

MasterWorks 4 Concert
Friday, February 24, 2012

Appalachian Spring

Aaron Copland (1900-1990)

Written: 1942-44

Movements: One

Style: Contemporary American

Duration: 23 minutes

Much of Aaron Copland's fame as a composer rests on his three brilliant scores for ballet: *Rodeo*, *Billy the Kid*, and *Appalachian Spring*. He didn't start out writing in the style found in those three ballets. As a young man he was much more allied with the modernist movement in America. However, in the 1930's he

. . . began to feel an increasing dissatisfaction with the relations of the music-loving public and the living composer . . . It seemed to me that we composers were in danger of working in a vacuum. Moreover, an entirely new public for music had grown up around the radio and phonograph. It made no sense to ignore them and to continue writing as if they did not exist. I felt that it was worth the effort to see if I couldn't say what I had to say in the simplest possible terms.

The success of *El Salon Mexico* (1936), *Billy the Kid* (1938), *A Lincoln Portrait* (1942) and *Rodeo* (1942) proved that Copland's newfound populism was the right course.

When Copland accepted a commission from the Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge Foundation to write a ballet for Martha Graham in 1942, the only restrictions that he knew of were that it had to be for a small enough orchestra to fit in the Coolidge Auditorium at the Library of Congress – only 13 players – and be about thirty minutes long. He knew that the general subject of the ballet had to do with the pioneer American spirit, with youth and spring, with optimism and hope.

As Martha Graham worked on the choreography with the music, the ballet grew into a . . . pioneer celebration in spring around a newly-built farmhouse in the Pennsylvania hills in the early part of the last 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.

Several years after the premiere of the ballet with the small pit orchestra, Copland extracted a large amount of the music and arranged it for a large orchestra. He describes the eight sections of the piece:

1. Very slowly. Introduction of the characters, one by one, in a suffused light.
2. Fast. Sudden burst of unison strings in A major arpeggios starts the action. A sentiment both elated and religious gives the keynote to this scene.
3. Moderate. Duo for the Bride and her Intended, scene of tenderness and passion.
4. Quite fast. The Revivalist and his flock. Folksy feeling, suggestions of square dances

and country fiddlers.

5. Still faster. Solo dance of the Bride, presentiment of motherhood. Extremes of joy and fear and wonder.

6. Very slowly (as at first). Transition scene to music reminiscent of the introduction.

7. Calm and flowing. Scenes of daily activity for the Bride and her Farmer husband.

There are five variations on a Shaker theme. The theme, sung by a solo clarinet, was taken from a collection of Shaker melodies compiled by Edward D. Andrews, and published under the title "The Gift to Be Simple." The melody mostly borrowed and used almost literally is called "Simple Gifts."

8. Moderate. Coda. The Bride takes her place among her neighbors. At the end the couple are left "quiet and strong in their new house." Muted strings intone a hushed prayer-like chorale passage. The close is reminiscent of the opening music.

© 2011 John P. Varineau

Tuba Concerto

Bruce Broughton (1945–)

Written: 1978

Movements: Three

Style: Contemporary American

Duration: 10 minutes

If you are a movie buff, you know the music of Bruce Broughton. His first major motion picture score was for *Silverado*, a work that earned him an Academy Award nomination. Other film credits include *Lost in Space*, *Tombstone*, *Miracle on 34th Street*, *Carried Away*, *Baby's Day Out*, *The Presidio*, *Narrow Margin*, *Harry and The Hendersons*, *Krippendorf's Tribe*, *Honey*, *I Blew Up The Kid*, *The Boy Who Could Fly*, *The Rescuers Down Under*, *Bambi II*, and the two *Homeward Bound* adventures.

If you are a television nut, you know the music of Bruce Broughton. In addition to *Hawaii Five-0*, his TV credits include *JAG*, *Tiny Toon Adventures*, *Dinosaurs*, *Amazing Stories*, *Quincy*, *Dallas*, *How The West Was Won*, *Lucy*, *Bobbie's Girl*, *O Pioneers!*, *Roughing It*, *The Blue and the Gray*, and *True Women*. He has over twenty Grammy nominations and has won ten.

In addition to all of his work for Hollywood and television, Bruce Broughton has composed for the concert hall. He has had works commissioned by the Sunflower Music Festival, the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, the Chicago, National, and Seattle Symphonies and the United States Air Force Band.

The *Tuba Concerto* started out as a *Sonata for Tuba*, written for Broughton's friend and collaborator Tommy Johnson. (Again, if you are a movie buff, you have heard Tommy Johnson. He was a leading Hollywood studio musician. The ominous tuba in the music to *Jaws* is played by Tommy Johnson). Broughton rescored the *Sonata* for band and for orchestra to provide more performance possibilities for the work.

The concerto has three compact movements. The first begins with a short introduction by the orchestra and then a statement of the main theme by the tuba. A brief interlude introduces a second, lighter theme, again played by the tuba. Motives from that second theme go through a slight development. The contrabassoon – rivaling the lowest notes of the tuba –

brings back the opening melody, and before you know it, the movement is over!

The tuba plays a melancholy little melody over plucked strings to begin the second movement. Gradually, other instruments enter to comment on the tuba's melody. The mood intensifies and then slowly fades away to shimmering chords in the strings. The clarinet gets to repeat the opening of the movement, this time with the tuba acting as commentator. As the strings get higher, and the tuba goes lower, the movement fades away.

The third movement begins with a jaunty introductory march by the orchestra. When the tuba enters, the music devolves into a sort of demented dance. Several themes recur and morph throughout the movement. When the march theme returns, it is more frenzied. Like the first movement, this last movement comes to a startlingly sudden finish.

©2011 John P. Varineau

Symphony in D Minor

César Franck (1822-1890)

Written: 1887-88

Movements: three

Style: Romantic

Duration: 40 minutes

When Nicholas-Joseph Franck arrived in Paris with his thirteen-year-old son, César, it was with the hopes and dreams of a pushy stage father. César was only ten when he earned a first prize in piano at the Liège Conservatory, so papa was then ready to take the world by storm with his precocious son. César enrolled at the Paris conservatory, where he again won the *premier prix* in piano. However, by the age of twenty his career as a virtuoso wasn't going anywhere, so the Francks returned to their native Belgium. César eventually escaped his father's clutches, moved back to Paris, got married, supported himself by teaching private lessons, and worked as an organist at a small church. Ultimately, he got a more prestigious appointment at the basilica of Saint Clotilde, where he spent the rest of his life. César also drew a small circle of students around himself, known as the *bande à Franck*. (They would become the next generation of France's leading composers.) Nowadays, his fame rests on the music that he wrote during the last ten years of his life. Perhaps the best known is his *Symphony in D*.

The short melodic idea that begins the *Symphony in D* forms the basis for the entire work. Slow, dark, and foreboding, it is reminiscent of a similar theme used by Beethoven, Liszt, and Wagner to evoke the idea of "fate." After an extended slow introduction—nearly six minutes long!—the symphony finally gets going. Eventually, a second theme emerges, much more positive in tone, that some call the "faith" motive. After substantial development, the "fate" theme returns, this time presented with awesome power by the brass.

Franck combines the standard slow second and fast third movements of a symphony into a single movement. The English horn begins the beautiful main theme accompanied by harp and pizzicato strings. (Just mention a single symphony by Haydn or Beethoven with an English horn," Franck demanded of a friend at the symphony's premiere.) In the middle of this movement, there is a brief diversion, introduced by the clarinet. Explaining the last movement, Franck wrote, "The finale takes up all the themes again, as in Beethoven's Ninth. They do not

return as quotations, however; I have elaborated them and given them the role of new elements."

César Franck had his detractors. "Incompetence pushed to dogmatic lengths," declared Charles Gounod. Others insisted that his music was "Cathedrals in sound." Nevertheless, in a country that had almost no composers famous for writing symphonies, Franck's *Symphony in D Minor* almost single-handedly remedied the deficiency.

©2011 John P. Varineau