

***Music for the Theatre***

**Aaron Copland (1900–1990)**

Written: 1924

Movements: Five

Style: Contemporary American

Duration: 22 minutes

Much of Aaron Copland's fame as a composer rests on his three brilliant scores for ballet: *Rodeo*, *Billy the Kid*, and *Appalachian Spring*. He didn't start out writing in that popular style; as a young man he was much more allied with the modernist movement in America. "People forget now that when I began in the twenties, I was considered to be a wild-eyed radical in musical terms," he states. "I got consistently razzed in the newspaper."

Copland started his musical career by taking piano from his sister. Eventually he moved on to more esteemed teachers, but he never went to college. Instead, he studied music theory with Rubin Goldmark and then, when he was 20, made the decisive move to go to Paris. While there he studied with Nadia Boulanger—the teacher who, more than any other European, is responsible for an "American" sound. In an interview with Vivian Perlis, Copland stated:

I cannot imagine what I would have done in Paris those three years if I hadn't met Nadia. In fact, I can't imagine my entire career if I hadn't met her. She took me to visit Koussevitzky when he was appointed as the new conductor of the Boston Symphony. I remember Nadia said: "You must meet him, because he can be of great help to you."

Indeed, Koussevitzky provided Copland with several important commissions when he returned to the United States. One of them was for *Music for the Theatre*. He started it in 1925 and initially called it *Incidental Music for an Imaginary Drama*. When he changed to the current title, Copland was careful to place a disclaimer in the score: "The composer had no play or literary idea in mind. The title simply implies that at times this music has a quality which is suggestive of the theatre."

In *Music for the Theatre*, you can hear the budding nationalism that comes to fruition in Copland's later works. For the national element Copland turned to jazz:

I was preoccupied with the idea of adding to the great history of serious music something with an American accent, and jazz seemed to be a comparatively simple way of introducing the American note in an authentic way . . . It was an easy way to be an American.

Beginning with works like *Music for the Theatre*, Copland paved the way for a truly American "classical" music.

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***Symphony No. 6 in C Major, D 589***

**Franz Schubert (1797–1828)**

Written: 1817–18

Movements: Four

Style: Romantic

Duration: 34 minutes

“Party Animal” isn’t quite the term that should be used to characterize Franz Schubert, but it is close. He was one of those incredibly talented composers who started studying and writing music at an early age. When he was eleven, he became a student of the powerful composer Salieri, that notorious nemesis of Mozart so ably depicted in the film *Amadeus*. By the time he was a teenager, he had already produced piano pieces, many songs, several string quartets, a symphony, and an opera. It was when he was in his twenties, still producing prodigious amounts of music, that he lived the life of a “bohemian.” Rarely having very much money, he would move in with various friends and somehow manage to get by, without seriously pursuing a “career” in music, either as a pianist or composer. When he did play or compose, it was for his friends. Their evening gatherings, called “Schubertiades,” were nineteenth century version of today’s jam sessions.

Schubert began work on his *Symphony in C Major* when he was only nineteen. Schubert idolized Beethoven and this symphony contains some of the drama and explosive jabs found in Beethoven’s symphonies. However, the music of Gioacchino Rossini was currently the rage in Vienna and it seems that Schubert modeled much of this symphony on the light-hearted and almost facile style of that Italian composer.

The slow introduction to the first movement begins dramatically enough, but soon melts into pure melody. The flutes introduce the main body of the movement with a jaunty little melody and from then on, it is all good-hearted mirth. The slower second movement is as melodic as an operatic aria, and the third movement is a lilting romp. The last movement is a succession of light-hearted tunes in contrasting tempos that eventually give way to a dramatic conclusion.

The only performance this symphony received during Schubert’s lifetime was during one of those private house parties. Its first public performance came three weeks after Schubert’s death as a last minute substitution for another symphony in C Major by Schubert. That was his *Ninth Symphony*, called “The Great.” It was too long and difficult for the available rehearsal time. That is why this symphony is often called “The Little.”

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### ***Clarinet Concerto No. 1 in C Minor, Op. 26***

**Louis Spohr (1784–1859)**

Written: 1808

Movements: Three

Style: Romantic

Duration: Twenty minutes

When Mozart wrote his seminal concerto for clarinet in 1791, the clarinet had only five keys (the modern clarinet has seventeen). That was still the case when Louis Spohr wrote his first concerto for clarinet. He confessed that he really didn’t know what he was doing:

Since at that time my knowledge of the clarinet was pretty nearly limited to its range and I therefore paid little attention to the weaknesses of the instrument, I have thus written much that will appear to the clarinetist at first

sight as unpracticable. Herr Hermstedt [the clarinetist], far from asking me to alter these passages, sought rather to perfect his instrument and soon by continuous industry arrived at the point where his clarinet had no faulty, dull, uncertain tones.

The instrument got eight additional keys and the evolution to the modern clarinet began.

Even as a teenager, Louis Spohr displayed prodigious talent as a violinist. He got his first job playing in an orchestra when he was fifteen and became Europe's youngest court orchestra conductor when he was twenty-one. He spent his life alternating between appointments as orchestra conductor for aristocratic courts, opera conductor in major cities, and touring as violin virtuoso. He was considered one of the greatest conductors of the time (and one of the first to use a baton) and, after Mendelssohn's death, Germany's greatest composer. He invented the violin chin-rest and was the first to employ "rehearsal letters" in his compositions. He wrote nearly three hundred works including nine symphonies, eight violin concertos, 36 string quartets—and four clarinet concertos.

Spohr met the clarinet virtuoso Johann Simon Hermstedt in 1808. Hermstedt was the band conductor for a local prince. The prince, an amateur clarinetist himself, commissioned Spohr to write a concerto for his clarinetist. Aside from the obvious virtuosic aspects of Spohr's *Clarinet Concerto No. 1*, there are some unusual elements. It is in a minor key, and the orchestra plays a slow introduction before fingerwork begins. The slow movement confines the accompaniment to just violins and cellos. In spite of the minor key, the third movement has a jaunty quality to it. Instead of ending with a technical flourish, there is a surprising and sudden fade to nothing.

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