

The History in This Program

It is fitting that music by Leonard Bernstein and Aaron Copland should share tonight's program: the two are broadly considered to be among America's greatest composers, and they were also close friends.

Bernstein first discovered Copland's music as an undergraduate at Harvard, where he became obsessed with the "prophetic, clangorous" Piano Variations. He played it often at parties, where it would clear a room instantly — with one exception. Bernstein met Copland himself on November 14, 1937, at dancer Anna Sokolow's New York solo debut. It was the composer's 37th birthday and at a post-performance party for him, Bernstein expressed enthusiasm for the Variations. Copland asked him to play it, but Bernstein demurred. "It'll ruin your party," he said. "Not *this* party," Copland promised. Indeed, the 20-year-old Bernstein transfixed everyone with a performance of the Variations from memory — and a lifelong friendship was born.

At the New York Philharmonic Bernstein championed Copland works, conducting more performances of his mentor's music than any other Music Director before or since. It was because of that advocacy that, when Copland was awarded Honorary Membership of the New York Philharmonic in 1970, he could be recognized as the composer "whose music has been represented on the Society's programs more than that of any American composer during its history" — a distinction he still holds today. Of the seven composers commissioned to create new pieces for the inaugural season of Philharmonic (now David Geffen) Hall, Copland's contribution, *Connotations*, was selected to be played on Opening Night, September 23, 1962. Bernstein would go on to devote an unprecedented three Young People's Concerts to Copland, including tributes for his 60th and 70th birthdays. The legacy continued even after Bernstein's death, when the Philharmonic dedicated three full weeks in 1999 to *Completely Copland*, a salute as part of his centennial year celebrations.

When Copland received a Kennedy Center Honor in 1979, Bernstein spoke at the ceremony, paying tribute to Copland's dedication to fostering young talent. "That is the mark of a great man: time for *people*," Bernstein said. "I know, because I was one of them."

— The Archives

To learn more, visit the **New York Philharmonic Leon Levy Digital Archives** at archives.nyphil.org.

Bernstein and Copland pore over the score of Connotations during a rehearsal in September 1962.



Third Symphony

Aaron Copland

Aaron Copland had already produced two symphonies, in 1924 / 28 and 1934, when in March 1944 the conductor Serge Koussevitzky extended a commission for another major orchestral work, which he hoped to introduce at the outset of the Boston Symphony Orchestra's 1946 season. In *Copland: Since 1943*, the second volume of the impressive oral history prepared by Vivian Perlis with the composer, Copland discussed the genesis and early history of this work. "While in Bernardsville [New Jersey] in the summer of 1945," he said,

I felt my Third Symphony finally taking shape. I had been working on various sections whenever I could find time during the past few years. My colleagues had been urging me to compose a major orchestral work. ... Elliott Carter, David Diamond, and Arthur Berger reminded me about it whenever they had the opportunity. ... They had no way of knowing that I had been working on such a composition for some time. I did not want to announce my intentions until it was clear in my own mind what the piece would become (at one time it looked more like a piano concerto than a symphony). The commission from Koussevitzky stimulated me to focus my ideas and arrange the material I had collected into some semblance of order.

Copland, by the way, employed the locution Third Symphony as a specific title for this work, preferring it to the more generic implication of "Symphony No. 3."

In the summer of 1944, he retreated to the remote village of Tepoztlan, Mexico, in order to work on the symphony's first movement in relatively uninterrupted isolation. The second movement waited until the following

summer, which he spent in Bernardsville. He recalled:

By September, I was able to announce to [the composer] Irving Fine, "I'm the proud father — or mother — or both — of a second movement. Lots of notes — and only eight minutes of music — such are scherzi! It's not very original — *mais ça marche du commencement jusque'au fin* — which is a help." Having two movements finished gave me the courage to continue, but the completion seemed years off.

IN SHORT

Born: November 14, 1900, in Brooklyn, New York

Died: December 2, 1990, in Peekskill, New York

Work composed: the roots of the Third Symphony reach as far back as 1942, when Copland wrote his *Fanfare for the Common Man*, which would be incorporated into the symphony's finale. Work on the symphony per se began (on commission from the Koussevitzky Music Foundation) in the summer of 1944 and the piece was completed on September 29, 1946; dedicated "To the memory of my dear friend Natalie Koussevitzky," who was the wife of the conductor Serge Koussevitzky

World premiere: October 18, 1946, at Boston's Symphony Hall, by the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Serge Koussevitzky, conductor

New York Philharmonic premiere: December 18, 1947, George Szell, conductor

Most recent New York Philharmonic performance: March 29, 2008, Michael Christie, conductor

Estimated duration: ca. 43 minutes

In the Composer's Words

Copland often proved eager to write about his compositions, and the Third Symphony was no exception. He prepared an extensive program note for the Boston Symphony Orchestra's premiere of the work, some of which he condensed and revised to be included in the narrative of Vivian Perlis's *Copland: Since 1943*:

In the program book for the first performance, I pointed out that the writing of a symphony inevitably brings with it the questions of what it is meant to express. As I wrote at the time, if I forced myself, I could invent an ideological basis for the Third Symphony. But if I did, I'd be bluffing — or at any rate, adding something *ex post facto*, something that might or might not be true but that played no role at the moment of creation.

The Third Symphony, my longest orchestral work (about 40 minutes in duration) is scored for a big orchestra. It was composed in the general form of an arch, in which the central portion, that is the second-movement scherzo, is the most animated, and the final movement is an extended coda, presenting a broadened version of the opening material. Both the first and third themes in the first movement are referred to again in later movements. The second movement stays close to the normal symphonic procedure of a usual scherzo, while the third is freest of all in formal structure, built up sectionally with its various sections intended to emerge one from the other in continuous flow, somewhat in the manner of a closely knit series of variations. Some of the writing in the third movement is for very high strings and piccolo, with no brass except single horn and trumpet. It leads directly into the final and longest of the movements: the fourth is closest to a customary sonata-allegro form, although the recapitulation is replaced by an extended coda, presenting many ideas from the work, including the opening theme.

One aspect of the Third Symphony ought to be pointed out: it contains no folk or popular material. Any reference to either folk material or jazz in this work was purely unconscious. However, I do borrow from myself by using *Fanfare for the Common Man* in an expanded and reshaped form in the final movement. I used this opportunity to carry the *Fanfare* material further

and to satisfy my desire to give the Third Symphony an affirmative tone. After all, it was a wartime piece — or more accurately, an end-of-war piece — intended to reflect the euphoric spirit of the country at the time. It is an ambitious score, often compared to Mahler and to Shostakovich and sometimes Prokofiev, particularly the second movement. As a longtime admirer of Mahler, some of my music may show his influence in a general way, but I was not aware of being directly influenced by other composers when writing the work.



Copland, as captured by Irving Penn, in 1946

In the fall of 1945 Copland rented a property in Ridgefield, Connecticut

Again, I told almost no one where I could be found. I felt in self-exile, but it was essential if I was to finish the symphony. By April I had a third movement to show for it. With Tanglewood reopening in the summer of 1946, and an October date set for the premiere, I headed to the MacDowell Colony for the month of June to work on the last movement.

Copland enjoyed a bit of a head start in that he had decided that the finale would incorporate the *Fanfare for the Common Man*, which he had written three years before. Here, however, it serves as little more than an introduction to the rest of the movement, although its general contours do seem to pervade a fair amount of the symphony's material. Copland made progress at the MacDowell Colony but did not complete his work before again being distracted by his teaching obligations at Tanglewood. He said:

After Tanglewood, I stayed on in the Berkshires to work on the orchestration. It was a mad dash! The finishing touches were put on the score just before rehearsals were to start for the premiere, 18 October 1946. It was two years since I had started working on the piece in Mexico.

Copland's Third Symphony was warmly received at its premiere, and it was awarded the New York Music Critics Circle Prize as the best orchestral work by an American composer played during the 1946–47 season. Koussevitzky, George Szell, and Leonard Bernstein all championed the work early on, although Copland's feathers were considerably ruffled when Bernstein decided to cut eight measures from the finale without discussing the matter with the composer first. Copland eventually

Sources and Inspirations

During World War II, Copland produced several works that were specifically related to the war effort. In 1942, he signed on to a project instigated by the conductor Eugene Goossens and the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, who commissioned 18 composers to write fanfares for brass and percussion. "It is my idea," Goossens said, "to make these fanfares stirring and significant contributions to the war effort." Most of the pieces celebrated a single Allied nation or military unit, but Copland settled on a more general topic. "It was the common man, after all, who was doing all the dirty work in the war and the army," he later explained. "He deserved a fanfare."

So was born the *Fanfare for the Common Man*, whose contours became instantly popular: stark trumpets proclaiming a proud, unhurried theme born of optimistically rising intervals, leisurely expanding from a unison statement to two-part harmony and then fully harmonized texture of the entire brass section. It continues to be heard regularly either in its stand-alone form or in its adaptation in the finale of Copland's Third Symphony.

came around to Bernstein's point of view on the cut and declared that "his conducting of the Third Symphony is closest to what I had in mind when composing the piece."

Instrumentation: three flutes (one doubling piccolo) and piccolo, three oboes (one doubling English horn), two clarinets with E-flat clarinet and bass clarinet, two bassoons and contra-bassoon, four horns, four trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, tenor drum, bass drum, chime, snare drum, tam-tam, cymbals, suspended cymbal, xylophone, orchestra bells, wood block, triangle, slapstick, ratchet, anvil, claves, two harps, celeste, piano, and strings.

This note is derived from an essay originally published in the program books of the San Francisco Symphony and is used with permission.