

Program Notes

Down a Country Lane (1962)

Originally conceived as a piano work for young students, *Down a Country Lane* was commissioned by *Life* magazine and published in the June 1962 issue. Copland subsequently arranged the work for school orchestra and published it in 1965 as part of a Youth Orchestra Series.

Down a Country Lane is based on music Copland composed for a 1945 Office of War Information documentary entitled *The Cummington Story*. The film, which was only distributed overseas, traces the temporary settlement of a group of Eastern European refugees in Cummington, Massachusetts. Narrated by the town's minister, it portrays the immigrants' gradual integration into the community. Copland sums up the film's message in its last line: "Strangeness between people breaks down when they live and work and meet together as neighbors." The "noble Cummington theme," which sets the stage for the film's church-centered small town, serves as the thematic material for Copland's *Down a Country Lane*. The refugees' theme from the unpublished film score was later used in his *Clarinet Concerto*, while the county fair music was incorporated into "Stomp Your Foot" from *The Tender Land*.

Four Norfolk Dances

Four Norfolk Dances was commissioned by the South Norfolk Youth Symphonic Band, who gave the first performance on 15th September 2001. Norfolk is one of the most beautiful counties in England, famous for its charming villages and boundless broads, a popular centre for sailing holidays. It is also the home of one of the best known of all British composers, Sir Malcolm Arnold. The date of the premiere of this piece was to fall close to his 80th birthday, so I decided to write something of a birthday tribute.

Some of Arnold's best-loved orchestral works are his sets of dances: there are two sets of *English Dances*, *Four Scottish Dances*, *Four Cornish Dances* etc., most of which have been arranged for concert band at one time or another. I thought it would be appropriate for the concert band to have its own set of dances and wrote *Four Norfolk Dances* very much in the style of Arnold's suites.

The four movements are each named after a village in South Norfolk that has a particular association with the band. *Diss Dance* is a charming waltz, which contrasts solo passages with the full band. *Lopham Lament* features a mournful oboe solo and a passionate climax for the whole band. *Garboldisham Jig* combines a lively jig with a graceful chorale tune. - Philip Sparke

Bolero

Ravel composed *Bolero* in 1928 in response to a commission by Ida Rubinstein. Rubinstein had danced as a member of Sergei Diaghilev's *Ballets Russes* 1909–11, then formed her own companies and commissioned music from leading French composers. Ravel completed the music within five months, and the dance was choreographed by Bronislava Nijinska, who had also been part of Diaghilev's troupe and who was the sister of Vaslav Nijinsky, dancer and choreographer for Debussy's *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun*. The ballet as conceived by Rubinstein and Nijinska was set in a Spanish tavern, where a gipsy dancing on a table gradually creates a state of ecstasy in her audience. This choreography reflects the hypnotic effect of Ravel's music.

The melody for *Bolero* came first, followed by the snare drum. Ravel played the melody for a friend one morning at the beginning of his compositional process, commenting, "Don't you think this has an insistent quality?" He later predicted, "The piece I am working on will be so popular, even fruit peddlers will whistle it in the street."

Bolero is music with a simple structure and sophisticated orchestration. The snare drum is constant throughout, repeating a two-measure phrase that serves as the backbone of the piece. Different instruments take turns presenting the melody first as solos, then in groups. Listen, too, for the instruments that join in playing the snare drum rhythm. Eventually, the entire orchestra plays together as the piece grows from pianissimo to fortissimo. The music requires a steady, slow tempo throughout and remains in the key of C major until the end, when it suddenly modulates to E major for eight measures before returning just as suddenly to C major and crashing to a climactic close.

A Copland Portrait

Fanfare for the Common Man-During World War II, Eugene Goossens, the conductor of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, commissioned a number of American composers to write fanfares to begin his concerts. Copland's contribution, written in the fall of 1942, was one of the most successful. Copland thought well enough of the piece to incorporate it, four years later, in his *Symphony No. 3*, where it serves as the basis for the introduction to the finale of the work. The Fanfare has been used as the introduction to the *Omnibus* television series of the '50s and it has been adopted by Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts as its radio "theme" music.

Variations on a Shaker Melody-This set of five variations on the Shaker melody '*Tis the Gift to Be Simple* was derived by Aaron Copland from his music composed for the ballet "Appalachian Spring", produced in 1944 in collaboration with Martha Graham. The ballet features a bride and her young farmer husband at a pioneer celebration in the Spring around a newly built farmhouse. The Shaker melody provided the sense of the pioneer American spirit, with youth, optimism, and hope in an elegant and simple manner.

Pastime: A Salute to Baseball Jack Stamp

Jack Stamp drew inspiration for this work during a 1998 visit to Candlestick Park for a Giants baseball game. His memories took him back to his first World Series in 1962 between the Giants and the Yankees; he was only eight years old at the time. This salute to the 1962 Giants and baseball in general is loosely woven around two motives from the anthem of the seventh inning stretch "Take Me Out to the Ball Game." Ever-changing meters, syncopation, and compound rhythms are skillfully crafted to pay homage to the heroes of the game. Measure numbers match player uniform or record numbers. Don Larsen, Willy Mays, Barry Bonds, Juan Marichal, Orlando Cepeda, and Roger Maris are a few to be so honored. A slapstick, woodblock, and rimshots imitate the crack of Willie McCovey's bat. The flutes and bells play the notes "B-A-B-E" to salute the Bambino. Strains of "Meet Me in St. Louis" pay a tribute to Mark McGwire. Polytonality abounds as the work continues with two fugues based on themes from "Take Me Out to the Ball Game." The work was commissioned by the Santa Clara County (California) Band Directors Association and was premiered on January 24, 1999 with the composer conducting. It is dedicated to Frank Battisti, long time conductor of the New England Conservatory Wind Ensemble, who retired that same year.

The Red Pony, Film Suite for Band

Aaron Copland wrote the music for the film "The Red Pony" during a 10 week period in 1948 on the studio lot in the San Fernando Valley. An orchestral suite was completed that same year, commissioned by Efrem Kurtz of the Houston Symphony Orchestra. Four of the original movements were transcribed for performance by the US Navy Band in 1968. John Steinbeck's story about a ten year old boy, Jody, and his life on a California ranch was based on the author's experiences growing up near King City and a pony he had once cared for. It is a story that derives its warmth and sensitive quality from the character studies of the boy, his parents, grandfather, and cowhand Billy Buck. It is filled with the emotions of daily living, from the joy of a boy receiving a pony of his own to the bitter nature of death and dying. *The Dream March and Circus Music* depict two of Jody's daydreams; he is at the head of an army of knights in silvery armor or the whip-cracking ringmaster of the circus. *The Walk to the Bunkhouse* shows Jody's admiration for Billy Buck's talents, especially with horses. *Grandfather's Story* tells of how he led the wagon train 'clear across the plains to the coast', but his bitterness that the 'Westerning has died out of the people' can't be hidden from his grandson. The last movement suggests the open air quality of country living and mounts to the climax of a *Happy Ending*.

Rhapsody in Blue

The *Rhapsody in Blue* was written in 1924 for Paul Whiteman's jazz orchestra. Gershwin played the piano part himself, as he said, "from the music in my mind," since he hadn't yet scored the music for piano. About the *Rhapsody*, Gershwin himself wrote:

"There had been so much talk about the limitations of jazz...Jazz, they said, had to be in strict time. It had to cling to dance rhythms. I resolved, if possible, to kill that misconception ... I had no set plan, no structure. The *Rhapsody*, you see, began as a purpose, not a plan. I worked out a few themes, but just at this time I had to appear in Boston for the premiere of *Sweet Little Devil*. It was on the train, with its steely rhythms, its rattly-band ... (I frequently hear music in the very heart of noise), that I suddenly heard -- even saw on paper -- the complete construction of the *Rhapsody* from beginning to end. No new themes came to me, but I worked on the thematic material already in my mind, and tried to conceive the composition as a whole ... By the time I reached Boston, I had the definite plot of the piece, as distinguished from its actual substance."