

Montgomery Philharmonic 2019 - 2020 Our 14th Season : Editions

Concert 1, October 13, 2019 at 7 PM – The Dance Edition

Brahms | Still | Copland

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. Copland went to France at the age of 21 to study with legendary composition teacher Nadia Boulanger. Copland is best known for his natural treatment of American music with simple melodies and buoyant rhythms. He developed a system of harmony that was based upon the interval of a fourth. This interval gives his music an open sense and is called quartal harmony. 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, New York
- **Died:** December 2, 1990, Sleepy Hollow, New York
- **Nationality:** American
- **Education:** Fontainebleau Schools
- **Compositions:** *Appalachian Spring*, *Fanfare for the Common Man*, *Billy the Kid*, *Appalachian Spring* (1945 Pulitzer Prize), *The Tender Land*, *3 Symphonies*, *An Outdoor Overture*, several sonatas for solo instrument, a string quartet
- **Awards:** Academy Award for Original Music Score, Pulitzer Prize

Rodeo: Four Dance Episodes (1942) – Aaron Copland (1900–1990)

Aaron Copland wrote the ballet *Rodeo* for choreographer Agnes de Mille. De Mille gave the premiere in 1942 with the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo, a dance company that moved to the United States during World War II. The Ballet Russe's commission of this work brought de Mille from relative obscurity to great fame because she was given complete creative control of the project. The Ballet Russe allowed de Mille to choose the composer (Copland), and, in turn, the reluctant Copland recommended a set designer to her (Oliver Smith). The original five-movement work, *Rodeo – The Courting at Burnt Ranch*, premiered at the Metropolitan Opera House on October 16, 1942 and received 22 curtain calls. The symphonic suite that Copland constructed from the original work drops the "Ranch House Party" movement and retains "Buckaroo Holiday," "Corral Nocturne," "Saturday Night Waltz," and "Hoe-Down."

De Mille danced the lead role in the premiere and, because Rogers and Hammerstein attended the premiere, she was asked to choreograph their new musical, *Oklahoma*. Three important dance movements used by de Mille made the ballet unique: a riding movement, a square dance, and a cadenza for tap dancer. Up until then, these movements had never been used in a ballet, but they caused quite a sensation and sealed de Mille as the top choreographer of classical American ballet.

The suite opens with "Buckaroo Holiday's" fanfare, which then transitions with the woodwinds in the cowgirl theme. The quiet, cowgirl theme transitions to the *Rodeo* theme in a highly rhythmic motif. The cowgirl seeks the attention of the cowboys, using the tune "If He'd Be a Buckaroo." This theme repeats in a massive section using a three-part canon. After the cowgirl theme returns, the movement ends with the entire orchestra playing "If He'd Be a Buckaroo."

The "Corral Nocturne" is a strikingly beautiful movement that uses all of the tonal colors of the orchestra. The oboe and bassoon play major solo roles in the movement. Copland uses groupings of five to give this movement metric freedom.

The opening of "Saturday Night Waltz" uses the string section playing the traditional tuning of open fifths as if to warm up before launching into the tune. The "Texas Minuet" theme of Copland's "Saturday Night Waltz" is de Mille's transcription of "I Ride an Old Paint," a tune that de Mille had already blocked out and insisted that Copland include in his ballet. In this movement, Copland uses more solo instruments than tutti sections, displaying his economy of sound.

Rodeo was unique among Copland's compositions. It was the first of his compositions to use American folk tunes in their complete form. The best example of this is the main theme in the "Hoe-down." The folk song "Bonyparte" was played by Kentucky fiddler William Hamilton Stepp and recorded in 1937. Ruth Crawford Seeger carefully transcribed the song and included it in her 1941 book *Our Singing Country*. It is thought that Copland had access to either the recording or the book (or both) and used it in this "Hoe-Down" movement. The "Hoe-Down" has been used outside of Copland's ballet more than any piece that he wrote. It can be found in various versions by rock and jazz groups, in an episode of *The Simpsons*, in the Beef Producers' commercial, in James Horner's movie *An American Tail: Fievel Goes West*, and during the opening ceremony of the 2002 Winter Olympics.

Instrumentation – 3 flutes (2nd and 3rd doubling piccolo), 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion (bass drum, cymbals, orchestra bells, slap stick, snare drum, triangle, woodblock, xylophone), harp, piano, celeste, violin 1, violin 2, viola, cello, double bass

Artifacts –

[Score Used by Leonard Bernstein](#)

[Aaron Copland, c. 1960](#)

[Aaron Copland, c. 1980](#)

[Aaron Copland rehearsing the New York Philharmonic, c. 1970](#)

[Aaron Copland with Pierre Boulez, September 18, 1974](#)



Bernstein Century - Copland: Appalachian Spring, Rodeo, Billy the Kid, Fanfare for the Common Man (Billy The Kid)

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[Copland: Appalachian Spring, Rodeo, Billy the Kid & Fanfare for the Common Man](#)

[What to Listen for in Music \(Signet Classics\)](#)