

Copland at 80

The celebration of the 80th birthday of Aaron Copland went on all year, an extraordinary outpouring of affection, respect, and admiration for this most American of American composers. The actual date of November 14 was marked by one of the jubilees that greeted Copland in practically every state of the Union and touched the capitals of Europe. The composer himself conducted many of the orchestral concerts, and narrated his own *Lincoln Portrait*. But whether or not he was present at the occasions designed to honor him, the spirit of joyous celebration permeated hundreds of concert halls.

Sheer numbers are astonishing: the *Appalachian Spring* in its original chamber form and in larger orchestration filled the months with 88 performances, significantly many with youth orchestras or in youth concerts and several with multiple performances. The "Milwaukee Performances for Youth" took the work to Scotland.

High in popularity were the *Lincoln Portrait*, with many distinguished narrators, as has always been the case with this striking work, and the suite from *Billy the Kid*, which also received staged performances in Atlanta and held its place in the American Ballet Theater repertory. Similarly, the *Concerto for Clarinet* enjoyed its ballet version as well as offering solo opportunities with more than a dozen symphony orchestras, while the Feld Ballet staged *Music for the Theater. Rodeo* was not neglected, appearing in the lists of the Cleveland Ballet, American Ballet Theater, and Joffrey Ballet.

It is probably safe to say that not a corner of Copland's extensive *oeuvre* was overlooked, and that even those pieces he purports to be fondest of, as a mother will cherish an unfavored child, shared in the cornucopia of Copland programming throughout the nation.

As a national honor, Rep. Frederick W. Richmond of New York read into the *Congressional Record* of November 14 several laudatory paragraphs about the Brooklyn-born composer, calling attention to his eminence, his Pulitzer Prize, his Presidential Medal of Honor, and 33 honorary doctorates.

The jubilation really began early, notably with Tanglewood and other performances during spring and summer (covered in the last NEWSLETTER).

Below are selected highlights of the year, and some quotations from the countless interviews and articles showered upon the hero of the year — as signal an object of public adulation as any superstar of the opera stage, with front covers on leading magazines, TV appearances, hours and hours of Copland music on radio stations, wise and witty lectures, and general excitement. Perhaps the most extraordinary tribute was the "Wall-to-Wall Copland," noted in more detail below.

Copland Occasions

October 16-18. *Inscape*, Philadelphia Orchestra under Ormandy. Also in Washington, October 20.

November 9. "Copland Cuts Another Cake," as he conducts the first half of the American Symphony Orchestra concert in Carnegie Hall (*Short Symphony*, excerpts from *Old American Songs*, suite from *The Tender Land*, and *Eight Songs of Emily Dickinson* - Linda Wall, soloist), and Leonard Bernstein takes over for *Lincoln Portrait*, which Copland narrates. After intermission, a rousing performance of *Fanfare for the Common Man* and a sing-along on *Happy Birthday*. Isaac Stern, Carnegie Hall president, gave Copland the Carnegie Hall medallion, New York City Commissioner of Cultural Affairs Henry Gehdzahler and others presented awards, and Morton Gould, eminent colleague and ASCAP board member, announced two scholarships in Aaron Copland's name of \$1,000 each. Copland modestly acknowledged that the whole thing "made it almost worth being eighty."

November 12. San Francisco Symphony under Edo de Waart plays the "wildly original" *Short Symphony*, with its "rhythmic and contrapuntal complexities" (Heuwel Tircuit in the *Chronicle*).

November 14. THE day. With the National Symphony, Mstislav Rostropovich leads *Fanfare for the Common Man*, *El Salon Mexico*, and *Quiet City*; the composer conducts a suite from *Appalachian Spring* and the early *Piano Concerto* with Leo Smit as soloist, and Leonard Bernstein presides once more over *Lincoln Portrait*, which Copland narrates. Bernstein also reads a letter from President Carter, which said in part: "Wherever music is played and loved...you are justly recognized as America's foremost composer." Morton Gould repeated the news about the ASCAP scholarships and Leonard Silverstein, NSO board president, read a proclamation from Washington's Mayor Marion Barry. "A Fitting Fanfare, a unique evening," purred Paul Hume in the *Post*.

November 16. All-Copland recital by Leo Smit, pianist, at the 92nd Street Y, New York.

November 19. At Harvard University, The Composer's World, shared with Leon Kirchner and Virgil Thomson.

November 21. New York Philharmonic, Avery Fisher Hall. Zubin Mehta conducts the *Third Symphony* — "even the supposedly abstract material sounds folksy. And for the most part, freshly and charmingly so." (John Rockwell, *Times*.)

November 21. Copland attends a screening at Symphony Space, New York, of the film, *Something Wild* for which he had written the score, and talks about working in film.

November 22. Thirteen-hour Marathon

in Symphony Space, New York, called "Wall-to-Wall Copland" with many other composers sharing in the richly varied program. Famous friends from the theater participate as well. The honored composer is present most of the time and conducts several works, applauding generously for works by Roger Sessions, Arthur Berger, Gunther Schuller, Jacob Druckman, William Schuman, Elliott Carter, Barbara Kolb, George Crumb, Ned Rorem, David Del Tredici and other colleagues, and hailing the more than 100 performers. His own music elicits devoted performance and attention, and the cumulative effect proves awe-inspiring, overwhelming. "The finest tribute of all!" (John Rockwell, *Times*.)

November 24. American Composers Orchestra, Carnegie Hall, New York, gives a "splendid" performance of *Orchestral Variations*, Copland's transcription for orchestra of his 1930 *Piano Variations*. Jorge Mester conducts.

November 26. The Chicago Symphony Orchestra under Virujan Kojian plays *Connotations*.

January 17. Houston Symphony gives *Eight Songs of Emily Dickinson*.

January 29. New York Philharmonic under Leonard Bernstein. On the program: *Clarinet Concerto*, *Appalachian Spring*, *Dance Symphony*.

February 5. New York Philharmonic under Leonard Bernstein plays *Eight Songs of Emily Dickinson*, Marilyn Horne soloist.

April 6. *Threnody No. 1* by Monday Evening Concerts, Los Angeles.

Coplandiana

Extracts from the many magazine and newspaper interviews.

Quite Early

"I began in the 20s as a wild-eyed musical radical... It was wonderful to be 20 in the 20s. The only bad part is that it requires me to be 80 in the 80s."

Paris Early On

"Stravinsky was the hottest thing when I was in my 20's. He was short, you know, and I am quite tall. So it used to worry me about that and the fact that most composers were short — Schönberg, Bartók, Beethoven, Brahms, and so on. But Prokofiev and Rachmaninoff were tall."

"Paris was the most exciting time of my life... I wouldn't have dreamed of missing a new ballet by Stravinsky... [for] the rhythmic life primarily. The essential Russianness of those scores suggested to me that it might be possible to create an American atmosphere in music. [And] French music is usually recognizably French by its character. I couldn't understand why we in America couldn't create serious music that people could recognize as typically American, particularly as the jazz boys had done it."

"Nadia Boulanger came as a breath of fresh air... I can't imagine what my musical career would have been like without [Boulanger and Serge Koussevitzky]."



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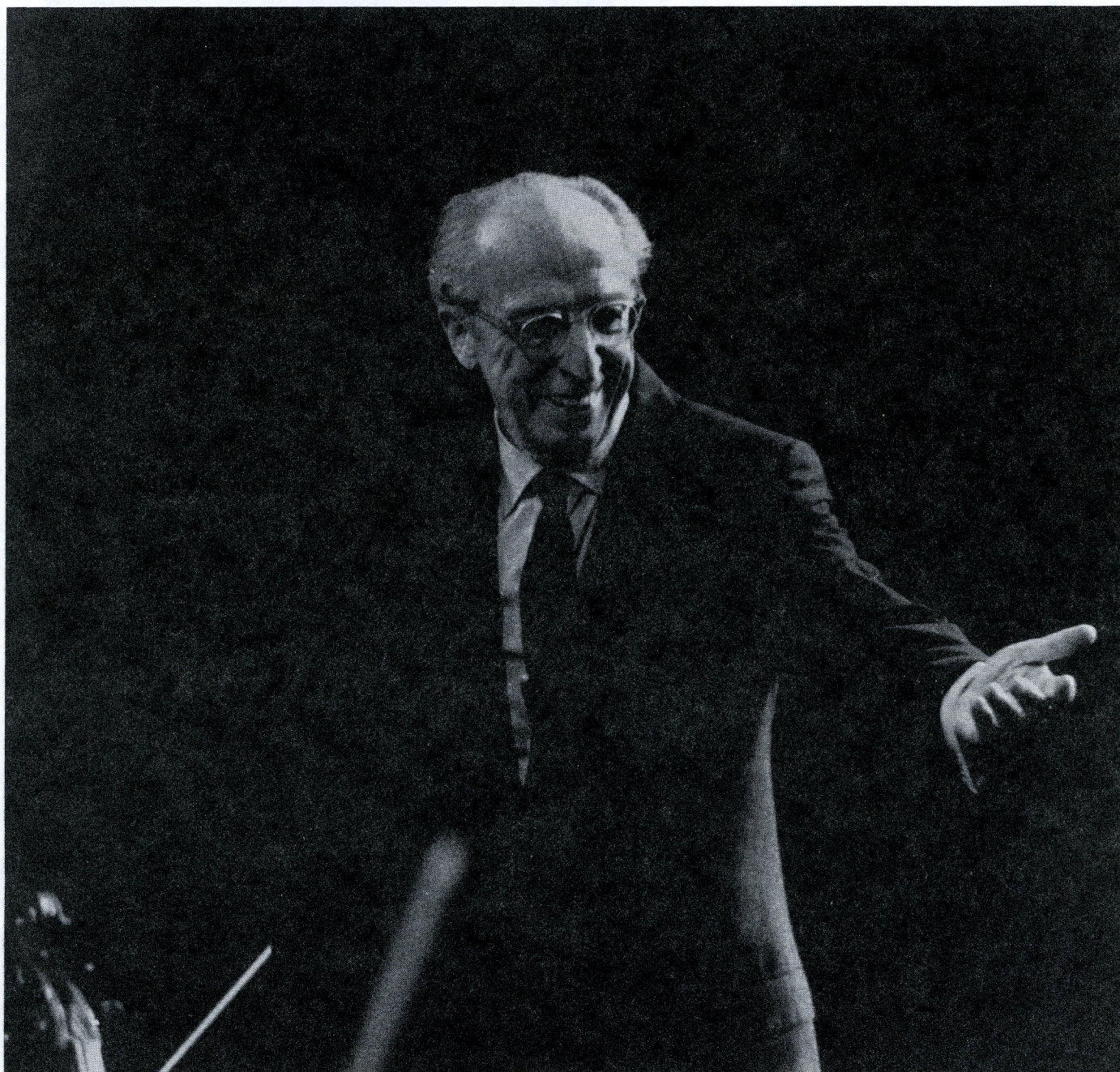
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Copland at 80

(See pages 6, 7)

"I can't imagine what it must have been without records to hear your own and others' music — what Beethoven and Mozart missed!"

"A civilization that produces no creative artists is either wholly provincial or wholly dead. A mature people senses the need to leave traces of its essential character in works of art; otherwise, a powerful incentive is lacking in the will to live."

"All of my music stems from a single vision."

"My main hope is that each work will have its own reason for being and will not be repetitious in terms of what I've done before."

"If I have any regrets, it is for the lesser-known works, the orphans."

"The fact is that weak or unsuitable librettos are the primary cause of opera trouble."

[Asked to appraise his colleagues candidly] "Why not? What's the point of being my age if you can't be candid?"

"What I find most annoying about being 80 is the approaching end; remove that and I'd be perfectly happy."

Question: "So at 80 you can't be painted as a tragic and pathetic figure?"

"Hell, no!"

European Engagements

Copland confided that these held the highest significance for him in this eighth decade of his life. The engagement with the London Symphony Orchestra in Festival Hall on November 30, 1980, proved to be specially felicitous. Desmond Shawe-Taylor, writing in the *Sunday Times*, remarked that "Copland is much loved in this country, both for his music and also for an unmistakable geniality of temperament and demeanor that is somehow all of a piece (and felt to be so) with his creative character. Not every long-lived composer can hope, like Monteverdi or Verdi, or Tippett in our own time, to remain productive and innovative into old age, and Copland seems unfeignedly resigned to the fact that his stream of invention has dried up; his admirers, on the other hand, are by no means resigned to the persistent ignoring of so many of his best and most serious scores in favor of the more immediately appealing ballet suites and mood pieces. The *Clarinet Concerto*, beautifully played on Tuesday by Jack Brymer, falls somewhere between these categories with its motionless, meditative first movement and delightfully lean and angular jazzy conclusion.

"No one is better than Copland at evoking and maintaining a state of suspended animation by means of widely spaced chords and curiously gapped arpeggios such as call up the notion of far horizons and blue hills. The state of contemplation is magically prolonged — until something begins to stir, like a horse vaguely pawing the ground. Soon the composer himself, on the rostrum, begins to paw a little too, drawing an answering resilience from his players and soon sweeping the whole house into a sort of barn-dance of shared

joy. Perhaps it is not so wrong, after all, to see those candid 'prairie' scores of his as his most individual contribution to the century's music."

Noël Goodwin added his appreciation in the *Times*: "Aaron Copland has repeatedly distilled the voice of a specifically American music in works which will never lose their exhilaration."

Acclaimed concerts in Paris and Brussels were also on Copland's European schedule.

What Others Say

His life is "full, satisfying, balanced. . . . He knows where his passions lie and what his life is all about."

Interviews with Harold Clurman, Virgil Thomson, and Boulanger reveal the young Copland much as he is today: undaunted by criticism, unspoiled by success, quietly enthusiastic, curious, practical, and unflappable. . . . Virgil Thomson, speaking for composers, has called Copland "The Mother of Us All."

"Copland has created his own kind of divine comedy reflecting a personality of unquenchable optimism, shared by a fated sense of aloneness."

"One of the last composers to believe in a brave new world and to proclaim its glory. In his music, as nowhere else, the American Dream lives on."

"Can you picture a room that might include, at the same time, William Schuman, Virgil Thomson, Elliott Carter, Morton Gould, and such others of the compositional craft as Leonard Bernstein? . . . almost without exception acknowledged masters who had been cubs to the evening's lion."

"His influence as guiding and supporting statesman for the 'new music' has been at least as significant as the music itself. . . .



At the American Symphony Orchestra jubilee of Aaron Copland (right) are, from the left, William Hopkins, president of United Neighborhood Houses; Isaac Stern, Leonard Bernstein, Morton Gould, Henry Gehdzahler, New York City Commissioner of Cultural Affairs.

He has touched profoundly on our national culture."

"Within that smiling, benign, avuncular figure of today there lingers a fighting heart and a combative nature that have done more to establish the good repute of serious American music than the efforts of any other man in this century."

"Given a word-association test, the average concertgoer would probably respond to 'American composer' with 'Aaron Copland.'"

"A man who is not just an American composer, but *THE* American composer."

The above excerpts were culled from interviews and stories as follows: Edward Rothstein in the *New York Times* and *San Francisco Chronicle*; Ed Deitemeier in *Forecast for Washington and Baltimore*; Peter J. Rosenwald in *The Wall Street Journal*; Irving Kolodin in *Saturday Review*; Annalyn Swan in *Newsweek*; Thomas Bedell in *Newsday*; Leo Smit in *The Piano Quarterly*; Philip Ramey in *Ovation*; Vivian Perlis in *Keynote*; Linda Winer in the *New York Daily News*; the composer himself at a party given by *Stereo Review*, which presented him with a laudatory plaque, and Irving Kolodin in *Newsday*, after a party given by Boosey & Hawkes.

Bernstein Hailed

Continued from page 3

A third recent composition by Bernstein is called *Touches* and is designed as a mandatory work for the solo-recital section of the semi-finals in the sixth annual Van Cliburn International Piano Competition, to be held May 17-31 in Fort Worth, Texas.

Lukas Foss conducted Bernstein's *Dybuk Suite No. 2* and *Slava!* with the Buffalo Philharmonic on January 10 and 12.

(*Touches* is available on sale at \$6.00.)