

director, and a cast including the young Norman Treigle. It was poorly received, with criticism focused on the weaknesses of the opera's characters and the storyline. Later analysis by Christopher Patton stated that one underlying cause of the opera's failure at the premiere was the contrast between writing for the intimate medium of television, the originally intended medium of the work, versus the more public and larger-scale setting of an opera house.

Patton has also commented on the role of Erik Johns' interest in the Vedanta branch of Hinduism in the libretto

Copland and Johns made revisions to the opera, expanding Act 2 for performances at Tanglewood in August 1954, and making further adjustments for Oberlin College in 1955. With the composer's agreement, Murry Sidlin re-scored the work with reduced forces - the same scoring as the original 13 instrument version of Appalachian Spring - for a production in New Haven in 1987, a staging that ran for more than 50 performances. Sidlin also added two of Copland's Old American Songs to the central party scene.

On July 28, 1965, the composer conducted a concert version of his work, as part of the French-American Festival, with the New York Philharmonic. In the cast were Joy Clements, Claramae Turner, Richard Cassilly, Norman Treigle, and Richard Fredricks. Three days later, Columbia recorded an abridged version of the opera, again conducted by Copland, at the Manhattan Center, with the same cast.



Aaron Copland conducting his
Appalachian Spring
The Tender Land-Suite
Boston Symphony Orchestra

Long after its composition, Aaron Copland's *Appalachian Spring* remains both the composer's quintessential masterpiece and one of the definitive ballets of the twentieth century. Written on commission from dancer/choreographer Martha Graham, *Appalachian Spring* depicts the lives of a newly married pioneer couple in nineteenth century Pennsylvania. The scenario that emerges in the course of the dance "narrative" includes a house-raising, a sermon, a festive party, and the couple alone in a moment of hopeful reflection. Throughout, *Appalachian Spring* unfolds with a spirit of unflinching optimism (though, as is clear from the Hart Crane poem from which the ballet's name was derived -- after the music was written -- the "Spring" of the title actually refers to a wellspring, not the season).

The music of *Appalachian Spring* is at once characteristic of Copland's "Americana" style of the late '30s and the 1940s. The harmonic language, based largely on triadic and other, mildly dissonant sonorities, is marked by an overall sparseness and simplicity; at appropriate moments, though, Copland employs fuller, more luxurious textures. The melodic material varies according to the ballet's episodic nature: the introduction, for example, is ethereal and almost non-melodic, but is immediately followed by leaping, spiky lines in which melodic fourths play a prominent role. What is undoubtedly the most famous tune from the ballet is not Copland's own: The composer presents the traditional Shaker hymn *Simple Gifts*, masterfully spinning a set of variations that progress toward the climax of the entire work, a final tutti statement of the theme marked by a particular dignity and grandeur. In keeping with the nature and purpose of the score, the rhythmic language is

particularly lively, even breathtaking, making *Appalachian Spring* among the most kinetic of any of Copland's works. Irregular, changing meters are a particularly notable feature; even when the music remains in a single meter, shifts of accent ensure a distinctive sense of constant motion and rhythmic surprise.

Practical and economic constraints led Copland to score the original version of the work for an ensemble of 13 instruments. Within a short time of the ballet's premiere, however, Copland arranged the music into a concert suite for full orchestra, in which form it is most frequently performed today. Many purists prefer the original instrumentation, which has, it must be said, a striking austerity and rawness that is largely smoothed over in the version for full orchestra. The latter, at the same time, presents its own beauties not present in the smaller-scale original. In any event, *Appalachian Spring* continues to flourish as a perennial favorite and remains Copland's most beloved contribution to the pantheon of twentieth century classics.

The *Tender Land* opera tells of a farm family in the Midwest of the United States. Copland was inspired to write this opera after viewing the Depression-era photographs of Walker Evans and reading James Agee's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. He wrote the work between 1952 and 1954 for the NBC Television Opera Workshop, with the intention of its being presented on television. However, the television producers rejected the opera.

Eventually, the work had its premiere on April 1, 1954 at the New York City Opera, with Thomas Schippers as the conductor, Jerome Robbins as the

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Appalachian Spring (Ballet For Martha)

- 1 Introduction Of Characters 3:00**
- 2 Display Of Action 2:56**
- 3 Pas De Deux For The Bride And Groom 3:54**
- 4 Revival Meeting 3:30**
- 5 Bride's Solo 4:02**
- 6 Reprise Of The Introduction 1:17**
- 7 Shaker Theme, The Gift To Be Simple,
And Variations Underscoring Scenes Of
Daily Activity For The Bride And Groom 3:04**

8 Coda 3:40

The Tender Land: Suite

- 9 Introduction And Love Music 10:14**
- 10 Party Scene 4:41**
- 11 Finale: The Promise Of Living 5:41**

Recorded by RCA at Symphony Hall, Boston, April 23, 1959.
Producer - Peter Dellheim Engineer - John Crawford



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