

Montgomery Philharmonic 2013 - 2014 Concert Season – A Confluence of Culture Music of North America – February 27, 2014

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Aaron Copland – *An Outdoor Overture* (1938)

An Outdoor Overture came about as the result of a request by Alexander Richter, a high school orchestra director. Richter was beginning a long-term plan to study “American music for American youth,” and took the chance of asking Copland to compose for his school. He chose Copland because he had recently altered his style from one of austere dissonance to one of folkish simplicity, which appealed to Richter, who felt it was the most American-like music that he had ever heard. Copland delivered four pieces during this period of time – *El Salón México* in 1936, the high school opera *The Second Hurricane* in 1937, and then two works—*An Outdoor Overture* and the first of his Americana ballets, *Billy the Kid*—in 1938. Richter premiered *An Outdoor Overture* with the orchestra of The High School of Music & Art in New York City. *The Second Hurricane*—Copland’s first attempt at composing opera—was commissioned by the Henry Street Settlement School, also in New York City, and performed by students at its music school; it premiered on April 21, 1937 at the school’s playhouse. The premiere production was designed by Orson Welles and conducted by Lehman Engel.

When composing *An Outdoor Overture*, Copland took into account the fact that the school’s orchestra was a very fine one, so he included many features that a professional orchestra would be capable of playing. Copland was careful to limit the technical difficulties, while, at the same time, creating a piece that had melodic simplicity and beauty as well as rhythmic syncopation, and which gave the musical world some of its first glimpses of a harmonic language that would later be called “quartal harmony.”

About Aaron Copland

Aaron Copland was an American composer, composition teacher, writer, and later in his career a conductor of his own and other American music. At the age of 21, he went to France to study with legendary composition teacher Nadia Boulanger. Best known for his natural treatment of American music with simple melodies and buoyant rhythms, Copland developed a system of harmony that was based upon the musical interval of a fourth; this interval, called quartal harmony, gives his music a sense of openness. He composed several famous ballets for the Martha Graham Dance Company and spent the final years of his life conducting his music all over the world.

- **Born:** November 14, 1900, Brooklyn, NY
- **Died:** December 2, 1990, Sleepy Hollow, NY
- **Nationality:** American
- **Education:** Fountainebleau Schools
- **Spouse:** Margaret Elizabeth Nelson (m. 1946)
- **Compositions:** *Appalachian Spring*, *Fanfare for the Common Man*, *Billy the Kid*, *Appalachian Spring* (1945 Pulitzer Prize), *The Tender Land*, three symphonies, *An Outdoor Overture*, several sonatas for solo instrument, a string quartet.
- **Awards:** Academy Award for Original Music Score, Pulitzer Prize

Instrumentation – piccolo, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani, percussion (bass drum, snare drum, cymbals, triangle, xylophone), piano, violin 1, violin 2, viola, cello, double bass

Artifact –

[Letter from Aaron Copland to Nadia Boulanger, November 22, 1938](#)

[Outdoor overture \(sketch\)](#)


1. The Aaron Copland Collection: Orchestral Music and Music for Solo Piano - Various Artists
2. Copland: Fanfare for the Common Man, Lincoln Portrait & Canticle of Freedom - Harris: American Creed - Gerard Schwarz, Seattle Symphony Orchestra & James Earl Jones
3. The Music of America: Copland - Various Artists

1. The Copland Collection: Orchestral & Ballet Works, 1936-1948
2. An Outdoor Overture for Orchestra. Full Score
3. Collection: Late Orchestral Works
4. Copland Conducts Copland - Expanded Edition (Fanfare for the Common Man, Appalachian Spring, Old American Songs (Complete), Rodeo: Four Dance Episodes)