warsaw, Adelaide, Ravinia and Tanglewood. Jan DeGaetani exerted a powerful influence on a new generation of singers and instrumentalists, teaching for many years at the Eastman School of Music and the Aspen Music Festival. Ms. DeGaetani's much-loved recordings with pianist Gilbert Kalish, on Nonesuch, Arabesque and Bridge, thoroughly document the wide range of her art. The present recording is the fifth in a series of Jan DeGaetani discs on Bridge Records.



**Jan DeGaetani**



**Leo Smit**, pianist, composer, conductor, teacher and writer, began studying music at age five with his father, a violinist in the Philadelphia Orchestra during the Stokowski years. By age 14, he had studied with Dmitri Kabalevsky, Nicolas Nabokov, and Jose Iturbi; By age 15 he had worked with Stravinsky and Balanchine, preparing three Stravinsky ballets: *Apollon Musagète*, *Le Baiser de la fée*, and *Jeu de Cartes*. Leo Smit has given recitals around the world and has played under the batons of Bernstein, Munch, Stokowski, Stravinsky, Copland and Foss. As pianist and conductor, he has premiered works by Bartok, Copland, Fine, Haieff, Hindemith, and Kabalevsky. Leo Smit received a Grammy nomination for his CBS Masterworks recording of the complete piano works of Aaron Copland.

In 1976 Leo Smit worked with Jan DeGaetani on songs by Cole Porter, which they recorded together for Columbia Records. Mr. Smit later arranged eight Cole Porter songs for mezzo-soprano, oboe, string orchestra and percussion. This was to be the last music Jan DeGaetani would perform, at the Aspen Music Festival on July 7, 1989.

Producer: Becky Starobin

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Photograph of Leo Smit and Aaron Copland by Jim Houghton, courtesy of Leo Smit

Photograph of Jan DeGaetani by Jane Hamborsky

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