

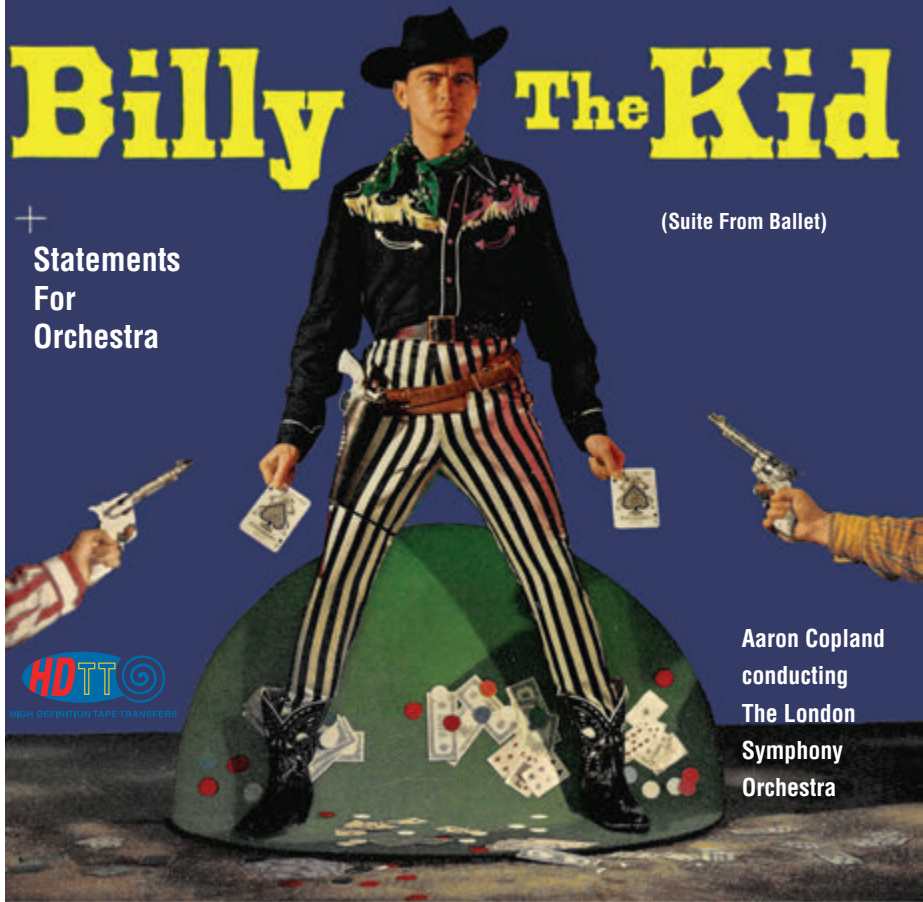
includes works like the Symphonic Ode (1927 - 1929), the Piano Variations (1930), and the Short Symphony (1932 - 1933). Copland had not yet quite adopted the more populist style of the works of the later 1930s, such as El salón México (1933 - 1936) or the ballet Billy the Kid (1938), so the musical language of Statements is more akin to the hard-edged, sometimes dissonant sound of those earlier compositions.

In Copland's words "The word 'statement' was chosen to indicate a short, terse orchestral movement of a well-defined character, lasting about three minutes." This "well-defined character" was specified in the one-word titles the composer gave each of the work's six movements. The purposeful stride of Militant opens the piece; it has been suggested by composer David Diamond that this movement may be a kind of portrait of the Group Theatre or some other left-wing organization (Copland was quite strongly involved with the political left at about this time). The slow and dramatic Cryptic, scored almost entirely for solo flute and the orchestra's brass section, leads into the more lively Dogmatic. This movement quotes the theme of Copland's Piano Variations. The mellow, lyrical fourth movement, Subjective, features only violins, violas, and cellos. The full orchestra is featured in the witty and satirical Jingo, which makes several allusions to the once-popular song "The Sidewalks of New York" (also heard in Copland's Music for the Theatre of 1925). The imposing final movement, Prophetic, features a slow-moving fanfare-like melody for solo trumpet. As forceful as most of this movement is, it ends quietly and ambivalently with a single quiet tam-tam stroke.

Billy The Kid

(Suite From Ballet)

+
Statements
For
Orchestra



Aaron Copland
conducting
The London
Symphony
Orchestra

It was ballet impresario Lincoln Kirstein who had the inspiration to bring together composer Aaron Copland and choreographer Eugene Loring to create a work based on the legend of Billy the Kid. Kirstein was particularly drawn to Walter Noble Burns' 1925 best-seller *The Saga of Billy the Kid*, a mix of lore, fantasy, and historical research. As related by Burns, Billy, a gambler, cattle rustler, and vigilante frontiersman, made his claim to fame in having killed a man for each of his 21 years. Loring devised a scenario which calls for four principals, along with "pioneers, men, women, Mexicans, and Indians." Much of the ballet's action, form, and mood reflects Burns' *Saga*, particularly the grotesque celebration which follows a central shoot-out scene.

Copland, having already composed works evocative of the American west and Mexico like *El Salon Mexico* (1933-36) and *Saga of the Prairies* (1937), was well prepared for this "cowboy ballet." The composer provided period flavor by incorporating six cowboy tunes into the score: "Great Granddad," "Git Along Little Dogie," "The Old Chisholm Trail," "Goodbye, Old Paint," "The Dying Cowboy," and "Trouble for the Range Cook."

Copland's score provides a vivid sonic depiction of prairie life. An opening processional is distinguished by Copland's trademark widely spaced "open" harmonies in the woodwinds, followed by a bass figure centered on a syncopated two-note motive. This plodding bass moves dramatically from pianissimo to a triple-forte climax, suggesting the laborious trudging of the settlers. The music of the processional brings the ballet full circle with its reappearance as the coda. "Street in a Frontier Town" moves from pastoral innocence to mechanistic violence, incorporating several cowboy tunes along the way. The rest of Billy's story moves unfolds in short vignettes, including "Card Game at Night"

(also known as "Prairie Night"), which draws upon the familiar image of the lone cowboy, including snatches of "The Dying Cowboy." "Gun Battle" is dominated by violent percussion, the sounds of gunfire represented by snare and bass drums. In "Celebration After Billy's Capture" Copland neatly transforms the trudging bass of the opening processional into a dissonant "oompah" figure that underpins a crude bitonal melody, while a waltz section transforms "Trouble for the Range Cook" into an ironic ditty with solos in the trombone and bassoon. "Billy's Death" is a solemn epilogue for strings, harp, and winds.

Billy the Kid was first performed by the Ballet Caravan in Chicago in a two-piano version on October 6, 1938. The familiar version for full orchestra was premiered in New York on May 24, 1939 to critical and popular raves. In 1940 Copland extracted a concert suite from the ballet, the form in which the music is today most frequently heard.

Copland began work on the *Statements* for orchestra in response to a commission by the League of Composers in the spring of 1932 at the artists' colony in Yaddo, NY. He continued to work on it intermittently over the next three years in various places, including Mexico City, northern Minnesota, New York state, Massachusetts, and New Hampshire. The orchestration was completed in New York City in June 1935, and the work, dedicated to Mary Senior Churchill, was given its first complete performance on January 7, 1942, at Carnegie Hall, New York, by the New York Philharmonic, conducted by Dmitri Mitropoulos.

The *Statements* belong to what has been termed Copland's abstract phase of the middle 1920s and early-to-middle 1930s, which also

Billy The Kid (Suite From Ballet) Statements For Orchestra

Aaron Copland conducting The London Symphony Orchestra

Billy The Kid - Ballet Suite

- 1 The Open Prairie 3:08
- 2 Street In A Frontier Town 6:33
- 3 Card Game At Night 3:03
- 4 Gun Battle 1:59
- 5 Celebration After Billy's Capture 2:08
- 6 Epilogue: The Open Prairie Again 2:50

Statements For Orchestra

- 7 Militant 2:41
- 8 Cryptic 3:30
- 9 Dogmatic 1:42
- 10 Subjective 3:53
- 11 Jingo 3:34
- 12 Prophetic 3:46

Recorded for Harry Belock and Everest Records
1958 at Walthamstow Assembly Hall, London, England.



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