



ABOUT THE MUSIC

BEETHOVEN & COPLAND

October 19, 20, 21, 2024

Program Notes by Elizabeth Schwartz

AARON COPLAND

Fanfare for the Common Man



COMPOSER: born November 14, 1900, Brooklyn, NY; died December 2, 1990, North Tarrytown, NY

WORK COMPOSED: 1942

WORLD PREMIERE: Eugene Goossens led the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra on March 12, 1943, in Cincinnati.

INSTRUMENTATION: 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, and tam tam

ABOUT THE MUSIC

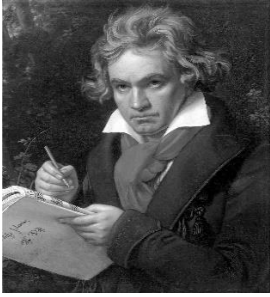
In 1942, Eugene Goossens, music director of the Cincinnati Symphony (CSO), commissioned Aaron Copland and eighteen other composers to write short, patriotic fanfares, and the CSO would premiere one at the start of each concert during their 1942-43 season. Goossens asked the composers “to make these fanfares stirring and significant contributions to the war effort ... I am asking you this favor in a spirit of friendly comradeship, and I ask you to do it for the cause we all have at heart.”

Copland himself struggled with the title for his own fanfare but eventually chose the Common Man because, as he explained, “it was the common man, after all, who was doing all the dirty work in the war and the army. He deserved a fanfare.” When Goossens heard the title, he wrote to Copland, “Its title is as original as its music, and I think it is so telling that it deserves a special occasion for its performance. If it is agreeable to you, we will premiere it March 12, 1943, at income tax time.” Copland replied, “I [am] all for honoring the common man at income tax time.” This fanfare became a favorite of audiences everywhere from the moment of its premiere, and Copland later used it as the main theme for the fourth movement of his third symphony.

Copland’s fanfare is the only one of the original eighteen to remain part of the orchestral repertoire. Indeed, Fanfare for the Common Man is probably heard more often outside the concert hall, thanks to commercials and sports events that have transformed this piece of classical music into a part of American pop culture. Appropriately, a number of versions of Copland’s Fanfare have also become favorites and standards in their own right. Musicians as eclectic as Woody Herman, the rock bands Emerson, Lake & Palmer, the Rolling Stones, and Styx have all made their own arrangements. Copland’s Fanfare has also been used on many television sports programs, both in this country and around the world, from the Olympics to ABC’s Wide World of Sports.

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Concerto in D Major for Violin and Orchestra, Opus 61



COMPOSER: born December 16, 1770, Bonn; died March 26, 1827, Vienna

WORK COMPOSED: 1806. Commissioned by and dedicated to Franz Clement, music director and concertmaster of the Theatre an der Wien.

WORLD PREMIERE: Clement performed the solo at the premiere, which Beethoven conducted at the Theater an der Wien on December 23, 1806.

INSTRUMENTATION: solo violin, flute, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani, and strings

ESTIMATED DURATION: 42 minutes

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Ludwig van Beethoven's only violin concerto shattered conventional notions of what a Romantic solo concerto could or should be. Instead of making the concerto a vehicle to showcase the soloist's technique, Beethoven placed the music front and center while also giving the soloist plenty of opportunities to display musical and technical artistry.

Twenty-one-year-old Franz Clement, music director and concertmaster of the Theater an der Wien, commissioned the Violin Concerto in 1806. After the premiere, Clement suggested revisions to the solo part, which Beethoven incorporated into his revised score.

Even a masterwork can suffer from a mediocre performance. According to published accounts, Beethoven finished the concerto just two days before the premiere, which meant Clement had to sight-read the opening performance. Although it was beautiful and staggeringly difficult, the lack of adequate rehearsal, among other factors, left the Violin Concerto with a bad reputation that took 30 years to dispel.

Thirty-eight years after the Concerto premiered, 12-year-old violin Virtuoso Joseph Joachim played it at his debut with the London Philharmonic. Joachim pored over the score, memorized the entire piece, and composed his own cadenzas in preparation. The hard work paid off; one reviewer noted, "[Joachim] is perhaps the finest violin player, not only of his age, but of his siècle [century]. He performed Beethoven's solitary concerto, which we have heard all the great performers of the last twenty years attempt, and invariably fail in ... its performance was an eloquent vindication of the master-spirit who imagined it."

Unlike Beethoven's concertos for piano, which feature thick, dense chords and difficult scalar passages, the violin solo is graceful and lyrical. This warm expressiveness matched Clement's style of playing, which Beethoven said exemplified "an extremely delightful tenderness and purity."

The concerto begins unconventionally, with five repeating notes in the timpani. This simple knocking is repeated, like a gentle but persistent heartbeat, throughout the movement, and becomes a recurring motif. In another distinctive break from tradition, the soloist does not enter for a full three minutes, and then begins a cappella (unaccompanied), before reiterating the first theme in a high register.

The Larghetto's main melody is stately, intimate, and tranquil, and becomes an orchestral backdrop over which the solo violin traces graceful arabesques in an ethereal high register. The soloist takes center stage in this movement, playing extended cadenzas and other passages with minimal accompaniment.

The final Rondo-Allegro flows seamlessly from the Larghetto; the soloist launches immediately into a rocking melody that suggests a boat bobbing at anchor. Typical rondo format features a primary theme (A), which is interspersed with contrasting sections (B, C, D, etc.) Each of these contrasting sections departs from the (A) theme, sometimes in mood, sometimes by shifting from major to minor, or by changing keys entirely.

KATHERINE BALCH

musica pyralis (West Coast premiere)



COMPOSER: born August 17, 1991, San Diego, CA

WORK COMPOSED: 2023. Co-commissioned by the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, Santa Rosa Symphony, Erie Symphony, and Ann Arbor Symphony.

WORLD PREMIERE: Manfred Honeck led the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra on February 16, 2024, at Heinz Hall in Pittsburgh, PA

INSTRUMENTATION: 2 flutes (one doubling piccolo), 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, bassoon, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 2 trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, bongos, Capiz shell (or glass), coarse ceramic tile, crotales, guiro, hi-hat, snare drum, suspended cymbals, 3 triangles, tubular bells, vibraphone, wind chimes, piano, harp, and strings

ESTIMATED DURATION: 10 minutes

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Katherine Balch's music captures the magic of everyday sounds, inviting audiences into a sonic world characterized by imagination, discovery, and textural lyricism. Inspired by the intimacy of quotidian objects, found sounds, and natural processes, she has been described by the San Francisco Chronicle as "some kind of musical Thomas Edison – you can just hear her tinkering around in her workshop, putting together new sounds and textural ideas." Balch has been commissioned by leading ensembles and musicians worldwide, and she also maintains an active career as an educator. In 2022, Balch joined the faculty of the Yale School of Music, where she serves as Assistant Professor of Composition.

"Pyralis is the genome name of the common Eastern firefly," said Balch in an interview with Jim Cunningham on WQED Pittsburgh earlier this year. "In the summer of 2023, I had just moved to rural Connecticut, where there is very little sound or light pollution. The nights are very loud and very bright, not with human lights or sounds, but the lights of the stars and the moon and the fireflies, and the sounds of the frogs and insects and the pond and the grass. I imagined what it would sound like if you could score a silent film of the fireflies' evening dance."

"musica pyralis begins with an ostinato, or repeated rhythmic motif, that is shared between the piano and the harp," Balch continues. "This gentle rippling chord progression is the core of the piece, from which other textures and little solos or choirs of instruments come forth and recede back ... one of the quirks of the piece is that I wanted to capture this blurry, fuzzy soundscape, so I asked the harpist to de-tune their instrument by a quarter-tone, which means that when they play with the piano, they sound kind of out of tune, an intentional out-of-tuneness that creates a fuzzy harmonic space from which other sounds can emerge as soloists."

In her own notes for *musica pyralis*, Balch writes, "Most of my music tries to filter the sights and sounds of my surrounding environment through the instruments I'm writing for, kind of like a musical sieve ... Nature is the best orchestrator – despite the saturated soundscape, each noisemaker can hear and be heard as they occupy distinct registral and timbral niches. I try to capture a glimpse of this miraculously transparent density in this (mostly) brisk concert opener and set to the song of the gently omnipresent twinkle of the phontinus pyralis."

AARON COPLAND

Lincoln Portrait for Narrator and Orchestra



COMPOSER: born November 14, 1900, Brooklyn, NY; died December 2, 1990, North Tarrytown, NY

WORK COMPOSED: commissioned by conductor André Kostelanetz for the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra in 1942, to showcase the "magnificent spirit of our country."

WORLD PREMIERE: Kostelanetz led the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra in the premiere of *Lincoln Portrait* on May 14, 1942, with actor William Adams narrating. The concert also featured musical portraits of Mark Twain (by Jerome Kern), and New York mayor Fiorello La Guardia (by Virgil Thomson).

INSTRUMENTATION: narrator, 2 flutes (both doubling piccolo), 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 3 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, orchestra bells, sleigh bells, snare drum, tam tam, xylophone, celeste, harp, and strings

ESTIMATED DURATION: 14 minutes

ABOUT THE MUSIC

“The composer who is frightened of losing his artistic integrity through contact with a mass audience is no longer aware of the meaning of the word art.” – Aaron Copland

In the spring of 1942, the United States was at war for the second time in less than 25 years, and the country was still recovering from the Great Depression. André Kostelanetz, then conductor of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, wanted to present a concert featuring “a gallery of musical portraits” of great Americans to boost public morale. Kostelanetz approached three well-known American composers with his idea: Virgil Thomson, Jerome Kern, and Aaron Copland. Thomson provided two portraits; one of New York Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia and another of the sharp-witted, acerbic writer Dorothy Parker (Kostelanetz ended up omitting the Parker portrait from the concert), while Jerome Kern created a work based on Mark Twain. Copland, who had contemplated Twain as well, chose Abraham Lincoln.

Copland biographer Howard Pollack writes, “*Lincoln Portrait* comprises a slow-fast-slow ABA form, with the second A section featuring the spoken recitation. This recitation contains five short quotes punctuated by narrative remarks in keeping with the idea of portraiture, noting Lincoln’s background, giving his height, sketching his temperament, and citing his achievements ... These quotes – in expressing the urgent need for responsible action, defining the democratic principles at stake, and offering thanks and remembrance to the fallen dead and hopes for a ‘new birth of freedom’ – clearly bore on the current crisis [WWII].”

“On discussing my choice with Virgil Thomson, he amiably pointed out that no composer could possibly hope to match in musical terms the stature of so eminent a figure as that of Lincoln,” Copland wrote in his own comments. “Of course he was quite right. But secretly I was hoping to avoid the difficulty by doing a portrait in which the sitter himself might speak. With the voice of Lincoln to help me, I was ready to risk the impossible.

“The letters and speeches of Lincoln supplied the text ... I avoided the temptation to use only well-known passages, permitting myself the luxury of quoting only once from a world speech [Gettysburg Address]. [Copland also included two quotes from Lincoln’s annual address to Congress on December 1, 1862, one from Lincoln’s writings, and a response to Stephen Douglas from 1858, during one of their famous debates]

“The first sketches were made in February, and the portrait finished on April 16, 1942. I worked with musical materials of my own, with the exception of two songs of the period: the famous ‘Camptown Races’ which, when used by Lincoln supporters during his Presidential campaign of 1860, was sung to the words, ‘We’re bound to work all night, bound to work all day. I’ll bet my money on the Lincoln hoss ...,’ and a ballad that was first published in 1840 under the title ‘The Pesky Sarpent,’ but it is better known today as ‘Springfield Mountain.’ In neither case is the treatment a literal one. The tunes are used freely in the manner of my use of cowboy songs in *Billy the Kid*.

“... In the opening section, I wanted to suggest something of the mysterious sense of fatality that surrounds Lincoln’s personality. Also, near the end of that section, something of his gentleness and simplicity of spirit. The quick middle section briefly sketches in the background of the times he lived. This merges into the concluding section where my sole purpose was to draw a simple but impressive frame about the words of Lincoln himself.”

© Elizabeth Schwartz

Elizabeth Schwartz is a writer and music historian based in the Portland area. She has been a program annotator for more than 20 years and works with music festivals and ensembles around the country. Schwartz has also contributed to NPR’s “Performance Today,” (now heard on American Public Media.)

NOTE: These program notes are for Santa Rosa Symphony patrons and other interested readers. Any other use is forbidden without specific permission from the author, who may be contacted at classicalmusicprogramnotes.com