

Aaron Copland



born

November 14, 1900
Brooklyn, New York

died

December 2, 1990
New York, New York

“

**Composers tend to
assume that everyone
loves music.**

**Surprisingly enough,
everyone doesn't!**

—Aaron Copland

”

The first syllable of his last name rhymes with “hope.”

A composer of the twentieth century.

Aaron Copland's family was not musical and didn't encourage him to take music lessons. Nevertheless, he began to study the piano at age 14. As a teenager he also studied music theory and began to consider composing as a career.

After high school, Aaron was accepted at a music school for American students in Paris, France, where he studied composition. His teacher was Nadia Boulanger, who later became famous because many of her students achieved great success as composers. Returning to the United States in 1924, Copland worked as a piano player at a resort hotel while composing several orchestral works. Within a year he had two works performed in concert and had been **commissioned** by the Boston Symphony to compose a work for them.

During this period, he also received a financial award from the Guggenheim Foundation, the first ever given to a musician, and won a composition contest sponsored by RCA Records. These awards allowed him to give up playing piano at the resort and spend most of his time writing music.

While in his 20s, Copland joined the League of Composers, a group whose goal was to encourage performances of new musical works. He remained active in the League of Composers throughout his life and eventually became head of its board of directors.

By the 1930s, Copland came to believe that a composer should write music for a variety of occasions and performing groups, and should not limit himself to composing just orchestral works for serious concert performance. He also began incorporating American folk melodies into his music. His most famous works were written during the 1930s and include **ballets** such as *Billy the Kid*, *Rodeo* (the Listening Example), and *Appalachian Spring*, which won the Pulitzer Prize for music.

Copland was one of the first composers to write music for motion pictures, and during the 1930s he wrote soundtracks for several important films. He was also greatly interested in providing music for student performers and composed several orchestral works and an **opera** for student groups. He also encouraged other composers to write for young performers.

By the 1940s, Copland had reached his goal of composing serious, quality music for a variety of audiences without ever lowering his musical standards.

Aaron Copland was a studious man and throughout his life he was active as a teacher and writer on the subject of music. He never forgot how he had to play piano at a resort to make a living while composing his early works. For that reason, he was active in several organizations that encouraged young composers by offering performances of their music as well as financial grants, which allowed them to spend more time composing. He was one of the first composers to take full advantage of the new technologies of the early 20th century, including recordings, radio, and motion pictures.

Aaron Copland

What I composed	Orchestra	Concerto	Chamber Music	Keyboard	Opera	Theater/Film	Ballet	Band	Choral	Vocal Solos
Aaron Copland	>	>	>	>	>	>	>	>	>	>

Copland Factoids:

- Copland stated that early in his career he was influenced by the music of **Claude Debussy**. He was also influenced by the folk music of Mexico, which he heard on his visits there in the 1930s.
- He was one of the first composers to incorporate jazz in his music. In 1930, however, he suddenly stopped using jazz in his music.
- Copland won an Oscar for his film score for the motion picture *The Heiress* in 1949. He also won the Pulitzer Prize for music in 1944 and the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1964.
- In honor of Copland's career as an educator, Queens College at City University of New York founded "The Aaron Copland School of Music" in 1982.

1900: Birth of Aaron Copland; the French painters, Picasso, Gauguin, Cézanne, and Renoir all artistically working during this time.

1910: Igor Stravinsky writes *The Firebird*.

1921: First radio broadcast of a baseball game.

1941: World War II: Japanese bomb Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, December 7.

1951: Color television is first introduced in United States.

1963: The Beatles song *I Want to Hold Your Hand* is popular.

1973: The Paris Peace Accords on Vietnam end the Vietnam War.

1980: American hostages in Iran are released on the first day of Ronald Reagan's presidency (January 20).

1990: Death of Aaron Copland; Hubble Space Telescope launched into space by the space shuttle "Discovery."

**What in the world
is happening?**

Aaron Copland (1900-1990) "Hoedown" from *Rodeo*



Aaron Copland is America's foremost composer of the ballet. *Rodeo* was commissioned in the spring of 1942 by the ballet company, Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo, working together with the famous choreographer and ballerina, Agnes deMille. It took Copland four months to complete the composition. "Hoedown" is one of the movements from the ballet *Rodeo*. It was premiered at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York City on October 16, 1942. Ms. deMille danced the lead and received twenty-two curtain calls the night of the premiere.

During the winter of 1942, after the very successful premiere of *Rodeo*, Copland extracted "Four Dance Episodes" from the ballet to form an orchestral suite of American dance forms. This orchestral suite was first performed by the Boston Pops Orchestra in May 1943. "Hoedown" is the final of the four movements, and uses two traditional square dance tunes: "Bonyparte," and a few measures of "McLeod's Reel." "Hoedown" is the best known and most frequently performed of the four episodes. Copland used folk music in his campaign to achieve a simple style.

It was Agnes deMille's idea for a cowboy ballet. At first, Copland didn't want to do it, because he had just written *Billy the Kid*, another cowboy ballet. But Ms. deMille said this one would be different, lighter and more bouncy. As the choreographer, (the person who is the dance director and who creates dance compositions), Ms. deMille captured the atmosphere of ranch life at the turn of the century.

A ballet is a story told by a company of dancers. The story danced in *Rodeo* is of a female cowhand who competes for equality with cowboys. Like some women, she also wants to get married and have children. She goes to a Saturday night dance, a "Hoedown," and meets a roper who regards her as a lovely woman as well as a cowgirl. The "Hoedown" is a square dance which Copland has expanded and elaborated.

- This piece uses polyrhythms (the use of contrasting rhythms within a piece). Can you hear the polyrhythms used throughout the piece? Notice how the accents are on different beats.
- Raise your hand when you hear the xylophone.
- Name some of the prominent instruments you hear.

“So long as the human spirit thrives on this planet, music in some living form will accompany and sustain it and give it expressive meaning.”
—Aaron Copland

TIMING

- :01 An excited introduction is played by strings and brass.
- :16 A soft interlude (listen for the woodblock) leads to the the main melody.
- :37 The main, "hoe-down" melody. Listen for the horns playing high notes at :44, an oboe solo at 1:03, and loud drums at 1:07.
- 1:32 A solo trumpet melody. Listen for the oboe solo at 1:40.
- 1:47 A new section beginning with trumpets and snare drum. Here the piece really begins to sound like a country "hoe-down."
- 2:15 A soft, slowing interlude. Listen for the trombone as the tempo slows.
- 2:38 A shorter version of the main melody.